

## **Second Chances**

By Jay Taffet

One of life's greatest treasures is second chances. I've been lucky to have plenty of them, but nothing as special as the one that happened over the summer.

I bought a Piper Arrow II in 2003, at the suggestion of my grandfather, a long-time Bonanza V-Tail owner, and flew this wonderful plane all over the country for the next 8 years. In 2011, due to a life change that took me from Alabama to New Orleans, I had to sell my Arrow and all the freedom and convenience that it represented.

I spent the next decade flying sporadically and, to be honest, missing my Arrow. I was blessed with finding my wife and starting a family and I was busy navigating various projects and ventures in aviation, but I never stopped thinking about the opportunity and freedom of having a plane.

This past spring my aviation ventures had matured to the point of "justifying" aircraft ownership again so I started the process of finding a plane that would support my business and provide fun travel

opportunities for my family of four. I worked through the options and finances of various Piper models (have only been a Piper man since earning my wings in high school), but I couldn't stop thinking about my Arrow.

I had not just loved owning and operating this plane, I had also invested two lifetimes in replacing, repairing and restoring almost every inch of it over the eight years that I owned it, including a specially-designed, custom paint scheme. So, being that I specialize in finding off-market aircraft for transactions in my business now (Gracen Jules), I used this skill set to see if the "impossible" might be possible – bringing my Arrow home!

I consulted the FAA aircraft registry and searched through Google and FlightAware, and there it was – at a rural airport in Georgia and seemingly idle with little flight history. With no actionable search returns on the owner (no phone number or email), I contacted the airport manager where the plane was based, explained my search and asked him to forward an email that I'd send to him introducing me and my history with the Arrow.

The Airport Manager said he would try to get my reach in front of the owner that week, and, sure enough, he did! The current owner of the Arrow called me, and, after a brief conversation, said he'd be happy to sell me the plane and return it to a former owner. Overjoyed doesn't do my reaction justice (which I guess is not good in negotiating a purchase, but he had already offered a very fair price), and I put the wheels in motion.

A few weeks later, after lining up financing, basing, insurance, pre-buy and positioning logistics, I was on my way to Georgia from New Orleans to pick up my Arrow. A brutal airline trip and 100-mile Uber ride later, there I was standing in front of a "ghost" – a memory of this special aircraft that had brought so much happiness into my life all those years ago. And climbing in for the first time in over a decade, it was just surreal –it was still in mint condition given that the owner, a tenured A&P, had cared for her as much as I did.

We took off (me and my Arrow) and headed back to New Orleans, and, pilot-to-pilot, I have to share that this was one of the most saturating flights I've had as I was so distracted with the reunion and flood of memories! I made a brief fuel stop in Alabama for my father to see her (and take a break - I hadn't flown cross-country in quite a while so I was

exhausted), and flew the last leg of the trip towards the homecoming at Lakefront Airport in New Orleans.

And here's the special part. I had owned my Arrow as a single guy years before I met my wife, and what my plane meant to me then, albeit special, was nothing compared to what I was about to experience upon landing in New Orleans: My wife had brought our daughters (8 and 6) to the airport and there they were, running up to the plane once I shut down the engine screaming with excitement and joy!

I reached through the vent window to hold their hands and I found myself in this unforgettable place of reunion and emotion. I had my daughters, my most special treasures, and my plane, my long-time companion, together – and my wonderful wife headed towards us – and I realized that who I was before and who I am now just connected towards a lifetime of new beginnings.

And all this was possible because I had been blessed with a second chance.

Jay Taffet is the founder of Gracen Jules and co-founder of FlytFinance. He lives in New Orleans with his wife and two daughters.