

Another adventure of a lifetime July 2007

This one started with an e-mail that said, "A signature gift from Kathy". I opened up the e-mail and much to my surprise and delight, it was for a one hour helicopter lesson for my birthday for Kathy!

I immediately called her to thank her, and she said that it was hard to find something for someone that has everything!

I downloaded the information and made a reservation for July 4th, since I was off from work and the helicopter place was in Long Beach, about an hour's drive from home.

I arrived there and met my instructor, and he gave me the ground briefing before we went flying. I had previously found a briefing on the internet, so I knew what to expect.

Flying a helicopter is a lot more difficult from flying a fixed wing aircraft, where once you are straight and level, there is little to do other than make minor corrections in course or altitude.

With a helicopter there are 3 controls; you left hand one controls your altitude, your right hand one controls which way the helicopter is going, and your feet control where the nose of the helicopter is pointing. It is like patting your head, rubbing your tummy and whistling Dixie all at the same time!

We got to the helicopter, started it up and took off, heading South over Long Beach harbor. We flew over one of the oil islands, and the Queen Mary. The white dome used to hold the Spruce Goose, but it is now used as a cruise terminal for a cruise line.



Once we were at a safe altitude, he let me fly using first one control at a time, then all 3 at once. It was quite a ballet, but I did get the hang of it after a little practice. After flying for a while, we headed back to the airport to practice hovering. This is done at about 5 feet off the ground.

Again, I tried it using one control, then two controls. The biggest problem I had was to keep the helicopter in place using one control. It was very touchy, and a very small movement made large excursions in the direction of the helicopter.

Unfortunately all good things come to an end, and we landed where we were hovering. I asked the instructor to take a few pictures of me and he did.

This had to be one of the best if not the best birthday present I ever got!

Thank you, Kathy!!!

