

Ever since Vicky can remember, she wanted to fly. Her uncle, Ernie Swinn, was a pilot based out of the Scotts Valley Airport. In addition to flying the family airplane, a Cessna 180, he also flew an aerobatic Pitts Special in local air shows and in the Reno Air Races. Vicky can still remember the first flight she took with him over the city of Watsonville. In a child's eyes the tiny cars below looked like toys. Vicky's uncle was bigger than life to her.

Life is funny though, and sometimes the path from one place to another is not a straight line. Vicky's uncle moved away when she was in her early teens and she went off in a different direction. Like her father, she enjoyed math and science and she studied hard and soon she was off to college to study Chemistry.

It was during Vicky's college years that a friend asked her if she wanted to go skydiving. That sounded like fun and off they went. One jump and she was hooked. She fell in love with everything that had to do with being up in the air. Vicky knew then that she had to learn to fly.

She was lucky. Her parents, both born and raised in Watsonville, had several friends that flew. One of their friends was Dick Petznick, a local Watsonville pilot.

Pilots are a special breed. They all have that special passion for flying and they want to share that passion with other people, especially young people. When Vicky's dad called Dick and told him that she wanted to learn to fly, Dick offered to let her learn to fly in his beautiful green and white 1941 Taylorcraft. All she had to pay for was gas and an instructor. It was a very generous offer.

So Vicky drove from Berkeley to the Watsonville Airport every Saturday for her flying lessons. Soon enough, she was out boring holes in the sky by herself. She didn't really need a place to go. She just needed to get up in the air. She loved that feeling of three dimensional freedom, spinning and soaring and playing among the clouds.

Through the years of finishing up school and getting her first job and working long hours, Vicky always managed to squeeze out enough time and enough money to fly. During her school years, living on a graduate student stipend, she would often skip meals to save money for aviation fuel. Later, during her working years, when her friends were buying their first house, she was buying an airplane.

Every year Vicky would return to Watsonville for the Memorial Day Fly-in and Air Show and watch the pilots fly their incredible routines and dream that someday she could do that. But to do that takes a lot of dedication, and time, and sacrifice, and not everyone can tolerate the extreme g-forces in the cockpit during the maneuvers.

A few years ago, Vicky had the opportunity to take an aerobatic flight with one of greatest air show pilots of all time, Wayne Handley. She realized right then and there that she needed to pursue her dream of being able to fly aerobatics. Within a few months of that flight, she bought an aerobatic airplane and began training.

Soon she started competing in contests. She flew in all the western states contests and eventually worked her way up from the Sportsman category to Intermediate category, and now to the Advanced category. Every year she goes to the National Aerobatic Championships in Sherman Texas and competes against the best pilots in the country.

Flying aerobatics at a competition level is hard work. To maintain g-force tolerance and the skills to necessary to compete requires constant practice, but for her, practice is fun.

Along the way Vicky's had many successes- won some trophies and met some incredibly fun and talented people. And now she gets to fulfill that longtime dream she's had of returning to Watsonville to fly in the Air Show in the place where it all began.