



Chapter 3

The cool morning air put goose bumps on Rick's arms as he carried the metal traps deep into the forested area to where a grove of saplings grew. Tim, who'd stubbornly refused to be left behind, trudged along beside him carrying the bait. Marcus had promised to meet them there the second his mom let him out of the house.

Through the trees, Rick could hear the low buzz of an airplane coming in to land at the small airport beyond the woods. With his love of flying, Rick had all of the local pilots and their airplanes memorized. Instantly, he knew who it was as the plane stormed overhead. "Look!" he shouted to Tim over the noise as the red-nosed aircraft buzzed the field before landing. "It's the P-51 Mustang." He and Tim shielded their eyes against the sun and watched the plane disappear over the edge of the treetops.

"It's awesome," Tim yelled as he looked up at the sky.

One memorable day, Mr. Schwartz, the proud owner of the P-51 Mustang, had let Rick look all

A GUIDE True Story Book

around inside his plane. Rick had been talking to Jim and Rob, the mechanics at the airplane hangar, and Mr. Schwartz, in a thick accent, had been more than happy to answer all of Rick's questions.

"Ah," Mr. Schwartz had said, "someday you fly, yah?"

"Yeah," he told Mr. Schwartz. "Someday I'll fly. You bet."

Rick often dreamed of flying above the clouds, and on that day as he'd run his hands over the smooth metal belly of the P-51 Mustang, he knew that the time would come when he'd own his own plane. Since then, every time Rick saw an airplane suspended in the sky, his determination became stronger.

"It's about time you guys got here."

A voice shattered Rick's daydream. Marcus jumped down off of the tree stump where he'd been sitting, and threw his hands in the air. "I thought I was going to be middle-aged with a wife and kids by the time you showed up."

Rick dropped the metal traps on the ground. "Your hairline is receding a little."

"Whatever," Marcus answered, but his hand flew up to his forehead. "Let's get these things set up. Where should we put them?"

Tim sat down on a log, cradling the bait in his lap while he watched the older boys scour the area for a good trap site. "How about under that bush?" Tim suggested.

Just Plane Crazy

“Well, no, I don’t think that will work,” Rick said, looking around. “We need to find a worn area—like a trail. I read that foxes will usually choose the path of least resistance, so we can’t put the traps near any tall grass or bushes. How about over there?”

A small animal trail curved off the main path through the trees, and Marcus chewed his lower lip while he nodded. “Yep, perfect.”

Rick and Marcus positioned the first trap in the path and pounded the stake into the ground with a mallet. Marcus pulled the lever down while Rick gritted his teeth and pulled the metal claws apart.

“Snap the centerpiece into place,” Rick commanded slowly, “and set the spring.”

“Don’t let go, or Marcus’ hand will be chopped off,” Tim offered cheerfully from the sidelines.

“Thanks,” Rick said between clenched teeth.

Marcus reached into the center and pushed the spring-loaded paddle into place. Rick gradually let go and fully removed his hands when he saw that the spring held.

“Wait,” Marcus said, scratching his head. “Shouldn’t we have baited it?”

“Oh, yeah,” Rick agreed. “Tim, bring us the bait.”

“What did you bring for a lure? Shellfish paste? Castor oil and musk drops? Mr. Bushnell said that aged intestines work well. Come, bait-keeper, show me what you have.” Marcus turned to look at Tim, and his mouth dropped open. He stood dumbfounded

A GUIDE True Story Book

for a heartbeat before he spoke in a strained voice. “Rick, whatever you brought for bait—well, your little brother is eating it.” He looked like he was going to lose his breakfast.

“Tim. Quit eating the bait. Give me that.” Rick grabbed the bag from Tim’s hands, and looked inside. “Oh, good. He didn’t eat it all.” Rick looked at Marcus sheepishly. “I, uh, didn’t happen to have aged intestines, so I brought what we could find.” He jiggled the bag. “This should work just as well.”

“What is it? Let me see.” Marcus impatiently stared at the bag in Rick’s hands.

“Vjnhadaj,” Rick mumbled.

“What?” Marcus demanded.

“I said, ‘veggie hot dogs,’” Rick repeated loudly. “They were left over from dinner. It was the closest thing to aged intestines that we had.”

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding,” Marcus howled, dancing around in a circle like a crazy duck. “Are we trying to lure a vegetarian fox? Is that a good selling point? That our furs have lower cholesterol?”

Rick did not see the humor in the situation. “Are you going to help me bait this thing, or do I have to do it myself?”

Marcus finally settled down, and bent over with his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath. “OK, man. It’s OK,” he said, stifling a volcano of laughs. “If it works for you vegetarians, it just might fool the foxes. We’ll see. Let’s put the, um, veggie dog on the trap.”

Just Plane Crazy

The boys put the lure on the trap, camouflaged it with grass and leaves, and then set and baited the other two traps further down the trail.

“Whew.” Rick wiped the back of his hand across his forehead. “Now I guess we just wait.”

“Well, I’m going to have to wait at home.” Marcus sighed. “I told my mom I wouldn’t be gone too long. I have to help my sister clean the house.”

“I’m going home, too,” Tim whined, wiping veggie dog from the side of his mouth. “I’m thirsty.”

“You guys go on ahead,” Rick waved them off. “I’m going to go over and look at the planes at the airport for a while.”

As the other boys headed back up toward home, Rick hiked down through the trees until he emerged from the woods and onto the moist green grass next to the airport. He walked across the open field to the airplane hangar, and pushed the door open.

“Hello?” Rick peered inside and waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkened room.

“Oh, hi there, Rick,” came a voice from the other side of a dismantled engine. “Hand me that wrench over there, would ya?”

Rick walked over to the table, picked up the tool, and put it into the greasy hand of Rob, one of the mechanics. He and Jim, the other mechanic, liked Rick and always let him hang out with them in the hangar.

“I heard Mr. Schwartz fly in this morning,” Rick said.

A GUIDE True Story Book

“Oh, yeah. That guy is the craziest pilot in the whole state of Washington. He loves to storm us before he lands,” Jim grunted as he and Rob worked. “He scares me half to death with his crazy antics. One of these days he’s going to lay that P-51 down on a nose or a wing instead of wheels. I just hope I’m out of the way when it happens.”

Rob came out from under the engine and looked at Rick with a half-smile. “Want to help us work on this engine? I’ll show you what to do.”

Rob and Jim were both pretty cool guys, and they liked having Rick around. They knew that Rick wanted to be a missionary bush pilot, and sometimes they actually seemed impressed with the stuff Rick already knew about airplanes. Rick spent the rest of the morning in the hangar, talking airplanes with Rob and Jim while they worked.

“Here’s a bit of advice,” Rob said, pointing his wrench at Rick. “If you ever take a plane engine apart, and put it back together, and find that you have extra pieces leftover? Don’t fly the plane anywhere.”

“You’re the expert,” Rick said with a bow as Jim rolled his eyes.

When Rick arrived home, Mom was in the kitchen. “I’m getting ready to make lunch,” she said. “Why don’t you and Tim practice your trumpets until we’re ready to eat?”

Rick went into the living room, pulled his shiny trumpet out of its case, and popped his lips together

Just Plane Crazy

to loosen them up. He didn't mind practicing—he actually liked it—and he and Tim had even played several special trumpet duets at church.

“Come on, Tim,” he called. “Let's practice that new duet we've been working on.”

They laid out their sheet music across the back of the couch and began playing the melody—first Tim, then Rick, then the two of them together. The smooth sound of the notes filled the house, and even Chris and Laurie stopped playing with their toys and came in to listen.

“Sounds good,” Mom called from the kitchen.

When lunch was over, Mom put Chris and Laurie down for a nap. “Whew, those two keep me busy,” she said. “The only time I can get anything done is when they're asleep.” She laughed as she kissed Tim on the head. “Hey, I'm going to go work on weeding that front flowerbed. Will you guys help me? The more hands we have weeding, the less time it will take.”

Rick and Tim grabbed their gardening gloves out of the garage and knelt next to Mom in the grass by the flowers.

“Have you met the new neighbors yet?” she asked as they pulled the pesky weeds out of the black dirt.

“No,” Rick said. “I thought I saw a kid my age yesterday, but I wasn't sure.”

“They seem really nice,” Mom said, pulling her gardening gloves off and pushing her hair out of her eyes. The fingers of the gloves were already crusted

A GUIDE True Story Book

with dirt. "I met them this morning. It's a mom and a son who's your age, Rick. His name is Ben. I told him about you. You should stop by and say hello."

"You mean, just go over and introduce myself like the neighborhood welcome parade? I'll look like a dork."

Mom shook her head. "It's not dorky to say hello."

Rick got his chance later, when his new neighbor came outside to shoot hoops. "Hey," Rick called, walking across the street. "Are you Ben?"

The kid glanced over his shoulder for a moment, and then kept dribbling his basketball.

"I'm Rick," Rick said as he pointed across the street. "I live over there. You just moved in?"

"Wow, you must be a genius," Ben said sarcastically. He caught the ball and draped his arm over it, as he stood looking at Rick. "How could you tell? By the great big moving truck?"

Rick's eyebrows drew together, and he was quiet for a moment. A hundred retorts dashed through his mind, but he didn't say any of them. Instead he said, "Yeah, we saw the truck. Where'd you move from?"

Ben turned and shot the ball from his fingertips. It swished through the hoop without touching the rim. "I moved from someplace really cool. And now I live in the boring town of Auburn, in this dumpy house, next to stupid people. Are you happy?"

Ben grabbed his ball and strode back inside his house without another word. Rick could feel a surge

Just Plane Crazy

of anger climbing his chest. “What a nice guy,” he mumbled as he turned to go home. So much for trying to be nice.

It was almost dark that night when the phone rang. It was Marcus, and he was frantic. “Rick. You’re not going to believe this, but our traps have been sabotaged.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, somebody set them off and kicked them off the path. We’re going to have to start over.”

Rick couldn’t believe it. Who would do something like that? When he hung up the phone, he could only think of one person—a new kid on the block. A new kid with a bad attitude.