

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYBODY!

Those of you who read our Holiday letter last year may recall that Pilot Sue sometimes thinks that we lead somewhat boring lives. Well, this year we overcompensated a bit. We have new family members, new aircraft, new jobs and new plumbing.

After a little over a year with no kitties, we just couldn't take the lack of chaos in our lives any more. We made several visits to the Grosse Ile Animal Shelter and, after deciding that we couldn't adopt all of the nice cats there, settled on only two. These two seemed to be quite friendly and lively, playing together constantly. They stood out from all the others, and finally came home to live with us. The slim Abyssinian male was named (by the shelter) DiMaggio. We didn't think this was a great name, so we called him Joe while we tried to think of a good name. Soon, it became apparent that Booger was an appropriate name for him, and so it is. He's Joe in polite company (like we'd have any of THAT) and Booger the rest of the time. His sister is a large boned grey tabby named Tootsie.



Tootsie

It didn't take long for them to feel right at home here, and they keep life



Joe (Booger) DiMaggio

appropriately chaotic. They run around at a hundred miles an hour, leap on stuff, get where they don't belong, splash in the sinks, drink out of the toilet, steal our food off the dinner table, bring dead (and not so dead)

mice into the house and generally act like wild animals. They're so cute! They're goofy little monsters, and we love them to pieces.

This spring, we postponed some vacation plans because Sue's Dad, Chet, had some health problems. After quite a number of doctor visits and tests, he had a cardiac catheterization, an angioplasty and a stent implantation. Unfortunately, his stent began to close, and he had to undergo open heart surgery to have three coronary artery bypass grafts. He's no spring chicken and surgery of this sort is a very big deal, so we

were very glad that he recovered with no problems, and is doing quite well. Little did we know what the future held in store.

This summer we acquired yet another flying machine (like one plane and a helicopter aren't enough.) Bob has always longed for an O-2A, and rather suddenly, one became available at a price that wasn't completely out of reach. We soon became the owners of a genuine Cessna O-2A, formerly owned by the U.S. Air Force, and used in combat in Viet Nam. It's a twin engine aircraft with a rather unusual configuration. One engine is in the front and pulls, the other is in the rear and pushes. Pilot Sue likes it, too! After her first flight in it, while getting checked out with an instructor, she said, "It has so much POWER!" Yeah, it's like that! It even has a smoke generator system and has hard points so we can carry external ordnance. (That means bombs 'n stuff like that. Cool, eh?!)



Pilot Sue flying our O-2A, N802A

Pilot Sue has earned a new Coast Guard Auxiliary qualification; she is now a Co-Pilot. No, that doesn't mean that she has to fly with another pilot all the time, it's just the nomenclature for the first pilot grade for Coast Guard pilots. (Don't ask me why, it's a long complicated story.) Anyway, she can now fly as Pilot in Command on several types of Coast Guard AUXAIR missions. She had her wings pinned on by the Ninth District Commanding Officer, Rear Admiral Ron Silva, during an awards ceremony in front of several hundred other Auxiliarists.



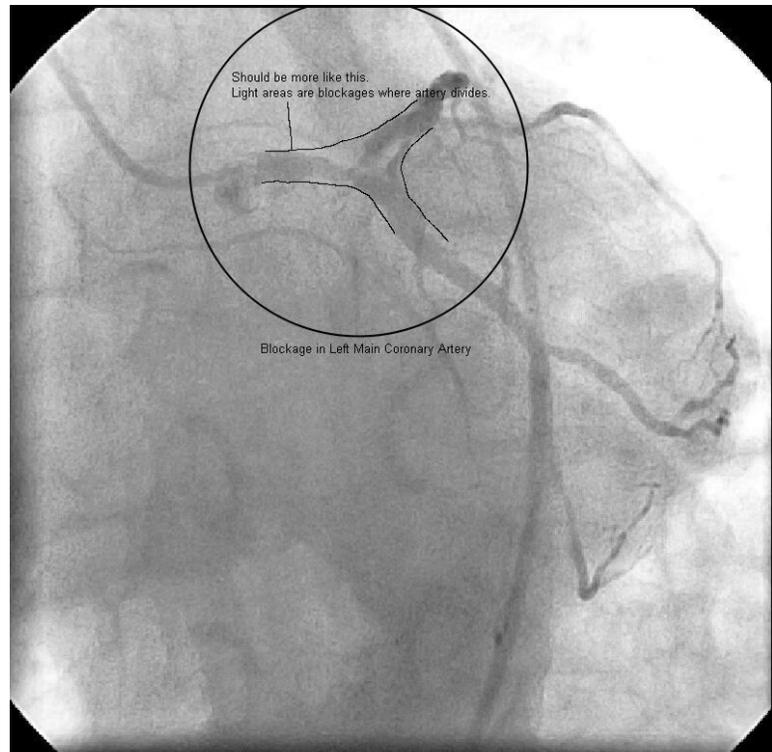
RADM Silva pins on Pilot Sue's wings

This August, Bob went to his Doctor for his annual physical exam. This time, the Doc noticed a slight abnormality in his EKG. This abnormality all by itself wasn't anything to get excited about, but it marked a change from prior EKGs. It was agreed that Bob would undergo a stress test which, with radio-nucleotide perfusion imaging, would show if there was any potential problem.

The stress test showed that there might be a minor blockage of an artery in Bob's heart, but a cardiac catheterization would be required to confirm the existence of a problem, and show its nature. Should there be a blockage, it was likely that an angioplasty and a stent implantation would treat the problem. Although we were told that it would be extremely unlikely, the worst case would involve open heart surgery. As Sue's Dad had just gone through this, we were sure glad that it didn't look like Bob would need this very serious surgery.

On Thursday, 25 SEP, Bob went into Beaumont hospital for the cardiac cath. After the procedure, he was taken to a recovery room, where the results of the examination were discussed. It was there that we all got the shock of our lives.

Bob had several very critical blockages in the arteries supplying blood to his heart. One of these was an eighty percent blockage of the left main coronary artery, the one that supplies all of the blood to the heart. The blockage was at a critical place. It was positioned just where the left main coronary artery divides, and was building rapidly. If it shifted or grew even a little bit, all of the blood supply for Bob's heart would be stopped. The first symptom he would have of this would be sudden death. If left untreated, this would occur very soon, certainly within a couple of months, and likely within a couple of weeks. Well, needless to say, they now had our full and undivided attention!



Bob's funky plumbing

All of the several doctors involved in the case repeatedly commented on how incredibly lucky Bob was that this "ticking time bomb" in his heart was detected in time for corrective surgery. They were all surprised that he had no symptoms or even a heart attack already. We think Bob's guardian angel has been working overtime lately!

On Tuesday morning, 30 Sep, Bob was wheeled into an operating room at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, and the procedure began. The surgery went very well, with five bypass grafts made (a quintuple bypass), and no complications (although he does have several very manly scars to show off now.)



Bob, after surgery, on lots of drugs.

After a couple of days in an Intensive Care Unit (hooked up to machines that went “BEEP” and everything – just like on TV) and several more days in a Cardiac Care Unit, he went home to continue recuperating.

Although he was pretty feeble for the first few weeks, he quickly improved, and is now almost back to semi-normal. He’s been going to a cardiac rehabilitation class three days a week, getting supervised exercise and enjoying “semi-retirement”. He’ll go back to

work after the beginning of the new year, and is already wondering what he can have operated on next in order to get more time off of work.

Finally, Bob got a new Coast Guard Auxiliary job. Through some quirk of fate, he was asked to apply for, and was subsequently accepted for a position on the National Staff as Division Chief, Air Operations for the entire U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. So now, in addition to running the AUXAIR program in Michigan, he’s in charge of it for the whole country. Yikes! (Next, the World!) It will be a lot more work, but he’ll have a fine staff of very good people helping him. And what the heck, if it were easy, it wouldn’t be as much fun!

So that’s what’s been going on here on our Island of Paradise. We’re looking forward to Bob’s full recovery and to his return to flying status, just as soon as he gets his FAA Medical paperwork all taken care of. (Meanwhile Pilot Sue will take Bob flying from time to time if he behaves). And we’re looking forward to watching our goofy little fur balls getting into trouble again and again. But mostly, we’re looking forward to a New Year that’s just a little less exciting than last year.

Best wishes to you and yours for a safe, meaningful and happy Holiday season. And here’s hoping that life isn’t too boring, but that it’s not too exciting, either.

PILOT BOB, PILOT SUE, TOOTSIE AND BOOGER

December 2003