



GEOFF RANKIN

Transporting to the Aviation Future

It's up high in the sky where Geoff feels the most grounded. When you're flying, there is tranquility and simplicity. Everything going on in the world below fades out. He feels most free.

For his most formative years as a kid, he was chained down by conditions around him. He was born in 1984 in the heat of the District's crack epidemic, which took both his parents as victims. He bounced around between relatives and landed at age 9 in a facility for troubled youth.

He remembers constantly scanning to look for opportunities to get himself in a better place. He was hell-bent on avoiding the same fate as his parents. There was a restlessness. Keep moving, he'd tell himself. He wanted to be transported far away.

Despite the cards he was dealt, he learned to embrace the world with an open hand and heart and operate with kindness and gratitude to everyone he met. He would graduate out of the facility at the top of his class, leaving to complete high school in Bethesda.

As a teenager, he found himself a job—at a Honda dealership—that would put him on a trajectory up and onward. He worked there for nearly ten years until age 24, handling service calls and accounting. He's still good friends with his bosses who took a chance on him and changed his life.

Geoff's route to aviation would be serendipitous. In his early 20's he happened to join a friend to go pick up a boat from an estate sale. It turned out the previous owner was a private pilot for the Rockefellers. What a fun job that must've been, he thought. The next day, while getting his haircut at a barber's shop, he struck up a conversation with the guy sitting next to him who happened to own three planes. How cool, he thought. When he got back into his car to go, the man passed by, knocked on his window and invited him to join for a flight. The aviation stars were aligning for him.

He was in love the second he took the controls. The guy said if Geoff was serious, there was an aviation program in Miami offering scholarships, but he'd need to be down there in two days to interview. Geoff packed all his belongs into his car that day and headed south. He wouldn't get the scholarship, but he was hooked and stayed with the program.

It wasn't all smooth sailing. He nearly failed out during the first year. On his first solo flight, he had to manage an emergency landing after the flap on his wing flew off on the final approach. He was a nervous wreck, but he walked away from the plane a more confident man. If he could handle that situation, he could do anything.

Before graduating, he took a break to do a Semester at Sea and explore the world for a bit. There was plenty of adventure—chased by pirates off the Somali coast and a near-miss of the tsunami in Japan. Best of all, he made life-long friends on the trip, where he says he finally found stability and a deep global perspective.

In 2012, Geoff headed back to the District and started a company called Virtue Aviation (now Congressional Aviation) that curates private plane travel experiences. If you want to jet off to the Kentucky Derby or to a wedding on your own with a hired plane and pilot, Geoff can link you up. It's sort of like Uber, but for air travel. He doesn't own the planes, nor does he personally do the piloting. He handles the online interface and logistics. It's a lucrative business, and he will soon be taking over a similar helicopter-by-hire company based in Texas that has 30 years-worth of loyal clients.

Now his company is expanding into the uncharted territory of Urban Air mobility. He's working with the District government and local hospitals to construct a new, modern public-use heliport. Silent electric helicopters and other vertical take-off (eVTOL) aircraft could transform travel between urban centers.

Geoff is only 38, but he's worlds away from where he started, and he certainly has a ways left to go.

He's found ways to give back. He serves as Board Chair of the Anacostia Watershed Society, with an eye on making the river fishable and swimmable by 2025. He's also a Board member of the DC Flight School, introducing inner-city youth to aviation.

Geoff's favorite movie growing up was *Willow*. Surrounded by chaos around him, he found comfort watching the movie over and over again. He was drawn most to the horses galloping across the screen. As fate would have it, just this summer he has been spending a lot of his free time with show horses at an Olympic Training facility in Virginia. One day he wants to have his own. Riding horses is like therapy for him. Their feet are firmly planted on the ground, but you are still free to gallop away. ■

