



*I was delighted to hear that you are writing a book telling your own story...
I am sure it will be an inspiration to others.*

—His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales

HOLD FAST to Your DREAMS

Passionate DESIRE turns
DREAMS into REALITY



George Lee MBE

HOLD FAST
TO YOUR
DREAMS

Passionate Desire
Turns Dreams into Reality

To Wally,
With my very best wishes,

George Lee

16 MARCH 2013

GEORGE LEE MBE

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Letter received from His Royal Highness
The Prince of Wales KG KT GCB OM AK QSO



BIRKHALL

10th September, 2012

Dear George

I was delighted to hear that you are writing a book, '*Hold Fast to your Dreams*', telling your own story. You have led, if I may say so, a most remarkable life, becoming World Open Class Gliding Champion at your first attempt in Finland in 1976, and then retaining the title against two subsequent challenges in 1978 and 1981. Your skills as a glider pilot were only too evident to me when I was fortunate to take to the skies with you in the June 1978 at Royal Air Force Bicester. This was my only experience of gliding and I enjoyed it enormously being instructed by such an expert, whose passion for gliding was only too obvious!

I know that your interest in aviation in general, and gliding in particular, was sparked at an early age when you were serving as a Halton Apprentice and that this led to commissioning in the Royal Air Force, before becoming a fighter pilot flying the Phantom aircraft, then a second career as a commercial airline pilot. I am delighted to hear that you are still gliding today in Australia – and passing on your encyclopaedic knowledge to the next generation!

I am sure your book will be an inspiration to others, and I just wanted to pass to you and Maren my very best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Yours most sincerely
Manny

DEDICATION

To my wife, Maren, who has supported me through
so much over 43 years of marriage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Albert Johnson for his friendship and for his dedication and commitment as my crew chief for every World Gliding Championships in which I have flown, as well as for many other major national and international competitions.

To Amanda Wells, without whose encouragement and support this book would not have seen the light of day.

ENDORSEMENTS

I have been one of only a few to have experienced the privilege of flying with George Lee in both a Royal Air Force F-4 Phantom and in a glider. I recall just sitting back and admiring his ability to precisely do what he wanted with a flying machine. I have also witnessed his quite extraordinary skill in air-to-air gunnery, an art in which no one in the RAF came anywhere near equalling him. I have tried, in vain, to keep up with George on cross-country gliding flights whilst flying an identical type of machine; he has an ability to get the most out of often fickle air currents which left one wondering just how he did it. George has what they say in the trade: “a truly exceptional pair of hands”. Besides this, he is the most modest of men and completely dedicated to all to which he turns. It has been my luck to have worked with and competed against a most remarkable pilot, whose achievements are unlikely ever to be repeated. If you seek inspiration, you need go no further than to read this book.

I D Macfadyen
Air Marshal
Constable and Governor
Windsor Castle

George Lee tells the story of his long and event-packed flying career in a straightforward style that will appeal to all. Born and educated in Ireland, George realised he wanted to be a pilot while still at school. As

a first step towards his goal he joined the Royal Air Force as an Aircraft Apprentice. During this training he started gliding. His passion for this demanding and fascinating sport led him to win three World Open Class Championships and many other highly competitive soaring contests. He managed to integrate these outstanding achievements with a most successful career as an RAF officer and fighter pilot, and later as a Boeing 747 captain with Cathay Pacific Airways. After retirement from airline flying, he embarked on the ambitious task of setting up and running his own airfield and advanced soaring centre in Australia, aimed at helping young glider pilots to improve their skills. He and his wife, Maren, are now Australian citizens. This account of his life as a pilot clearly shows the determination, dedication, and concentration George has applied to achieve success during his remarkable flying career, as does his devotion to Maren and their two children. One is also left with the strong impression that he and Maren have drawn much inspiration from their Christian faith. The book will be of particular interest to those with a love for flying, and in the pressures and joys of competitive gliding at the highest level.

Air Vice-Marshal John Brownlow,
CB OBE AFC FRAeS
Former Chairman, RAF Gliding and Soaring Association

CONTENTS

	Foreword.....	11
	Preface.....	13
Chapter 1	Fishing and Flying.....	17
Chapter 2	Living, Loving, Learning.....	29
Chapter 3	Phantom Flying.....	41
Chapter 4	Gliding Along.....	53
Chapter 5	Alliances.....	67
Chapter 6	Cross Country Currents.....	83
Chapter 7	Accolades and Accents.....	103
Chapter 8	Departures and Arrivals.....	117
Chapter 9	Hong Kong Living.....	129
Chapter 10	Worlds of Welcome.....	137
Chapter 11	Holding Fast.....	149
Chapter 12	Plain Soaring.....	163

FOREWORD

George Lee is probably the most focussed person I have ever met in life and has to be admired for his extraordinary application to the task in hand. Readers of this book will know him as a triple World Gliding Champion (Open Class), but many will not be aware that for a number of years he was an operational fighter pilot with the Royal Air Force flying F4 Phantoms where his application gave him the highest possible results. And in getting to that level, he did not have a straightforward ride and had to apply himself at every stage of his life to make the grade to become a Royal Air Force pilot; and not just any old pilot, but one of the very best. Although he writes about this in his book, his modesty has prevented him from making much of it—but I can and do so now. If ever there was a case of “pulling oneself up by the boot straps” then George is the perfect example.

But I really only know George from his gliding where his application is legendary. As a one time member myself of the British Gliding Team, I once asked him what the secret was that had made him achieve success well beyond my own rather meagre achievements, and I remember that he replied on the lines of, “I always set my sights on being World Champion and I knew I could achieve it”. He believed in himself and what an example he set by so doing. Looking back I did not have such confidence

in my own ability and that is probably the most important thing that George's success highlights.

Attention to detail is something else I recall so clearly and can be seen in this little snippet from a World Championship. At the end of each flying day, the wings of gliders taking part would have hundreds of squashed flies along the leading edge of the wings and one of the tasks of each crew at the end of each day would be to remove the aforesaid flies to ensure optimum performance was achieved at the start of the next day's competition. (This was in the days before "bug-wipers" had come on the scene). George's crew would deliberately leave just one fly on so that the next day, when George checked his glider, he would have the satisfaction of discovering and removing it! Attention to detail is another of George's characteristics that has set him apart from many others. The other one that is so relevant is that he was and is a superb pilot in the sense of being a "natural".

George, by his success in life of overcoming many obstacles and achieving his ambition, sets an example to all who aspire to achieve their own personal goals, and he also shows that one should strive for the utmost as only then will you discover what is really possible.

And, when his time in the Royal Air Force came to an end, I must mention his extraordinary application in achieving a first time pass in his ATPL (Airline Transport Pilot's Licence) sufficient to enable him to secure the one and only job available at the time with Cathay Pacific, and doing so in what must have been a near record time! Typical of him!

This book is inspirational and is a "must" for all glider pilots and to anyone who aspires to achieve something in life but sees nothing but obstacles in his or her path.

John Delafield
Air Commodore (RAF retired)
Eight times British National Gliding Champion

PREFACE

Dreams can be very powerful. Many dreams are without substance, even insignificant, but then there are the dreams that deeply impact the very core of our being. These are the dreams that we may experience repeatedly, the content of which keeps pressing into our thoughts and even our emotions.

This book is the story of my life so far, within which I have known the realisation of my dreams. The story starts with my early years in Ireland and the sowing of the seeds of desire to become a pilot. From my humble, non-aviation related beginnings in Ireland, the story continues with my joining the Royal Air Force (RAF) as an engineering apprentice and finally becoming a fighter pilot flying Phantoms.

I share how I took up gliding to show motivation towards becoming a pilot and how I was drawn towards competition gliding, the fascination contributing to my winning the first three World Championships that I entered, becoming the first person in history to do so. My story covers the time I took Prince Charles up for his first flights in a glider and my being subsequently invited to lunch with The Queen and Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace.

I describe how I met Maren, my Norwegian wife, and how we jointly made the big decision that I should exercise my option to leave the RAF

at the age of 38 and face the bleak prospect of trying to secure employment during the harsh recession of the early 1980s. The story continues with my acceptance into Cathay Pacific Airways and moving to Hong Kong to fly B747s for fifteen years.

I am a Christian, and *Hold Fast to Your Dreams* covers my coming to saving faith in Hong Kong, a faith that has become central in my life. Also covered is our joint decision to retire to Australia and set up advanced coaching gliding courses in rural Queensland.

I have lived a varied and exciting life so far. There are people who say life is pre-determined and that's the way things are going to work out. I disagree because I believe that we have been given the freewill to make choices and decisions in every area of life and that we have to live with the consequences of those decisions.

Dreams and visions can be powerful, significant events in life, and it's good to meditate on them. The power of the mind is often under-estimated; but if we reflect on the content and implications of our dreams and visions, they can become reality providing we hunger for that outcome. I dreamed about becoming a pilot and that became a reality. When I discovered the challenge and satisfaction of competition gliding, I dreamed about winning the World Championships and that became a reality. During my final years in Hong Kong, I dreamed about setting up gliding courses for experienced junior pilots. I was given a vision of what the physical setup would look like, and it all became a reality as envisaged.

I wrote this book because I was given a wonderful opportunity to have my life story published. It is my hope that everybody who reads my story will be both encouraged and inspired to hold fast to their dreams for they have the potential to be truly life-changing.



*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.*

—Langston Hughes



DREAMS CAN BE VERY POWERFUL. SOME MAY BE WITHOUT SUBSTANCE, EVEN INSIGNIFICANT—BUT THEN THERE ARE THE DREAMS THAT DEEPLY IMPACT THE VERY CORE OF YOUR BEING. HOLD FAST TO THESE!

From humble beginnings in Ireland, George Lee's inspiring, dream-catching story soars through blue skies that include piloting Royal Air Force Phantom fighter jets, winning three World Gliding Championships titles, and taking HRH Prince Charles on his first gliding flights.

An intensely personal account, *Hold Fast to Your Dreams* is a witness to an ordinary man's passionate pursuit of his extraordinary dreams that lead him through the clouds of Europe, Asia, and the United States as well as into the back streets of Hong Kong and the halls of Buckingham Palace where he had lunch with The Queen.

Believing strongly that people's choices determine their destinies, this high-flying and motivating true-life adventure is full of remarkable achievements as well as disappointments—both creating foundations on which the author builds his exciting life of success and dream fulfilment.

George Lee lives with his wife, Maren, on a small farm in Queensland, Australia. He previously flew in the Royal Air Force and for Cathay Pacific Airways. Gliding has been a major part of his life. He and his wife have two children, Sonja and Brian, and three grandchildren, Benjamin, Anna, and Dominic.



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