


Two of us: Ross Woodthorpe Anderson and Herbert 'Woody' Woodthorpe

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Ross Woodthorpe Anderson, 23, and his English-born grandfather, Herbert "Woody" Woodthorpe, 87, share a passion for flying, and in particular gliding. Woody first took up gliding 52 years ago, while Ross got his glider's licence at the age of 15.

Ross's story

I refer to him as my granddad, but I've always called him Woody. I don't know why. Ever since I can remember, I've been talking about planes with him. I think I was less than nine when he first took me up in a glider. Then it was pretty cool for a 14-year-old to be taught how to fly by your granddad. Everyone at school was so jealous that I could fly a plane, even though I couldn't drive a car.

He's pretty straight-up-and-down. If we're flying he'll say straight away if I've done something wrong, or if I could have done something better. He doesn't treat me softly, which I'm glad about. When he was instructing me he was always pilot-in-command, but if we're just going for a flight, I'll usually do most of the flying. It's a pretty cool place to hang out with your granddad: 3000 foot in a little glider.

Sky's the limit: Ross Woodthorpe Anderson and his grandfather Herbert.
Photo: Steven Siewert

Three years ago we hit this big bubble of air and Woody let out a little expletive. It's the only time I've ever heard him swear. We were in hysterics after that. Then we realised we needed to concentrate and get back down, because it was

getting quite rough up there.

He's fun to be around. He tells me terrible jokes. They are usually rude or black humour and they're hilarious, but they're so bad. He loves dogs. I love them as well. If we go out for a coffee and a dog walks past, he'll stop the conversation and start patting the dog.

He won't train me any more because he's given up his instructor's rating, partly because of an accident eight months ago. He was walking a dog and got pulled over when it ran the other way, and had to have brain surgery. To bounce back like he has is impressive, and he's getting back into gliding again now.

I started playing the cello at five, and did an associate diploma in musical performance and a bachelor of music. So music almost comes naturally. Like flying. They're always there and I'll always go back to them.

I'm doing a post-graduate certificate in tourism management and marketing, and I'm trying to get into the air force. From when I was little, it was either music as a career and flying as a hobby, or music as a hobby and flying as a career. Now I'm hoping flying will be my career. Without the gliding, I wouldn't have even considered wanting to be a pilot.

Woody has a phenomenal amount of knowledge of just about everything. He worked as a civil engineer in Hong Kong, Bahrain, Malaysia and the UK. He's written a memoir and it's fascinating. I read it every now and again and find out something new that he's never told me, and I think he's even cooler. I look up to him, not just in an aviation sense, but because he's done so much and he's always successful. He's so passionate, and he's instilled in me the same sense of passion about the things I want to do.

Last year I was awarded the Australian Bravery Medal, and after the ceremony Woody came up to me and said, "I'm so proud of you, you're a good egg." I felt so proud when this man, whom I respect so much, said that about me.

Woody's story

Ross and I have always been close. He's my only grandson. He was a cute kid, a bright spark and generally of a very happy disposition, and he had nice gingery hair, but perhaps that's grandfatherly talk.

I was a gliding instructor, and from when he was five years old he'd come down to the airfield at Camden, south of Sydney, with his mother and sit

in a glider. He didn't fly with me then because he was too small, but he was always interested in aircraft and the idea of being able to fly. When he was 14 he decided he'd have a go at gliding, and he did all his instructional flights with me. I got another chap to check him for his solo flight and off he went. He was 15. When he was doing his HSC, and then when he started uni, he didn't fly at all. Then he came back to it two years ago. Since then we've done quite a lot of flying together. I think he likes to fly with me, or fly when I'm there, but he hasn't done much flying recently because of my accident. Now we're both back in gear. I'm the captain with us two, because of my experience and also because I'm paying for the flight.

I've always been interested in aircraft. I was in the Air Training Corps [in England] when I was young. Then I went abroad and it wasn't until I was on leave in 1962 that I learnt about gliding courses being operated in England, and thought, "I must have a go at that." I was working in Hong Kong and there wasn't a gliding club, so I learnt to fly powered aircraft and got my instructor licence. It's only since I retired in 1988 that I've been able to go gliding on a regular basis.

Normally, when we're gliding together, we see each other once a week and we spend the whole day down in Camden. He's a very likeable lad and has a good sense of humour. I think it makes Ross laugh that I'm a bit of a dodderer sometimes, but he doesn't seem to mind going around with an old fogey like me.

Now he's got his own car, he can get over to where we're living at Winston Hills [in Sydney's north-west] and see my wife and me when he's free. That's another plus. And we're both fond of dogs and birds. I don't think I spoil him. We do things together we both enjoy, so it's spoiling myself, too.

Generally, I can say that I understand most of the things he does, though he has dressed weirdly at times. We disagree on odds and ends, but not about anything major. I think if we have disagreed, he's tended to give in to me, anyway. I hope I'm a mentor for him. I haven't set out with that in mind, but I hope I've given him a few ideas about things that are useful to remember.

He started playing a cello when he was quite young and he's stuck with that. Then he went on to do his degree in music at the University of Western Sydney. So he's shown dedication in his allotted field, which I think is a great thing.

He was presented with a bravery award last year. He was up on the NSW north coast with a friend and they saw a woman in the water obviously in trouble. Ross went into the water and managed to keep her afloat while the friend went off to get help. Someone must have reported it, because he was later rewarded with a bravery medal. I was very proud. It showed the right spirit.

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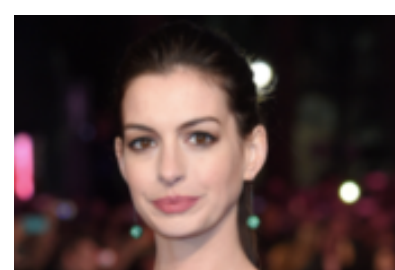
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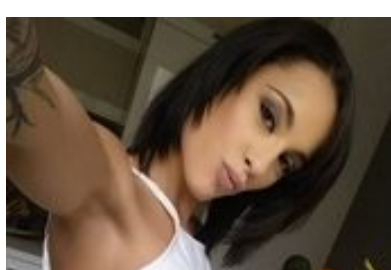
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