

The Allen-Stinson 1938 Trip into China

This story has been in the 'works' for 10 years and finally the collaborative effort has come together. Phyllis Donaghy, daughter of Dr. Stewart Allen, and David Stinson, son of Rev. John Stinson, have pooled together pictures and letters and remembrances in order to tell you this story. We, also want to commemorate this story to our parents and to the missionaries who gave their lives to the service of the people of China most notably in the province of west China called Szechuan or as it is spelled today, Sichuan. Also, we wish to commemorate this story to David's older sister, Dr. Dora Stinson -Thompson, who was born on Mount Omei in 1939 and Phyllis' older sister, Margaret Williamson, who was born in Kiating (Leshan) in 1930.

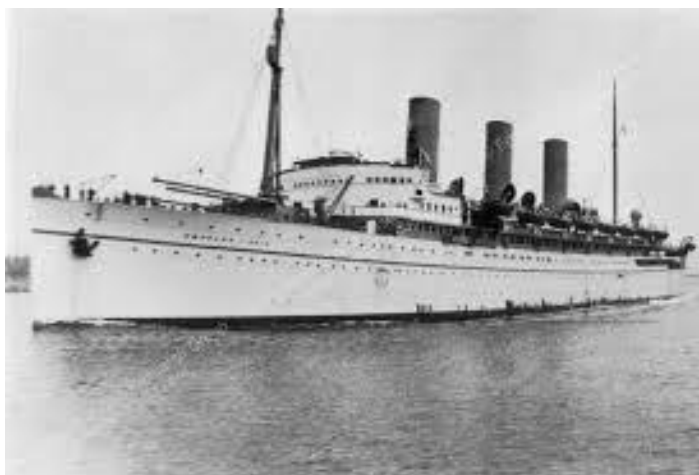
The Stinson story began around 1935 when John was a theological student at Emmanuel College in Toronto. At the time, there was an evangelical movement - 'The World for Christ in our Lifetime'. One of the evangelists spoke about the need for evangelism in China. However, it would be a few years before John was able to begin that journey. While at First United Church, Hamilton, under the mentorship of Rev. Crossley Hunter, John served as assistant minister. While there, he met Isabelle Morris who was president of the Young Peoples Union (YPU). Her capable organizational abilities, athletic abilities and her general charm and his love to sing and laugh and love of God and his own general charm soon resulted in their marriage in 1937.

They travelled west intending to sail for China to work in the United Church of Canada mission there but because of hostilities with Japan they were delayed until the spring of 1938 and until that time arrived worked with the First Nations peoples at Kispiox, B.C. The following early spring word came that they would be able to go to China or continue their work among the people of Kispiox. They chose to go to China and then made their way to Vancouver. There they made acquaintances with the Dr. Stewart Allen family. His wife, Win and 3 daughters - Margaret, Gwyneth and baby, Phyllis.

The Allen Story - Phyllis writes - I think my Dad was inspired by his Grandfather, a Methodist minister from 1886-1920, and very much believed in "spreading the word", though this was in Canada, his last church was in St. Andrews, NB. The United Church wanted to open new churches out west, which he was very much in favor of. After his retirement in 1910, he moved, first to Winnipeg, where one of his sons was teaching Physics at the university. Then he stopped over for a while in Saskatchewan and finally ended up filling in for a sick minister in Nakusp. British Columbia, where he died and was buried in 1923. Dad respected his grandfather highly, and having chosen to become a doctor, decided to use his training from University of British Columbia and McGill to help people who didn't have the benefit of modern medicine. He was encouraged by Jim Endicott's father to choose China.

It is unclear if the Allen/Stinson families met on board or previously on shore in Vancouver. It was the custom for 'new' missionaries to be accompanied by seasoned ones, so it was likely that they did meet in Vancouver as Stewart, later, mentions that the Stinsons seem like good people and there was also mention of their discomfort on the passage. More on that later. There, they boarded The Empress of Asia.

John writes in his remembrance of this ship and its journey. 'I suppose the

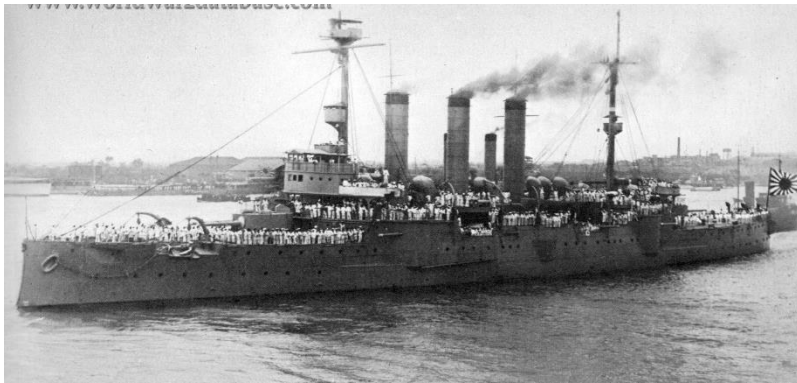


Empress of Asia is one of the most seaworthy of vessels, but I do not recall of a time when I felt more wretched.' Shortly after embarking on their way to China via the Aleutian Islands and subsequently Japan they ran into a massive storm either like a hurricane where you are buffeted entering the storm, then the quiet of the eye and then receiving its onslaught once more or they ran into 2 sequential storms. He continues - 'The wind shrieked and howled about the boat at times the waves were so high that they were hammering against the bridge. It was quite dangerous to go out on deck and for four or five days most of us remained within, needless to say that a landlubber like myself needed no coaxing. The storm seemed to travel in a wide circle for it abated as we came insight of the Aleutian Islands, beautiful snow-capped peaks and then struck us again with full fury a day or so later.....I breathed a distinct sigh of relief when I placed foot on the solid ground of Japan.

They arrived in Yokohama on March 31st. There they were met by a college friend Rev. Howard Norman and his wife and Mrs. Margaret and Dr. Ralph Outerbridge. A quick tour was had of Tokyo but they were limited to what they could see other than commenting on how modern of a city it was and the bustling crowds and cars and trucks and street cars and buses honked and whistled their way through the crowds that John said reminded him of the Toronto C.N.E.

It was on to Nagasaki where the ship took on coal. Again, they went ashore, and crowds followed them everywhere. They were warned to keep their cameras out of sight or they would be confiscated. Compared to the modern dress worn in Tokyo, these folks were dressed in gowns and it was the footwear of the ladies that attracted the most attention. Returning to the ship, 3000 tons of coal had been loaded by straw basket from barges, by men, women, and boys in less than 7 hours.

The yellowish-muddy waters of the Yangtse River tainted the ocean as they arrived in Shanghai the reality of hostilities was present with Japanese gunboats and armed Japanese police on shore. The Chinese had withdrawn their army the previous November conceding Shanghai to the invading forces. John writes - 'The famous Woo-sung forts lay in ruins As we went on up the river, further evidences came to view, pagodas standing gaunt against the skyline, shell holes plainly visible.... The tall buildings of the International Settlement were not attacked. They docked on the Whong-pew side of the river opposite the Idzumo warship, a heavy cruiser, flying the flag of the Rising Sun.



They were grateful to reach the fortified British colony of Hong Kong a few days later, April 7th. On Good Friday. They got their first view of a British cruiser, submarines, an airplane carrier, planes flying constantly overhead and searchlight piercing the sky at nighttime.

They were able to stay at the Phillips house in Kowloon. Dr Allen and John and Isabelle attended an open air Anglican Service of Witness. The addresses and songs were in both Chinese and English. It was hot and they found that umbrellas were quite handy for both sunshine and rain. Win Allen stayed 'home' with the 3 kids.



Again, we are unsure if supplies meant for the missions in the interior were already there waiting to be escorted inland or whether they came from Canada on the Empress of Asia. There were crates upon wooden crates needing to be taken to Sichuan and it could not be done by plane or road so the only option, as they found out was to travel out of French Indo China, present day Vietnam. Dr. Allen 'laid plans carefully for the trip which necessitated arranging passports for ourselves and a

whole sheaf of export and import papers for the freight that was in our care.'

John was 'elected' to accompany Stewart on this journey which meant that he would leave his wife, Isabelle, to travel with Win and the 3 children by plane to Chungking and from there to Chengtu where she would immediately begin language studies. I can only imagine the trepidation she faced entering this totally alien environment without her husband. Her letters home to her brother are filled with the challenges she faced each and every day.

On April 19th at 8 AM we see John and Stewart on the tarmac of the airport in Hong Kong waving goodbye to their wives and kids. I wonder if they knew that it would be a long time before they were reunited.



Read the story of the 'Flight to Chungking' at the end of this journey.

The only way to get from Hong Kong to Haiphong/Hanoi was by boat. They booked passage on the British owned Kwantung planning to leave Hong Kong on Sunday the 24th but as they boarded the Kwantung a fire broke out among the mail bags. A large number of Chinese passengers began to panic but shortly the ship's crew moved all passengers forward on deck while others dealt with the fire in the aft hold. So, their departure was delayed until Wednesday after the sodden and burnt mail and nearby cargo, 800 tons, was removed from the hold, ferried ashore, sorted and the best was retuned and reloaded. As an aside, this gives an example of often everyday hardships that folk had to deal with. The captain of the Kwantung told John that he had picked up a letter minus its envelope with part of the letter burnt away. It read 'Dear Jim – I have been trying to get a letter to you for over two years. I trust that this one arrives safely...' However, there was no hope that this effort would succeed as there was no address remaining. The subsequent trip was 'calm as a mill pond' as the captain put it. Flying fish seen through the day and phosphorent jellyfish at night. They arrived in Haiphong on the following Saturday at 10:30 AM. They would have off-loaded in Haiphong, which is on a delta 60 kms. downstream from Hanoi, on to rail cars. As it was the end of the month and the Customs office closed at noon and the customs staff were quite tired only 2 trunks were opened and the rest of the inspection was over. John and Stewart met up with Miss Knowlin, Rev. And Mrs. McCurdy and family and together, all 8, were taken on an exhilarating drive and eventually went for a sail on beautiful Baie D'Along now called Ha Long.



They stayed in Hanoi from Saturday until Wednesday and stayed at the Christian Alliance Mission, run by the Cadmans, where prices were reasonable (1.35 piastres per day), the meals, except for the chewy rolls and coffee that constituted breakfast, were acceptable and the house was empty as the Cadmans were away. John said that he had eaten hardtack before but these rolls were something else! They found food more to their liking in the little Chinese restaurants. Later they found out later that if the

Cadman's were at home it would have cost them 2 piastres more.



French was the operative language while in Hanoi and while there using the best French that they could muster, they visited the French garrisons and got permission to climb the famous hexagonal Flag tower built in the 1780's getting a view of the city and the very flat countryside about it. Visiting twice the museum they admired displays of art and sculpture from all of the

provinces of Indo-China. The botanical garden contained 100's of different trees, tigers and leopards and a 15-foot-high bronze Buddha which John thought looked rather frightening. John, at first, refused to wear shorts but it being so frightfully hot he decided that it was the wisest choice and got sunburned in the process.





The mission crates carried things like a sewing machine, a stove and refrigerator among other necessities and occupied 2 rail cars for the rail journey to Kunming. They ended up taking a faster train happily, arrived in Kunming 2 days later. Their freight arrived fortunately a day later. Dr. Allen writes - Getting on the train at Hanoi, we found ourselves on the end coach with several freight cars behind us. They always keep their engines up to capacity even for short distances so that there is no wastage of coal and man-power. There was first a baggage car then four 4th class carriages. These have wooden windows only with no doors at either end. The baggage is piled in the middle and the passengers sit on seats arranged along the sides or on top of the baggage as they prefer. After that was the carriage we were in. It was divided into 1st, 2nd and 3rd class. First consists of 1 mattress leather seat and several chairs of the same upholstering. It has glass windows all about and being so that an excellent view is provided of what one can see of the scenery around the freight cars at the rear. Second consists of 3 seats of the same upholstering but plainly finished. Third was of wooden slat seats. A kitchen stove was also on the car so that meals could be prepared by the boy in charge. These consisted of rice and curry or plain meat or fish as far as we could see. There was a door in the front of the third class compartment, the entrance for all the classes. There were windows and shutters which closed sufficiently to keep out the rain but not the smoke that poured in when we went through the tunnels. In fact it did not matter a great deal whether the doors and windows were shut or not. Seeing we were (the) only men we decided to take third class and thus saved about fifty dollars for the mission. We could not see any advantage except softer seats and we thought we could manage that for three days.

He notes that for some strange reason the trains never leave at 6:30 AM exactly. It is either a few minutes before or after and then never run at night but stop about 12 hours later for an overnight at a French hotel.



Over the 3 days the landscape slowly changes from cultivated fields to palm and banana forests and then very rugged terrain with little tree. The narrow gauge railway wound its way through 160 tunnels, countless bridges as the landscape became more barren and finally, on Friday, they arrived into the cool night air of Kunming - some 6500 feet above sea level.

However, they would find daytime temperatures considerably warmer.



The following Thursday, after a speedy clearing of customs, the next part of their journey would begin. The customs agent declared that he had been examining missionary things for 5 months and found that their statements to be correct thus reducing the necessity of opening all the cases and crates. Being in Kunming for only one week was unbelievable. The previous missionary took 7 weeks to 'get out'.

Again fortune was on their side, a new trucking company had just opened business and were able to supply the 8 trucks it took to carry all of the goods and materials and at a newly government mandated rate far lower than previously.

Finally, the road part of their journey would begin on Saturday, May 14th. 1136 kms. It would take 2 weeks. If you think about it that is only 80 kms a day. Dr. Bob McClure writes in his book 'The China Years' - there was a saying that the journey over the Burma Road was 'like an ant climbing over corrugated iron'.

On day 1, John and Stewart drove the lead trucks until they found that the Chinese drivers behind, were 'not anxious to travel very far' and had to be forced to do so. Stewart writes - 'They were very obstinate and not at all inclined to do what they were told and would not assist us in any way'. The roads being as twisting and sharp cornered as they were it was impossible to really know what was going on behind you.

On day 2, a truck turned a corner too rapidly and got into a soft spot taking an hour to clear up and then they discovered a truck 2kms. back had overturned taking 3 hours in the drizzling rain to get that straightened out. The drivers decided it was time to call it a day. Around this time, it was decided that Stewart would drive the truck at the rear.



On day 3, a 3rd truck went off the road taking 4 hours to clear up. Being upset that the drivers had quit so early the day before John and Stewart decided to push on but the trucks got separated in the night. Being in bandit infested country, they stopped in a village where Stewart slept in the car and a guard was posted. However, Stewart had no idea where the 5 trucks ahead were.

On day 4, they caught up to them where a bridge was broken. Earlier that day, John had to go into a village and hire some new drivers as some or all of the original drivers had decided that they had had enough and left. For four hours they waited while long timbers (see left) were bound to the broken girders - like a splint. The first truck, we can surmise it had John driving, tested the quality of the repairs. Stewart called the experience 'thrilling'. Anxious to arrive at their wanted destination, they drove on into the night without lights to illuminate their way.

On day 5, in the morning, they arrived at Kweiyang, the capital of Kweichow Province where they stayed for the rest of the day.

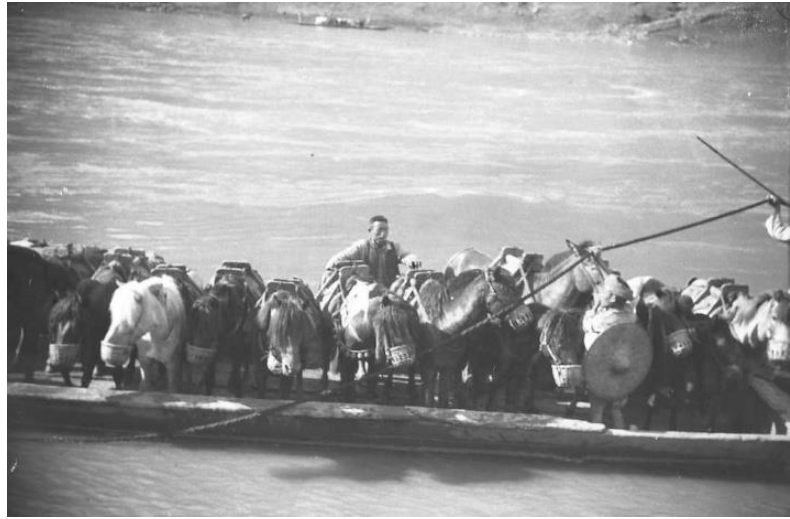
Fortunately for the next 450 kms. the road was of better construction although it consisted of climbing several thousand feet through a series of switchbacks and down the other side through another series of switchbacks. There is mention that John, while driving, whistled a lot (likely hymns to keep his nerves under control). Stewart writes - 'The turns were so sharp that on 5 or 6 of them the trucks had to back up to get around at all. Needless to say, we played safe and got out on each occasion that they had to do this. This had to be done 50 or more times on the whole route. There are hairpin turns until one gets almost dizzy going around them (24 going up on one count). He continues 'I think one morning John almost lost his nerve as that type of road was all new to him.' (John grew up on the gently rolling farmland of southern Ontario).



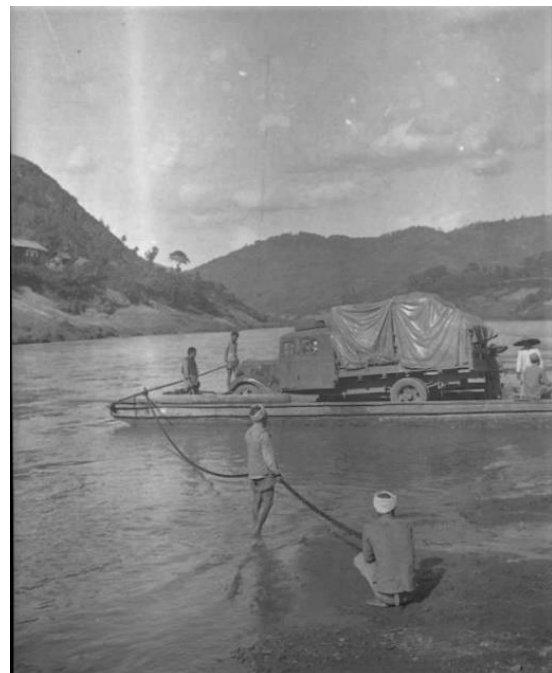
The following are a series of pictures which encapsulate this memorable journey



Tire Problems



Horse Ferry



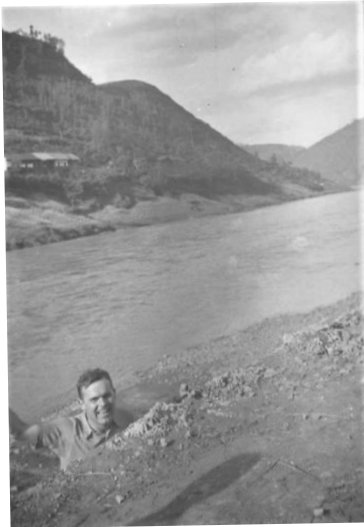
Fording A River



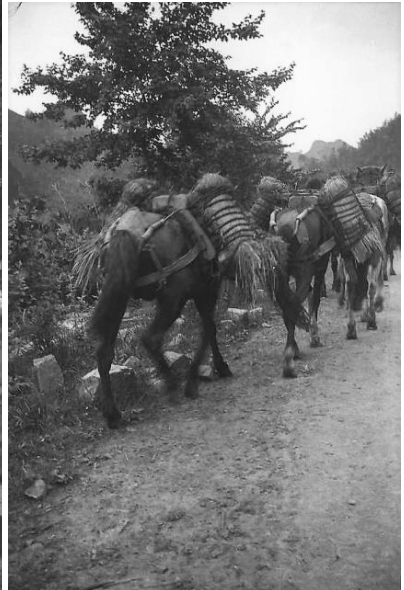
MORE TIRE PROBLEMS



PLAYING THE ERHU



FROM RIVER TO MOUNTAIN TOP



OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION



STONE GUARDRAIL

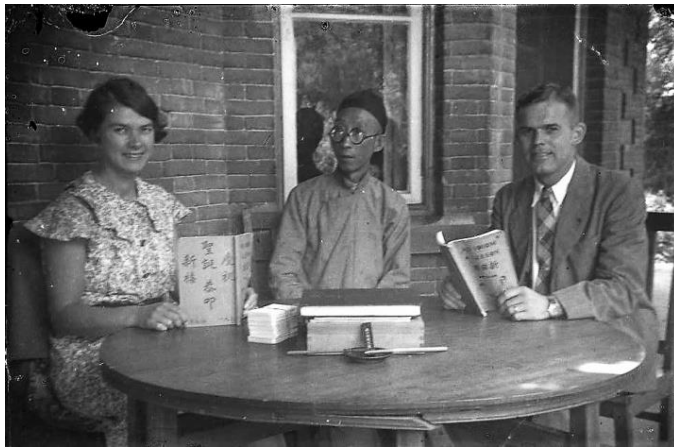


LOTS OF KIDS

The balance of the journey was less hilly and with only one mishap had the convoy arrive in Chungking just after noon on the 28th of May. Isabelle writes in her diary – They had some road trouble – one truck overturned, another slid into the ditch, one got a broken axle and a little bridge was broken. They had dysentery on the road but were well on arrival. John had gone on a stroll and his truck left without him. He had to catch a ride on a government truck.

John would still have to journey on to Chengtu to reunite with his wife, Isabelle but he would have to wait as the mission truck was being overhauled and he finally was able to see her again on Sunday, June 5th at 3 PM where he immediately joined her in language studies.

It is worthy to note that in many of the letters home the details of the various mishaps and delays were left out or quite simplified.



Stewart arrived to find his daughter, Phyllis, just getting over a case of the German measles, Gwyneth being a rambunctious little girl and Margaret attending school. He notes that Win 'looks fine and has lost the tired look that she had when she left home'.

The picture is from 1947, nine years later. A fourth girl is now added to the family. Stewart is about to begin a new adventure in China.

Back Row - Gwyneth, Stewart and Phyllis
Front Row – Win, Marion and Margaret

The Flight to Chungking

We left the 2 wives and the 3 Allen children on the tarmac at Hong Kong airport. Isabelle in a short note to her brother describes the flight leaving Hong Kong, Tuesday, April 19th, at 8 AM, as stormy and that she arrived in Chungking at 2:30 PM.

However, the Allen version is slightly more explicit. The first part of the flight and the last part were fine but Phyllis, the baby, did not like going down for each of the two landings the one in the middle of the flight and the landing in Chungking. However, the middle flight was a different story. Phyllis writes, 'In the middle, however, they spent half an hour or so in a terrific storm - couldn't land at all with high wind and lightning and rain with the plane, a DC3, getting into lots of air pockets. ... The women both lost their breakfasts. Win said that seasickness hasn't a patch on it that they didn't even have the time to be frightened or think about it. After it was all over, the pilot came back and got them fixed up with hot black coffee and talked to the children for a time. Margaret complained of her ears so Win gave her an aspirin which carried her through the bad part. Phyllis, the baby, went to sleep wedged between pillows in the aisle. Gwyneth stayed awake and the steward kept an eye on her for Win.

Isabelle in her diary writes – We had a stormy passage in the plane. We were all right for the 1st half of the journey but we struck a storm and started bumping in a very sickening manner. In another letter, she writes – “We hit air pockets and fell, then rose again, and the lightning flashed and clouds were dark – we couldn't see the earth for sometime. I wasn't interested in earth though.’

The storm delayed the plane half an hour – but the pilot and steward were very kind to us – they served us hot coffee and biscuits whenever we felt like it, adjusted our sets and so on. It was cold high up but very hot when we got to Chungking.

John writes to his mother – Isabelle had an excellent trip to Chungking aboard the airplane and writes quite enthusiastically about it. I was very glad that she enjoyed it and that all went well. *We can chuckle now that we know the real story.*

On arrival, Isabelle writes 'the smells of Chungking assailed my nose and almost sickened me. I was warned to keep close guard on my belongings that thieves often snatch things. Via chairs and rickshaws and a small river ferry and many, many steps going both up and down she finally made it to a compound where there were 3 houses and the hospital. One was where the Hoffman's lived; one was for Miss Irene Harris, the nurse, (where Isabelle would stay for a few days) and the other the Irishes who had just vacated and where the Allen's would live. Win Allen couldn't come immediately as the Hoffman children had whooping cough and she as well would have to arrange to bring their furniture from Kiating.

On Friday the 22nd, Isabelle was told to prepare immediately to drive to Chengtu with the Crawfords in their new car. A prolific writer, she describes this trip, the culmination of her journey into China through the countryside, in great detail



We hope that you have enjoyed this small snippet of our parents lives in China. The Stinsons, now a family of 6, came home to Canada in 1949. The Allens? Well that is another story. You must read Dr. Allen's book 'Trial of Faith'.

submitted by: Phyllis 'Da Jie' Donaghy

David 'Ge ge' Stinson