

FLOATPLANE PILOT ERRORS

In 1962, when I was twenty-five, my brother Ted and I bought Long Island in the Strait of Juana Fuca, which separated British Columbia, Canada from Washington State. The island was sixty acres, had eight sandy beaches, one deepwater cove, and was ringed by rock cliffs topped with windswept fir trees.



Long Island.

Ted and I had camped on Long Island as boys and had always secretly envisioned owning it. When we learned it was available, we didn't hesitate. The timing was perfect for Ted. He needed a north Puget Sound cove to contain Killer whales until they could be sold. After obtaining a Killer whale, Namu, to exhibit at his Seattle Marine Aquarium, Ted became a supplier of Killer whales to oceanariums worldwide.



Namu performing at Seattle Marine Aquarium (1963).

To fly by floatplane from American Lake near my home in Tacoma, Washington to Long Island took approximately one hour, depending on the wind. To drive to Anacortes, take the ferry to Lopez Island, then cross from Lopez to Long Island by outboard, was an all-day affair. So, I signed up for pilot lessons.

When my license was issued, my wife Wendy, our children, and I flew to Long Island at every opportunity. Over long weekends, we fished, went crabbing, gathered oysters, dug clams, and searched for agates. Sometimes we flew to Canada and visited friends on Salt Spring Island and Savory Island. We even flew to Vancouver for an evening at the ballet. Unfortunately, all of our trips did not go well. Following are five flights that could have ended in tragedy.



Ashley, Wendy, Sterling, Scott, baby sitter Whitney. (1969)

Storm

After completing flight training and passing my private pilot's exam, I had to make a one- hundred mile solo cross-country flight before my license would be issued. When I arrived at American Lake, the temperature was in the mid-seventies and the sky was cloudless. I filed a flight plan at the seaplane base, so aviation authorities would know where to search if I didn't return. Through the office window, I watched a forklift drop my red-trimmed, white Cessna 172 onto the lake. I did not call in for the weather forecast.



Jim at American Lake Seaplane Base (1962).

At the dock, I did the usual preflight: checked the fuel and oil levels, instrument gauges, and controls that operated the flaps, aileron, tail and water rudders.

Once off the water, I circled to gain altitude. If the engine were to fail, I could glide to Puget Sound or back to American Lake. I climbed to twenty-five hundred feet and turned west toward the Sound. As I passed Steilacoom, Washington's oldest city, I watched the open-decked McNeil Island prison ferry leaving its terminal.

Minutes later, I was above the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The original bridge, nicknamed "Galloping Gerdie," had collapsed into Puget Sound in November 1940 after rippling in the wind like the tail of a kite.

Over Tacoma's Commencement Bay, Mount Baker was framed in Seattle's skyline. The sun reflected a rainbow of colors off the mountain's snow-laden slopes. Mount Baker, a glaciated volcano near the Canadian border, holds the national annual snowfall record, ninety-five feet, set in 1999.

I left the Washington coast over the once-thriving logging community of Port Townsend. Halfway across the Strait of Juan de Fuca, I dropped down to look at the Smith Island sand spit, where Ted captured seals for his Seattle Marine Aquarium. I was surprised not to see any seals lounging on the hot sand.

Ten minutes later, as I was approaching San Juan Island, the sky grew dark and clouds blotted out the sun. I cursed myself for not checking the weather before departing, and switched radio channels.

"Sixty mile-an-hour gusts in the Strait of Juan de Fuca," blared the forecaster over and over. The empty beach at Smith Island was no longer a mystery to me. The seals had sensed the barometric weather change and had sought shelter.

The strait quickly became a maelstrom. My mind raced with possible alternatives. Setting down in the strait's four-foot waves would be like landing in a field of stumps. If I stayed in the air, I could lose control of the plane and crash. I decided to try and make my original destination. Friday Harbor was less than ten miles to the north and surely would offer some protection against the wind?

The full fury of the storm struck over Cattle Point at the southern tip of San Juan Island. My Cessna bounced like it was on a trampoline; one moment, tossed skyward, the next, falling back down. The yoke, which functions like a car's steering wheel, felt like the handle of a jack hammer. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Friday Harbor appeared at the skyline.

I dropped over the one-hundred fifty-foot fir trees into the harbor. My, God! Gigantic waves driven by the north wind were funneling through the harbor's entrance and crashing against every shore. A ghastly taste of bile permeated my throat. I was out of options. I had to land.

I turned into the full fury of the wind, reduced engine power, set the flaps at twenty-degrees, and let the Cessna settle to the water. I fought with the controls to remain level into the wind. If a wing caught a swell before the pontoons touched the water, the floatplane would cartwheel. I knew the impact would kill me. I thought about what would happen to Wendy and the children if I died.

Then the pontoons bounced off a swell and the concussion brought me back from my thoughts. The plane momentarily went airborne, and whitecaps cascaded over the windshield and blotted out all visibility.

I cinched my seatbelt, grabbed a life preserver, dropped my head into my lap, and braced for the collision. It came with a shuddering impact. The pontoons dove into the curl of a breaking wave, then bobbed like a log in a raging river. I unfastened my seatbelt and opened the cockpit door. If the struts, connecting the fuselage to the pontoons, collapsed the Cessna would sink. I was not going to be trapped if the plane went under.

The struts held. I breathed a sigh of relief and engaged the water rudders. I had to keep the Cessna in the troughs to prevent from being hammered by each oncoming wave.

There was no response to my manipulation of the rudder foot pedals. The wind and tide clutched the plane in a death grip, pushing me ever closer to a reef.

A few moments later, barnacles ground against the pontoons. I shoved the throttle in, jammed my feet on the rudder pedals, and yanked on the yoke. The surge of power tore the pontoons free and the Cessna rammed its way forward. The pontoons climbed the swells, then fell into the valleys as wave after wave smashed into the cockpit. I felt like I was driving through an automatic car wash in the middle of an earthquake.

I passed the ferry landing, then the seaplane dock, before increasing power, to break free of the wind, and turning shoreward. Then I let the current float the plane backwards.

Before coming alongside the dock, I opened the cockpit door to grab the rope that was secured to a pontoon. As I prepared to jump onto the pontoon, a man ran out onto the dock and caught the Cessna's wing. The wind and tide were too strong, however, and the wing slipped from his grasp and the Cessna shot forward like a sailboat on a spinnaker-run.

"No!" I screamed, visualizing what was about to happen.

I turned off the engine, but too late. The Cessna smashed into the ferry terminal, and the propeller imbedded into a piling, like the blade of a chainsaw stuck in a log.

My mind turned inward. I heard voices yelling in panic, but they didn't penetrate. Finally, my mental fog cleared. I was alive!

I climbed out of my seat and onto the pontoon. A swell crested above my waist. I held onto the strut to avoid being swept out into the fifty-degree water.

I turned toward the voices. Two ferry-terminal employees were struggling with a crow bar to dislodge the propeller from the piling. "Anacortes ferry!" they shouted.

Through foam and spray, I saw the ferry. The captain would never see my floatplane in time! I would be squashed like a bug!

At more shouting, I looked up. The propeller was free! The attendant was yelling that he was going to try and pull the plane out of the ferry's path. He threw me the end of a rope, and I fastened it to the pontoon cleat. He lowered himself to the beach, and then ran with the other end of the rope to the seaplane dock.

A moment later, the sound of wind was drowned out by the acceleration of the ferry's engines in full reverse. The ferry captain had seen my Cessna. But was it soon enough?

I prepared to dive into the icy water out of harm's way—then the plane began to move. The terminal attendant and Good Samaritan were pulling furiously on the rope. I took a quick look at the approaching ferry, and grabbed the buoy pole attached to the pontoon. I fended the Cessna's wing off the pilings, as the plane was pulled out of the ferry's path only seconds before being bashed against the terminal.

My blood pressure didn't come down and I didn't quit hyperventilating until the floatplane was secured to the dock. Then, after profusely thanking the men who had saved the plane, I phoned my flight instructor, Dick White, and explained what had

happened. He said he would alert Search and Rescue so they wouldn't come looking for me, and I called Wendy to tell her I'd had engine problems and would be taking the commuter flight from Friday Harbor to the South Tacoma Airport. This was not the time to tell her anything more. It took all my determination to keep from bawling like a baby.

The following day, Dick, who was also an aviation mechanic, flew to Friday Harbor to assess the necessary repairs to the Cessna. When he returned, he phoned me. Luckily, the only damage was a mangled propeller and punctures in the wing and fuselage's aluminum skin.

The next morning, he and I flew to Friday Harbor in his Cessna 180. While we installed a new propeller and patched the holes, my mind replayed my ill-fated flight and I questioned whether I was emotionally ready to fly my plane back to American Lake.

"Let's get going," Dick said.

I froze, staring at my reflection in the now mirror-like water.

"Griffin, move!" Dick shouted.

He knew, he told me later, that if I didn't overcome my fear and get in the Cessna, it was very unlikely I would pilot a plane again. Dick's harsh tone got me moving.

I waited for him to taxi away from the dock, then I cast off. I climbed into the cockpit, took my seat behind the controls, buckled the seatbelt, put on the headphones, and pulled up the water rudders.

Then I froze again.

"Griffin, get with it!" Dick shouted when he saw the plane drifting in the current.

His piercing voice blared through my headphones. Reacting like a puppet manipulated by strings, I followed his Cessna 180 into the air. I mimicked its every change in elevation and direction, until I arrived at the American Lake Seaplane Base. To this day, I have no recollection of that return flight.

Flooded Pontoons

To provide a docking facility to keep my Cessna 172 floatplane at Long Island, Ted built a walkway on piles and connected it to a float in the island's deepwater cove. The plane accessed the float via a ramp. One end of the ramp was attached to the float by a steel bar, which worked like a swivel. The other end hung just beneath the water's surface.

To inaugurate the ramp, Wendy, with our sons, Scott and Sterling (Whitney was still a baby; Ashley wasn't born yet), and my thirteen-year-old brother Charlie and I flew to Long Island the following Saturday. I taxied the plane up the ramp onto the dock without a hitch.



Long Island docking facility.

At dusk, the wind began to howl while we were roasting hot dogs and hamburgers over a beach fire. The weekend forecast had called for light winds in the Strait of Juana Fuca. I wasn't concerned.

Twice during the night, I was awakened by fir branches rattling against the beach cabin's canvas roof. Each time, I left my sleeping bag and checked on the plane. Waves were breaking over the top of the dock, but the Cessna's mooring lines were snug.

I woke at daybreak. The sun was peeking over the Cascade Mountains in a dazzling kaleidoscope of colors. Last night's whistling fir branches were now motionless. I left the cabin and went down to the float to check on the plane. Its position had not changed.

We spent the morning searching for agates and blue-green glass Japanese fishing-net floats that sometimes drift ashore during storms. Then, while Wendy and I packed the plane, Charlie looked after our boys who were searching the rock pools for sea anemones and star fish.

After everything was loaded, I made the standard preflight check. Then Charlie, Wendy, and I swung the plane around and let gravity take it down the ramp and into the water. I strapped everyone into their seats, with some difficulty, as our boys were holding containers filled with their rock-pool treasures. Then I cast off, took my seat behind the controls, steered around the cove's kelp beds, and taxied into the channel between Long Island and Lopez Island.

I turned into the wind, pulled up the water rudders, set the flaps at twenty degrees, and increased the throttle. The Cessna acted sluggish. The pontoons barely came out of the water.

Wendy turned to me for reassurance. I told her the rudders had probably snagged kelp, and it would break loose with increased speed. I shoved the throttle all the way forward. With the additional speed, I was able to bounce the pontoons off a wave and into the air. The stall buzzer immediately began blaring. I didn't have enough airspeed for the Cessna to fly, and the plane dropped back onto the water with a thunderous jolt.

"What's happening?!" Wendy screamed.

"I don't know." And I didn't. Over the engine noise, I hollered to everyone, "Put on your life jackets!"

I wasn't worried about drifting onto a reef because I had control of the plane. I opened the cabin door and stepped down onto the pontoon. Immediately I saw that the pontoons were protruding just above the surface, which was well below their normal height. They

had to be full of water. My suspicion was confirmed when I removed a cap from one of the openings used to pump out water.

"What is it?" Wendy shouted.

"Water seeped into the pontoons during the storm last night. There's no way the plane can fly carrying all this extra weight."

"I thought you were supposed to check the pontoons when you did your preflight?" Wendy said as she stuck her head out the door.

"I should have. With the plane out of the water and up on the dock, I didn't think it was necessary. I should have known better."

I found the hand pump in the storage locker and began pumping. The wind and tide continually pushed the Cessna back toward the reefs and every few minutes I had to restart the engine and move the plane back out into the channel.

When I grew tired, Charlie took over. By the time we finished pumping, we were soaked and chilled to the bone.

After we were in the air, eye contact with Wendy told me we were both thinking the same thing: If a strut had broken when we dropped back onto the water, the Cessna would have quickly filled with water and sunk.

Flying Blind

One fall day in the late 1960s, I woke to a rising barometer. From the bedroom, I couldn't see the lake, but a rising barometer usually indicates that the fog will clear by midmorning. I hadn't been able to fly for nearly two weeks because of a series of Pacific Ocean storms, and I had a fetish about flying twice a week to keep my skills honed.

Before I left for the office, I asked Wendy to call me when the fog lifted.

She called at 11:30. "The lake's clear."

"I'll call the weather line. If the forecast checks out, I'll come right home. Do you want to join me? We'll be back before the kids get home from school."

"Okay."

"Great. I'll see you in a few minutes."

Before I left the office, I phoned the weather line. The temperature would be in the high seventies, and no clouds. Then I called American Lake Seaplane Base and asked to have my Cessna 172 floatplane taken out of the hangar and put on the lake.

I picked Wendy up just after twelve. We were at the seaplane base ten minutes later; we lived on Gravelly Lake, which was separated from American Lake by only a few hundred yards.

From the parking lot, we saw the Cessna tied at the dock. We went straight to it. I didn't stop at the base office to file a flight plan because we would remain in lower Puget Sound.

During the preflight check, I noticed that the oil level was low, so I took a quart from the Cessna's storage locker.

"Jim, your secretary is on the phone!" shouted Dick. White, my flight instructor and the base mechanic, from the office.

"Okay, tell her to wait a minute."

I poured the oil into the intake pipe. When the can was empty, I pulled it out and ran up to the office, depositing the oil can into a trash barrel on the way.

"Is there a problem?" Wendy asked when I was back at the dock and fastening the cowling over the engine.

"No. Ruth called to tell me my meeting was cancelled, so the afternoon is free."

I completed the preflight, started the engine, and we taxied out onto American Lake. There wasn't a ripple on the water; early morning fishermen were home napping and water skiers were at school, with their boats put away for the winter.

"What's that film on the windshield?" Wendy asked as we were circling the lake to gain altitude before crossing to Puget Sound.

"What film?" I said. Then I saw it. "It's probably aviation fuel jettisoned from a McCord plane." McCord Field, an air force base, was located two miles north east of American Lake.

I finally realized that oil was spraying out of the Cessna's cowling. We were now just over halfway to Puget Sound.

In seconds, the windshield was totally obscured and I could see only out the side windows. I knew from working in an auto shop as a teenager that an engine quickly freezes up without oil. At any moment, I expected to hear grinding metal, like the sound of a fork caught in a garbage disposal. Tears were running down Wendy's cheeks.

"We're almost within gliding distance," I said.

Moments later, I turned the engine off and let the Cessna glide. The plane dropped quickly, but there was sufficient altitude to clear the trees at the edge of the Sound. I looked north through Wendy's side window. In the distance, the Narrows Bridge towers rose out of the water like sentinels. A tug was pulling a gravel barge. Against the tide, it looked like it was standing still. Two pleasure cruisers were traveling south. There were the usual salmon fishermen in small outboards clustered near the bridge pylons. None of the boats appeared to present a problem.

I turned north into the wind, watching the instrument panel as I had been taught to do in simulated landings, while wearing blinders like the horses in New York's Central Park, so I didn't see out the windshield. The altimeter was dropping rapidly. We were just over one-hundred feet off the water.

"A sailboat!" Wendy screamed, staring out her side window. "It's crossing in front of us!"

The sailors were oblivious to our presence. I turned on our engine, then quickly turned it off. The sailors heard the noise and looked up. We were close enough to see their terrified expressions. They instantly "came about," tacking easterly. It was a close call.

The Cessna settled on the water. The north wind and incoming tide quickly stopped the plane's momentum. I opened the cabin door, stepped out onto the pontoon, and unfastened the engine cowling.

"No!" I exclaimed. I couldn't believe my carelessness.

"What?" Wendy shouted, with her head out the cabin door.

"I left the cap off the oil-intake pipe when I was fastening the cowling. Thank God it's still here."

"Do you have more oil?" she asked.

"One quart."

I emptied the last quart into the oil spout, then pulled out the dip stick. It was dry. I couldn't remember how much oil the engine held. At the moment, it didn't matter. I had a

more pressing problem. The eight-knot current was rapidly sweeping the plane toward the rock retaining wall that supported railroad tracks along the Sound's easterly shore.

Wendy and I went to work using toilet paper to absorb oil off the windshield. Then we leapt into the cabin and I started the engine. We made the ten-minute flight back to American Lake in a high state of anxiety. I expected at any moment to hear grinding metal.

The following day, Dick called and said that though the dip stick had been dry, there was enough oil to keep the engine lubricated for the short flight. Another possible catastrophe had been avoided.

Wing in the Water

"Jim," Ted said on the phone, "it's supposed to be in the high seventies Sunday. Can you and Wendy bring the kids over for a beach picnic? With school starting Monday, it will be a little hectic around here after that. Come in the plane. You've been promising my kids a ride." Ted and his wife Joan lived on Bainbridge Island, a twenty-five minute ferry ride across Elliott Bay from Seattle.

"I'll check with Wendy. After the incident with the oil, she's a little sensitive about the children flying with me."

"I understand. Suggest that she drive."

"I'll get back to you."

I got home from the office just as Wendy was putting dinner on the table. "Wendy," I said, as we all sat down, "Ted and Joan want us to join them for a picnic on Sunday. Do we have anything going on?"

"No, we're clear."

"He wants us to come in the plane, so I can give his kids a ride. You know I've been promising them."

"Okay, but I'll take the children in the car."

"No!" they screamed. "We want to go with Dad."

By the end of dinner, the children had worn their mother down, and she agreed that we all would go in the plane.

Sunday morning, I phoned the weather line. As Ted had said, the forecast called for sunny skies, with the temperature in the high seventies. It also mentioned twenty-five knot wind gusts in lower Puget Sound. The wind would be no problem because Ted's house was at the end of a sheltered cove. Then I called American Lake Seaplane Base and asked to have my floatplane ready to go at one o'clock.

When we arrived at American Lake, I went to the seaplane base office to phone in a flight plan. Wendy took the children to the dock and helped them put on life preservers. Ever since the incident at Long Island, when I had neglected to check the pontoons for water, Wendy had insisted on life preservers. By the time I got to the dock, she had everyone strapped into the back seat. With three young sons and a four-year-old daughter, each seatbelt held two children.

I completed the preflight inspection, making certain that the oil cap was firmly attached and the pontoons were dry. When I cast off, I threaded my way through the water skiers and fishing boats to the southern end of the lake. A light northerly breeze

filtered through our open cabin windows, helping to offset the heat of six sweating bodies.

Less than a minute after liftoff, we were over the Tacoma Country and Golf Club, in sight of our house on Gravelly Lake. While circling to gain altitude, before crossing to Puget Sound, we saw our German shepherd, Max, and Golden Retriever, Sprig, curled up on the warm asphalt driveway.

When I reached the Sound, I flew northward, skirting the east side of Vashon Island; then northwest toward Bainbridge Island, which was silhouetted by the Olympic Mountain's snowcapped peaks. The Olympic Mountains separate Puget Sound from the Pacific Ocean.

I buzzed Ted's house at 500 feet. He was on the dock, working on the Pegasus, his boat for capturing Killer whales. Joan and their four children were on the beach. They heard our plane and waved. I dipped my wings in acknowledgement.

As forecast, the Sound was choppy, but the bay was like glass. I made a steep descent over the fir trees behind their house. However, I misjudged the distance and touched down near the entrance to their cove. I immediately cut my power, but momentum carried the Cessna out into the white caps.

A gust of wind caught the right wing, lifting it into the air and plunging the left wing into the water. The Cessna hung in the air like the high side of a teeter-totter, on the verge of flipping. Vivid memories of landing at Friday Harbor in a storm flashed through my mind. I grabbed hold of Wendy and pulled her upper body (her seatbelt was still fastened) into my lap. Whether it was the shift in weight, or a lessening of the wind's intensity, I don't know, but the right pontoon dropped back onto the water. I took a deep breath and breathed a sigh of relief. Wendy sat speechless, frozen in place. I turned north into the wind and regained control of the Cessna.

The ashen faces of my brother and his wife Joan, as we came alongside their dock, sent shivers down my spine. We could have drowned.

Holes in the Fuselage

One summer morning in the early 1970s, Wendy and I flew to Savary Island in the Canadian San Juan Islands to spend the weekend with friends. We cleared customs at Nanaimo, one-hundred miles north of Victoria, B.C. on the east coast of Vancouver Island. I circled Savary until I spotted their summer cabin. My friend Dick, his wife Betty, and his parents were waiting on the beach when we taxied to shore.

After unloading, we towed the Cessna 172 behind Dick's speedboat to a buoy anchored out beyond extreme low tide. We tied the plane to the buoy, and then crossed the channel to the Lund Marina on the mainland to pick up groceries. Lund was the end of the road for cars driving north on Canada's west coast.

On our return to Savary, we stopped and tied the speedboat to the buoy. Then using a long rope, tied the Cessna to the back of the boat. We rowed to shore in a dinghy, looking back to make sure the boat and the plane were separated in the current by the length of the rope.

The temperature remained in the eighties for the next two days. We water-skied, played touch-football on the beach, tennis on a wood-planked court, and hit golf balls into the ocean, which we picked up at low tide.

The night before we were to depart, I woke to the sound of hail bouncing off the cabin's metal roof and pine branches rattling against the windows. I jumped out of bed to go check on the plane.

"What's wrong?" Wendy asked, bolting upright as she saw me running toward the door.

"A storm is brewing. I can't see a thing through the window."

From the porch, I could just make out the plane's silhouette. It appeared to be riding comfortably some distance behind the boat. Since I hadn't taken time to put on shoes or a coat and I was quickly soaked by the rain, I dashed back inside.

By morning, the storm had blown over. The Cessna, strung out behind the boat, looked to have weathered the squall without a mishap. After breakfast, we all sat on the porch, cradling our coffee and tea mugs, enjoying the array of colors ricocheting off the snowcapped peaks of the Coast Mountain range.

When it was time to leave, Dick rowed me out to the plane. A few feet from shore, I saw that something was terribly wrong. The Cessna's profile had changed.

As we drew near the buoy, Dick stammered, "My... God!... What happened?"

I began hyperventilating. There were gaping holes, some more than a foot long, in the aluminum skin of both the fuselage and wing. One large piece of skin clung to the boat's light pole like a pennant from a sailboat's mast.

"Will you be able to fly?" Dick asked.

"I don't know."

"The wind must have blown the plane into the back of the boat at slack tide when there wasn't enough current to keep them separated," Dick said.

Where could I get it repaired, I wondered? The nearest town, Powell River, was more than an hour's drive south of Lund, and I might have to go as far south as Vancouver. Dick rowed to shore while I checked the controls, cable by cable, to make certain that the flaps, aileron, and the tail and water rudders were functioning properly. Nearly an hour later, after pumping the pontoons, I started the engine and taxied to shore.

My blood pressure shot up when I saw the concerned looks of Wendy and the others on the beach. To them, the Cessna must have looked like a badly shot-up reconnaissance plane in an epic war film.

"What's your speed?" Dick's father asked.

He was an engineer. He might know at what air-speed the skin would peel off.

"It cruises at about 105 knots," I answered.

"I don't know," he said. "It could be risky."

While I was trying to figure out what to do, Dick's mother came out of the cabin, carrying two rolls of four-inch plastic duck tape. It was similar to that used by my instructor Dick White years before when we had patched the punctures made when my Cessna collided with the Friday Harbor ferry terminal.

"This ought to hold the skin from further tearing," Dick's mother said.

Two hours later, we were ready to leave. I checked the weather one more time, Wendy and I got lots of hugs, then everyone helped to turn the plane around and we left.

"Will the tape hold?" Wendy asked as we lifted off the water.

"I hope so." I didn't have the slightest idea. At any moment, I expected the tape to tear off and the aluminum skin to begin peeling.

But the tape held and we made it back to American Lake without mishap. The U.S. customs agent at Roche Harbor on San Juan Island did ask, with a grin, if we wanted to make a report on who was shooting at us.

"That's it," Wendy said as she stepped onto the dock at the American Lake Sea-Plane Base.

"That's what?" I asked.

"Neither I nor the children, if I have anything to say about it, will ever fly with you again."

Flying without the family soon became a burden rather than a joy, and I finally had to accept the possibility that my next pilot error could end my life.

I quit flying.