

When the Dust Settled

~By *Adverse Yaw*

Suddenly things didn't seem to be right. The aircraft wasn't accelerating like it should, and it seemed heavier than it ever had before. The field seemed rougher than when we landed and the grass taller and thicker. Something was holding us back and not allowing us enough speed to get airborne. I had a white-knuckled grip on the yoke with one hand and was trying to push the throttle through the firewall with the other. I began to feel like a monkey on the back of a running greyhound—about to lose his funny little hat—barely hanging on with both hands. It seemed that I had been transformed from a pilot into a frightened little passenger absent any control of my immediate destiny. I began praying under my breath! “Please God, let us get airborne! Please God, don't let me screw up! Please God, please!” Dead ahead and above were treetops, and behind the trees were several dangerous electrical wires which lay stretched between sets of double poles. If we flew into them we would be dead for sure, it could decapitate my brother and me, or worse, we would burn to death dangling in the wires twenty or thirty feet above the ground. Finally, we became airborne, but only in ground effect. There was no possibility of clearing the obstacles ahead. I started a shallow turn to the right, and I could see more obstacles in this direction, but they were farther away. The speed began to increase slightly. The ground below was now filled with ditches and brush that was four to six feet tall. As the landing gear hit one clump of brush after another acceleration became impossible. I felt that I had no choice but to pull back the throttle and land the airplane as best I could—straight ahead. The landing was rough and noisy, little more than a controlled crash. When the aircraft finally came to a stop, the prop was bent, and one of the wings had suffered major damage. There was no way to fly this airplane out of here. I was finished, the airplane was finished, but thanks to God's grace, no one was hurt. My brother was fine, and there were no injuries to any property on the ground.

My ego was suffering, it was bleeding to death, and I began to feel my world ending. Only hours earlier it had been one of those glorious Saturday mornings when soft breezes and warm sunshine made future dreams exhilarating. Now, all my emotions were a dark shade of gray. The future seemed dreary. I was a failure, a stupid person who had almost killed my little brother and me. Moments before I had thought of myself as a rooky aviator just waiting for the opportunity to prove my worth. I had been caught up in a fantasy of preconceived grandeur. But now, those dreams of being Captain Evans in a Boeing 747 SP on short final into Hong Kong International had vanished. If I had been of Japanese descendents, falling on my dagger would have been my only option. I was consumed with disgrace and the agony of defeat.

The owners of the aircraft that I had rented were less than happy when they learned that it was seriously damaged. They wanted their pound of flesh.

I was broke, driving an old car, and living at home. I had to have help with money to rent the airplane. I had no extra flesh to offer much less a whole pound.

The owners were paid several thousand dollars by their insurance company to repair the airplane, but of course less the deductible. The owners perceived that I should be required to make up the difference, and then some. They hired an attorney who attempted to talk me into sending them a check for several thousand dollars. If I had had the money I would have gladly sent it to them, but it was all that I could do to make ends meet.

I seemed to be very much alone. I remember what a friend told me after the incident. He was a highly respected person who is still working in aviation. He said to me, "Evan—know and remember this. In your situation the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) is not your friend—be careful what you say, and how you say it." I took his advice to heart, although, my experience with the FAA was not confrontational at all. I was honest, but tried to speak only when spoken to by the FAA inspector. He turned out to be an okay man who later gave me a check flight to make sure that I was competent. He offered his explanation of what had happened, and how I should have handled it. He filled out the blanks on the necessary pages which certified that I was a safe aviator. This was the official blessing from the 'administrator' that allowed me to legally fly again. Although a dirty smudge on my record, I could still experience the joys of commanding an airplane in flight.

There was still the issue of this pound of flesh that the airplane owners wanted. It was a troublesome burden that seemed to be my constant companion—a ball and chain that I couldn't seem to free myself of. I met with a friend from my church and told him my problems. He laid hands on me and prayed for me especially on this issue.

The next day, for some mysterious reason an older man came into the retail store that I was managing. I was searching for advice and encouragement from anyone. I am the oldest of three boys, my Dad had passed away recently, which made me feel even more alone and frightened. It was a time in my life that I was trying especially hard to be a good brother for my younger siblings. This older man represented the father that I no longer had, and he must have sensed my need because after my needling him for legal advice, he looked me directly in the eye with a grandfather's kindness and said. "Evan, tell me exactly what you have done, and tell me all of it." Unexpectedly and all of a sudden a rush of relief filled my being. It was as if my prayers were being answered and Providence was providing for me right there in that retail store. I will always remember that moment. Peace and calm began to flood my being.

I could mention all the details that happened, and how the manager of the flight rental company had been rude and cold to me. How I felt the lawyers threats that stung like a whip. How I learned about insurance and the way it really worked. Now unexpectedly during this time of constant turmoil God had provided a savior to snatch me from the fire. Honestly, I was overwhelmed. And just thinking about it now, causes me to tear up.

When Mr. B. J. Cooper walked into the store that morning, I introduced myself and asked him what he did for a living. I was, and still am a bit nosy, but in a warm and friendly way. He told me that he was a lawyer, and when I asked him what kind

of a lawyer, he quickly replied, “A damn good one!” I then spent the next few minutes trying to explain that that was not what I meant—that what I meant to ask him was what kind of law was it that he practiced. I had been humbled right off the bat, and I could tell that this lawyer was one to be respected by his opposition. He answered that his specialty was Aviation Law. I immediately started quizzing him for information that might apply to my situation. This is when he made eye contact with me and became a grandfather figure in my life.

As I recall this too was a Saturday morning, and Mr. Cooper spent it with me as I gave him a blow-by-blow description of what had happened, and what was going on.

He gave me detailed instructions of what I should do which included timing of when to act and react. He invited me into his office for more consultation. He advised me that I should proclaim or declare to the opposition that he, Mr. B. J. Cooper, represented me. To make a long story short, my problems with the owners of the airplane disappeared. Money or fees were never mentioned by me, or by Mr. Cooper. Mr. Cooper had both represented and opposed almost everyone who was anyone in aviation, giant corporations such as Piper Aircraft, Cessna Aircraft, Continental & Lycoming Engines to mention only a few. And now, this precious older gentleman was the very same man who out of his generosity and kindness, had pulled me out of what I perceived to be an extremely hot and consuming fire.

Mr. Cooper called me one morning and said, “Evan, — B. J. Cooper here. The good news and bad news is the opposition agreed to settle for nothing if I agree not to sue them.” I asked him “What should I do now?” and I will never forget his reply. “Evan, don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

I was so relieved that I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t say much of anything except thank you.

It was several months before I saw Mr. Cooper again, and it was inside of an elevator full of men in dark suits with serious looks in their eyes. We made eye contact, and he asked how I was doing. I never saw him again. I often wonder if he realized what an impact that he had had on my life.

Finally, the end of this story is that God is good and provides all that we need. I still fly as often as I can. I am a better pilot than before—safer, smoother and still cherish every minute that I’m airborne. I gave up on a career in aviation and went into the insurance business. My life is not without problems, but I have been blessed with a lovely wife and two wonderful children. I am not rich by any means, but there is and always has been plenty to go around. ✈

This is a true story than happened more than twenty years ago as told to me by my friend Evan Evans of Bakersfield, California.