

**Flight To The Angels**  
**by**  
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Young lady, why do you say, "How are we today?" Don't  
You know how you are? How do you expect me to answer?  
As a prisoner in a nursing home, victim of a stroke, my  
Means of communication is very limited. All I can do is  
Lay here in quiet embarrassment, while you give me a bath.

Powdered eggs are not my favorite blah breakfast. Like sawdust,  
They dribble down my chin, and mix with my spit, which  
Nobody seems to care about, nor wants to clean. Zombie,  
You call me. What do you know? You are young and pretty,  
Full of life, and cannot visualize yourself, old and gray.

You say that I look like I am ready to board the Flight  
To the Angels. What a paradox, that Death is called  
"Flight to the Angels", considering nearly a century of  
Flight has been my life. Under your breath, you say,  
*"Pops, you smell more like Hogen's goat than clover honey!"*

Girl, you don't know what bad smells like until you have  
Walked behind a mule all day. Growing up on Granddad's  
Farm, I can remember dreaming of flight. Occasionally, a  
Bi-plane would fly over, and I knew that someday I would  
Be at the controls of one. Did you say honey?

Grandma made the best homemade bread. Hot, fresh out of  
The oven, with melting butter, fingers sticky with honey  
From Granddad's bees. Images of smoked ham, fresh sweet  
Corn, and homemade chocolate ice cream for desert bring  
Me back to those favorite memories of childhood.

Stinging my face, the sands at Kitty Hawk made me cry  
On that cold, windy, December day. Granddad said history  
Was in the making, but at age five, all I wanted to was  
Go home. My tears dried as I stood in awe, fascinated  
By the first flight of the Wright Brothers.

In my teens, I worked for free as a mechanic to learn to fly.  
Then, at twenty, I flew a SPAD VII in France, in the same  
Squadron that flew against Baron Manfred von Richthofen.  
Exhilarating as the hope of having the Red Baron in our  
Gun sights, gut wrenching was the fear we would be in his.

Upon firing my guns, and seeing the Fokker D.VII react  
Violently to the bullets in its fuselage, I flew close  
Enough to the German pilot to verify my first kill. I  
Had a fleeting glance into blue eyes agonizing that  
There would be no more talk about "After the war..."

As if waltzing with its invisible partner Gravity,  
The Fokker augured into the ground, without exploding.  
From the air I could see the crash site was near our  
Aerodrome. I landed my plane and everyone cheered.  
We immediately drove to the smoldering wreckage.

Jumping off of the truck before it stopped, I ran to  
The pilot. "Call the Doctor" I yelled. Bleeding, and

Unconscious, he died in my arms. A one-month old  
Photograph of him, his pretty wife, and a young son  
About two years old stuck to his blood-soaked pocket.

Gremel is a German name. My granddad immigrated from  
Munich in 1850 at age ten. This pilot and I could have  
Been friends, could have both fought on the same side.  
What have I done? My friend WWI Ace Eddie Rickenbacker  
Handed me a saw, and I cut off the propeller at the spinner.

Beer flowed that night. Everyone wanted to shake my  
Hand, buy me a drink, and caress the cut off prop,  
Which was the conversation piece of the evening.  
Blaming beer as the cause of me getting sick was less  
Honest than blaming memories of a German pilot's eyes.

Somona, the cleaning lady asks, "Mr. Gremel, why do you  
Have tears in your eyes? I wish you could talk to me."  
This lady brings me home made tacos that the nurses don't  
Know about, places a fresh flower in a vase everyday,  
Gives me picture calendars, and always talks to me.

My mother died during childbirth. Devastated, my dad  
Vanished into the Alaskan goldfields, leaving me with  
Granddad. Inspired by his salty sea captain stories, I  
Chose to sail around the world, taking my discharge in  
France, after the signing of the Armistice.

Tramp steamers to Rome, Venice, Athens, Constantinople,  
And a place nobody ever heard of called Sinop, on the South  
Black Sea coast. There, broken Greek marble columns  
Silently spoke of the triumphs and tragedies of ancient  
Warriors, ignored by men riding in solid wheel ox-carts.

In Jerusalem, I picked up as a souvenir a square-cut  
Stone the size of a dice out of a Roman road. Did  
Christ's feet touch this stone as He walked from the  
Garden of Gethsemane on His way to the cross? Perhaps  
The time is near when I will be able to ask Him myself.

Rough Turkish cigarettes parched my throat as the hot  
Sun reflecting off of sands near the Pyramids burnt my  
Face. River of Moses, Riddle of the Sphinx, Tombs of the  
Pharaohs, so exhilarating, so enchanting. Riding a camel  
In Egypt cured me of any romantic Bedouin notions I had.

Africa. The day I finally hiked to the top of Mount  
Kilimanjaro left me puffing and wheezing like a Stanley  
Steamer. Proud Black hunters led me on safaris. While  
Eating gazelle steak, I worried about lions. Elephants  
With ivory tusks and giraffes roamed the Plains of Kenya.

"Magnificent" inadequately describes the beauty of the  
Taj Mahal. How can such a rich luxury exist in India,  
The Land of the Sacred Cows, while so many are starving?  
Stepping around crippled beggars, wallowing in their own  
Stench, I felt guilty as I averted my eyes from theirs.

To tell of my experiences on this Round-the-World  
Trip, I would have to write a book. I can't even hold  
My hands still. Kathmandu to see Mt. Everest, then to  
Bangkok, to Borneo, on to Australia. There, I drank

Beer with an Aussie pilot, who gave me a kangaroo pin.

Those lads from Australia and New Zealand were the  
Bravest of all. Little did they expect to see me when  
They told me back in France to look them up if I ever  
Travelled to their countries. Many beers cloaked many  
Tears; men couldn't cry while toasting those who died.

Exotic, beautiful birds sang in the rain forest near  
Cairns, Australia. The best diving in my life occurred  
In the Great Barrier Reef. Clam shells two feet in  
Diameter, royal blue starfish, and fish of every color  
All lived in coral reefs, guarded by reef sharks.

To experience the exquisite colors of Ayers Rock, in the  
Northern Territory, one must view it at sunrise. Fire  
Opals, Aborigine handmade boomerangs, and graceful,  
Bouncing kangaroos are dominant in my memory of the  
Land called Down Under.

Mt. Cook, the crown of the Southern Alps on the South  
Island, Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, fjords such as  
Milford Sound, the extinct snow-covered volcano of Mt.  
Egmont on the North Island, and Maori cultural influence  
Leads one to believe New Zealand is paradise found.

Finally, after several months of roaming in New Zealand,  
I obtained a deckhand job working on a supply ship going  
To the states, via Papeete, Tahiti. Imagine my surprise  
While walking around that island, of seeing a young lady  
Without a top to her dress, as if in a Gauguin painting!

Long after mountains of Tahiti disappeared over the  
Horizon, images of that girl lingered in my mind, as did  
Upside-down coconut trees playing ping-pong with a full  
Moon on Pacific Ocean reflections...Farm boy, combat  
Veteran, pilot, world traveller, now a man of twenty-one.

Home from the War. Ecstatic to be in the land of the  
Free, alive. Proud, somewhat arrogant, a well-travelled  
Pilot, with a jet black bushy beard; and no visible  
Wounds. Clickity-clack, America from a boxcar: Arizona  
Cactus, West Texas, Gatlinburg, north to Michigan.

Nothing had changed but me. Civil War vets interrupted their  
Checker games, feebly shook my hand, welcomed me home.  
With eyes staring into the past, they ask me how Fly Boys  
Could know anything about war, flying those inferno  
Machines, high above the smell of blood, guts, and death.

Infected by disease called travelitis, I realized the  
Restlessness in my soul guided my inner being to search  
For a direction not marked on my compass - up. Ambling  
Down the path called Destiny, I came across a 1918 Curtiss  
JN-4D Jenny. Prior to owning a car, I flew my own plane.

Honing my flying skills, I soon joined the fraternity of  
Veteran pilots, barnstorming county fairs. Introducing  
Other to the marvels of flight, we entertained them  
With their first rides in Flying Machines. Within a few  
Months, my Jenny and I landed in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Every bit as spectacular as the Swiss Alps, and Mt. Cook  
In New Zealand, America's Alps are the Tetons. My Jenny  
Flew with her twin sister in mirrored formation over the  
Calm waters of Jenny Lake, intruding on the solitude of  
Twice imaged snow-capped peaks, pink from an ebbing sun.

Herds of majestic elk live near the Tetons. In autumn,  
When they are in rut, their bulging is heard for miles.  
Golden leaves of Aspen contrast in a harmonious balance  
Of nature with royal blue skys, tall green pine trees,  
Branches heavy with diamond dust of early snowfall.

Time for Physical Therapy. Robert is OK. He tells me  
About his girlfriends, and his plans to enroll in medical  
School. Like Somona, he talks to me as if he knows I can  
Hear. But brother, at my age, some of the exercises he  
Puts me through would make a man half my age wince.

Hard up for cash, and winter coming on, I decided to try  
Doing some honest labor, instead of flying youngsters  
In my Jenny around the Tetons and calling it work. Fence  
Mending and rounding up strays didn't sound too difficult.  
Nobody said anything about Wyoming winds at forty below!

Only in his piercing bluish-gray eyes did Arrowhead Andy  
Resemble a TV cowboy. Short and bald, his tobacco-  
Stained toothy grin disarmed me into thinking that I  
Only signed on to ride his brand until Spring. My plan:  
Rope, brand, forget the old coot, and fly my Jenny away.

As if describing Arrowhead Andy, an unknown poet wrote,  
"...Bronc buster, wild Indian fighter, Grizzly bear  
Hunter, pretty good windmill mechanic, too." One crisp,  
Cold, winter night, air scented by burning pine logs,  
Between bites of elk steak, I asked him about his name.

He spat out his chew, grinned, took a swig of "White  
Lighting", and with firelight flickering in his eyes, he  
Told of balding early. Wounded by a arrow in his right  
Shoulder in an 1875 Indian skirmish, he tricked a scalp-  
Hunter by smearing blood on his head and playing dead.

War souvenirs - an arrowhead mounted on a belt buckle, a  
Sawed-off German propeller. Bound by a bond of shedding  
Blood of admirable adversaries, my plan of forgetting an  
Old coot disappeared in the melting snow. My heart had  
Been roped and branded by his beautiful daughter, Ella.

Red-hair, green eyes, high-spirited, Love of my Life. We  
Clashed in the beginning. I was nothing but a restless  
Pilot, living in the bunkhouse with the other hands. She  
Rode a horse better than any man, and immensely enjoyed  
Embarrassing me as the greenhorn from Michigan.

Loosing a horse race to Ella actually appealed to me. If  
She won, I had an obligation to teach her to fly. As she  
Stepped into the cockpit of my Jenny, her eyes sparkled  
When she said, "Greenhorn, let's see what this bucket of  
Bolts will do." Fortunately, Jenny didn't hold a grudge.

Oh, how we soared through the clouds and through the  
Passes of the Tetons that day. The ecstasy I felt that

Day surpassed that of my first plane ride. Impressed her on My smooth landing techniques.. bumpity, bump. "Greenhorn, You fly like you ride a horse." Then, she kissed me!

Intensifying my amnesia of a single man's life, Ella soon Wore my ring of gold. Our vows were exchanged at The Church of The Transfiguration, which is the little Church with the pine Cross in the front of the picture Window overlooking the incredibly beautiful Tetons.

Insatiable passions, cold winter nights, and God's gift Of Life to us caused Ella's stomach to swell. Old Doc Porter congratulated me on the birth of my son, but I had The feeling he had seen the miracles of life before. God, Please help me, I don't know anything about being a daddy.

Wearing a yellow robe, a radiance glowing from her face, Ella's beauty as she quietly pondered little toes and a Little nose is as vivid today as the day my son entered Our hearts. One year later, I again had the privilege of Seeing that lovely look; God blessed us with a daughter.

Family man, family responsibilities. What future did a Pilot working as a cowboy have in the wonderful country Of Wyoming? Dreams of aviation and improving airplanes. Aeronautical Engineer program - Montana State University In Bozeman. How could this farm boy pass mathematics?

My Jenny and I flew to Bozeman, Ella drove an old Model T Truck with Bud and Marjorie. Fortunately, we could afford Tuition. Somehow we made it, and Ella taught me to ski. In 1926 I graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree and Thought I knew enough about airplanes to become famous.

I received a job offer from Ryan Airlines in San Diego. Ella and I flew out in my Jenny, sightseeing through the Grand Canyon. We rode a train to Wyoming for the kids. Having hoboed in boxcars, paying for Pullman tickets Disgusted me, but Ella thought I should act respectable.

Adjusting to San Diego, I started my Engineering career. In February, 1927, Ryan contracted with businessmen From St. Louis to build a plane for Charles Lindbergh. Proud to have participated in its design, part of me flew In the Spirit of St. Louis, across the Atlantic to Paris.

Prohibition and the Depression. Everything changed, and My career disappeared for a couple of years. Odd jobs fed Ella, Bud, and Marjorie, but my heart broke when I had to Sell my beloved Jenny to pay the rent. When one is broke, Fifty dollars is like winning the Irish Sweepstakes.

Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank, California established itself By building Jack Northrop's designed Vega, the plane Amelia Earhart flew solo across both the United States And the Atlantic in 1932. I hired on in time to work on The Electra, the plane she last flew in 1937.

Finally, its eleven o'clock; time for lunch! Too bad Grandma can't replace these institutional cooks. Now, I have the chance to climb into the cockpit of my Wheelchair, taxi past the rose garden, concentrate on

Clearing the trees, and if I'm lucky, see a plane fly.

In 1936, Ella's father died and left a small inheritance. Wanting to escape the pain, we decided to go Europe. In Munich, we found Granddad's boyhood home. Upon telling The lady of the house we were Gremels, she smiled and Invited us in, she then showed us the room of his birth.

Memories of Granddad engulfed me; tears threatened to Embarrass me, so I thought of a funny letter he had Written to my grandmother while serving in the Civil War. Goldbricking was probably invented by a foot soldier in Caesar's Army, but Granddad perfected it into a fine art:

*"My health is much better than it has been for years. I have tolerated easy times as I do about as I please and you may be sure I do not please to do much this hot weather. I do not drill nor attend dress parade or in fact do nothing except picket guard where it suits my convenience which is about every three days always provided the weather is fair and when they try to push me beyond this I just walk to the hospital and get excused from all duty for forty-eight hours. I expect to be transferred to the invalid corps next month and do guard duty in some forts."*

Granddad had told stories about seeing the Union Army fly Balloons for spying. German newspapers praised the Hindenburg's flight to Rio de Janeiro in March. Fate once Again favored us; we were able to exchange our steamship Tickets for the last available tickets to Lakehurst, N. J.

A chance to cross the Atlantic in LZ129 (the Hindenburg) Overrode our disturbed feelings of seeing the NAZI emblem On its tail. The Hindenburg departed Friedrichshafen-Lowerthal May 6 1936 on her maiden flight to Lakehurst. Across Germany, Holland, England, northwest to America.

Flying as a passenger on this gigantic airship thrilled This middle-aged pilot. To be allowed to take the controls For an hour was a cherished gift from Captain Lehmann. He Knew by my incessant questions that whatever made me tick Required I be separated from earth by a blanket of clouds.

Relaxing over the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, chatting With fellow passengers, the familiar face of one well-Dressed lady bothered me. Where had I seen her before? As she stood up from a lounge chair, she knocked her Purse over; my face pained as I picked it up for her.

A tattered photograph of a young and proud German pilot Standing next to his pretty wife, and a young son about Two years old made my blood run cold. Rushing to my Cabin, eighteen years of bitter tears flooded out. Ella Always knew I had held something back about the war.

With thirty hours remaining in flight, how could I Face this lady? Sitting quietly by myself, she asked if She may join me. "By the expression on your face, I knew You were the one who shot my husband down. Right? For Years I hated you so much. This isn't easy to talk about."

"Have you seen me visiting with my friend, Father Schulte, The Priest on board this flight? During the War he was a German pilot. Now, he flies as a missionary. He helped me Realize that in combat, there is only a split second Difference of who lives and who dies. You were faster."

"You did what you had to do. It was either him or you. I'm sure he would have shot you down. I can't call myself A Christian and be full of hate at the same time. Herr Gremel, you are forgiven. Now, you must learn to forgive Yourself." I slept better that night than I had for years.

After landing in Lakehurst, we flew in a Ford Tri-Motor to Wyoming, where we camped in the mountains. Springtime in The Rockies. Wildflowers were in bloom, the streams full From melting snow, and the night sky so clear one could Touch the Milky Way. Deer watched us from safe distances.

Ella sacrificed her love of the Wyoming ranch so I could Design airplanes in California. We bought a few acres Between Burbank and Palmdale. Painting the canvass of the Mojave Desert, God contrasted the pinks and oranges of Early sunrises against twisted and gnarled Joshua trees.

In those years prior to World War II, many thousands of People out of work migrated to California. We had felt The pangs of the Depression in the early Thirties, but Counted our blessings that I had managed to hire on with Lockheed. Nobody who lived through those times forgets.

Our house must have appeared in the Hobo Directory as the Place to eat the best home-cooked wheat rolls. Ella never Turned anyone away, and more wood usually needed to be Cut, or a fence might need mending. Hungry, honest men Do not hurt children, and each had his own story to tell.

Johnny, the man who later became our son-in-law, rode the Rails for a few weeks. He said he drank the best coffee in his Life from a tin can while in a hobo camp. Once, he loaded Watermelons for four hours, then received fifteen cents. He told the boss to keep it, if he needed money that badly.

Marjorie didn't marry Johnny until after World War II Started. Diogenes, the ancient Greek, roamed the world Carrying a lantern seeking an honest man. His journey Would have ended had he found this fine man from Alabama. As a child of nine, Johnny hawked roasted golden peanuts:

*"Double-jointed, humped-back, California, knock-kneed, bow-legged, pigeon toed, hammered down, sawed off PEANUTS! Grown in the shade, parched in the sun. If you don't have a nickel you can't get none! They're so hot they'll warm your teeth and curl you hair, make you think you're a millionaire! Get em now and get em cheap; get em now, get a heap, while they last, selling two bags for a nickel! Not only good, sweet as honey, and the best you can buy for the money. They'll do you good and help you, too; make the old feel young and the young feel new. Guaranteed not to rip, rear, run down the hill, get hot and smell between your toes in hot weather. Get em while they last. Good all the time! How about some, Mister?"*

News of Pearl Harbor didn't reach me until that Sunday night. I had been prospecting out in the Mojave Desert. Old men Smoking cigars stuck wall maps with thumbtacks: Our ships, Planes, regiments, territories, defenses; their armies, Navies, weaknesses. Didn't talk of young men who will die.

Bud wanted to enlist the next day, but I said he had to Finish high school. In June of 1942 he joined the Army-Air Corps to fly. He didn't make it as a pilot, but was Selected to be a Bombardier-Navigator on a B-17. He married Mabel, and fathered three fine sons.

Marjorie, my most precious daughter, always cared for Other people, gave of herself, and shared such a deep Faith in God with her new husband Johnny. They drove "If-it", a 1929 Model A, to Tacoma, where he worked in Shipyards on aircraft carriers, and her asthma cleared.

Ella packed parachutes to help in the war effort, and I Designed warplanes at Lockheed. One of the sharpest Designers in aviation history, Kelly Johnson, asked me to Join his engineering team on the P-38. I felt honored, For even then, his reputation preceded him.

The country cheered when Jimmy Doolittle bombed Tokyo, With B-25's flown off a carrier deck a few months after Pearl Harbor. Our airplanes and our pilots had to be better Than those of our enemies. We had a war to win. Eventually We did, but not without paying a very high price.

"We regret to inform you..." said the dreaded yellow Telegram. No! Not my son, my little boy. Surely, there Must be some mistake. What a terrible coincidence, shot Down in a raid over Germany. Is this how nature balances Her books: A son's father; a father's son?

"The War to end all wars" concluded on Armistice Day. The War to end all wars started in Hiroshima. One hundred Thousand Japanese wiped out by one bomb; twelve million Jews and undesirables gassed by the orders of one madman. Assyrians eliminated thousands in ancient cities.

Those were other people's mothers, fathers, daughters, Sons. They were statistics in newspapers.. 'Yes, I'll have More lemonade"... Those millions did not release my hand When taking their first steps. They did not look up at me With a dirty face, grin, and say, "Daddy, I love you!"

Ella never fully recovered, and I'm not sure I did Either. It seemed as though the gashes in our hearts Would bleed incessantly. Gradually, a skin called time Allowed the shirt of life to cover naked wounds, creating Illusions that to be dressed was to be healed.

Knowing that our hearts were breaking, God once again Replenished the loss of a loved one with new life. Laughter and squeals of delight from six grandchildren, As they gleefully discovered their own world, lightened

Our burden; smiles returned, our tears were those of joy.

"It is time to listen to the fifth grade choir sing to us, Mr. Gremel." Oh Good! We can move out of our rooms again, And socialize. We all sit in our wheelchairs, propped up By pillows. The kids are delightful, and often, funny. After that will be BINGO, but I would rather play chess.

After World War II, those of us in aviation shared the Pleasure and challenge of Chuck Yeager breaking the sound Barrier. It mattered not that his Bell X-1 had been built By a competing company. Those years of flight-testing At what is now Edwards Air Force Base are fond memories.

Mostly fond memories. Too many good test pilots died. They knew the risks involved flying airplanes to the Envelope, keeping America on the forefront of air power. But they flew anyway. And the rest of us drank to them At Pancho Barnes's Happy Bottom Riding Club.

Or we drank toasts to those that broke the records, like to Scott Crossfield for becoming the first to fly at Mach 2, And to Bob Hoover, for his many exploits as a test pilot, And his precision flying in a P-51 Mustang that thrilled Millions of people at air shows around the country.

Along came the jet age, and with that, the Korean War. Some called it a "Police Action", but those dodging Bullets and Bombs share a different view, as did the Pilots who flew F-86's in MiG Alley. The surviving airmen, Soldiers, sailors, and marines eventually came back home.

Ex-military pilots found themselves buying Cessnas, Pipers, and Beechcraft. They might not be flying high Performance airplanes, but they could not stay out of The air. Neither could thousands of other men and women, For whom learning to fly became an obsession.

Ella and I flew with two of our grandchildren to Devil's Tower, Mt. Rushmore, and Yellowstone in our Stinson Voyager 108-1, and on up through Canada to Alaska. Whales, salmon, bald eagles, caribou, grizzlies, and Denali dazzled me; I even learned to fly a floatplane!

Sputnik electrified the country, and Kelly Johnson's Skunk Works developed the U-2 and the Blackbird. Long Working hours didn't leave much of a home life, but Ella Knew not to ask me about what projects I worked on. That Wonderful lady had been my strength for so many years.

Travelling to Antarctica had enticed me since Admiral Byrd flew over the South Pole. Recognizing that I needed A respite from classified work, Lockheed sent me there In the early Sixties to check out the use of Hercules Aircraft landing on the ice at McMurdo and the South Pole.

Observing whales, penguins, and seals in their natural Environment, and seeing the multi-colors of bluish-green Glacier ice, contrasted against the pure white volcano of Mt. Erebus, made me feel thankful that God had shown me More evidence of how awesome His Creation really is.

There's a place called Ob Hill that overlooks McMurdo Sound. On top of Ob hill is a cross, placed eighty years Ago as a memorial to Robert Scott, who perished on his Fateful trip from the South Pole. As I struggled to climb Ob Hill, words from "The Old Rugged Cross" guided me up.

For some reason, that Hymn reminds me of what disturbs me Most about people. The Lord's Prayer says, "... Hallowed Be Thy Name..."; One of the Ten Commandments says not to Take the Lord Thy God's name in vain. God's last name is Not Damn; the "H" in Jesus H. Christ means, to me, Holy.

Spending Christmas in McMurdo and lonely for my family, I wallowed in self-pity, almost failing to enjoy glistening Snow off of distant glaciers, a crystal blue sky enhancing The beauty of Mt. Erebus, and the meaning of Christmas Reflected in the eyes of those at the candlelight service.

To fly to and from McMurdo, one must travel through New Zealand. Over thirty years had passed since I had visited Kiwi war buddies. My pilot friends were now grandfathers; It seemed as though that I was talking to the fathers of The young men I had flown with - did I look old to them?

In February of the next year, Ella and I flew to Japan, To be awed by spectacular ice and snow carvings at the Snow Festival in Sapporo. Once again, though, God's Artistic talent reigned superior to man's as we viewed A crimson sunset on the snow-capped volcano of Mt. Fuji.

That reminds me of 1968, when as a guest of Naval Squadron VQ-1 and the Army Security Agency's 1<sup>st</sup> SAD, I was given a lifetime thrill: CDR Scott Beat performed a Barrel roll over Mt. Fuji in a Douglas EA-3B jet, perfectly Timing it so that we were upside down over the crater.

As guests of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Ella and I had the Privilege of seeing Frank Lloyd Wright's design which Blended simple, but eloquent, Japanese culture with Functional aspects of American architecture. This hotel Survived an earthquake the same week we married.

Ladies dressed in pink kimonos smiled shyly at our Awkward attempts to speak Japanese. Occasionally, Shinto Shrines with roofs curled at the corners like elf shoes Would delightfully appear as we toured the narrow city Streets in taxi cabs driven by laughing Kamikaze pilots.

By the time we mastered the art of eating rice with Chopsticks, and learned that Saki gave bad hangovers, it Was time to leave. We sailed from Yokohama as passengers On a cruise liner; the memory lingers on of sailing into San Francisco at midnight under the Golden Gate Bridge.

For me, that bridge is symbolic of the Golden Age of Flight, From which men first flew airplanes, and now fly spaceships. Alan Shepherd, Gus Grissom, John Glenn, Scott Carpenter, Wally Schirra, Gordon Cooper, and Deke Slayton are the Mercury astronauts who crossed that ethereal bridge.

Those were exciting days. Just before Alan Shepherd Lifted off in Mercury 7, the Russians surprised us all by

Launching Yuri Gagarin. Although he lived in the Soviet Union, the pilot in us all admired his bravery. Man had gone From flying airplanes to spacecraft within fifty-eight years.

Until then, my career focused on aircraft design. Just prior To my retirement, I was given the chance to participate In the Lockheed design of the Agena spacecraft for the Gemini program, the two-man predecessor to the most Famous event of all mankind: The Apollo Program.

One day, the plant had a visit by one of the Gemini Astronauts, Mr. Neal Armstrong. While shaking hands with An astronaut tends to lift ones spirits, my pride of Humble contributions to the space program just about Burst the day he became the first man to walk on the moon.

After retiring in the mid-sixties, I often walked the Beaches, listened to the pounding surf, quietly enchanted By the golden sunsets bouncing off thundering waves, Crushing onto rocks. Once, I had no money in my pocket, But went home with a starfish and a sand dollar richer.

During those years, it was incredulous how those young People dressed. Hippies wore their hair long, and many Chose to go to Canada to avoid the draft. How can one Not fight for their country? Perhaps Viet Nam awoke this Country into thinking that actions of war may be immoral.

An often-heard motto then was to "Do your own thing". John Stuart Mill wrote in his Essay "On Liberty" about a Hundred years earlier that people should have the right To do what they wanted to do, as long as they didn't hurt Others, and took responsibility for own actions.

My four grandsons all joined the military, and three of The four went to Viet Nam. They all came back alive. But During that time frame, Tragedy twice again struck its Uncaring head, taking my granddaughter Cathy in a car Wreck, and my grandson Eddie in a propane accident. Why?

Here I am Lord, I am an old man, and have lived a full Life. You could have taken me, and not these young Adults. Doesn't this cycle of old men living and young People dying ever end? I must bear not only my own pain, But watch my children endure the agony of children lost.

One more time, we picked up the pieces of shattered Hopes. The world continued to turn, and exploration of Space began to excite me, while Ella gradually became More withdrawn. Fortunately, we had friends and family Who cared, and now we had great-grandchildren to love.

In the early Seventies, I visited a friend at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and my timing was just right. Employees were signing their names to the Voyager 1 Spacecraft, and I was invited to do so. My signature is Now travelling past the boundaries of this solar system.

By the Eighties, my grandchildren were grandparents. My Grandson works at NASA, and he took me to the first Space Shuttle launch. He has desires to travel into space, and Is confident that sometime he will actually escape the

Bounds of gravity, to view the world without borders.

One grandson cleans up the environment, one lives in The state of South Carolina, and my beautiful granddaughter lives in Illinois, working as a paralegal. Both Marjorie and Johnny have retired to a farm in Missouri. Although they have had hard times, their faith is strong.

Ella succumbed to a heart attack about five years ago. She bravely endured the pain, and minimized it so others Wouldn't be uncomfortable around her. What a remarkable Woman that God gave me for a partner to share life with! For her, death came as a blessing, and her pain is gone.

Just before she died, she said, "Greenhorn, I have a Confession to make - I cheated on you once." Oh no, that Can't be true! I was always faithful to you. Then, with The same sparkle in her eye, she said, "On the day we had Our race, I made sure that I had my father's fastest horse."

Alone again, after sixty-five years of marriage. How would I ever make it without her? But I talked to her, and I Know she listened. Gradually, the one-day-at-a-time Approach worked. I fell asleep at night with visions of Her beauty, hearing her laughter, and feeling her love.

Until my stroke, I lived by myself, self-reliant and Independent of my family. Placing me in an old folks' Home to receive constant care probably seemed the right Thing to do for me, and the decision to do so a difficult One to make. These facts I understand.

But, my good family, if you so concerned about my Welfare, why is it that no one visits me anymore, as you Did in the early months? Even though I could not focus My eyes, and I acted unresponsive, I always knew you were Here, and my heart leapt for joy when you entered my room.

Although I do not communicate very well, you can still Talk to me about your problems and your happiness. I Listen well. Now, the staff here at the home and my Memories are all that keep me company. Had I never Travelled, nor raised a family, what would my memories be?

In my life I have witnessed flight from Kitty Hawk to the Rings of Saturn. As the fourth man to walk on the moon, Apollo XII astronaut Alan Bean paints about humanity on a Celestial body in "Helping Hands"; "To Beautiful To Have Happened By Accident" recognizes God as The Creator.

Once, I saw a painting of three men walking to a space Shuttle, with an image of Christ in the stars. They were Soviet Cosmonauts; the painting was entitled, "Go With God". Isn't it wonderful, for the nation that wouldn't Acknowledge the Presence of God, to have such an artist?

In this world there are many religions. For me, the right One is Christianity. I have sinned, but feel forgiveness By accepting Jesus. I cannot accept that God does not Exist. One who can make a seashell have the same Mathematical spiral as distant galaxies does exist.

Jesus said that in His Father's house are many mansions.  
One may be called space travel. Perhaps I will be able to  
Travel to those distant galaxies in the form of conscious  
Energy. That would be quite a journey for a boy who used  
To walk behind a mule, dreaming of becoming a pilot.

Life has been beautiful, and painful. Do not pity me  
Because I am old. Old age is the price paid for living.  
Instead, pray for me to recover, because I still hope to  
Ride the Trans-Siberian Railroad, visit the Patagonia  
Mountains, walk the Great Wall of China, see the Midnight  
Fire Dance of Aurora Borealis, and people landing on Mars,  
Before I board the Flight to the Angels.