

## Chapter 5 - Oshkosh Bound

**I don't think I possess any skill that anyone else doesn't have. I've just had perhaps more of an opportunity, more of an exposure, and been fortunate to survive a lot of situations that many other weren't so lucky to make it. It's not how close can you get to the ground, but how precise can you fly the airplane. If you feel so careless with you life that you want to be the world's lowest flying aviator you might do it for a while. But there are a great many former friends of mine who are no longer with us simply because they cut their margins to close.**

— *Bob Hoover*

I can safely say that no serious aviator anywhere in the world has not heard of the annual Oshkosh AirVenture. It is Mecca to all who proudly carry an airman's certificate in their billfold. Every year, over 11,000 general aviation aircraft arrive to this tiny Wisconsin community located on the western banks of Lake Michigan.

My first Oshkosh AirVenture began in the summer of 2000. For any number of reasons, I had put off this obligatory pilgrimage for nearly 15 years following my own initial solo flight. First, it was money, then it was time, then it was the lack of a suitable airplane, then it was family. One excuse after another robbed me of what would eventually become of the greatest annual aviation adventure of my flying career.

Planning for Oshkosh 2000 began in the early Spring when I inserted the six required days in my electronic Palm Pilot calendar. My early plans included a thorough review of the Oshkosh 2000 web page. Here, the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), the famed originators of the annual Oshkosh fly-in, posted the details of this year's event. Like a school boy sorting through his baseball cards, I began selecting the various aviation seminars I would be attending and checking out the aircraft parking and campsite arrangements. With 11,000 visiting aircraft and twenty times that many individual spectators, I realized that solid planning would be required.

I was particularly delighted in the planning process because this, unlike nearly all of my regular flight planning, was not business related. There were no clients to think about, no hard and fast schedules to maintain, and no sales pitches that I would have to make. This was basic pleasure planning, pure and simple. It was a man and his flying machine. It doesn't get any better than this!

Erica and I discussed going to Oshkosh together during our visit to Space Camp in Huntsville,

Alabama earlier that year. I shared with her about camping under the wing of the airplane and about the various programs designed especially for children. She leaped at the opportunity to go. Her enthusiasm sent me into overdrive as my love of flying suddenly converged with the thought of another special father-daughter week together. Her eager questions fueled the planning process as we began assembling the required camping equipment and logistical support items. Having not spent any serious time in a tent since my basic training days in the Army some 35 years ago, I would have to start from scratch. Let's see, we would need a tent, several cots, a cook stove, lantern, cooking utensils, camp chairs, matches, fuel, food, and drink.

Recognizing that simply getting into Oshkosh might not be an easy task, I flying advice from several fellow pilots who had made the pilgrimage in recent years. One such pilot was my dear friend, Ken Condrell. Ken is a practicing child psychologist and former owner of a Cessna 182, a Mooney, and Cardinal. He had flown into Oshkosh several years back.

"Hey, Ken. Why not join Erica and me this year," I asked.

I knew that Ken and Erica would get along just great. He certainly knew kids and Erica bonds easily with adults. This would make for a perfect trip, I thought. Ken pondered my invitation for all of about six seconds then said, "What day do we leave?"

"There's only one hitch," Ken said.

"What's that?"

"I've never slept in a tent before! My previous visits to Oshkosh involved stays in nearby motels."

Hmmmm . . . This was going to be an even larger adventure than I had originally thought.

Our departure day was quickly approaching. I had spent the last several weeks making the necessary purchases of camping equipment and supplies. I had also acquired the Oshkosh arrival procedures from EAA. Erica gathered together everything she might need including her six month old pet rabbit, cage, and rabbit food. Ken and I coordinated what we needed to bring.

While the Cessna 210 is a great people and equipment hauler, I began to wonder if we could pack all of this stuff into the airplane and still get it off the ground. Other pilots use to tell me that if you can get it into the 210, it will fly. Somehow, I figured that a more scientific approach to weight and balance determination would be required.

Knowing we would be pretty close to gross weight, I brought out the bathroom scale on the aircraft loading date. Each item was weighed and the necessary weight and balance computations were made on the loading table. After everything was loaded, plus passengers and fuel, we were still 300 pounds under the maximum takeoff weight of 4,000 pounds.

Loading the aircraft quickly demonstrated that weight was not the critical factor. Rather, it was the volume. I removed the middle two passenger seats to give us as much room as possible. Ken and I would be sitting in the front two seats and Erica would occupy the rear seat. Once loaded, nearly every square inch of cabin space was taken. Even the narrow row we planned to leave for Erica was now filled, thus removing her from our view from the front seats. She was literally surrounded by camping gear. Nestled squarely on her lap was the small carrying cage for her rabbit.

Having completed the loading process, I reviewed our emergency escape procedures. Ken and I had immediate access to the aircraft doors. I had to be certain that we could quickly reposition the sleeping bags and pillows situated between Erica and the left front door. This, I was sure, would be no problem. Actually, this soft gear afforded her more protection in the event on an untimely landing than either Ken or I had.

All we had to do now was fire up, call for clearance, and launch ourselves skyward. It was a beautiful summer morning. A few wispy clouds dotted the deep blue sky. Winds were be light, thus enabling us to complete the 433 mile direct routing in about 2.5 hours. Our planned course took us along a 292 degree heading over Canada, the southern one-third of Lake Huron, central Michigan, then over a 55 mile span of Lake Michigan. Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh is located 35 miles west of Lake Michigan.

The only potentially troubling aspect of the trip was the Lake Michigan crossing. Climbing to 16,000 feet provided a calculated glide distance of approximately 22 miles in the event of engine failure. Given the 55 mile crossing distance assured us that we would never be more 27 miles from either shore line. As such, there would only be about five miles in mid-crossing where we would not be able to reach either shoreline in the event of engine loss. Given a ground speed of 180 knots or 3 nautical miles per minute, I would have to hold my breath for about 1.5 minutes as we passed the "point of no return." It is curious how pilots seem to hear more strange engine sounds during these brief mid-crossing points than anywhere else along the trip.

Cruising at 16,000 feet in a nonpressurized airplane required that all aboard use supplementary oxygen. This is really quite easy given the factory installed oxygen system in N4720Y. All each of us had to do was plug our nasal cannulas into the conveniently situated oxygen ports nearby each seat. An in-line flow valve assured an adequate flow of lifesaving oxygen. We also used a portable pulse oximeter to monitor the actual blood-gas concentration of oxygen each of us was receiving throughout the high altitude portion of the trip.

It was not until we were two-thirds of the way across Lake Michigan that a curious thought entered my mind.

"Uh, Ken," I said, "I think we may have killed Erica's rabbit."

"What do you mean?"

"Well . . . we've been at 16,000 feet for over an hour and we've got no oxygen mask on the rabbit!"

I switched Erica back into the communications loop and asked her, quite casually, how the rabbit was doing.

"The rabbit is asleep," answered Erica in an equally casual manner.

I switched Erica out of the loop again as said to Ken, "We did it, we killed the rabbit!"

"Maybe it's only brain-dead," Ken chuckled in jest.

"How can you tell the difference between a normal rabbit and a brain-dead rabbit, I asked?"

This was beginning to sound like a bad joke.

"Hmmm, you got me there, Bob. I don't know."

Switching Erica back in, I asked her to give the rabbit a nudge to see if it would wake up.

"Yeah, Dad. The rabbit is now awake and moving around," she said. "Why did you want me to do that," she inquired.

"Just wondering how the rabbit was doing, that's all," I said.

We began planning our descent into Oshkosh Airport. Chicago Center was working our flight along with literally hundreds of other general aviation aircraft descending into Wittman Regional from all directions.

We were following a special use "STAR" or "Standard Terminal Arrival Route" that had been designed by the FAA for the Oshkosh event. This procedure worked beautifully. Uncomplicated by adverse weather conditions, all the arrivals were folding themselves almost automatically into a series of conga lines, each moving their precious aircraft ever so quickly to the airport.

While the STAR required careful visual monitoring of ground checkpoints, each of us were turned over to the Wittman tower at about the five mile point for final sequencing of traffic into the two runways in use. Half of the arrivals were landing to the north while the other half, including us, were being sequenced into the west runway. This was where things got a bit dicey.

The STAR stipulated that after initial tower contact, arriving airplanes were not to acknowledge radio transmissions. Simply follow the instructions as issued. Aircraft were identified by make and color rather than by tail numbers. These were our tower issued instructions:

"Red Stinson, enter a left base for two eight, break, green and white Cessna one eighty two turn right base for two eight, break, white and blue two ten (this was us) cleared straight in for two eight."

Ken and I peered out the windows searching for simultaneously arriving traffic.

"I got the guy on left base," I said.

"Yeah, I got the guy on the right base," responded Ken quickly.

This was not going to work as planned, I thought. It appeared that we three airplanes were going to converge on the final approach course all at the same time and in the same place, one to two miles from the runway threshold.

Breaking the rules, I called the tower.

"Ah, Wittman tower, this is the two ten on straight in for two eight. We've got immediate converging traffic both on the left and on the right. Advise now, please," I said at a somewhat higher pitch than normal.

"Cessna two ten, give me some S turns, cleared to land runway two eight short, break, red Stinson, cleared to land runway two eight long, break, white Cessna one eighty two, cleared to land runway two eight midfield."

Brilliant, I thought. This guy on the ground with a microphone and a pair of binoculars managed to bring the three of us in, all traveling at different airspeeds, at the same time and on the same runway. And without skipping a beat, he continued to sequence in the next 300 arriving airplanes in exactly the same manner. Room for error here? None what so ever. Now I understood why the FAA assigns only their best controllers to work the Oshkosh show every year.

This was my first Oshkosh experience and one that I will never forget. Will I do it again? You

bet.

### **Same Place, Same Time Next Year:**

As in the year that had just past, Erica and I were, again, in bonding mode as we began winging our toward another wonderful Oshkosh adventure.

The sun was just rising in the Eastern sky as Erica and I taxied to the active runway for our annual trek to the famed Oshkosh fly-in. There is something about Oshkosh that I, like the other 11,000 pilots who meet there every year, find exhilarating. Oshkosh is akin to a religious experience where the recreational, experimental, historical, home-builders, and professional sides of the aviation industry come together to look admiringly at each other's creations.

Frankly, I'd rather do a week in a tent at Oshkosh than a resort hotel on the beach in Maui. Strange as that may sound to the uninitiated, Oshkosh is, indeed, the Mecca of aviation.

But to me, Oshkosh is more than a giant trade show for pilots or an escape to nature for an over-worked businessman. It is a very special time where a dad and his daughter can spend precious moments together, unhindered by phone,, fax, or e-mail.

I have often wondered why Erica seems to enjoy Oshkosh as much as me. Armed with credit card and checkbook, I come to Oshkosh to indulge my taste for aviation gadgetry. Erica, on the other hand, seems content to simply absorb the enormous stimulation of planes, people, and tents. Somewhere in all this, I secretly hoped she enjoyed my company as well.

The sun was shining brightly with light westerly winds as I advanced to full throttle for takeoff. I flipped on both the stormscope and the radar to be sure each of these important weather avoidance items were working properly. My pre-flight weather briefing included an advisory to a fast moving line of thunderstorms along the lower tip of Lake Huron and across the State of Michigan. My plan was to skirt this line by hedging a bit southward along the northern shore of Lake Erie before turning northwest over Saginaw, Michigan, then up to Muskegon before crossing over Lake Michigan direct to Oshkosh.

As in the previous Oshkosh trip, we managed to pack every bit of camping equipment I owned into Two Zero Yankee. Unlike last year, we elected to bring along all the necessary food and drinks to last several days rather than making a trip the Oshkosh Piggly Wigly supermarket upon our arrival. This would assure us plenty of cold water that would be needed when setting up camp in the expected 97 degree temperature at Oshkosh's Wittman Airport.

The Cessna 210 is the sport utility vehicle of general aviation aircraft. With its middle two seats removed and the rear seat folded down, it can haul a garage full of gear. In fact, it took us two trips in my Jeep Grand Cherokee just to get our gear to the airplane. While I like to camp, I do not like really roughing it. So we brought cots, folding chairs, two different kinds of stoves, several Coleman lanterns, three tables, a large ice chest, and a huge tent having two separate sleeping areas and a large "livingroom." We also brought along a large screen canopy, sleeping bags, and enough food and clothing for twice as long as we expect to stay. All in all, we were pretty comfortable.

I climbed to our planned altitude of 14,000 feet. This would give us the best combination of true airspeed and minimal headwinds. We could fly higher and faster through the thinner air in the

upper flight levels but the winds on our nose would have more than negated benefit. Erica had already positioned herself for a comfortable snooze in the climb before we left Buffalo's airspace, so I positioned her oxygen mask strap around her head for quick donning when we climbed above 12,000 feet. I wanted to climb up to 18,000 or 20,000 feet for the Lake Michigan crossing, but the high winds above would have reduced our ground speed to a snail's pace.

As expected, darkening clouds to our northwest gave the first sign of the line of thunderstorms along the northern edge of our planned route. I switched on the stormscope which quickly revealed several intense cells of weather about 150 miles ahead. I gave a call to Cleveland Flight Watch to learn their speed and direction of movement. The specialist I spoke with delivered the bad news.

"Ah, Two Zero Yankee, the line is moving southeastward at 39 knots. It looks like they're going to pass directly over your route of flight."

With full fuel and all the time in the world, I really wasn't concerned about making large detours around the weather, so I motored on while keeping a close look on the stormscope images overlaying the GPS moving maps. It was not long before we moved into the developing clouds ahead of the advancing thunderstorms. Without outside vision now obscured, it would no longer be possible to keep the storm cells in view. I flipped on the radar. Large red blotches signifying heavy rain cells matched the location of convective activity displayed on the stormscope. This combination of technology painted a virtual obstacle course of intense weather activity ahead. But like all obstacle courses, the stormscope and radar outlined a circuitous path of passive weather through which we could navigate to our destination.

There are two things that pilots using this weather technology have come to learn. First, the stormscope provides reliable information about the location of electrical discharges associated with thunderstorms. Likewise, the radar accurately paints the location of rain cells also associated with thunderstorms, thus making it quite simple to fly around hazardous weather. . . at least in theory.

The second thing they learn is that weather changes rapidly. What does not appear in one swing of the radar antenna could appear in the next. And areas free of lightning one minute, may display an intense cell the next. This is the reason why thunderstorm prediction is so difficult. All the forecasts really say is that the combination of temperature, moisture, and air movements in a given area are conducive to thunderstorm formation.

And so it was on this trip to Oshkosh. I reached over and gave Erica, now sleeping, a confirming tug on her seatbelt as I did mine. I called the center controller and requested a more southerly routing, down toward Detroit. They quickly approved my request.

I was playing a cat and mouse game with the southerly moving line of convective cells. The line moved south; I moved south. The stormscope was able to see out 200 miles in all directions thus clearly depicting the backside of this weather system. My plan was to pass south at least 25 miles clear of the nearest cell, proceed southwest, before heading west over Lake Michigan. I notified ATC of my intentions.

Something strange began to happen. I noticed an upward trend in the altimeter. The autopilot altitude control knob was rotating downward in an attempt to correct for this unexpected altitude gain.

What is going on? Next came a disconcerting bump of turbulence, then another. Suddenly, the vertical speed indicator pegged itself to the top of the scale at 2,000 feet per minute. I switched off the autopilot and pulled the power back to 20 inches of manifold pressure and pointed the airplane downward. We were racing uncontrollably upward, through 14,500 feet to 15,000 feet. I called Chicago Center.

Two Zero Yankee: Chicago Center, Centurian Four Seven Two Zero Yankee.

Center: Go ahead, Two Zero Yankee.

Two Zero Yankee: "Urgent, we need a block 14,000 to 18,000 altitude due to convective weather."

Center: Request approved, fly 14,000 block 18,000 feet. Advise when clear of the turbulence.

Unknowingly, we had experienced the birth of a thunderstorm even before the spark causing friction of sliding air forces or rain had begun. This was the first stage the thunderstorm cell development as the lifting action of air currents carried warm, moist air from the surface to the cooler climate above.

I was well aware of this phenomenon having studied it numerous times in preparation for the various airman ratings as well as in countless discussions with students. This was the first time I had actually encountered it. I also knew what was coming next. Every school child knows that what goes up must come down. I knew that this rapidly rising column of air was running along side an equally fast column of descending air. I did not relish the prospect of flying through the vertical air masses passing by each other in opposite directions at over 4,000 feet, or perhaps, far faster.

I reduced power to idle and concentrated on keeping the wings level and gave another cinch on my seatbelt.

"Erica, wake up and hold on. We are in some bad weather."

It was like waiting for the other foot to drop. But, where was it? I had the airplane in a power off, 20 degree nose down attitude, but we were still climbing. I was counting. . . one, two, three . . . where is the other side of this thing?

Then nothing. The climb stopped and we began a gentle descent. I raised the nose and adding power. I called Center and advised them that we were clear of the developing cell and would be descending down to our originally assigned cruising altitude of 14,000 feet.

The rapidly rising column of air was apparently just that. It had not yet found the ingredients necessary to convert itself into a thunderstorm. Instead, it was like a snorting bear waking from a long winter sleep.

Moving westward, I kept close eye on what the stormscope was painting behind us. It was not long before that rising column of air did find what it was looking for and turned itself into raging storm. The weather ahead began to open up as the sun appeared through the thinning haze and clouds. I could see Lake Michigan's eastern shoreline.

Lake Michigan crossings are always a lip-biter for me. Despite having a meticulously maintained airplane and a relatively new engine, I get concerned anytime I cannot glide to a safe landing site. Such is the case when crossing this 55 mile wide Great Lake.

Erica had gone back to sleep even after our soaring elevator climb. I sometimes marvel at her calmness in a storm. Most passengers tend to get a bit edgy at the slightest bit of rough air. Erica, on the other hand, always remains calm. I like to think it is her confidence in me. Realistically, I think her calmness is attributable to the aviation gene in her mix of DNA.

I advanced the throttle up to maximum cruise of 2,500 RPM, pushed the throttle up to 33 inches manifold pressure, and enriched the fuel mixture to 17.5 gallons per hour or about 75 degrees rich of peak turbine inlet temperature. This produced about 85 percent power, well above the 55 percent power I generally cruised at. The net effect of this power boost was to add about 15 knots to our true airspeed to hasten the lake crossing. Traveling approximately three miles per minute, we crossed the lake in just 20 minutes. We were outside of gliding distance from either shoreline for no more than ten minutes.

With the western shoreline in sight, I dialed in the Oshkosh automatic terminal information service (ATIS). Most of this pre-recorded message addressed the arrival procedures for VFR traffic. Since we were on an instrument flight plan, all we had to do was listen and do as we were told by the Chicago approach controller.

Air traffic appeared remarkably light despite the fact that we were arriving two days before the official start of the show. Most aircraft campers like to arrive early enough to get set up before things really begin.

**Chicago Approach:** *Centurian Four Seven Two Zero Yankee, descend and maintain 2,800, turn right 15 degrees to intercept the VOR 27 final approach course, contact Oshkosh tower on 126.6. Welcome to Oshkosh.*" I read back this clearance, checked in with the Oshkosh tower, then gave Erica a nudge. "We're here, Babe. Time to wake up."

We hit the thermal boundary at about 4,500 feet. This was where warm air radiating from the green earth below connected with the cool dry air global currents above. The outside air temperature jumped almost immediately to about 80 degrees. The surface temperature on Wittman Field soared to a near record breaking 97 degrees.

### **Oshkosh Day One (Sunday):**

Oshkosh was landing VFR traffic on runway 18 and IFR traffic on the perpendicular runway 27. It was the tower's job to keep these southbound arrivals above 1,800 feet on short final to allow the westbound IFR arrivals to slip in under them. When things got busy, the tower put six airplanes down at one time, three in each direction.

Like most tightly cowled, high performance aircraft, Two Zero Yankee runs very hot when temperatures get above 80 degrees. Its oil temperature approached its upper safe limit of 220 degrees as we rolled out on the runway. A yellow shirted flagman signaled us to pull off on the grass where we then were passed along to a succession of flagman until we arrived at our parking site in the aircraft camping area. The heat was oppressive. Even with the prop wash blowing through both open

windows, Erica and I began to sweat profusely. Wow, I thought. It seemed even hotter than last year's squelcher.

I taxied next to a Cessna 180 tail dragger from Omaha, Nebraska. Several Oshkosh volunteers greeted our arrival, giving us a quick briefing and along with stern instructions to get Two Zero Yankee tied down as soon as possible.

I wondered what the hurry to get Two Zero Yankee tied down was all about. Then I recalled our Oshkosh arrival last year when we experienced three powerful thunderstorms within the first 18 hours. Not again, I wondered.

"You expecting weather," I asked.

"Yup," said one of the volunteers.

Erica and I performed like a well-rehearsed team of tent makers. She quickly unpacked the front of the airplane as I pulled things from the baggage compartment in the back. The first thing we had out was the ice chest containing bottled water and our perishable foods. I tossed a bottle to her as I gulped mine down like a thirst-parched horse.

There is something about the first few hours on the ground at Oshkosh that cannot be described. Perhaps it is the noise and apparent confusion of hundreds of airplanes arriving at the same location at the same time, or it is the exhilaration from hundreds of happy faces of people who have left the world of stress behind. For me, Oshkosh is a return to my roots where, as a boy, my father would routinely bring me to nearby airport where he worked as a station manager for Northwest Airlines. In those days, some 45 years ago, there were no jets. Instead, there were DC 3's, DC-4's, and Boeing Stratocruisers, all with large, radial piston engines and three-bladed propellers.

I pounded in the tie-down stakes as Erica pulled our large tent from the large yellow duffle bag. After several such airplane camping trips including one at Sun'n Fun in Florida, we had become quite adept at setting up our two bedroom tent in the wind. We both recalled the near tent tragedy we experienced last year at Oshkosh when a sudden thunderstorm . . . . no, three sudden thunderstorms, nearly tore our tent from its stakes. Taking no chances this year, I brought along 100 feet of one half inch wide hemp rope to reinforce the security of the tent.

With our home home for the week under the wing fully in place, we walked around a bit to meet our fellow tent dwellers and to examine their homesteading techniques. As a rule, we aviators are a pretty ingenious group of people. We can find a hundred different ways to suspend canvas from a wing structure, erect sun shelters, arrange screened in dining areas. The variety of aircraft campsites at Oshkosh was enormous. Even more ingenious was how one got all that camping equipment and people into a single airplane.

As the sweltering sun began to sink, the oppressive temperature eased up somewhat. Even still, Erica and I took turns pouring cold water over each other's heads. The humidity was so high that we couldn't tell if we were wet from the water, our perspiration, or the steamy air around us. All three conditions worked together to form an immediate recollection of my military tour of duty in the jungles of Vietnam 33 years ago.

My heart went out to Erica who, in addition to enduring this oppressive weather, was dealing with the discomfort of having a full set of braces installed in her teeth just 48 hours earlier. True to form, she complained little, choosing to deal with her pain by keeping busy.

As she puttered around the campsite, I thought about her mother's admonition to me before we left to keep her in sight at all times. A rash of nationally publicized kidnappings reminded us both how vulnerable children are to the sick elements of our society. What a strange paradox, I thought. There are no such sickies at Oshkosh. They're not allowed in.

I know it sounds tremendously naive, but pilots, as a group, are good people. So I lengthened Erica's leash a bit and allowed her to walk freely between our campsite, the showers, and along the roadway to the flight line. Unlike her mother, my fears for Erica were not the sickies. I worried about how of her own rapidly emerging hormones would influence her behavior with other pre-teenage boys occupying nearby campsites.

Our first night's supper was a quick and easy one . . . beans and franks on the grill. By then, the sun was down and a brisk wind from the northwest, possibly signaling the pending arrival of the predicted thunderstorms that night. You could cut the humidity with a knife. Following supper, we each retired to our respective private sections of the tent. I laid out my sleeping bag over the cot, stripped to my underwear, and thought to myself, as I drifted asleep, this has been a good day.

I was awakened about 3am with the familiar sounds of high winds blowing on the tent and the pounding of rain, with the flashes of lightning providing a strange air of pending doom. The tent began to buffet wildly, straining at the extra tie-down ropes bracing the corners to the ground. What would Oshkosh be without that first night thunderstorm, I thought?

"Erica, you okay," I shouted across the tent? No reply. She remained sound asleep despite the loud cracks of thunder. I peaked out the side window of the tent to check the Two Zero Yankee. It, too, was straining at the three tie-down ropes affixed to each wing and tail. I wondered how much wind our little artificial community could really endure before things broke loose.

The extra precautions we took setting up the tent must have worked because we survived the night, with no damage whatsoever. As the storm passed, I fell fast asleep in anxious anticipation of the activities ahead.

### **Oshkosh Day Two (Monday):**

Having arrived two full days ahead of the start of the show and having devoted the first day to setting up camp, this day was intended for decompression and total relaxation. This was, in fact, the first day in months that I did not wake up with something pressing somewhere on my day's agenda.

My first glimpse at rising sun came as I peaked my head out the tent door to assess effects of last night's storm. My awakening was prompted by the sounds of four giant radial engines on a B-17 landing on runway 9, immediately adjacent to our parking area. The rumble was reminiscent of the previous year at Oshkosh where warbird after warbird made landings and takeoffs throughout the day.

I opened the zippered wall leading into Erica's sleeping area. She was still rolled tightly in the fetal position, sound asleep, oblivious to the roar of landing aircraft. I wandered out on grass, bare footed, taking in the wonderful sights and sounds of fresh new day. The pace of aircraft arrivals picked up considerably on this, the last full day before the start of the show. I walked out to the roped area separating the taxiway from runway 9/27 and watched and listened as the tower controllers knitted a conga line of planes of every size and shape. The pace of tower-issued landing clearances was elevated to maximum intensity in a machine-gun fashion rapid fire pace.

"High wing red and white on left base rock your wings . . . I got you, follow the white and blue Arrow onto final, land on the green circle, maximum forward speed; I've got a Twin Commanche right behind you. Twin Commanche, I need a couple of S turns for spacing. That's it, nice job. Land on the numbers, watch high wing at your 12 o'clock. Welcome to Oshkosh."

Wittman Field is the busiest airport in the world during the annual Oshkosh fly-in and the air traffic controllers working its arrivals and departures are the best of the best. Not only do they have to know how to move airplanes safely, they have to do so at lightning speed, often bringing down six at a time. And they have to recognize literally hundreds of different makes and models from five miles out. Most importantly, given the wide range of pilot skills, each controller has to have the patience of Job.

Tragically, Oshkosh is not without its aviation mishaps. It seems that each year brings with it several sad stories of airplane mishaps, mostly resulting in cuts and bruises, others fatal. The two typical causes of aircraft accidents related to Oshkosh are: (1) VFR pilots flying into instrument weather conditions to or from Oshkosh, and (2) mid-air collisions in and around the traffic pattern at Wittman where one pilot or the other was not paying attention to ATC instructions. The overall safety record at Oshkosh, however, is remarkably good given the enormous volume of aircraft movements.

It was 9:30am before Erica stuck her sleepy head out the tent door. I was already well into my day reading the various aviation periodicals I had brought along. The eight foot square sun shelter erected just outside of our tent housed our two cook stoves, several camp chairs, two tables, and our assorted supplies. We had mosquito netting if bugs became a problem but, despite the heat, moisture, and acres of surrounding fields, bugs were remarkably scarce. This absence of flying and crawling things is one of the definite pluses of Oshkosh over Florida's Sun 'n Fun. There, it is a constant battle between man and critter.

The sun was already high in the sky but the passage on last night's storm front brought somewhat lower temperatures and humidity. The noise of incoming aircraft seemed to pick up in intensity as many of the larger show planes ranging in size from Pitts Specials, to F-18s, to an Icelantic Airlines Boeing 747-300 were making their arrivals.

I persuaded Erica to ingest some yogurt which she reluctantly did despite the annoying teeth discomfort she was experiencing.

"Let's get this show on the road," I said enthusiastically.

"Okay, Dad," she replied knowing me the way she does and realizing I would not relent until we were well on our way to the flight line. The show would not officially open until the next day, but there were numerous vendors already set up in the aircraft flea market section anxious to sell there

wares. There were also literally thousands of airplanes of all shapes and sizes neatly arranged by vintage in the various display areas to go see.

We spent the remainder of the morning walking through and chatting with the various vendors as they were arranging their booths. Virtually every homebuilding tool, aircraft part, and useless gadget could be found in this eclectic collection of aircraft paraphernalia. We still had several important tasks to perform before the day proceeded much further. One, of course, were showers and the second was the first of our daily ice and food runs to the Piggly Wigly Supermarket just outside the western boundary of the airport. Actually, we were in pretty good shape as far as food was concerned. Ice, on the other hand, was a serious need. The hot sun was melting 30 pounds of ice stored in our Coleman cooler every 24 hours.

We completed these two remaining tasks, then returned to camp where I threw a couple of hot dogs on the gas grill. Erica would not eat hers, so I ate both. She laughed at me for such indulgence, threatening to tell of this dietary indiscretion to my fitness trainer, Derek Alessi. My threatening to withhold her cell phone privileges for the day won her secrecy.

We fiddled around the campsite for the rest of the afternoon, even catching an hour of so of nap time under the shade of Two Zero Yankee's large left wing.

"What do you want to do tonight," I asked Erica.

"Let's go over to the Hilton for a little while, then to a movie," she replied with a note of delight on her face.

"You got it," I said, not realizing that having run down the battery on the cell phone, her true motive was to get to a pay phone to talk with her friends back home. For me, however, the promise of cool, dry air conditioning sounded like a dream come true.

Some of this, of course, was a bit of reminiscence from previous trip to Oshkosh. The Hilton Hotel was the latest improvement to the Oshkosh experience, constructed just before last year's airshow. It was where our friend Ken Condrell, Erica, I would go after the taste of my camp dinners lost their appeal. It was also the gathering place of aviation's rich and famous who managed to secure real hotel rooms during the Oshkosh event. It was there, last year, where we met Conrad Hilton, himself, along with Chuck Yeager, the famed aviator who was first to break the sound barrier.

### **Day Three Tuesday:**

At last, the oppressive heat broke with a passage of a strong cold front during the night. The temperature dropped to a near record of 56 degrees as we searched for extra clothing and blankets to keep us warm. What a stark contrast from the previous two days of sweltering heat.

As in the previous two days, I was up at dawn. With my sleeping bag draped over my shoulders, I ventured out of the tent door to greet the rays of the rising sun.

"God, I love the smell of 100 octane aviation fuel in the morning!" Today's forecasted temperature was a delightful 76 degrees, clear skies, and low humidity. If this wasn't heaven, at least

we were not far from it, I thought.

I did some reading and writing as Erica snoozed well into the morning. The winds had swung around from east, making runway 9, adjacent to our camp site, the landing runway. I picked up a chair, my hand held radio, and walked over to the edge of the runway and spent about an hour judging each landing of the string of arriving aircraft. The warming rays of the sun felt good on my back.

Looking back, I observed Erica walking around the campsite apparently looking for something to eat. Her sore teeth really cut into ability to eat and I was growing concerned. She had been taking Tylenol and Ambusol for the pain. But she never complained. At the risk of sounding like an over-proud dad, Erica is really a remarkable young lady. My times with her like this continue to reveal her many enduring qualities. Mature well beyond her years yet still very much her daddy's little girl, I've grown to cherish each rapidly diminishing hour with her. Like my fond memories of annual vacations alone with my own dad, I knew these Oshkosh trips would soon be a distant memory, too, for both she and I.

We quickly made ready for the opening day of the show. There was so much to do including dozens of forum lectures, to vendor exhibits, show planes on the flight line, to demo rides in ultralights, to Kidsadventure in the museum complex.

We decided to mix several forum lectures midst our day's planned activities. The first lecture was titled, "Flight Instructor Professionalism in the 21st Century." The second one we attended was "IFR under Part 91." Both were informative . . . and I did learn several valuable tips from each.

One side benefit from forum participation is the opportunity to recharge the electronic gear we brought along including, of course, the cell phone, my Sony CD player, and this handheld computer I'm writing on. Necessary electrical outlets were few and far between at Oshkosh.

The Oshkosh lecture forums offered some of the best aviation wisdom in the world. The presenter for the "IFR Under Part 91" was a Boeing 777 captain for United Airlines who also served as an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner. His talk alone was worth the entire Oshkosh trip this year in terms of lessons learned.

Other forums that we attended that day included "Women in Aviation, Opportunities and Resources," "How to Talk to ATC to Get What You Want," "Flight Tests: Why Good Pilots Sometimes Fail," and "Into Thin Air: The Dangers of Flying above 8,000 Feet."

Erica grew a bit weary in the early afternoon and elected to return to the campsite while I continued to visit with vendors and picking up assorted gadgets that I felt I could not possibly live without.

I grabbed a bratwurst and a Diet Pepsi and made my way to the flight line for the first of a weeklong series of aerobatic shows by some of the world's top pilots. In the true tradition of Oshkosh, I found a tree to sit and lean against at just the proper angle to optimize airshow watching. In what I judge to be less than 30 minutes, I was fast asleep despite the roar of P-51 fly-bys, and heart pounding vertical climbs by a flight of F-18s with afterburners glowing. Can it get any better than this, I wondered?

I returned to the campsite expecting to see Erica, but instead I found a note she left saying that she walked over to the Hilton. I wondered why, but immediately remembered that I had my cell phone and she had my AT&T phone card. The rest was easy to figure out. I settled in one of the reclining chairs, sipped on some diet ice tea, and resumed a bit of writing. Erica returned within an hour and insisted we go back to the Hilton for supper.

"Hey, kid, I've got porkchops on the grill planned for this evening," I said. She looked back at me and said, "Da-a-a-d," in a slow drawl that only a woman can perform effectively.

While I have said repeatedly, she is her father's daughter, she is also very much her mother's daughter as well. It by a force of sheer genetic aberration that she likes to camp. Jo earnestly believes that a night in anything less than a \$300 a night hotel room is camping. This is why, as you might imagine, that Jo elects not to participate in our annual trips to Oshkosh.

Okay, I gave in far too easily but the thoughts of a dinner in the Hilton sounded pretty good to me as well. Hopefully, Erica would choose to eat something more than the mere morsels she had been consuming at the campsite.

We finished our delightful dinner and bummed a ride on the back of a passing golf cart to the Theater in Woods where we would enjoy Oshkosh's tradition of excellent open air entertainment. This night would feature "The Kids of Wisconsin," an award winning musical dance team of 18 to 20 year olds performing a tribute to New York City and ending in a rousing patriotic rendition of songs from World War II to God Bless America. The audience loved it. I must admit that I shed a tear of emotion as I glanced around and saw the expressions of many in my father's generation who fought so hard 60 years ago to make this and many nights like it possible throughout America. No, it doesn't get any better than this.

### **Day Four Wednesday:**

I awaked like each previous day as the sun was just peaking above the eastern horizon. It was about 6am and few, if any, of our fellow campers showed signs of life. The weather was still refreshingly chilly so I put on a light jacket I purchased the day before. Erica was still fast asleep with no promise of rising before 9 or 10am. We had both been up late the night before so I thought best to let her sleep as long as she liked.

I made some hot tea and did a bit of writing before dressing for the day's activities. The early morning arrivals were starting to land so I walked over to the edge of runway 9 to watch.

Erica was still sleeping when I returned to the tent, so I dressed quietly, then made my way over to the exhibit area without her. I was particularly intrigued by the rapidly emerging multi-functional display technology where one large screen displayed multiple forms of flight information. I was also intrigued by the solid state attitude indicators that required no moving gyros to measure pitch and bank angle. This information could be piped into a hand held computer, thus eliminating the need for a back up attitude indicator. And it accomplished all this for at a lower cost than a conventional electric attitude indicator.

I managed to make it to only one forum lecture this day, but it was the best one yet. Its title was, "Why Good Pilots Sometimes Fail Their Checkrides." It was given by a long time Designated Pilot Examiner who worked in the Chicago area. I figure I learned enough in this forum to eliminate all possibility of having any of my students fail a checkride. I also ran into Rick and his daughter Lauren who we met during our first visit to Oshkosh. We greeted each other like long lost cousins and quickly agreed to meet for dinner at his campsite. It is not unusual for Oshkosh acquaintances to become lifelong friends.

I reconnected with Erica at the forum seminar. We spent the remainder of the afternoon looking at homebuilt and vintage aircraft. We also walked through the large NASA display building and looked at their various aviation research initiatives. We emerged from NASA's building to the roar of two F-86 Sabre jets doing a formation takeoff just 300 yards from where we stood. They were setting up for a mock dogfight with a flight of Soviet Mig-15s as occurred in Korean Conflict. This was a real crowd pleaser.

I found a comfortable spot on the grass right next to rope separating the crowd from the active runway area while Erica made her way back to the campground. The unseasonably cool temperatures, clear skies, and picturesque white puffy clouds made these conditions too good for me to pass up. My only obligation this afternoon was to meet back up with Erica at 6pm, then to make the long trek to Camp Stoller on the other side of the airshow grounds to have supper with Rick and Lauren.

When I greeted Erica back at the camp she said, "Okay, Dad. Let's shave that thing off."

"What, my beard," I replied?

I had decided to remain unshaven since arriving at Oshkosh and I was looking pretty scraggly. I willingly complied, feeling somewhat like an aging Pappa Hemmingway. Besides, it was itching like heck.

Freshly shaven and with a clean shirt on that Erica bought for me earlier in the day, we began the long walk. Actually, we didn't walk very far since my young traveling companion had become quite adept at hitching rides on any passing vehicles with a couple of extra seats. It was her ponytail and pretty young face that worked every time.

We met up with Rick and Lauren on the most distant, far corner of the airport grounds. They were camping with four other guys, all of whom were captains with Northwest Airlines. Our dining fare for the evening were assorted sausages, potatoes, corn on the cob, onions, peppers, and carrots which had been simmering all afternoon in a kettle of beer.

This evening turned out to be one of the very best hangar flying events I had ever attended. Hangar flying is an aviation term describing a process roughly equivalent to a group of fishermen telling lies about their biggest catches. Anyway, as the evening wore on and the cold beer took hold, I heard airline flying stories that would cause all departed FAA Administrators to roll in their graves. One particularly tale told by Dave is worth repeating here.

"When I was co-pilot with Eastern Airlines I had a trip with an aging captain who had a reputation for very sloppy flying. Seems he had recently transferred to Eastern from Trans-Caribbean Airlines. The older he was getting, the worse his piloting skills were becoming.

"I had already made several hair-raising landings with this guy at the controls earlier that day," said one of pilots. "We were approaching San Juan, Puerto Rico in our B-727. He was very high on the glideslope and wide of the localizer, weaving back and forth and up and down in a vain effort to center the needles as we were descending through low clouds on the final approach course. Fearing this guy would take us both to eternity, I mustered the courage to grab the controls from him and finish the landing process myself. On the ground, I used my best diplomatic skills necessary to save my career and apologized for usurping his pilot in command authority.

He turned to me and replied, "That's okay, son. Most of you guys won't even let me take off!"

One of the other fellows told of night flight from San Diego up to San Francisco when they lost power in the number three engine on a B-727. Following standard procedures, they systematically shut the engine down and proceeded to their destination on the remaining two engines.

As the captain exited the airplane, a ramp serviceman came up and asked if we had a rough flight. "Yeah, I said, we lost engine somewhere over Los Angeles."

"Do you think they'll find it," he asked?

"Find it, what do you mean," came the captain's reply?

"Well it ain't there, sir."

The captain turned and looked at the tail section of his airplane and observed, to his horror, that the ramp serviceman's comment was correct. The entire engine, cowling, and mounting pod were gone! Later investigation revealed that a leaking lavatory produced a giant block of ice on the fuselage that broke loose in flight and tore the entire engine off.

Countless tales of unreported airline bloopers, embellished I'm sure by free flowing beer, were shared on this fun evening. Another that I liked was told by one of the pilots who flew as first officer on the early stretched versions of the DC-8. These were enormously long airplanes which operated just prior to the advent of today's jumbo jets.

On takeoff, he said, the captain advanced all four throttles. Three of the four engines responded normally, but the forth did not spool up as expected. Still on the takeoff roll, the captain pulled the throttles of the three operating engines back to idle and immediately turned off of the runway onto grass. As he did this, the non-functioning engine, which happened to be the outboard one on the wing opposite his turn, suddenly spooled up. This caused the airplane to whip around like a ball on a string.

Coming to a stop, the captain asked if I was okay. I said that I was okay but I wonder about the guy in the last row in the back. He must have experienced six "Gs" in that turn!

And so on went that evening until I finally gave in said we gotta a go back. Little did I know that the greatest adventure of the week was yet to occur on this night.

It was late and most of the vehicular traffic on the long road back to camp was gone. Not willing to accept defeat in her hitch hiking efforts, Erica spotted a golf cart moving down the road with no light on it. She flagged it to a stop and asked the young male driver if we could have a ride. He motioned us to climb on.

"Where you all going," he asked?

"Back to aircraft camping," I replied.

"I can't take you there directly, he said, because my cart doesn't have a security sticker. But I can take you the back way, through the woods and several open fields. I know where there is a hole in the fence that I can drive through."

Sure, why not, I thought. This would be better than the three mile walking alternative. And so off we went, into the dark without a headlight. Navigating by moonlight and a dim flashlight, our driver, who happened to be a college student from Union College in Upstate New York, took us midst trees and bushes along a winding path. Erica was in the middle and I was holding on tightly in the right seat.

He turned off of the path and began making his way through an open field. I spotted what appeared to be an open trench running along side of paved road just ahead. He was moving toward it at full speed, either not seeing the open trench or believing it was shallow enough for him to cross it. All I remember from this second on is a blurr.

The golf car struck the trench and came to an instant stop. I recall feeling myself leaving the seat, head down, tumbling in the air over the front of the golf cart before landing flat on my back on the soft grass on the other side of the trench.

I'm either dead or paralyzed I though while laying there in the moonlight. The first thing I heard was Erica's loud laughter. Well, at least I knew that she survived the spill, but I still wasn't sure about me. At 57, one's never quite sure how durable his bones really are.

"Golly, I'm sorry, sir," said our driver. "You okay?"

"Donno, I replied. Give me a minute."

As fate would have it, I apparently landed in spread eagle fashion flat on my back on very soft sod without damaging a thing. I looked at Erica, then joined her in laughter.

"Dad, she said, "this will make a great story for your book!"

I gave Erica a big squeeze and thanked God for this wonderful week I was having with her. We continued our journey back to camp driving a bit slower and a bit more carefully. Our chauffer dropped us in front of our plane and within minutes, Erica and I were fast asleep inside.

### **Day Five (Thursday):**

Thursday is the traditional day before "hump" day at Oshkosh marking our last full day before breaking camp and returning to the world. Most Oshkosh visitors plan either to arrive at the show a day or two early and leave before the weekend like us, or they arrive Thursday or Friday and stay to the end the following Tuesday. If I had my choice, I'd do both but I did not want to push Erica farther than she could endure.

We were very much into our Oshkosh routine by this day in the week. I rolled out of bed around 7am and stuck my head into Erica's section of tent and observed her rough form buried, head to toe in her sleeping bag. The deep roar of a flight of P-51 Mustangs lifting off of the nearby runway did not even cause her to stir. I got some hot water going on the Coleman stove for my tea and made the

obligatory run to the portable lavs located several hundred yards away. Ahhh . . . there's nothing like the lilac scent of chemically treated toilet water in the morning.

The skies were a bit overcast with widely scattered showers in the forecast. I spotted the Phillips 66 fuel truck rolling down the row behind us and motioned to him to stop by and top off our tanks. We took on 44.3 gallons, which confirmed my estimated fuel burn of 14.2 gallons per hour on the inbound trip. Our plans to return the next day remained in effect, so this was one last task we got out of the way before we were to leave.

I returned from my favorite position on the runway edge having critiqued some 40 or 50 landings and found Erica, still in semi-sleep mode, walking up and about our campsite.

"What do you want to do today, Erica," I asked?

"I'll do whatever you want, Dad," she replied.

With that, we both completed our pre-day freshening up and made our way to the forum area. We checked the seminar schedule, then walked over the vendor area. We stopped first at the Mountain High oxygen equipment supplier booth where I made good on returning the \$2.00 change I owed that vendor for a coupling I purchased several days ago but did not have the right change. From there, we made a second visit to the Winslow Life Raft booth.

I had been researching life rafts for nearly a year and this decided to invest the \$1,400 necessary to secure peace of mind for my frequent Lake Michigan crossings and my monthly low level trips out over Long Island Sound. Part of ongoing research revealed that emergency water landings, or ditchings as they are called, are 95 percent survivable IF pilot and passengers have the necessary floatation equipment. I have always carried approved lifejackets on board Two Zero Yankee, but they are only useful during the summer months when the water is relatively warm. Survivability drops to less than 30 minutes in water temperatures below 35 degrees.

The life rafts on display ranged from the show special four to six man raft selling for \$990 all the way up to a \$4,500 floating Hilton Hotel with canopy, double floor, and a wide array of supplementary survival equipment. I opted for the show special figuring that in the worst case scenario I'd have search and rescue well on their way before we hit the water. It is comforting to note that the actual probability of a forced water landing is extremely remote, assuming one carries on enough fuel and the airplane is reasonably maintained. High altitude crossings further reduce the risks, but like Mr. Murphy implied, there is always a chance.

We left the vendor area and went back to forum pavilions where I attended two back-to-back sessions on aeronautical charts and another on weather. I brought along the attendance confirmation sheets I had been carrying along to each of the others sessions. I needed to have each presenter sign one as part of the Master flight Instructor certification process I had been working on.

Like each of the forums I had been attending, I came away from today's sessions with new knowledge. Twenty first century aviation in the post September 11 environment was moving forward at an enormous pace. While most pilots can get by on what they learned five years ago, flight instructors provide about the only avenue of learning for all who fly. Flight instructors who do not attempt to keep up with the changes are, in my opinion, morally reprehensible. What they teach or fail to teach translates

to the safety of future generation of pilots directly, and indirectly, to our continued privilege to operate light airplanes in the national airspace system. Some lessons learned reinforce basic airmanship skills like teaching a student to use rudder instead of aileron to recover from botched cross wind landings. Others pertain to better understanding of thunderstorm formation or the insidious effects of tailplane icing.

Following another plane-side supper, Erica and I walked over the Theater-in-the-Woods for an evening of entertainment. The program included a presentation by Eric Lindburgh, grandson of Charles, who shared his recent experiences retracing his fame grandfather's New York to Paris flight in 1927.

This was followed by a special presentation by Paul and Tom Poberezny, founder and son, respectively, of the Experimental Aircraft Association. The covered with film, photos, and personal visits by famed aviators, of the remarkable first 50 years of EAA.

As this evening came to an end, I looked around at this outdoor theater realizing this was our last night here for another year. Our plan was to leave Oshkosh after the next day's airshow. I gave Erica's hand a squeeze and said, let's go back to the tent. She looked back at me and said, "Thanks, dad, for bringing me to Oshkosh."

Hokey as it sounds, I secretly dried a tear from my eye! She was 12 years old and I knew that her pending teenage years could sufficiently change her priorities so that this might well be our last trip to Oshkosh together. I prayed that it would not.

### **Day Six - Friday:**

The weather turned very warm again as the sun lifted above the field of remaining airplanes to the east. The noisy warbirds were flying as I emerged from the tent flap. I fired up the Coleman stove and got my tea water boiling. Erica, of course, was still in deep sleep, undisturbed by the roar of departing airplanes.

My plan was to attend another couple of seminars, hook up with Erica, then have lunch. After that, we'd play it by ear. I walked over to the forum area and sat in on an interesting talk by George Braly, founder and chief engineer for General Aviation Modifications, Inc. (GAMI). He was discussing the new electronic ignition system that would enable big bore Continental engines like mine to run on 87 octane fuel instead of 100LL.

I met up with Erica as planned and we looked in on a seminar conducted by Jane Garvey, the outgoing FAA administrator. She highlighted recent events following September 11 and related items of interest to aviators.

We then grabbed the shuttle bus to the museum area where the sightseeing helicopters were operating. We purchased our \$25 tickets and waited about one hour for our ride. I walked around the hangar display area depicting the early barnstorming days of aviation. I marveled at the several masterfully restored Stinson and Standard biplanes.

Our number was called and we marched up to the helicopter staging area and boarded the three place Bell Model 47 chopper. The side doors had been removed giving us an unhindered look at the

grounds 1,500 feet below. I deliberately took the middle seat, leaving Erica next to the open door. She looked at a bit apprehensive. "Don't fall out," I said, poking fun at her fears. She didn't laugh.

The ride was a real kick. Interestingly, few fixed wing pilots fully understanding the aerodynamic aspects of vertical flight. I was fascinated more with cockpit and controls than I was with the wonderful view it afforded us of the one-half million people walking around the 1,800 acres comprising Wittman Field.

We returned to the camp area and began the unpleasant task of taking down the tent, the canopy, and repacking Two Zero Yankee for the flight home early that evening. I had filed our instrument flight plan back to Buffalo earlier in the day. Our P-time was 2330 Zulu or 6:30pm Central Daylight Time. Hopefully, we could avoid lengthy delay on the taxiway by being among the first to depart after the airshow. I filed a second IFR flight plan that we could pick up in the air over Green Bay in the event we decided to depart Wittman under visual flight rules (VFR). Having either option afforded us the flexibility we might need during the anticipated departure rush hour.

As expected, airplanes began to queue up along the grass taxiways just as the airshow ended. Lacking the IFR departure NOTAM, I was not as prepared as I should have been.

Volunteer flagmen guided the conga line of airplanes through the circuitous route to the two active runways in use. A white placard displaying the letters: "I-F-R" taped to our windshield enabled flagmen to direct us to the proper runway.

In the rush to beat the crowd to the departure end of the runway, I had forgotten to pick up our clearance for the IFR plan I filed earlier in the day. Chicago Center was not accepting airborne clearance pick-ups, so I found myself in an unexpected dilemma. One of the ATC controllers working the departures with his hand radio while standing at the end of the runway understood my plight. He came up and yelled through my open window to call Clearance Delivery on 124.3.

With my departure clearance now in hand, I called the tower announcing was ready to go. The positioned us on the left side of the runway, along side a Bonanza that would launching right after we lifted off.

**Tower:** *Centurian Four Seven Two Zero Yankee, you are cleared for take off, runway 28.*

Per previously issued instructions, I did not respond and simply advanced the full throttle. We accelerated very slowly in the humid 85 degree sun. The airplane was packed tightly with camping gear, with much of the weight in the back.

I received my first sense that our weight and balance was off and that our center of gravity was aft of the envelope when I rotated. Instead of lifting off of the ground, the tail dropped precipitously close to the runway and the stall horn began to blast. I glanced quickly at the engine instruments which were all well inside the green range of proper functioning. We had maximum fuel flow; we were pulling 38 inches of manifold pressure; and we were producing 2,600 RPM. Yet something seemed wrong.

I immediately lowered the nose to build ground speed. We passed through 65 knots, then 70, then 75. At 80 knots, I gave the yoke a backward tug. The nose again lifted, this time with more zeal. Knowing that lift is proportional to the square of airspeed, the added 20 knots of rolling speed

substantially improved our ability to climb. Once airborne, I said to Erica, "That was a strange takeoff, wasn't it?"

"Dad . . . you should know that I trust you, but I don't trust the airplane. I didn't like that."

"Yeah, I know. I didn't like that either," I replied.

As we turned back to the east, the Oshkosh tower controller handed us off to Chicago Center who cleared us up to our planned cruise altitude of 17,000 feet, direct to Buffalo. Looking out our right window we could see the hundreds of airplanes still parked in the camping area and the crowds of people still enjoying the Oshkosh experience. "So-long to another year," I said audibly to myself. I was, indeed, sad.

We were passing through 14,000 feet enroute up to 17,000 as we headed out over the 60 mile spanse of Lake Michigan. We were on the final segment of one of the most wonderful adventures that occur this time every year. The pilot is me was, indeed, gratified. More importantly, the Dad in me was lifted to new heights. In short, we had a very good time.