

Ch. 1 LEARNING TO FLY

E111517 is twenty years old and has just started his third year of college. Four of his classes meet on Mondays and Wednesdays, and only one class meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the early morning. Working four days a week at the local hotel's restaurant as the third cook on busier nights makes a full week for him. He has his own car and living at home with his mom and dad means there is no rent to pay, but there are chores and special projects to fit into his busy week.

Cool autumn air makes the leaves fall from the trees and they fill the yard quickly in dad's quarter-acre lot. Just after lunch on an always demanding Thursday afternoon, he starts raking the countless leaves in the front yard. It is sunny and fifty degrees, which is warm for mid-November. There is a breeze drifting in from the west bringing cooler northern air that passes over the yard from the front right corner to the left side of the house. He rakes by following the wind because the occasional gusts blow the leaves along. Life is more peaceful at home when the work is voluntary as opposed to requested by his parents.

After an hour of raking, half the front yard is browning leaves while the other half is green grass, swept upward and looking bright in the sunlight. Breaking to admire his half-completed, strenuous work, he pauses and takes a depth breath to refresh himself. A single droplet of perspiration trickles down his side and tickles as it meanders over his rib cage. Even with the help of the wind driving the leaves across the yard, it is still a considerable amount of work.

E111517 opens his fall jacket and turns into the crisp northwesterly wind to catch a pick-me-up. A gust of freshness fills his jacket and it balloons out like a parachute. Closing his eyes, he enjoys the coolness against his body. It is very peaceful, and he feels lighter than air as the fresh draft restores his commitment to the front yard. After standing and enjoying the renewal of his spirit for a solid minute, he opens his eyes.

The freshly raked, vibrant, green grass, which is normally six feet below his eyes, is now twelve feet down. Startled at the sight, he descends quickly to the earth stumbling but not falling when his feet touch the land. Not until his feet are firmly back on solid ground does he realize the full thrill, fear, and excitement of the experience. His heart is pounding, his breath is shallow, and his mind is racing as he realizes the magnitude of the feat he just accomplished. He thinks to himself, "Was I floating in the air? I did just defy gravity and flew above the ground." Glancing up and down the street, he realizes there is no one to testify to this happening. It is a very quiet, dead-end street on this sunny Thursday, and he carries mixed emotions because there are no witnesses to his deeds of the day.

E111517 goes back to raking, but the memory of freshly raked grass from that dizzying height entices him and he starts reviewing it in his mind. With the view etched into his mind, he asks himself: *Did it really occur, or was it just a daydream? Was I really floating six feet off the ground or was it a mirage of my mind playing tricks on me? Is this something repeatable or just a once in a lifetime event?* Realizing the memory of floating lighter than air will torment his thoughts for years to come, he must try it again.

E111517 opens his jacket a second time then turns to capture the next gust of wind with great hope of flying high and...nothing. It was not refreshing, it was not satisfying, and it did not lift him off the ground as it did the first time. He tries several more times, once with his eyes open, then with them closed, and still no hovering of his body. Tilting his head forward and then back, he twists right and left, trying to catch the power of the wind, and yet, the full weight of his body still bears down on his feet. The uplifting current could not elevate him off the freshly raked grass.

Feeling disappointed, he relives the first experience in his mind. As the events unfold, he remembers he thanked God for the cool, gentle breeze. So, closing his eyes and giving thanks to the Lord with his coat wide open, the wind energizes his body as it passes through him, and he feels the altitude change. As his eyes open, he can see further down the road. His head brushes against a limb of the tree, shedding its leaves. Now his toes are ten feet from the ground and feeling a little more comfortable about it. It is a freeing feeling hovering above the earth and he gives thanks to God again. With just a thought, his feet gently descend to the ground with controlled and deliberate intention.

The unraked leaves beckon him, and he resumes raking the front yard free of the autumn nuisance. As his chore reaches completion, the contemplation of the power bestowed on him fills his mind. Then uncertainties and questions burst into his head. *Would a running-start help me fly me higher and faster? Is this a parlor trick and the power is only up and down? Or will it fly me to other places?* These questions pester his thinking as the browning leaves slowly progress across the yard. With the raking done, he has to attempt another flight and push the limits of this newfound ability.

Setting off across the grass, spreading his coat and praising the Lord, his feet speedily leave the ground. But the power lines at the edge of the yard hastily approach his head. Then the cracked pavement of the asphalt street comes at him faster than the power lines. This time, the collision with the ground is complete with the blacktop scraping his hands and knees. There is no blood penetrating the skin, but it burns and stings for a few seconds. He discovers what the Wright brothers

learned less than 85 years before: be watchful on your takeoff and avoid overhanging obstacles.

This time, his running-start begins in the street with a jump and praise to God, and he rises diagonally over his neighbor's yard. His launch is smooth and controllable, and he can see that the neighbor's roof is in need of repair as his height increases. Clearing the big oaks that act as a wind guard for his neighbor's house, he rises an additional 200 feet in the air in a matter of seconds. Now there is a majestic view of the neighborhood with every house on the street recognizable from his perch in the sky.

While he admires the scenic view, the westerly trade winds push him over his home. Achieving five hundred feet in the air, the wind blows him like a balloon, tossing him from one side to another. He saw a picture of his old house from a satellite image years after this event and the view matches his memory perfectly. The unraked backyard appears minute and the shed and arbor are pocket-sized from this height. Soon, the next neighborhood to the east comes into view as the turbulent wind whirls him toward it. Then the real fear of being far-flung over the woods behind his house brings him to his senses.

El11517 leans into the breeze to cease himself drifting and bobbing like a floating balloon without guidance. Like the tall ships from history moving slowly forward by traversing the wind, he leans slightly to the right and starts moving forward. By floating 100 feet to the right and then 100 feet to the left, he moves closer to home. With each change in direction, he loses altitude, but it brings his backyard closer into view. After traversing five alternating directions, the backyard is under his feet. Letting himself down in the backyard, he walks to the front yard, puts away the rake and tarp, and goes to work.

The day's events and discoveries fascinate him and there is a need to tell someone about his unusual exploits. But where to begin? How do you tell an impossible story? And how to tell people without revealing the power to everyone? Will people believe my story or think I am a lunatic? Some people might become jealous of my power and kill me for it. Even worse, it might make me a hero that people will want to meet and glorify me. The thoughts of flying dance in his memory until the evening rush of the restaurant distracts him and forces his focus on the business at hand.