

Greg Brown

Made My Dad Proud

The best landing anyone ever made

"We're out of control!" yelled my father, grabbing the wheel. "No, we're not," I replied, grabbing it back.

Ignoring my father wasn't easy, as he'd been a pilot since before I was born. He bought his first airplane in 1949, a tiny Aeronca Chief. Soon afterward he traded it for an Ercoupe, which he landed in a Missouri farm field to wait out thunderstorms. Pilots don't do that sort of thing anymore.

"We're in trouble! I'm taking over!"

"Dad! Please believe me. We'll be OK...."

Next came a triple-tailed Bellanca Cruisair. "Most efficient airplane I ever owned," he claimed, "150 mph on 150 hp." He earned his instrument rating in that Bellanca, using just a headset, compass, and turn-and-bank indicator. In those days pilots flew airways defined by Morse code—*A* indicated one side of course and *N* the other. On-course aviators were treated to a steady tone. No frilly moving maps back then.

My dad's one metal-bender occurred in that Bellanca, which had retractable landing gear manually extended by many turns of a crank. Approaching New Orleans on instruments, he was interrupted by radio calls and forgot to finish lowering the wheels. Fortunately, damage was slight, and his bird soon flew again.

"We're icing up!" shouted my father, jolting me back to the present.

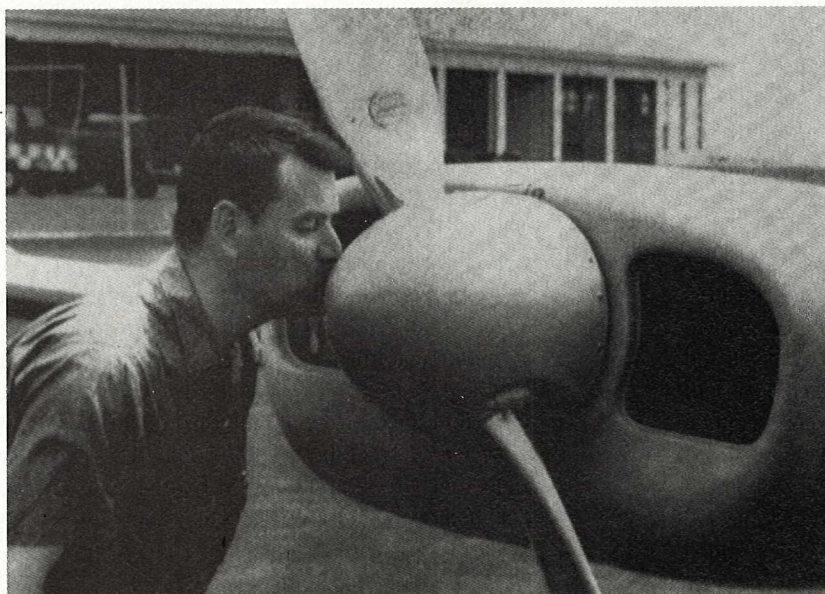
"Dad," I replied. "We land in 20 minutes. Please relax!"

In the Air Force during the Korean conflict, my father tried the controls of early jets like the T-33 and B-47. But he was proudest of authorization to land his Bellanca on base in San Antonio,

flying it home on leave to see my mom in Chicago. After leaving the service he moved up to Bonanzas—three in a row.

Then, in 1960, he bought the hottest personal airplane of its day, a twin-engine Cessna 310. We kids knew it was a big deal because Sky King flew

a 140-gallon gas tank and flew with a buddy to Europe. They didn't take the northern route commonly flown by light airplanes, but instead navigated via Newfoundland and the Azores Islands to Portugal. The longest over-water leg exceeded 10 hours.



The author's father expresses gratitude for a safe landing following an overseas flight.

one on his popular TV western. It was easy enough to imagine ourselves chasing those bad guys in our own airplane. Heck, Sky's Songbird was even painted similarly, though we couldn't be sure it was the same two-tone green on our black and white television.

It took more than TV adventures to satisfy my dad, however. With my mother, he frequently flew to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. My mom, although afraid of water, even accompanied him to Bermuda, though she declined his biggest aviation adventure.

That occurred in 1962, when my father swapped the 310's back seat for

On the way home, they experienced engine roughness between Lisbon and the Azores. With instruments reading normal, the two pilots debated which engine was acting up, not wanting to kill the good one 250 miles from land. Eventually they shut down the left engine, which proved to be the correct decision. Relaying their position with the help of a nearby airliner, they proceeded to the Azores. It turned out that one cylinder had cracked all the way around and was within a half-inch of blowing off. I still have the photo of my dad kissing the good right engine after landing

