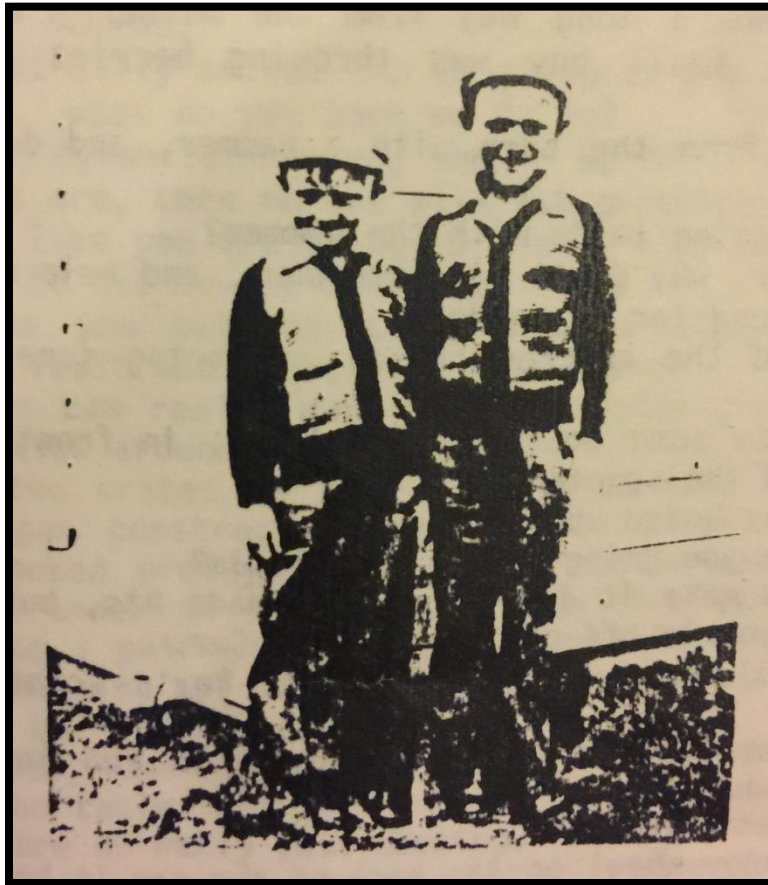


DUST

AIRPLANE



Setting up in the Mulberry tree, I was picking some of the berries that had already ripened in the early summer sun throwing them down to the ground just to watch the chickens run and fight to see which one was going to eat it. With the morning chores finished and a rain the night before, there didn't seem to be much else to do with my time. Listening to the radio didn't seem to be much fun anymore after you had heard the news for the hundredth time about England, Palestine, Arabs, and the new formation of the ancient nation of Israel, which the Jews had for two thousand years been waiting to return to.

All the reports seemed to point to war in the Middle East. With England trying to extract its troops from the certain conflict. While the sons of Ishmael were rattling their swords at the sons of Isaac, vowing to fight to the last drop of blood of the last man in the Arab Nations.

Even our Preacher, Joe Ray Land, at the Baptist Church was saying from the pulpit that there was going to be a great war between the sons of Abraham over the land of inheritance which they had both taken from the sons of Canaan, and it would be a war without borders, consuming the young men of all nations who troubled themselves with it. America should not become involved in an ancient family feud of Abraham if we didn't want to see our youth back in

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uniform marching off to fight another devastating foreign war with long supply lines and many marble tomb stones standing on the land.

In the mid nineteen forties our world was a lot larger and the Middle East was a long way from the Mulberry tree in Western Oklahoma where a small boy was throwing berries at his Mother's chickens.

R.E. emerged from the barn with a hammer and Dad's coffee can of nails.

What are you going to do with the hammer?

Make a scooter. Why don't you come down and help me?

What do you need for me to do?

Go out behind the chicken house and bring some of the boards Dad has out there.

Returning with some boards I found R.E. in front of the house preparing to build the scooter.

Gary hold this board while I saw it.

OK. What are you going to use for wheels?

I'm going to make it like Roy Folks made his, but we will have to use the wagon wheels off of the Dynamite Car.

But that will ruin our car, besides Roy's scooter has roller skate wheels.

But roller skate wheels are too small to run in the dirt, we will need larger wheels.

But what about our car?

Gary, the buggy wheel on the back of the car is broken. We can't ride it anymore since we wrecked it going down the canyon hill.

Maybe we can find another wheel.

No, besides it takes both of us to use the car, but either one of us can ride a scooter by ourselves.

OK. Let's do it.

With hinges for the front suspension, two wagon wheels, an old push lawn mower handles for handlebar, boards pulled out of a trash pile, and a wagon end gate rod for axles.

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After a trip to town where R.E. talked Uncle Jake [Pike] out of a box full of pop bottle caps to use for decoration, we had a new scooter. So decorated that it looked suspiciously like it was imported from an Old Mexico used car lot.

R.E. was right, one person could ride it without help and on a good hill we could both ride at the same time, something we could never do with the dynamite car. Many times we took the scooter to the mailbox, riding down the hill together, then pushing it up the other side to the mail post, then returning the same way.

I don't ever remember wearing the old scooter out, I suppose it was destroyed when the farm was hit by a tornado that destroyed a lot of things, but one thing that did survive the tornado was the shell of the dynamite car, so with a new passion for the fast life, we put the dynamite crates to new application.

Gary, let's take these crates and build an airplane.

How?

I'll show you but we'll have to wait until Monday to fly.

(Monday is the day Mother goes to town to do the laundry, I just know he is going to drag me into trouble again.)

That's washday!

"Yes!" he replied, with a smile as he turned and walked toward a small pile of boards.

I know that silly smile. He IS going to get me into trouble.

All right. What do you want me to do?

Bring the dynamite crates we'll build it down in the canyon where the caves are, then no one will ask questions.

It sounds like you are going to get me into trouble again.

No! It'll be OK. No one will ever know.

Every time you tell me that someone always finds out, then it's always my fault when something goes wrong.

(But if he can really make these dynamite crates fly, well I'll just have to stick around to see that.)

We took the crates to the canyon with saw, hammer, nails, and pliers, to begin construction of our new airplane. When we were finished it looked pretty good for a dynamite car with some

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1x12s nailed under it for wings, with wire tied to them then up over the top to a pair of Dad's barn door rollers. If no one noticed the barn door missing before Monday, this airplane will fly!

Gary, wake up! It's Monday.

Out of bed and into the kitchen where Mother was putting breakfast on the table, "You boys are up early this morning."

Gary and I couldn't sleep. Are you going to do the laundry today?

Yes. It's Monday.

Do you want us to gather the laundry for you?

Well, yes that would be nice if you will.

Come on Gary. We can gather the laundry real quick.

Don't you boys want breakfast?

"We're not hungry." I said, following R.E. into the bedroom. I started loading a basket full of laundry, but when I looked around R.E. was stripping all the beds.

What are you taking the blankets off the beds for?

Gary, don't ask questions, just load all the laundry you can find, dirty or not.

R.E. that's silly!

Gary, the more laundry we send, the longer she will stay away. Now are you going to help, or are you going to talk?

(Now I know I'm going to be in trouble, when he starts acting silly there is no limit to what he will ask me to do.)

Do you want the curtains?

No! She might become suspicious.

After filling all the baskets and a big box we found, we dragged them outside to the car and loaded them.

Did you boys take the blankets off of the beds?

R.E. looked at me then at Mother, saying, "Well, they didn't smell too good, do you mind washing them?"

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No, I don't mind if they don't smell clean, I just hadn't noticed.

Mother you know R.E. he wants everything real clean, I hadn't noticed either.

Yes, and it wouldn't hurt you to be a little more like your brother in that respect.

Mother you just don't know. It might hurt me if I was like him.

R.E. looked at me with that look that meant, "Gary shut up and do your part of the work before she asks any more questions." So I went to load the soap, bluing, and bleach, while Mother commended R.E. on how helpful he was when she needed help.

By the time Mother was ready to leave for the laundry, R.E. was standing at the door waving goodbye with one hand and holding a pair of pliers in the other.

Is she gone?

Yes.

Let's go get them!

Not until she goes over Frymire Hill.

As soon as her car disappeared over the hill, R.E. and I ran out the front door toward Mother's new clothes line, it was sixty foot long with four of the best and strongest wires on the farm. With them removed from the posts we dragged them down to the canyon where a tall Cottonwood tree stood with a large limb about thirty foot above the ground and another limb about three foot above that one, just perfect for the maiden flight of a dynamite airplane.

Climbing up to the limbs R.E. tied one end of a wire to the limb, then on the ground again we ran the wire through the barn door rollers. While he started splicing the wires together I went to the barn to retrieve Dad's lariat rope so we could tie it to the tail of the airplane and pull it up to the launch limb.

(This is going to be a better flight than the bedspread parachute.)

By the time I had the pull rope tied to the tail piece R.E. had all the pieces of wire spliced together, so I helped him tie the other end of the wires to a Hackberry tree about two hundred foot down the canyon.

When we tried pulling the airplane up to the Cottonwood tree, the wire sagged so bad it wouldn't go up. Setting down on the canyon bank we rolled a cigarette and thought about the problem for a long time.

"I've got it!" R.E. shouted, jumping to his feet.

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Well I hope it isn't contagious.

Oh Gary! Be serious once in a while. We go up to the barn and get Dad's fence stretchers, that way we can pull the wire tight enough to allow us to fly.

OK, we've gone this far we might as well do something.

Returning to the Hackberry tree with the fence stretchers we pulled the wire until it was tight enough to twang like a guitar string then it was easy to pull the airplane up to the launch limb and tie it off.

Gary, you stay here while I go to the house and get my leather pilot's cap.

Back at the launch limb with his pilot's cap pulled down so tight it made wrinkles in his forehead R.E. was ready to fly.

Boy! I wish I had a pilot's cap.

"Well you don't, so when I say go you turn loose of the rope." he said, as he crawled into the crate with wings.

Oh, No, you don't! I worked on this airplane just as hard as you did so I get to go too.

Gary, this was my idea so I get to go first. Now turn me loose so I can fly!

No, if I don't go, you don't go!

OK. I'll let you wear the pilot's cap when it's your turn.

We're not talking about wearing the cap. We're talking about me being the co-pilot of this crate!

Gary! You're being stubborn again!

OK. I'll let you fly, I'll untie this wire and you will fly in a straight line. DOWN!

No! Gary, we're thirty foot in the air. Don't untie that wire!

We fly together or you fly alone. Straight down. Take your choice.

OK. Get in.

I crowded in behind R.E. while he held the rope then handing the rope to me he shouted let her fly!

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I turned loose of the tag rope and the airplane began to creak, the barn door rollers started squeaking as the airplane started leaving the limb, suddenly she lurched forward and we were in free flight over the deep ravine below, faster, and faster she went, rust from the barn door rollers began to pepper me in the face, thump, we passed the first wire splice, the wire sagged a little more, and we started into a steeper and faster dive, now we were really going.

"Boy! This is great!" R.E. said, as we came to the second wire splice, thump, twang, the wire splice gave away, now we were into a dynamite crate crash dive.

I just knew he was going to get me into trouble, this time I'm going to die and Mother will think it was all my fault. Would God keep a little boy out of Heaven just because he has an idiot brother who wears an old pilot's cap and flies dynamite crates? I should have told Mother goodbye! CRASH! We hit the bottom of the canyon, then a barn door roller hit me on the top of the head, splinters of wood went flying everywhere.

R.E. laid slumped over in the crumpled cockpit where he died. Just as I thought, he doesn't have any wings, he was a devil. Wait a minute. I don't have any wings either, maybe we're not dead after all. He's moving, that's good, now he can take the blame for this one.

R.E. started crawling out of the tangle of wire and splinters.

Gary, are you hurt?

No! But you are going to be as soon as I get out of this mess of wires!

Setting up on the canyon bank looking down at the crash site it was hard for me to believe he could have talked me into riding with him.

Gary, we did something wrong.

No! I did something wrong.

What?

I trusted you to tie the wire splices!

Well anyway, I think it's ruined.

I hope it's ruined before you get me killed you idiot! And that may happen real soon since Dad is coming down the hill right now.

"Gary this is no time for one of your jokes." Just then he looked straight at me and realized I wasn't joking, that caused him to turn even whiter.

"Have you boys seen your Mother's clothesline around here anywhere?" Dad ask with a slight smile on his face.

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I didn't answer, I was too busy keeping the canyon between Dad and me as long as I could. R.E. looked around at him.

We borrowed it for a while.

What happened here?

Our airplane crashed. We were going pretty good, but the wire splice broke and we crashed.

Well it's lucky for you boys that it did.

Why?

How was you going to stop when you got to that Hackberry tree at the other end?

Dad was still smiling until he saw his barn door rollers.

It is very hard to stretch a used clothesline wire with someone fussing about wet laundry and someone else complaining about a barn door leaning against the back of the barn without hanger rollers.

Sometime after that day a large rain came thundering across the dusty plain and it's muddy waters washed away forever two dynamite crates leaving only a memory of the great flight over the dusty canyon.

Thanks Mother and Dad for love that is stronger than clothesline wire and barn door rollers.

Thanks R.E., no greater pilot ever flew only 120 foot or made so soft a crash landing for his backup pilot.