

**Every day starts with a sunrise,
Its what we do before it sets
that matters.**

K. McGraw

First in Flight! The Adventure Begins!

The predawn morning air was crisp, yet perfectly tepid for today's unpredictable journey. The birthday card had read, "Let's Get Carried Away!" When opened, it revealed, "Let your dreams take flight! Dates were previously set and replaced, as the fickle autumn weather changed its mind. Today's auspicious climate for flight had been confirmed, "Good to go!" by Emilia, one of the two talented pilots, ready to provide us with a most memorable outing. Everyone: My father, my brother and myself were in full anticipation of the day's event, not knowing what to expect. Our only experience with hot air balloons was from the Jules Verne's novel and its adapted movie version, which featured Phileas Fogg in, "Around the World in Eighty Days."

I heard the harsh blare of the horn for the third time and had run with arms flailing towards the rams head logo that gleamed in the moonlight. I threw my knapsack, along with my body, into the open door of the silver, king cab, pickup truck which I had always referred to as the "pavement princess." His smiling eyes glanced in the rear view mirror at me, alone in the back, except for my later to be found unnecessary, overstuffed backpack. "Good morning Evonne!" exclaimed the driver, my brother Erik. He chuckled inaudibly and shifted the transmission into gear. My father and I exchanged greetings and pleasantries, as I smelled the aroma and gratefully sipped the provided hot coffee. They knew why we were tardy. The question was, "When would we arrive?" The preset audio system resounded a welcomed accompaniment of, "Up Up and Away by the

5th Dimension as we traversed the county.

Our trio arrived long overdue at the pre-arranged launch site. The sky was opalescent, a few clouds parted generously to let the sunshine through. One glance at the enormous, white based, black and yellow checkered, towering inflatable, would captivate anyone fortunate enough to visualize this incredible sight. The large triangular, brilliant gold and powerful black emblem of Deptford New Jersey's Police force, was ablaze on the aircraft and glistened atop the profound inscription,

FIRST & FINEST

We were politely hustled to our tethered transportation and heard the furnace blasts', cycle on and off. This apparent activity was needed as the crew provided ballast and awaited our coming appearance. The dedicated pilot had displayed his acumen, as he kept proper inflation while the effective ground crew did not allow the singularly occupied aircraft to lift off; the way the Wizard of Oz, as he waved alone, had left the Emerald City. We each were graciously assisted into the spacious, tawny colored, made in America basket.

Our hurried approach did nothing to re-prioritize the introduction of Steve, our accomplished pilot of twenty-two years, or to be provided proper flight instructions as we lifted off towards the heavens. The sky had cleared and brightened as predicted. The first magnificent object our aviator had directed our attention to, was a previously launched, distant, multi-colored balloon. All of our heads careened to see the referenced, also fortunate group, catching the altitudes breeze and headed on a southerly course. Not so far away that we couldn't see its radiant yellow, red, green, blue and purple hues under the bright morning sun. Steve had started to inform us, "That beautiful balloon," that phrase alone caused me, to have begun silently mouthing the lyrics,

We can sing a song and sail along the silver sky.

For we can fly, we can fly!

and he continued, "It's brand new and piloted by Emilia, a great friend and ace pilot. We are both certified by the Federal Administration Aviation (FAA). First and Finest and DreamWorks Balloons have flown together for many years." . I excitedly expressed, "Talk about ..." I was interrupted by the temporary din of the gas burner, and heard a muffled, "Cloud nine!" It was not the first time my parent finished my thought for me. Steve quickly became a wonderful tour guide and friend, as he regaled us of different delightfully happy and adventurous breath taking experiences, that he, his family and many other's had encountered in their decades of flight. Our pilot wore only a short sleeve shirt and I could feel the warmth of each blast as he raised the wingless multicolored aircraft. I looked at his summer attire versus my winter clothing and kicked the full rucksack, that had laid by our feet and thought,

** This needless arctic wardrobe almost caused us to miss our agreed upon windless launch time! **

Together we inhaled the vast beauty as we all shared our impressions of the amazing escapade. Erik pointed to the shrinking black and gray roof tops and once giant, pristine evergreens below. Wearing a broad warm smile he declared, "Awesome!" Dad with glazed eyes, articulated an emotional response, "What a wonderful world!" I observed and shared the clear, bold eastern horizon, over the Atlantic Ocean as Steve momentarily pulled the gas supply handle to the burner; uplifting us to what the altimeter had read, "one-thousand feet," in the clear infinite sky. I pointed to the east and hollered to overcome the roar, "Look! This is unimaginable! I had no idea that this event would be so incredible!"

Erik and I had previously read and now brought to life, Maya

Angelou's loving quotation, *"Be a rainbow in someone's cloud."* This captivating adventure was one of three wants that remained, seemingly for eons on our Dad's bucket list. Our father had just crossed off one integral item, borrowed from the aged character, Carter, played by Morgan Freeman in 'The Bucket List'; it was a proverbial statement, "Laugh until I cry!" He had told us in a comical remembrance, the reason for his own episode of intense nonstop laughter. Just the thought caused me to reproduce a pleasing and grateful smile. Weeks had passed until the glorious point in time that we set afloat; us with our begetter, found that solar day, had provided many happy emotions and considerations of our good fortune. Together that very day above the earth, we experienced Carter's final selection to his check list, "Witness something truly majestic." Our father's terminal condition was a visceral topic and very rarely discussed. This was not a time to lament; it was the quality of life he conveyed this day and most days, that will be a cherished unforgettable memory for us all! It was the day we could not escape the words he spoke heartfelt and in earnest, nor did we ever desire to; "The best things in life aren't things!"

Our group carried on at peace, with our heads mentally in the clouds, as Steve continued with admirable efficacy to energize the balloon upward. We trekked onward; the master of our buoyant airship maneuvered the flier and nodded his sun-kissed silver haired head to the west, creating an awareness to the shrinking exuberant Philadelphia skyline. I was certain that my brother, two years my senior, would be eyeballing the thirty story work-in-progress, that he currently held immense responsibility for all of the carpentry aspects there in, or at least the three tower's recently completed for Temple University. Steve with a charming radiant smile, on his tan profile, had constantly shown how and why he excelled at his craft. Time seemed to stand still as Steve communicated our location to the

chase team, which later we learned consisted entirely of volunteers. Many of the staff; loyal and energetic to this nonprofit organization, were retired Deptford and New Jersey State Police hierarchy, fire fighters, EMT personnel, community members, friends and multiple generations of his loving family. Never once, as our skipper navigated our inflated dreamboat, had we heard even jokingly, any resemblance of, "Houston we have a problem!"

The flight had begun a slow descent; lower, lower and lower, which brought each of us physically and mentally down to earth. Everyone could literally almost touch the outstretched forest green boughs, as the basket's bottom skimmed across those once distant tree tops. Our quartet in the well traveled basket, instantly gained celebrity status as people everywhere, gathered in yards to wave up to us and take photographs or videos with their cell phones. Just as we had also done, from what I felt was a much better perspective. Many of the individuals were in awe as they pointed skyward and shouted questions. An abundance of vehicles pulled over to admire, the not often enough captured observance of the colorful overhead sight. It seemed that the whole world wished, that we could drift longer. Steve clicked on his mike and calmly queried "Pop, can you see us?" He was communicating to his father, an original founder of the Deptford Aviation Unit. Steve's right arm controlled the on and off of the tremendous warmth upward, into the vast inward spaciousness, of the colorful translucent, still enclosed vapor lock. He verbally added to the ground team with determination and unlimited confidence, "I've chosen a field to drop this baby!" Then instructed us to bend our knees for a potential bounce, as he pointed his index finger on a well calloused hand to a dirt tractor path for our scrutiny. "Right there!" In anticipation, I had little trouble convincing myself,

** I'm certain that he knows best! **

Steve engaged a release vent atop the balloon and simultaneously

threw out the landing straps to two young ladies that gave foot chase to the airship. It looked as though our airman had willed the balloon to his focused spot on the earthen track. The landing was as smooth as silk to the passengers, but not to the youths who toiled admirably, to hold and corral the giant wind catcher, while others scurried to assist.

We exited the craft. Dad and I observed and conversed, as Erik helped the fastidious squad perform the extensive procedure of the balloon's deflation. It was quite a satisfying eyeful to have witnessed the collapse and expert packing of a nylon balloon that so recently hovered above our noggins and now been put into a trailer unit, that provided its own historical experiences to everyone involved. It was then that we were presented with special accolades that will be remembrances of our journey and forever cherished. Our triad met the most amazing people, inclusive of the family's matriarch, Mrs. Moylan; still actively involved after knee replacement surgeries, along with the other tireless first responders, her granddaughters Danine and Chloe. We felt privileged to have encountered the renowned, 'Pop', Mr. Moylan senior, the retired Deptford Police Lieutenant. I quickly had begun to realize; that people who fell into Pop's personal orbit were affected by him, in a positive and devoted fashion. We also met a most admirable retired State Police Lieutenant Commander, Mr. Ronald Small. These esoteric, charming and obviously well seasoned veterans are still actively involved in community affairs. Between the duo, they shared almost a century of dedication to law enforcement and conveyed only positive, wonderful, exciting and often funny tales of their escapades with us. Together they are a remarkable, textbook example of continuing public service!

The task at hand completed, both of the flight groups were escorted to a breakfast feast, of food and conversation. It was our family's privilege to have been able to have spent time, with some of

the nicest people we could ever meet! Our group, also learned about this dynasty's other amazing events, past, present and future. One and all had become educated to the phenomenal insight, long history and professional merchandising behind Deptford Township's, "First in Flight", fantastically successful public relations endeavor. A nonprofit, not tax payer funded, charitable organization. To share in detail, the knowledge and familiarity of that time spent, would be a voluminous conveyance for another day.

** Bucket list: Eight down! Two to go! **

Their website WWW.FIRSTANDFINEST.ORG is a must read! When you meet Steve, Emilia or Pop; you can be sure to expect "Random acts of kindness." Be certain to inquire about the very first ever, experimental balloon flight from Philadelphia to Deptford New Jersey in seven-teen-ninety-three. If this fantastic team ever produces a reality show or movie of their adventures and yes, some misadventures, we want front row seats!

Genuinely,
Evonne M.

Evonne M.

October 26, 2019

To; The Deptford Township Police Aviation Unit
Attn; Mr. Steve Moylan
From; The Melon family

Re; The best time ever!

We want to offer everyone involved in our most rewarding adventure, sincere "Thanks!" Our enclosed letter expresses our genuine feelings. As we had discussed, it may seem a little over the top. Please feel free to offer any corrections, changes or editing you think are necessary to this original draft. Thank you for all.

Our Best to you and yours,
Edward, Erik and Evonne Melon

E. E and E Melon

