



SWIFT ENTERPRISES PRESENTS

**Zimby Cox**  
**Wally Was Not My Father**  
**and Other Revelations of a Swift Pilot**

With T. Edward Fox

Zimby Cox came to work at Swift Enterprises right out of the Navy where he was a pilot. Well, not *just* a pilot. Since he is so unassuming and won't mention it, it must be noted that he was rated as the top military pilot three of the six years he spent in the service.

The top pilot across all of the armed services. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine pilots included!

As in, he was the absolute best of the best.

Quiet, good-natured and always ready to answer the call to duty, he only has one problem that has nagged him for all his adult life: he bears a remarkable resemblance to an old comic actor. It has stood in his way with being taken seriously, and with women. Until they get to know him.

This is his story, so that you can get to know a bit more about the man who flies on practically every Swift adventure whether it be in the air, under the oceans or into space. Zimby is always there.

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This book is dedicated to those who just sort of blend in. You don't look nice or nasty; you just flow through life doing the best you can, which is frequently better than the rest of us. Keep going. It may not look like it, but people do notice you and appreciate you. And, if they don't, then BLEEP 'em!

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FOREWORD

Zimby is someone I only came to know about a year ago. Oh, I'm certain that he was always there, it is just that I sort of failed to see him.

He is a great pilot, one of the best from what I have been told, but he never makes anything of it. He isn't shy. He just isn't all that interested in blowing his own horn or making a big deal out of his exploits.

That's a pity. Once you see him and spend a little time getting to know him, he can become a very good friend. And, for Tom Swift, a valued employee and fellow adventurer.

I like Zimby. He has a good sense of humor about practically everything, except for one. It is his uncanny and unwanted resemblance to a famous man from a few decades ago.

We all know that it niggles at him and many of us take great pains to see that others do not unknowingly bring it up. We're not always successful.

*Thackery E. Fox*

**CHAPTER 1/****The Things I Know**

I KNOW at least fifteen things to be absolutely true. And, in spite of appearances, number one on that list is that my father was not—and let me make this absolutely clear—my father was *not* Wally Cox.

Nor was that famous and very funny man my grandfather, uncle or a long lost missing twin of any of the above.

Go ahead. Look me over. That's number two on my list. I know that I look spookily like Wally Cox. When my eyes can't take wearing contact lenses, which is about one week out of every three, I wear a pair of black rimmed glasses.

I have lived with a receding hairline since turning nineteen. It headed backwards for a couple years leaving an isthmus of hair in the middle, and then stopped. I wear it a little long and it is fairly fine and wispy.

My bad for not doing something to make it look less like 'his' hair, but there you go.

When I served in the Navy, I was an aircraft designer's dream. I am about five foot six inches and one hundred forty pounds. I fit so well into each and every cockpit that I can 'wear' a plane right off the assembly line with no adjustments.

It's as if they make 'em just for me. That has saved my life on more than one occasion.

Years ago I lost a good friend to an ejection accident. He was a solid six foot three and hit his head as he exited the plane. Snapped his neck. The only plus about that was that they figured he died instantly so there was no suffering.

But, enough about sadness.

Let's talk about me.

After six good years of active duty I decided there must be more to life than wiggling a joystick for thirty hours a week. Or more. Sometimes getting up at 3:00 am to do it.

What to do? What to do?

I was sitting in a coffee house down on East twenty-eighth in Manhattan, reading the New York Times business section a couple weeks after my release back into the wild. As I took a sip of my rapidly-approaching-tepid coffee my eyes spotted something that made my heart race a bit:

NEEDED—Excellent pilot with few family ties and desire to fly into the future. Contact Enterprises, Shopton. 888-888-1234 — Job 22DP99

I figured right that 'Enterprises' had to mean Swift Enterprises. My first civilian plane experience—while still on active duty, which was technically a no-no according to Uncle Sam—had been in a Pigeon Special, the little acrobatic plane the Swifts had been building for at least three years at that point. Great little airplane that Pigeon Special.

A friend had purchased one and let me have a couple hours in it.

He had to pry my hands off of the yoke and practically yank my body out of the cockpit with a block and tackle. Just in case you couldn't tell, I didn't want to stop flying it.

Now, I've told Tom this—that's Tom as in Tom Swift—but I'll tell you as well. Pigeon Specials are more acrobatically suited and certainly with faster response, than any military fighter jet I've ever flown. And, that list is about thirty craft long. Changing into one from a Mil-Spec jet is just like changing from a huge, yet fast, muscle car and into a perfectly balanced little sports car. Lots of great handling if not a lot of vrooom!

Ah, but I digress. It happens.

So, here was an opportunity to go to work for them. Hopefully as a test pilot of something like that. I went inside and used the café's phone and called that number. After listening to a three minute recorded message telling me that Enterprises only accepted résumés from people with degrees in the field they applied for, or had at least five years of documented and verifiable experience, and that only applicants who were considered to be top of their list would be contacted, I was given a code number and transferred to another line.

It was answered by a woman... I forget her name. Jane? June? Hmmm? She left Enterprises a week after I spoke with her for maternity leave and never came back. Anyway, I gave her my name, the code number and the job code I was applying for. She asked me to give her my Social Security Number—something I am really hesitant to give out, but did—and she placed me on hold for about ten minutes.

Do you realize how annoying it is to hear "We've Only Just Begun" played over and over for ten minutes?

She finally came back on and asked if I could drive up that afternoon. They would put me up at a local motel and I would have my interview the next morning. I rented a car.

When I pulled into the main gate that following morning I was given a pin-on emblem that fit under my collar. Turns out it was a combination tracking device, walkie-talkie, and personal ID tag.

I was picked up by another woman and taken to one of the twenty or so building right in the middle of the whole complex, smack dab between a maze of runways. After sitting alone in a room for a half hour—I'm pretty certain I was being watched—in walked this kid, about nine or ten years younger than me.

I was speechless. It was Tom Swift, himself. He reached out a hand and said:

"Welcome to Swift Enterprises, Zimalist. Or, may I call you

“Zim?”

“Actually, Mr. Swift, I prefer Zimby,” I told him.

He smiled at me and nodded. “Then it’s Zimby. And, I’m always Tom. My dad’s the ‘mister’ of the family.” He smiled at me. “If you want the position, it’s yours. We looked into your background and think you are exactly the man we want.”

Back then, I couldn’t spell flabbergasted, but that I was. In spades!

As it turns out, they are really proactive about getting to know who they are about to offer jobs to. Tom told me that during my on-hold experience the day before that the HR folks had done a complete background check on me. Later, after I had agreed to come up, they had contacted the Navy and learned all about my service. Tom and his dad are good friends with an Admiral who is very high up in the Brass Circle, if you know what I mean.

The Admiral really played me up as Mister Perfect Pilot, or something like that. I guess that’s okay with me. It’s kind of embarrassing. I have this knack for being able to hop into anything with wings or rotors and just start flying it. Plus, anything I get to spend much time in, I get pretty good at.

Okay. Confession time. I’m not bragging, but I *was* to top military pilot in the entire U.S. three years of my service time. NASA tried to get me to leave the military and join the space program, but I really didn’t want to do that.

I get a strange sensation when I look down from great heights. It is very uncomfortable.

It’s not a fear; it is just being able to look straight down through nothingness and not being able to discern what is below me makes me feel odd. From the cockpit of a jet, even at 70,000 plus feet, I can still see what is on the ground. But, put me in front of a screen watching footage of the Earth spinning below a space capsule or shuttle, and my stomach begins to go

wobbly. I couldn’t imagine how I’d react to the real thing.

I finished my commitment hitch and then left and found myself at Swift Enterprises a few weeks later, being offered the job of my dreams: on duty pilot for everything they make that flies. And, plenty of free time to practice in each aircraft.

Within the first six months here I also discovered that ‘aircraft’ also included seacopters and rockets and repelatron-powered spacecraft and much more.

There are several of us who are dedicated pilots and then there is Bud Barclay. Talk about a character. Bud is Tom’s age and best friend. If he ever decides to leave Enterprises and go into the military, I can see him becoming a better pilot than I was. By the time he was eighteen, he was quite possibly one of the top five civilian pilots in the country.

On top of everything else, he is an absolute hoot. He’s got a great sense of humor, a habit of nicknaming all of Tom’s inventions, and just the right amount of mischievousness to make him someone you always keep a watch on.

He is also one lucky guy. He’s dating Tom’s sister, Sandy. Not only is she cute, she is also a great pilot having been trained by her father, brother and Bud. All she lacks is experience and she might be as good as Bud.

The Swifts are a talented family. Even their mom, Anne, who is a killer cook!

When I was younger and had notions of my absolute ‘dream job,’ I never thought that it could turn out to be better and more than I might have imagined.

But, here I am. So, the number three thing from my list of ‘knowns’ is that I am the absolute luckiest son-of-a-gun in the entire world.

No questions!

**CHAPTER 2/****One Big Trip... And a Fall**

I'M NOT ONE to make unnecessary risks or to ask for special considerations. I just love what I do so I take on just about everything I can. Most of the time it leads to fun and fairly easy flights. Just not always.

In my three years here I have had the pleasure of piloting more than thirteen different aircraft models and several hundred actual craft.

I have also had the misfortune to have racked up six major crashes in under thirty months.

Now, let me just say that none of these were pilot error. In fact, there was only one case of equipment failure in there, unless you count having a missile take off a big chunk of the back end of your cargo jet, or a sonic disrupter knocking out—more like burning out—all of your controls.

Or the time that a freak storm forced my jet down near some mountains where it pancaked into a jungle swamp. It didn't break up and I might have even been able to take back off except that the plane sank up to the top of the fuselage.

Or... well, you get the idea.

In all I have suffered a fractured arm, a broken big toe, two concussions—and Doc Simpson took me off active duty for a full week for each of those—a nasty laceration on my forehead, and a cracked tooth.

Oh. Something just occurred to me. Some of you might be asking why a guy who wears corrective lenses and glasses would ever be a top pilot in the Navy. I don't actually have bad eyesight. In fact, I am just slightly far-sighted but I do have astigmatism that can cause headaches. I don't wear lenses or

glasses when flying, just when I'm on the ground.

Okay?

Anyway, I mentioned that I share some of the test pilot duties with a small group of really nice people. Bud and Tom's sister, Sandy are among them, just not on a full-time basis. They both do some testing and also deliver aircraft to our customers. Sandy's still in school, so...

Enterprises prides itself on flying each and every aircraft they build for a full twenty hours or more. That way, all of the little manufacturing bugs get found and fixed before the customer takes delivery. We have the highest rating for 'out of the box' satisfaction in the industry!

I don't do the deliveries, but I do like to get into a brand new or an experimental aircraft and put it through its paces. I've never crashed one. A few close calls, but most of the test flights are either around upstate New York or just off the coast so anything that goes amiss will happen over non-city areas.

We don't expect problems, but we want to minimize any possible collateral damage. Just in case.

My favorite test flight took place just a few weeks ago.

Tom has been working on some project that can use brainwaves to create images, or something like that. As a little side project to test some of his concepts he cobbled together a brainwave-controller device that can fly jets. As I understand it, he hopes to open the world of flight to people who have physical disabilities like paralysis and amputations.

The engineers outfitted one of the new generation Pigeons, the *Racing Pigeon*—larger, turbocharged engine with a three blade rather than two blade prop, seven degree swept wings and a sleeker fuselage—with the preliminary controls. Over a period of a week I took it for more than a dozen taxi rounds going all over Enterprises. It took a little getting use to, but I understand that the system uses some of the stuff he is working

on now in conjunction with some of the TeleVoc technology.

Within a day I was able to perform all of the preflight checks using just my mind, as well as cranking up the engine. Some functions, like tuning and activating the radio and releasing/activating the parking brake are done using voice commands, but that may change in the future.

It's a bit freaky; I wanted to reach out and just do it all with my hands, but I had to pretend that I couldn't do that... so I sat on them.

Day two saw me inch the plane forward a couple dozen yards and then turn around and move back to the start point.

Of course, that's a maneuver I can do in my sleep using my feet and hands, and it isn't very exciting. But the sense of accomplishment by being able to do that simple maneuver using this new technology brought tears of joy to my eyes.

Two days later I was taxiing and doing brief hops into the air, and by the end of the first week Tom came over to watch. He seemed to be pleased with my progress, so he gave me the thumbs up for a real test flight.

I wish I could give you an idea of the feeling of freedom when all you need to do is think about revving up the engine, feeling the plane race down the runway and practically leap into the air. All with you just sitting there. I think it took the better part of a day to get the smile off my face. And, that's even though I lost concentration once and almost went into a power dive. I had to use my hands to recover from that, but was soon back on brain power.

Another of the things I know is that I take it for granted that I can master anything that flies. That has led me to be a little cocky at times. This time, it was a close call. It actually took most of the altitude I had under me to recover that dive. If I had been over any place with trees, I probably would have ended up hanging in some branches.

As it is, I believe I had less than fifteen feet between me and the ground by the time I leveled off and started to climb again. Close, but no damage done. I completed that flight plus about a dozen others over the next two days and then turned the plane back over to the design team along with some notes I had made and a suggestion or two.

One of the engineers tells me that Tom will try to perfect the system in a month or so.

Once he gets his Thoughtograph doohicky finished.

Guess I'll have to wait to see the next version.

Along with the good comes the not so good. As I mentioned, I have had more than one plane drag me from X thousand feet to ground zero.

They say that your first time is something you always remember. 'They' are right. My first crash is so vivid in my mind that I can close my eyes and relive it almost second by second. Possibly even millisecond by millisecond. Adrenaline really makes your whole world go into slow motion.

It happened five months after I started working for Tom and his father, Damon. By the way... Damon Swift is a very interesting man. Grandfather and great grandfathers were both amazing engineers and inventors. His father was not. From what I hear, he was not a lot of things. Not a dynamic personality. Not a very good businessman. Not inclined to invention or anything that marks the name of Swift.

Damon had that drive and was involved in the development of the Space Shuttle. He holds only two fewer patents than Thomas Alva Edison—though Damon's are actually all his; Edison took credit for the work of others, patenting their inventions in his own name. I hear he is working on three things right now so that record is all but in his pocket.

But, back to the flight.

My assignment was to fly a cargo jet down to Australia to take supplies to a team of Aussies who were working on an American project, one that was suppose to locate a rare metal that was needed by the U.S. Government. Enterprises had been hired to provide the cargo flights because we have a fleet of cargo jets that can be configured almost in an instant and can deploy in a quarter of the time as anybody else.

I went down there with two other pilots, Dave Jefferson and Pete Jayson. Both of them were hired a few weeks after me, so I got to be 'the old man' and was chief pilot for the trip.

We reported in to Queensland Air Control and they vectored us on a direct course for our destination in the middle of the Gibson Desert in the Western Territories.

What they failed to tell us about was the AAF exercise taking place south of Alice Springs in their Northern Territories. So, what *I* failed to do was to get permission from the Air Force to cross through their airspace.

And, in one of those 'everything *perfectly* failed to happen correctly' sort of things, they kind of failed to radio us to see who we were before they launched a missile. The one that ripped through the tail of our jet.

Good thing it was a practice missile with no warhead or I might not be writing this.

I said a silent prayer to the gods of redundancy right after that. Sure enough, the damage missed totally crippling us, just taking away about seventy percent of our maneuvering controls.

Between Pete and me, we wrestled the jet down and kept it intact until that final fifteen feet or so. That's when the nose suddenly dipped, the landing gear rolled into the little dry creek, breaking it off, and causing the damaged tail to crack off and hit the ground.

The remaining fuselage cartwheeled once and then skidded

on its upper side another four hundred yards before coming to a grinding halt.

We all hung there in our harnesses for a few minutes, trying to get everything shut down properly.

On the plus side, there was no fire and two of the three of us survived with only minor bruising. One of us fractured my... uh, his arm. Also to the plus side, the Australian government paid Enterprises for the loss of the aircraft and they even transported all of our supplies—except for two damaged crates of digging tools—right to the exploration team.

I was mortified and was absolutely certain that my days with Swift Enterprises had come to a—pardon the pun—crashing end.

Nothing was further from the truth.

As Tom told me, "If crashing a Swift aircraft or other vehicle was cause for dismissal, I'd have been out of the family years ago!"

**CHAPTER 3/****Lost But Not Forgotten**

WELL, I MIGHT as well give you the rundown on the other... uh... accidents I've survived. I'll start with that jungle landing I mentioned earlier.

Tom has been gracious enough to not mention that one whenever he talks about his second expedition to the New Guinea jungle to follow up on the work he did while perfecting his Ultrasonic Hydroplane. There were just so many things to do on that first visit what with the rescue operation that eventually saved Bud and another of my pilot associates, Slim Davis.

What they found at the same time they found the guys, was a hollow fake volcano with a giant chamber filled with mysteries and artifacts. And, though a team of archeologists from Australia, New Guinea and the U.S. went back in to explore the situation, Tom never felt comfortable with several of the members of that team.

Tom was on site with the team and made a private radio call to Harlan Ames one evening to express a concern. Harlan followed up on it and requested that we make a slight detour on our flight down there.

Slim, Pete Jayson and I flew down there with supplies and a surprise. Tom's hunches paid off when Interpol finally came through with information on at least one of the people he didn't feel good about. And, his possible accomplice.

The man, Werner McDermott, was an Aussie by way of New Zealand and Fiji who turned out to be a German wanted for tomb raiding in the Giza area of Egypt. Although he had skillfully changed his name and forged new credentials, and altered his appearance, there was something about his demeanor that niggled at Tom.

We were flying one of the older Model 1 Swift cargo jets—one of the first with the scorching-hot jet lifters and due to be retrofitted on our return—on a course that took us first to the city of Brisbane in Australia to pickup the surprise part of our crew; three Interpol officers with a warrant for McDermott's arrest and a search warrant for the possessions of his assistant, Lee Goodwin.

We headed back to New Guinea and were an hour in the air when we received satellite notification of a very nasty storm quickly brewing up between us and our destination. Bad enough to warn all ships in an eight-hundred mile area to batten down and try to skirt around it.

Bad enough to strongly suggest that civilian aircraft avoid the same area unless they were capable of 50,000 foot altitude or greater.

We poured on both the vertical as well as horizontal thrust to get over it and to speed our way to New Guinea at Mach 1.2 rather than the relatively-pokey Mach .7 we had been traveling.

Still, we got tossed around pretty severely for an hour or so.

Our guests managed to hold their lunches down—barely—and we finally approached the Southeastern coast, flying in over Milne Bay and the small town of Abau. We were near the tailing edge of the typhoon as we dropped down to about 10,000 feet. It started getting rough again. It was even worse as we crossed back over water and the Gulf of Papua.

Our destination was a jungle area about eighty miles north Lake Murray in the Western part of the country.

We got to within nine miles of our destination when we were hit by the most powerful downdraft I've ever experienced. Not wind sheer but wind shooting ground-ward at better than two hundred miles per hour. It felt like a giant fist slamming into the topside of all horizontal surfaces.

Guys will understand this more than the ladies, but you



know that feeling when you suddenly drop? Like on a teeter-totter or a very fast elevator? Well, what is mildly pleasant at those speeds is positively uncomfortable at our downward speed.

And, your ears pop almost explosively.

I fought with the controls and soon figured that it was going to be a losing battle for me. Pete tried to assist, but it really doesn't matter how many people pull on a control yoke when your aircraft is fly-by-wire. Down and down we were forced until we could see the ground coming up under us, perhaps a thousand feet away.

Then, and so suddenly that it failed to register on me for a good two seconds, we were out of it. I finally poured on the forward thrust, pulled back on the yoke a little and reached for the vertical lifters. As I opened them up, our drop slowed...

*WHAM!*

Right into the swamp.

By a combination of our almost arrested drop and very little forward speed, the 'black box' we managed to rescue indicated that we only hit at about twenty feet per second drop—a fairly hard landing speed but survivable for both aircraft and occupants—and a forward speed of under fifty MPH.

And, the swamp was pretty wet and muddy, so we slid a few hundred feet before coming to a sticky stop.

After checking that everyone was okay I looked over our situation. The status lights all showed that we had sustained little or no damage. I was about to celebrate this when Slim pointed out something.

"Wasn't that tree about five feet lower a minute ago?" he asked, pointing at a fallen trunk I later found out was a caldcluvia.

"Oops! And it's continuing to come up. And, you know what that means, don't you?" I asked. "We're sinking!"

We quickly gathered up what we could, popped the top hatch in the main fuselage and shoved out the two large life rafts and supply packs.

Slim ran back to the cockpit, something I yelled at him about, and lowered the landing gear.

"Maybe there's some sort of bottom to this swamp," he said. "It'd be great if we could keep her from going totally under. Right?"

I had to agree.

You want to know something? He was right. The jet sank another ten feet so that only the top four feet or so of the fuselage was above the muck, and then it stopped. We didn't realize it at that time because we had already left the area to find dry land.

I'm sure Tom was frantic with worry, what with the previous crash on exploration number one, but we couldn't raise anyone on our radios.

Five days later we saw a couple military jets circling high above the jungle. We had been using those emergency radios almost non-stop and had run the little solar batteries down so far that I guess our signals didn't reach the jets.

I suggested that Slim and I take one raft and try to get back to the cargo jet. We'd closed the hatch, and I was hoping that the trapped air might have been enough to keep her dry inside, maybe floating a bit. Even if digging down and opening the hatch made a mess, at least I could gather up a couple new batteries.

When we got back, there she was, fuselage top and the entire tail visible.

We were able to climb back in and radio a mayday from the cargo jet, bouncing a signal up to the AUSSTAT-1 that was Australia's first telecommunications satellite, and from that on to Swift Enterprises.

The radioman on night duty—we were seventeen hours ahead on the clock—immediately got onto both civilian and military agencies plus he dispatched the Sky Queen to come get us.

Within five hours a helicopter from a small Navy base in Hoskins, New Britain located us and winched us aboard. We arrived in Port Moresby eighty minutes later and were on the Queen nineteen hours after that.

Tom sent the new Super Queen down a week later and they managed to disassemble and pack up the entire cargo jet into the two large cargo pods. The old girl was rebuilt with a full set of upgrades and is still an active part of the Swift cargo fleet.

Oh, and the Interpol men? When we popped back to the volcano site before coming home, they arrested McDermott and his assistant. We picked Tom up, dropped off some backup supplies the Queen had managed to bring down on short notice, and then we took our guests and their 'guests' back to Australia.

All in all, it was an exhausting trip.

Things were a little easier on me for the next couple of crashes.

The first one involved an attack by an agent of the old Eastern Bloc country of Kranjovia. One of their scientists had created a sharply focused beam weapon that could broadcast an electronics-disrupting sonic signal about five miles.

I was flying a test in an aircraft as a favor to Tom. He and Bud are pretty slack about making time for their respective girlfriends, and they absolutely needed to take an afternoon off to appease them. So, as he and Bud soda-pop'd and dined their

ladies on the shores of Lake Carlopa, I took the little research jet for a flight at somewhere around 25,000 feet.

For those of you who don't have calculators—or minds that can do sums—that is just bit under five miles high, right within the range of the aforementioned beam weapon.

I felt and heard the hum of the sonic signal before I noticed that I had lost all control of the jet. In seconds, all my instruments, really just the one big glass panel with displays for everything, shut down and the plane lost all control.

Again, fly-by-wire was a much an enemy as the Kranjovian weapon. Try as I might, I couldn't control anything; there were no electrical signals getting from my control yoke and pedals out to the control surfaces.

Then, the engine began cutting out.

It was all I could do to shut down everything by pulling the master fuse out, open the manual fuel dump mechanism so that the plane would not be a fire bomb when it hit, and then I bailed out.

Jet hit an old logging road and became many little pieces; Zimby hit a high-tension power line and got zapped through the parachute cords. Not enough to make for big troubles, but enough to make me jump and jerk around for a bit until they melted and sent our author dropping to the ground, below giving me a concussion.

A few days later I was summoned to the office of the Chief of Security, Harlan Ames. *Well, this is it old son, I told myself. It's been fun, etc., but they're about to let me know that I've caused too much trouble.*

Actually, Harlan asked me to sit down and then stunned me by saying, "I am almost certain that you saved Tom's life the other day, Zimby. Thank you."

After watching me sit there with mouth agape, he continued,

“We discovered a mole in our scheduling department. She passed along Tom’s flying schedule to her Kranjov handler. Tom’s name was never taken off the roster for that flight you... um...took. They were out to kill him!”

I was even more stunned at that revelation. “But—”

Holding up his had to silence me, he said, “You and I both know what a great guy Tom is. He is the most amazing person I know under the age of forty. But, where you let your years of piloting experience tell you it was time to bail, Tom would have stuck around trying to make the jet work. His attitude of ‘just give me one more minute and I’ll fix it,’ would have meant he would have left himself no time to bail when his efforts failed.”

“Well, maybe—”

“No maybe about it, Zimby. I’m sorry you got injured, but you saved the day!”

One of the fifteen things I know for certain is that some people just need a sounding board and the only thing to do is let them have their say. What they say often has deeper meanings, but that’s okay. I’m pretty sure that his worry for Tom’s safety was all pent up and just needed an outlet.

I didn’t agree with Harlan when he said I had ‘saved Tom’s life’—even though it was really nice to hear him say all that—but I kept it to myself. Tom treated me to a wonderful steak and lobster dinner that weekend by way of thanks.

Yet another crash—I’m really not painting a very good picture of my piloting prowess, am I?—happened when the Toad I was testing just before its scheduled delivery had a little malfunction.

You’ve seen the Toads, haven’t you? Nice, wide, underslung cockpit and cabin surrounded by a clear 360 degree canopy, swept-back wing above and mounted on that wing are two Swift jet turbine engines. Seen from the front,, the thing actually is reminiscent of a toad with its big, bulgy eyes.

Technically, its the SE-11 Commuter, and it is an absolute blast to fly. It’s capable of Mach .9 and gives pilot, copilot and passengers an amazing view.

Anyway, we were about to deliver our two-hundredth SE-11 and it was my turn to give her a shakeout flight. The slow speed and high speed taxi runs went fine as did the first two of the six test flights.

Those are the ones where we do straight and level flying two hours out and two back. It’s more for the engine tests than anything else. Full speed then fifty percent then back up and down and up and—

Flight three is what Slim and I have dubbed ‘the big slalom.’ Chow Winker, the old Texas cook who is an absolute fixture here at Enterprises overheard us one day and came over, scratching his head.

“What in tarnation is this big salmon thing, guys? I haven’t heard o’ any requests for salmon for months! ‘sides, they’re out of season.”

We explained it to him, but once Bud heard about it the name stuck and so we all began calling that flight the ‘big salmon.’

I hopped into the cockpit, did the preflights and started up the turbines. Smooth as silk and pretty quiet to boot. The placement of the engines puts both the front end and the back over the wings so that all sounds get muffled. Anything else gets silenced with some innovative noise cancellation circuitry inside the cabin.

The first leg took me almost due East over the city of Ticonderoga, across Vermont and Massachusetts, and from there out over the Atlantic Ocean. I headed down the coast toward Fearing Island, the Swift’s private rocket and ocean research base, and then performed a series of acrobatics.

We think that it is best to do those maneuvers near a Swift

base—just in case—and not anywhere near civilization—also, just in case!

Well, the “case” happened and I found myself flying a jet that stubbornly refused to turn to the left. At least, using the rudder. It seemed to be stuck and only moved to the right. I spent twenty minutes trying to free it up but to no avail. I stayed in constant contact with Fearing, keeping them up to date on what was happening. I decided that I had enough control to try for a big right turn and line up with their main runway.

Assuming that I could keep her straight after that, it would be pretty easy to put her down. Everything went just as I planned. A nice, slow right turn that took me farther out over the ocean, but eventually aligned me with runway 34—that is the one running from 160 degrees South to 340 degrees North and it generally affords a nice fifteen mile per hour head wind.

As I said, everything went just as I planned right up until a freak gust of wind caught me broadside when I was just five feet over the tarmac. With no left rudder I wasn’t able to overcome it and my left wing went up.

Fortunately, the right wing scraped the ground and kept me from rolling. I hit hard and bounced three times, but I did put her down with only wing tip damage. It was enough to force the entire jet to be torn down and rebuilt—and a different one was delivered to the customer. Oh, and Swift Enterprises never sells aircraft that have these little accidents. That jet, still in service, is used only by Enterprises employees.

Doesn’t sound like a crash? To me, anything that causes any airframe damage is a crash. Big or small.

## CHAPTER 4/

### Crash Number Seven

OF THE THINGS I know, one of the top ones is that there are those who are born to do specific things, those who can rise to do wonderful things, and those who—despite all attempts—are never going to be able to do something.

Slim Davis, Hank Sterling—the chief pattern maker here at Enterprises—Pete Jayson and I were having a beer a month ago and discussing somebody who falls smack in the middle of that last category.

His name is Norbert Paulson Alexander-Miller and is a thoroughly nice man. An Englishman by birth and education, but American by citizenship, Norby is the type of person who has fostered a dream for most of his life of becoming a great pilot, astronaut and space adventurer.

Beginning at the age of fourteen he took flying lessons back in his home town of Chatham, which I believe I remember as being Southeast of London. Somewhere like that.

One day he was flashing around his CV—that’s sort of like a résumé but has a lot of other things about his personal achievements—and I saw that he had received his pilot’s license at the age of sixteen. What it didn’t show, and he only admitted it to me in a moment of drug-induced self-realization, is that he took more than a dozen flying courses starting on his fourteenth birthday and only received his license the day before his seventeenth.

And, at that, it appears that daddy and daddy’s friends and money greased the skids. By luck or circumstance he had never had an accident, eventually amassing about 800 hours of flight time according to his log book.

I have a suspicion that an extra zero or even two might have

accidentally found their way into that book, but I'll let that pass.

Damon Swift, in one of those 'hands across the sea' efforts at cooperation with one of our British customers, agreed to take Norby on as a pilot in training with the possibility of astronaut training if he succeeded in the first six months of working at Enterprises.

Like I said, Norby is a nice man. The sort of person you kind of go out of your way to make sure he succeeds. That's probably the problem with him. He has always engendered those feelings in the people he works with, so he has never had the opportunity to fail and to learn from that experience.

Two months ago he took a crash course in gaining that experience, and took me along for the ride.

We had been detailed to fly up to Freeport, Maine, to pick up an older Pigeon Special. The owner wanted it to be factory refreshed and have our new all-glass cockpit panel installed instead of the old set of analog gauges. That's great. Of the several thousand Specials sold before the change to the new cockpit technology, more than forty percent of owners have opted for that upgrade.

It's also great because it give Enterprises the chance to make sure that everything is okay with the older aircraft, and to make repairs or replacements on things that are out of spec. It's a great deal for the owners, too. For about fifteen to twenty percent the cost of a new aircraft, they get theirs back with thousands of hours of additional life.

We even repaint the things for them.

Norby and I took off and headed North, planning to scoot across the U.S - Canada border until we reached Maine and then down to Freeport. A little indirect to be sure, but we knew that the Air National Guard was having a day of maneuvers over Massachusetts, so we opted to avoid them.

We were actually headed for the Brunswick Naval Air Station, a nice facility that allows specially-cleared civilian aircraft to use their runway, and is only a dozen or so miles from Freeport.

There is a nice little town called Norway that we would be flying over on our approach. One of Tom's relatives lives there. It was to be our turning point for approach to our destination.

I had given Norby the controls soon after we left Shopton air space and he seemed to be doing a good job. I only had to ask him for a small course correction to keep us in U.S air space one time and he reacted immediately and correctly.

I began to relax as we came up on Norway and was thinking about how we other pilots might have misjudged our Brit buddy when the proverbial poop hit the fan. Or, the propeller. Whatever.

The upshot of it was that we suffered a bird strike at more than five thousand feet—a rarity, to be sure—and a hit that left my side of the windscreen cracked, leaking bird guts, and groaning ominously as if it might collapse in on me at any second.

Norby's side was fairly clear and intact. I imagine that the prop rotation shot everything to my side rather than allowing it to pass straight through.

It took me about two seconds to access the situation and then I turned to Norby.

Or, to the frozen statue that had replaced Norby.

Just as solidly as the bird had hit us, panic had hit him. And, when it hit, his ability to move or react disappeared.

*Now*, I thought, *we have an awkward situation*. I couldn't see anything in front of us and was drenched in goo, and he was barely aware of anything.

Pigeon Specials are great little planes. And, when I say ‘little,’ I mean ‘small and snug and no room to swap places in.’

At that moment, and with a rueful chuckle, I mentally added one more thing to my list of knowns. Norby should never have been given his pilot’s license. Part of good pilot training, at least in the U.S., deals with handling unknown and emergency situations. You panic or freeze and you don’t get the license.

Luckily, we were flying straight toward Brunswick NAS and our radio still functioned. I called out a mayday, gave them our situation and approximate location, and then asked for suggestions.

“Smack him, hard!” was what the Lieutenant JG in the tower told me. “Wake him up or dump him out.”

I momentarily considered just that, then figured I’d never be able to do it without losing control of the plane.

“Opportunity lost,” Slim told me later.

Opportunity or not, I had to get Norby:

- 1) Awake and responding, or
- 2) Out of his seat, or
- 3) Out of the plane

Two and three just weren’t going to be options, so I reached over and gave his face a little slap.

All that got me was a grunt, a quick glance over at me with wide open eyes that didn’t seem to register anything, and then he went back face forward.

Slap number two was a little harder and I could see that he was gritting his teeth, but little else.

There was no slap three. It was a solid punch, or as solid as a left-handed man can make across his body in a cramped space.

That did something. It got a response.

I knocked Norby out!

Cold!

But, that gave me the opportunity to try option number two. I locked the control yoke—Pigeon Specials have a little lever you can pull that locks the yoke in one position. It is meant as an assist feature in case of really rough weather or if you need to take your hands off to consult a map.

After engaging that, I unhooked my harness and climbed backward and on top of the seats. With one leg dangling in the back storage area and the other braced against the left door, I unhooked Norby and yanked and pulled and tussled and shoved him out of the right seat and into the left.

Half on the seat and half on the floor, I just left him until I could get into his seat and take control. I should have pulled him back up onto the seat. One of his legs, I’m not sure which one, got jammed against the rudder pedals effectively rendering them almost useless.

It took more than three minutes and just about all my reserved strength to get him up; he came to half way through and began to panic so I had to give him another good punch in the jaw.

It’s a good thing he never went into boxing. That glass jaw of his would have meant fifteen-second rounds with his opponents winning by knockouts every time.

We were out over the water by the time I gained what control I could, and about fifty feet above the waves. Everything would have been okay, I would have had enough time to pull up and get us turned around, but the curse of Norby got us.

Somehow, he had flipped the ‘fuel dump’ lever at some point and all of our aviation gasoline had been oozing away since the bird strike.

I got the nose up as the engine sputtered and died.

In simulators while I was in the Navy I had practiced water landings in A6 aircraft and F-111s. It's easy to 'walk away' from a simulator crash. And, as strong and as well built as Pigeon Specials are, this landing was a doozy.

The Navy had already dispatched a Sea King helicopter to tail us as we headed out to sea—just in case—and they watched us go in.

I forgot, in all of the Norby-bashing, to harness back up. About twenty percent of my forehead stayed attached to the control yoke. I really hit that hard.

Hard enough that I have no recollection of getting out of the plane. Hard enough that I have no memory of pulling Norby out after me and getting us both away from the plane just before it sank from view.

Helo Team Bravo from the Brunswick NAS had a rescue swimmer in the water right next to us within two minutes and we evidently were up in the helo and on our way back within five.

I have no memory of any of that.

It isn't that I had any brain damage, it is just that it is all a blank. Norby couldn't shed any light on it. He, too, remembers nothing.

Pigeons don't have a black box. They have a solid-state RAM-based memory pod that records a dozen or so pieces of information. That pod is designed to eject and float in case of a water landing. It did and sent out its signal. The NAS sent the helo back to retrieve it. Nice guys.

The data shows that I did everything right. It also recorded the cockpit conversations of the final fifteen minutes. That includes the NAS controller suggesting dumping Norby. Hopefully, nobody ever plays that for him.

We were both in the hospital for a week. Me with my forehead and one broken tooth, and Norby with two broken knees, a half-dozen cracked ribs, and a cracked jaw.

If you don't tell anyone how he got that, I won't!

Even if someone did, he has since departed the employ of Swift Enterprises and never writes!

**CHAPTER 5/****Yo-Ho, Yo-Ho, A Pilot's Life For Me!**

LET ME tell you two other things I know for certain.

First, rhubarb pies are the absolute best pies devised by man. Period. End of sentence. Addendum to this: rhubarb sauce is the perfect accompaniment for *anything* in the dessert family.

Second, I am one of the luckiest people in the world.

I'm only partly referring to my ability to crash and survive. That is certainly a big part of it. I am also lucky to be doing exactly what I want to do. There hasn't been a minute since I first came up here to Shopton to interview for the job where I didn't love—without reservation—what I do. Day by day. Minute by minute.

Things that I didn't believe I wanted to do have been offered to me, over and over, until I have either said a polite but firm “no,” or I have relented and thought, *What the heck I'll give it a try.*

I mentioned that I pilot more things than planes and jets. Seacopters are a big thing here at Enterprises. There is the Model 1, just like Tom's first seacopter, all the way up to the super-sized, double rotored cargo carriers. They share the same basic characteristics: fuselage wrapped around one or two giant rotors that act as both lift and submerge thrust.

Each model flies differently, though. Some are well balanced and can balance on the head of a pin. Others require a firm hand and full attention. Computers help, but in the end it is the pilot who must *pilot* the craft.

Climbing into the first seacopter was an experience. You see, most of them don't actually fly. As in, this isn't a type of helicopter. These are ground-effect craft. The rotor or rotors lift

the seacopter up a few feet and then a combination of forward thrust and the cushion of air pressure that builds up between the bottom of the fuselage and the ground or water do the rest.

Turns are wider than in most other aircraft because you can't tip the thing at an acute angle enough to aid in the turn. If you do tip one side up to make your a turn, the ground effect slides out from under you and you begin to settle closer to the surface.

Then, the computer takes over and levels your out so you don't do yourself and the seacopter any damage.

Seacopters make up for this minimal-tilt issue by being able to travel at hundreds of miles per hour over the surface. At least one model can make it from Fearing Island to the West coast of Ireland in just over seven hours.

And, one model is powerful enough that it actually can fly at altitudes up to about 10,000 feet.

It isn't the seacopters that took me out of my comfort zone. It was my first taste of space.

The outpost in space had been completed before I joined Enterprises, but they wanted all pilots trained and available for all sorts of rocket jobs. My desire to remain within the atmosphere was accepted for a month. That is, until I received a knock on my apartment door and opened it to the smiling face of Ken Horton one evening.

Ken is the Commander of the outpost, even on his one month out of three rotation back to Earth. He is also an ex-military pilot and a man whose reputation precedes him like a phalanx of trumpeters. You automatically respect Ken. He's that kind of man.

“I'll get right to the point,” he told me as soon as I invited him in and offered him a beverage. “Tom tells me that he's letting you off of astronaut duty. Says that you're too valuable down here that he can't spare you.” He raised an eyebrow at



me. “I know your record in the Navy. The absolute best, and that comes from no less than Admiral Hopkins!”

I could only sit there thinking, *I’m heading for space, aren’t I?*

Ken looked me over before continuing, “I trust the skipper, explicitly, and bow to his judgment, but I would really like to have you at least take the training. It’s tough but nothing as bad as Navy pilot’s survival training. A little centrifugal force, a bit of weightlessness and learning how to drive a rocket. Nothing you couldn’t handle. Besides, it would just be training in case you were needed in an emergency.”

By the time he left five minutes later he had made up my mind that I was excited about the prospect of becoming an astronaut. He agreed that I could start the following Monday.

Heck. Even Chow Winkler is an accomplished space hand. He doesn’t pilot anything, but he’s been up at least eleven times, and that includes spending time on the Moon!

I’ve looked through a lot of the old press released that George Dilling and his team put together when Tom and Bud first went into space and when the outpost was built. Lots of details are already out there about the basic training the first Swift astronauts went through.

What they don’t tell you is how it all feels.

Sure. Somebody can say that being in a centrifuge is like having a hurricane gale pressing you back into your seat, but it is more *and* less than that. Strapping into that gimbaled seat is an adventure in itself. The darn thing is set to rotate freely in all directions and it does that with each move you make, beginning with just grabbing hold of the seat and pulling yourself forward to climb in.

I pulled myself in and almost went face down as it swiveled down and away from me. I mastered that after only an hour—they don’t want to help you because you are suppose to be able

to figure things out on your own—when I finally saw the trapeze bar overhead you are suppose to use. Space is a lonely place so you need to be resourceful. I wasn’t the quickest they’d ever seen, but I wasn’t the slowest on the uptake, either.

You sit in the chair, a seven-point harness holding you firmly into the hard cushions and wait. You need to be fully relaxed and your heart beating at under 70 bpm before they will start the thing. You only have a mockup of a control panel with a joystick to look at—no window—and that is pretty simplistic.

Then, you feel a little sideways motion and a slight rumbling as the big arm starts to pick up speed. Because the chamber you are in is actually a ball within a ball, not only does your seat rotate around as it is affected by the C- and G-forces, the entire capsule rotates in a ball bearing and fluid sheath so you are never sure of your exact orientation to the floor.

What this all does is ensure that all of the forces are pushing from your front to back and not side to side or top down.

The next sensation is that of feeling like a second body is being molded and pressed against yours. Only the parts of you that are vertical, though. Your lap, which remains perpendicular to the forces, feels so incredibly light that you have to look down to make certain your upper legs are still attached.

It is weird!

That body pressed against yours? Somebody must be force-feeding it because it keeps gaining weight. You feel pressure in areas like your jaw. The lower mandible wants to press back and the hinges on either side take the strain. Inside you mouth, your tongue wants to slide to the back of your throat. And, because you must wear a mouthpiece, you can’t stick your tongue out.

You get firmly taped into a protective cup which keeps things from being shoved out of place. Fortunately, they let you do

that for yourself.

I got a cramp in my tongue the first time that kept me from being able to talk for a half hour.

When the controller asks you to perform a series of motions, you realize just how tiring all that force can be. That's why all astronauts need to do regular muscle-strengthening exercise. I've been both a passenger and a pilot and can tell you that passengers come out with a "well, that wasn't so bad," attitude—they just get to sit and enjoy the ride—while pilots sometimes strain bicep or triceps muscles reaching for various controls.

The next shock to your system comes when they slow and stop the darn thing and you climb out. You immediately feel like you are falling forward. Perpetually. Your body tells the brain that you weigh nothing while your body tells your legs that they had better buck up and carry your weight.

Your stomach comes back from vacation a day or so later. It is one of the best diet aids I have ever experienced.

And, I found out why they want you to *thoroughly* go to the toilet before starting.

Training also included parachuting from twenty thousand feet in full suit. Now, we rarely wear the things in real life. But, you have to know how to do everything, *just in case!*

I have to say that the most amazing part of the training is the simulation of zero-G chamber. Tom designed this plexiglass room that interacts with a special head to toe suit to make you feel like you are floating. NASA has their jet trainer, the 'vomit comet' that does parabolas giving you near weightlessness for a minute at a time, but Tom's chamber can give you that for hours at a time. It is a brief moment of disorientation followed by a serene feeling.

I felt so relaxed after my first fifteen minute session that it was like having had a full body massage.

The final little training test is an actual flight. Of course it would be foolish to fire rockets up just to train potential astronauts, so they ship you down to Loonau Island in the Pacific where you hitch a ride up to the outpost in that week's supply rocket.

Now that is an interesting experience. Especially the launch.

They take you out by cabin cruiser to a point about two miles off of the island where you get off on a floating dock in the middle of nowhere. What looks like a shack in the middle is actually the embarkation lounge. Your rocket will have already been mostly submerged so that it is oriented tail down and the nose is inside the shack.

You go into the shack, climb into the hatch, seal things up, and the rocket is winched down hundreds of fathoms while the dock is towed out of the launch zone. A buoyancy ring is attached and countdown begins. A minute later the cables holding the rocket and buoyancy ring release and you rush toward the surface. Just a few dozen feet below the surface the rocket engines roar to life and you clear the surface already traveling at a hundred miles per hour; more than enough to speed to reduce the fuel necessary to achieve orbit by better than 60%.

That means that you can get from here to there using a single-stage rocket. Since everything is reusable, each launch costs only the price of fuel. We can fly one ship a week for a year on what NASA spends on a single shuttle launch.

It also means that by the time you are a thousand miles up, you are traveling at about 21,000 miles per hour, and you have experienced G-forces that are about thirty percent higher than in the centrifuge. However, to offset that, there is no 'speed up' or 'slow down' time. You are hit with the Gs right off the bat and they instantly disappear as soon as the main engines shut down.

All that remains is the slight bumping feeling—kind of like a

polite version of bumper cars—whenever a maneuvering rocket goes off showing the nose this way or that, and when the rocket speeds up or slows down.

Newbies get to unstrap and float around the cabin for about an hour as you coast up close to the geosynchronous orbit of the outpost. Then, and all too soon to suit me, the time comes to pull yourself into your chair/cot and strap in for the final series of maneuvers it takes to correctly align your rocket with the outpost, and then to maneuver to the proper docking point; there are eight of them, although only three are actively used.

I was allowed to pass through the hatch and into the airlock first. When I emerged into the actual space station, Ken Horton wrapped his arms around me, gave me a sloppy kiss on the forehead and boomed out, “Newbie Cox, arriving! All hands, tongue salute to newbie Cox!”

From all around me and even down the spoke and from the hub area came the sound of a couple dozen men and women blowing raspberries at me.

“Did I have that coming?” I asked him.

Ken smiled and nodded. “Welcome to space, Mr. Cox!”

Three months and a lot of training later, I went—voluntarily I must admit—into the rotation of pilots for the weekly supply trips. I’m one of five pilots and also a once-a-month alternate co-pilot. Flights never have the same load. Sometimes this means that my copilot and I are the only human cargo along with food, electronics, solar batteries—empty going up and charged coming back—and various experiments packages. Other times we ferry up more people than cargo.

As I look back I am glad that I refused to join NASA. I’ve been assured by friends who have become shuttle pilots and payload specialists that they work for the love of it, and love working for NASA *most of the time*, but I can’t imagine becoming a space pilot any other way than the way I did.

There was minimal kicking and screaming involved.

Tom and the rest of the Enterprises people let me discover how empty my life would have been without taking the step. Now, not only can I spell ‘pilot,’ I are one!

**CHAPTER 6/****The Things I Know**

IT IS TIME to come clean. My list of the things I know to be absolutely certain changes practically every day. I once tried to figure out how long the list might be if I didn't rotate old thing off as I put new things on.

As nearly as I can computer, the list would be about four hundred items long. See, I've been compiling and editing the list since I was about eleven. Back then, it was two items long:

- 1) I'm not any relation to Wally Cox, and
- 2) My sister is a troll!

Over the months and years that second one quickly headed to the end of the list. Funny thing, though... it is still hanging on at number fifteen.

The list has changed many times since I arrived at Swift Enterprises. One of the additions that remains is the fact that Tom Swift is not only the brightest inventor of our time—seconded by his father, Damon—but he is the future of this world of ours. We've made a right mess of the environment and even our relationships with those living around the world.

People like Tom, and certainly Tom himself, hold the keys to making things better. Oh, I don't imagine a Utopian world in my lifetime, but I'll bet that he will have a lot to do with us not blowing ourselves to smithereens.

I also know that my life would be considerably emptier if I hadn't picked up that New York Times business section on that fateful day in Manhattan and made that phone call. The realist in me says that I worked hard to get where I am today.

The fatalist says it might have happened anyway. I prefer

listening to the realist.

My dedication to flying got in the way of two relationships that might have led to marriage, something I regret more than a little, but wouldn't go back and change even if *and when* Tom develops time travel.

Oh, yeah. He will. If anyone can, it's him.

I also know for certain that the most desolate place on Earth is a small town in North Dakota. I won't insult the fine population of 78 (try that as a hint) by naming the place, but suffice it to say that there is literally, figuratively and virtually nothing to do once the sun goes down. People don't go out; if you are over visiting someone they shoo you home just five minutes before it turns totally dark, and you get exactly one television station unless you have a satellite antenna.

And that one station broadcasts Canadian television, and only until ten pm local time.

There is no bar or store or restaurant. You want that? Drive thirty-eight miles. And, don't forget to gas up; there isn't a service station in town either.

Why do I know this? I had a great uncle who lived (?) there and was asked to go take care of him for a month right after high school.

It isn't what you might think. My dislike of the place was not an adolescent boredom thing. At Uncle Gus's funeral I asked one of the ladies of the town why people stayed there. She looked at me and said, "Beats the Shinola out of me, young man. I guess we're all a little too lazy to pack up and move. Gawdawful place and all. Gus is the lucky one; he won the escape lottery today. Hopefully someday, someone will set fire to it and we'll *have* to move! You don't happen to have a match, do ya?"

Another thing I know, but it isn't going on my list because it is just one of those universal truths, is that the Swift

organization not only listens to its employees, it acts on their suggestions. From executives to mail clerks. If you have an idea or spot something, just tell them.

The engineers recently redesigned the Whirling Duck helicopter. I took the prototype up the day after Bud. Bud reported that it flew just fine.

For him.

I had issues with the control linkage wanting to lock up slightly in hard left turns. Those good old centrifugal forces pushed the u-joint under the floorboard against something that made the control feel too stiff and a little jerky to me. It turned out to be a wiring harness issue, one that might have led to disastrous electrical shorting problems if the u-joint wore down the insulation.

Even though Bud is practically family, and it was never a 'my word against his' matter, the engineers and Tom and Damon got together to investigate and found the problem. Bud and I helped them as well.

Bud congratulated me for finding the fault. And, he meant it. Completely and without any jealousy, rancor, or other words I might find in a Thesaurus.

I've learned a lot about life, about air, water and spacecraft, and about myself in the time I've been here. I plan on learning more, whenever and wherever I can.

I also plan on asking out the secretary who works the main desk at the Enterprises dispensary. Seriously cute.

Speaking of learning... today I learned something brand new about myself. Life changing sort of thing. Today I learned, for certain, that I was adopted.

Maybe I need to amend that thing about who my father wasn't.