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GOOD NEWS MAGAZINE

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Pilots for Christ International
890 22 Mile Rd NE
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Paul Pankratz (Minnesota Chapter President) Personal Story (Continued)

I distinctly remember crying out "momma!!!!" when I let go of the wing strut and fell away the very first time. By the fourth jump I was doing about a 5 second free fall. And I even had hold of the D-ring when I touched down. The scariest flight was in a rental aircraft in Joliet, Illinois where I had just joined an absentee flying club. I call it absentee because I never met any of the members. I paid my membership by mail. They sent me a hanger key in the mail. You made your own reservations by writing in a book at the airport. This was long before computers or the internet or cell phones. The plane that Saturday was a well used Cessna 150. The preflight and taxi were fine but I did notice a "slapping" sound of the cables against the fuselage tail cone floor as I steered out to the runway. It wasn't until just after rotation that I began to feel how horribly out of trim that bird was. A check of the wind sock confirmed that there was barely any cross wind but man did I have to hold cross controls just to maintain direction. Those loose rudder cables and something else was terribly wrong. The approach on final was even worse requiring almost complete travel of the controls in the crossed or opposite direction just to maintain heading. The landing was "firm" and once slowed to where the airflow over the flight surfaces was low, things seemed normal again. Needless to say, I reported it (wrote the anomaly in the aircraft log) and tried to contact someone in charge but having failed to connect... thought it best to quit that flying club.

As I'm sure many of you feel, the flying we do for public benefit and for our Lord is the most fulfilling. Near the top of the list is participation in the EAA Young Eagles program with local EAA Chapter 25. The Young Eagle program created by the EAA enlists volunteer pilots to give free airplane rides to kids ages 8 to 17 when accompanied by a parent or guardian. The fun of seeing the kids' faces upon landing makes the effort worthwhile even after having flown about 400 Young Eagles to date.

By far some of the most gratifying and humbling flight experiences result from doing missions for Pilots for Christ, International. There is no better feeling than knowing you are doing God's will by sharing the gift of flight which God has entrusted to you. And sometimes the PCI missions don't even involve flight. That was the case when weather (a line of thunder storms) prevented going by air for the second leg of a high priority mission back in July 2008.

This most memorable PCI mission involved providing ground transport for a mother and two children from a midpoint pickup in Cedar Rapids, Iowa where PCI Alabama chapter members Tommy Lee, Phil Allen and Fred Kelly had arrived from Birmingham, Alabama to transfer Crystal (mother), Lilly (infant daughter) and Delilah (5 year old daughter) to me for the drive north to Children's Hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota for a life saving bone marrow transplant operation for Lilly.

While we might find gratification in believing that we are positively changing the lives of those we are endeavoring to help... by simply sharing what God has given us... it turned out on this mission that God changed me by His sharing of Crystal, Lilly and Delilah over that 5 hour drive. You learn a lot about a person (family) when you are cooped up together in a pickup truck for that long. The faith and the witness in Jesus Christ articulated by Crystal as the source of the strength that was enabling her and her family to overcome the severe hardships they were enduring was a light and an awakening for me. It helped me to appreciate on a whole new bigger grander scale of just how truly great is our God.

What a wonderful gift God has instituted and given by the example of His Son Jesus Christ when He invented the process of sharing... where, in following His example... in sharing of ourselves to positively affect another, we ourselves can be positively affected.