

# Falling Sky

By Quinn Fischer

To my grandfather ~ Who may find  
my flying analogies  
horrible.

“That should do it,” my grandpa said as he finished slipping on the new fuel line, onto the engine. We were both standing outside, by the barn, working on the engine of the power-chute. It didn’t take much effort, considering it could really help to have something that held fuel, instead of leaking.

“Oh. Wait. That’s not all. Just a few more things. Find something to occupy yourself,” grandpa said, bursting my bubble of excitement. I sighed dismally, as I ran my fingers over the powerchute. It always made me stare at it, with it’s oversized propeller in the back, and the purple-grey frame, all attached to the parachute. It had a open cab, so, in canada, you had to dress pretty warm. But, the thing that amazed most, was it’s wingless design. Only the oversized parachute out back. Sheer magic.

“Are we ready for take off?” I asked, dancing from foot to foot waiting impatiently. “That’s all. Hop in.” Grandpa got into the front pilot’s seat, and I jumped into the back, by the instrument panel. “Oh. Almost forgot to throw out the parachute!” Grandpa chuckled. And we wouldn’t be able to get off the ground without it. It provided all of our lift, and acted like a wing, but also a steering rudder too.

As grandpa made the final adjustments to the parachute, he insured there was fuel for the power hungry V-8 engine that kept us in motion. Finally, he grabbed hold of the three point propeller, spinning it and starting the engine. The blade behind me roared as if it were a wild lion, and the three instrument panel gauges to my left wobbled around as they stabilized.

Nervously, I checked the instrument panel, ensuring that the engine power gauge was even. That gadge had 2 needles, one for each engine block. If they were uneven, the engine could stall out, and may not start again. That thought was a bit scary, but the parachute would help us back down.

“Let’s go,” grandpa announced over the power-chute’s helmet intercom. He goosed the throttle stick forward, taxing us down our road. The altimeter twitched as we started to bounce off the road and into the vivid sky above. Everything looked okay, at least in my inexperienced eyes.

“And lift off!” I announced. The altimeter read 5ft. Then 10ft. Then 30ft. We were in the air. And without a hitch. Wind rushed furiously towards my face, and in an effort to fight it, I slammed down my visor. Suddenly, the chute banked to the left, towards the yard. It was funny how everything seemed different. Almost as if there was no stress up here. The odd creature, dog, cow, or person, would be in view. Yet, they seemed like ants. It almost seemed like a play farm, yet you couldn’t manipulate the objects below. At least, not with precision.

After unceasingly flying around the pasture, I started to think about our new fuel line, and if it was working. I also recalled that I was busy repairing the gauges, and replacing the little 9 volt battery that ran the instrument cluster, while grandpa was working on the engine.

And then I remembered our little argument too.

“But why can’t we just go up into the sky, without maintenance?” I questioned. “We’d find that bull faster too,” I added.

“Do you know how scary it would be to drop out of the sky?” He said, reinforcing the need for repairs. He was right. That probably the last thing I needed to see.

“Well, okay. I guess we should.” I surrendered. I was lucky I didn’t go any further.

The clouds in my mind drifted away, as I looked to the left. All of the gauges seemed normal.

Continuously, I scanned the panel for anything odd. *Altimeter looks okay. So does the rpm.* Then there was the block power. The left gauge was crooked. I must be seeing things, I thought as I repeatedly tapped it. I tapped it again. Same result. Before I knew it, the engine started to sputter.

“Uhhh.... Grandpa, I think we have a problem. Our left engine block is messed up,” I blurted into the intercom. I looked over at the gauge again. They were in completely different territory, the left pointing to 6, the right pointing to 9.

“It must be that dang float valve in the left carb again, or possibly the fuel line on it, but could also be both.” he spat out, almost if he were Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*, knowing basically every technical detail possible. The block power gauge on the left sky-rocketed down to 3. The engine kept going, still producing its loud roar. “POP!” The engine backfired. This was it. It was going to quit.

I watched the RPM gauge fall, almost in slow motion, but the block power gauge didn’t move a mechanical muscle. “POP!” The engine quit. Seconds wore on like minutes, as we helplessly drifted through the air. Then, suddenly, the engine roared back to life, driving us forward once more. The gauges temporarily danced from side to side, and then into the correct positions. Grandpa experimentally

wiggled the throttle, like it was radioactively unstable. The engine normally responded, by pushing just a bit harder on the air behind us.

“Let’s get home,” I said, hoping this wasn’t the beginning of a whole new mechanical error. “Okay. Probably not a bad idea.” Grandpa replied. Luckily, we were right below the field, our landing place.

“OOF!” I grunted, as the chute roughly landed. Once all movement stopped, Grandpa got out, and rolled up the parachute. “You can walk back,” he said, while he worked. I jumped out of the seat, and unhooked the intercom wire from my helmet, and flipped up the visor.

Later that evening, we looked at the left engine block, the one that failed. As we looked closer, we could see that it was indeed the fuel line. But not the one we replaced. We’d replaced the right carb line, not the left. It was plugged. So less fuel would get delivered to the block, and more air would get in, causing it to run lean, resulting in a power drop, like we saw.

“Never hurts to be safe, rather than sorry,” grandpa said. “Without the new fuel line, we’d be toast,” I chimed in. “Ain’t that right.” he replied back.

Even though we would've been up in the sky faster without the maintaince, we’d be out of the sky faster than you could say fast. Sometimes, cutting corners doesn’t always land you in the right place. Literally.