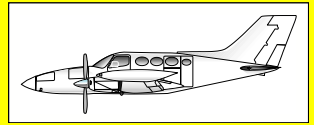


Ken Stoltzfus



Flying Higher

Squawking 7700

No. 1 in a series

Daring to pursue the highest possible level in all of life

I only declared an emergency once, and I was flying with my son Brian at the time.

It was a nice ride as we cruised along IFR at 7000' with the autopilot on. Suddenly, without warning the Cessna 402B pitched down, and then up. Brian immediately disengaged the autopilot, but he couldn't move the elevators to control the pitch.

I told ATC that we had uncontrollable pitch oscillations and were unable to maintain altitude. It seemed like the right time to "squawk 7700".

The 402B was close to gross and toward the forward CG with Brian's wife Sandi, their four children, my wife Elaine, - - and "stuff" in the nose compartments.

We had climbed through precip and were watching for ice. There seemed to be no reason for serious concern from the way the wings looked. Elaine had commented about some ice on the tail but we had told her "not to worry".

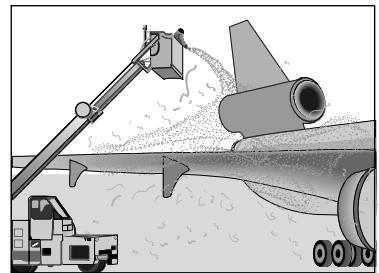
Just northwest of Greater Pittsburgh, we were cleared for a straight-in to runway 14. After another oscillation and the loss of a couple thousand feet, Brian was able to regain elevator control and stabilize things.

What happened (we think) is that with the way the aircraft was loaded, we were flying with a bit of "up elevator".

Apparently we got ice between the stabilizer and the elevator tips, locking the elevator in the nose up position. (We should have listened to Elaine!) The tail was stalling, the nose would drop, the tail would regain lift, the nose would come up, and then we'd do it over again. Quite a ride!

As we got to a lower altitude the ice melted off and freed the elevator. Phew - - what a relief!!

There was a series of events here that sort of snuck up on us, as we say. We thank God for the outcome because it could have ended very differently. (You can be sure there were quick prayers going up from all over the place in that 402!)



In life we might need to get rid of some ice at times if we're going to fly well!

When I originally wrote this story I was just coming out of one of those life experiences where a person gets overloaded. Even a fairly sane person like myself ☺ can find our moods and emotions going up and down somewhat like the 402, and it's downright scary!

My oscillations came from how I was thinking about and reacting to a situation (outside of my family) that seemed very unjust to me. I felt like I was the object of a power play from people who had personal agenda.

Maybe I was, and maybe I wasn't, but feelings and imaginations are as powerful as reality in shaping our emotions. I found myself responding to innocent people in a way that reflected my anger toward the offenders, and I needed to deal with it. I had to step back and take a fresh look at things.

Many circumstances in life can bring us to this point, including relational, financial, physical and other challenges. Usually things sneak up on us and we're overloaded before we know it.

Sometimes we have a warning, like someone asking what's bugging us. Often we brush them off with a "not to worry."

Some pretty serious crashes follow. Sharp words wound the hearts of our loved ones, or we create distance with employees, fellow workers and others. Marriages break up causing untold pain, especially to children. Pilots lose their focus and wreck an airplane because of emotional overload. And our own sense of self-worth goes subsurface.

But there's a way out. First of all, we might want to acknowledge our need and ask those around us to give us some space. Usually they will.

And then there's God. It doesn't matter how deep in the dive we are, or how we got there, He's always ready to hear our "Mayday." He's on duty 24-hours a day and never takes a break.

I like Psalm 145:18, 19: "The Lord is close to all who call on Him, yes, to all who call on Him sincerely. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him, he hears their cries for help and rescues them."

It's strange, how so many people think of God as an impersonal, grouchy old man with a white beard - - one who is ready to punish us at the slightest provocation. But He's not. In fact He's just the opposite.

He gave us the Bible to tell us how to live well. It tells us how to think about the situations of life that cause us problems. How to forgive people instead of letting bitterness build up inside. How to respond when bad things happen. And lots more.

He sent Jesus to make us whole in a broken world; to counsel us in our times of trouble; and to give us peace forever.

If He did all that, He's certainly not going to play hard to get when we're in a bind. He's ready to help us get the ice off our tail and get things trimmed out again. All we have to do is squawk 7700. I'm so grateful, because I need that once in a while!

1999, rev. 10/09, Bible quotations from NLT



Ken Stoltzfus was born in 1940, the son of a crop duster. He has worked as a pilot, pastor, business man, missionary to Africa and writer.

A Commercial Pilot with S&MEL&S, DC-3, Glider and Instrument ratings; CFI with A-I-G ratings; Ground Instructor A&I; and A&P, Ken lives in northeast Ohio with Elaine, his wife of over 50 years. His hobbies are aviation photography and collecting aircraft photos, negatives and slides.

This is #1 in his "Flying Higher" series. ©2009, Ken Stoltzfus, www.John2031.com, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA