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Mid-Month  
Musings

## **My Life as an Airline Pilot**

In the summer of 2009, I was invited to speak at the weekly Businessmen's Luncheon at First Baptist Church of Jackson. It had been suggested that I talk of my personal spiritual journey as well as of my current profession. So, after the following brief personal background, I described My Life as an Airline Pilot. Read along, if you choose, while I record this memoir for my grandsons.

I am the grandson of Copiah County farmers – hardworking, solid, God-fearing folk who are the trunk of my family tree. My Granddaddy Courtney taught Sunday School right up until his death, and he had 18 hash-marks on the flyleaf of his Bible – one for every time he had read it all the way through. My Grandmother Pevey was the world's most elegantly Christian woman, with a grace and faith that coated each of her five children, including my mother. (It is on my Grandfather Pevey's side that I am fourth cousin to Cooper, Peyton and Eli Manning, but that's another story.) My father, Hank, got his law degree at Jackson School of Law in 1958 and was my first full-time employer and law partner twenty years later. My mother, Carol, retired after decades as a church secretary and teacher of children at Alta Woods Baptist Church in south Jackson. (All my friends knew and loved "Miss Carol".) We were at church "when the doors opened" and I was baptized at 8 years of age (one year before my brother, Scott, was born).

I married my high school sweetheart, Ruthie, after we attended Mississippi College together, and in the fall of 1975 we moved to Oxford where she worked while I attended Ole Miss Law School. She is a beautiful woman of strong faith, whose parents (Fran and Erskine) did not neglect to bring their children up in the way they should go. We returned to Jackson after graduation in January 1978, and in March 1979 our daughters, Melanie and Melissa, were born (eight weeks early, and they're still impetuous and impatient today!). Melissa excelled in school, won scholarships to Mississippi College where she ran cross-country, and later met and married a wonderful young engineer, Wes, with whom she is now rearing Will and Owen, ages 5 and 2. (She also publishes this newsletter as my communications director.) Melanie has prevailed over cerebral palsy and related learning disabilities to achieve a community college degree and now works at our church, First Baptist Church of Madison.

It is because of Melanie's circumstances that I came to practice Elder Law and Special Needs Law. She is in her third Medicaid coverage program, has been a recipient in the past of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance, currently receives Social Security Disability as the result of having worked after college, and has Medicare and a Medicare Part D drug plan. Thus, my personal experience with public benefits programs and special needs planning for families with disabled members. I translated this experience into the practice of Elder Law over two decades ago, since many of the issues faced by persons with disabilities at early age are

similar to the issues faced by persons as they age. (The financial criteria for Melanie's Medicaid waiver program are the same as for the nursing home Medicaid program.)

Now, you might ask, that's all fine and good, but what about My Life as an Airline Pilot? Well, let's get into that.

**I am not now, nor have I ever been, an Airline Pilot.** But . . . the title fits my story, since all the adages and clichés which I have heard regarding flying a large passenger airplane apply to my Christian experience and spiritual journey. Three such sayings come to mind.

**“Flying an airliner consists of long periods of tedium and routine, punctuated by moments of sheer terror.”** My Christian life has been uneventful. I have been blessed with solid, faithful (boring?) grandparents and parents as guides – no Damascus Road experience for me (see Acts 9:1-9). I have been surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses” (see Hebrews 11:1 – 12:1) showing me how to be unassumingly faithful in a Christian walk. In fact, Paul could have addressed to me personally the words he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5-6: “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother, Ora, and in your mother Carol and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” [2 Rick 1:5-6] And this upbringing has produced bountiful blessings, but no real excitement. However – there have been moments of sheer terror. When Melissa contracted an unknown infection in the ICU that the doctors conceded might take her life; when Melanie was just over a year old and we heard the neurologist say “cerebral palsy” for the first time; during sleepless nights associated with job changes in my early career; when we returned from a trip in April 1989 to discover my father in the hospital with cancer that took his life 30 days later; when Melanie experienced lasting adverse effects from spinal cord surgery at age 10; when Melissa had a serious bout with depression in college. Through these and other struggles, we have learned an essential truth that is not a cliché: God was there for us, in the tedium and the terror.

**“What goes up must come down.”** Life is not just perpetually traveling along at cruising altitude, smoothly, away from the demands of life. We come down. We come down because that is what is expected – it's part of the itinerary, the schedule. We have others riding on this trip with us who have to be allowed off to go on their way. (I miss my grandparents and father, but look forward to seeing them again.) We also come down because we just run out of fuel! We can't stay in the air forever. We must get re-fueled back on the ground, dealing with life at ground level.

**“God is my co-pilot.”** Finally, this little bumper sticker saying is, sadly and regrettably, true of my Christian journey and my current life struggle. As I fly along, the pilot of my ship, I know nothing about the terrain below, the weather ahead, the internal mechanical problems I may experience or how to fix them. But, I just can't let go of the yoke! I am so afraid not to be in control and to let the others on the plane with me see that I am not in control. And all the while, God sits patiently (but sadly) in the co-pilot's seat, waiting to be asked to take control. After all, **He has all the information** about the terrain below, the weather ahead, the operational systems of the plane, the needs and schedules of every passenger including me, and even about my fears of letting go of the yoke. The reason He knows all those details is that **He made** the terrain below, the weather ahead, the plane and all its systems, every passenger, and even my capacity

for fear (and faith)! He is able to completely control the plane (my life) and all the externals and the lives of those in it. **But – I must let go of the stick.**

I am a lawyer. I was not trained to be dependent, powerless of my own destiny, or surrendered. So pray for me – and for one another – that I will let go of the yoke and turn the piloting over to Christ.