

THE HISTORY OF POP AVIATION

When American physiologist Walter Cannon first coined the term, "fight or flight response" in 1929, he wasn't proffering an infantryman versus aviator interpretation of how, when we feel threatened, we will either stand our ground or literally take to the air.

His definition was a physiological one, owed largely to the fact that he was a physiologist. If he'd been an avid linksman or train engineer, we might now have more studies in golf handicapping or railway switchbacks, instead of a lab rat treatise on why we react the way we do to perilous propositions.

I'm grateful that Walter minded his scope of practice, because I wouldn't play golf if you changed the greens to gold and chained me to a club, (the organization or the instrument) and there hasn't been a passenger train in this town since spats.

But, I today find it necessary to redirect Mr. Cannon's theory, if only slightly, away from its physiological intricacy and into the overt actions of two California adolescents, who ran away from home ... in an airplane.

They skulked into the hangar at Big Bear Airport after resolving that their respective parental controls overshadowed their desire for noncompliance, (fight) and landjacked the small plane belonging to one of their fathers, setting off for God knows where (flight). They did this, apparently, as dictates the mindsets of fourteen-year old boys, thinking it a good idea at the time.

If I remember correctly, my domestic breakaways at that age also seemed justifiable in their means and just as undefinable in their ends, though I never had the airborne option available to these luckless lads. Had I been so blessed, I too might have chosen sky jaunt escapism, and not the much more restrictive geo-confines of a Schwinn Varsity.

The closest I came was an earlier attempt to flee the papa constraints of my pre-adolescence, and one I can only now report, when I climbed to the barn's ridgepole with a Newton-defiant umbrella, opened the latter and leapt off. As is often said now in the skydiving

community: "The ground's the limit," and my stunt must certainly stand as precursor to that admonition.

The two fugitives in this case, however, also unmindful of the Newtonian sub-text which demands that what goes unlearnedly up must certainly come down well-schooled, crash-landed their foolhardy Phoenix shortly after take-off, nose-down in Joshua Tree National Park. They couldn't have invented a more poetic ditch, given how the Joshua tree got its name, and how its namesake once also managed to, as did these boys, seduce the sun as a vandalous co-conspirator in a quest for conquest.

Yes, I believe Mr. Cannon's "fight or flight" discovery was destined to be applied here, not as mere sympathetic nervous system catalyst, but the broader meaning, drawing from my own memories of when I pedaled to town in a non-conforming snit, and risked a plummeting canopy inversion rather than submit to unfair curfew:

"Boys will be boys."

Ride like the wind, young rebels.

At least until Dad gets home.

* * * * *