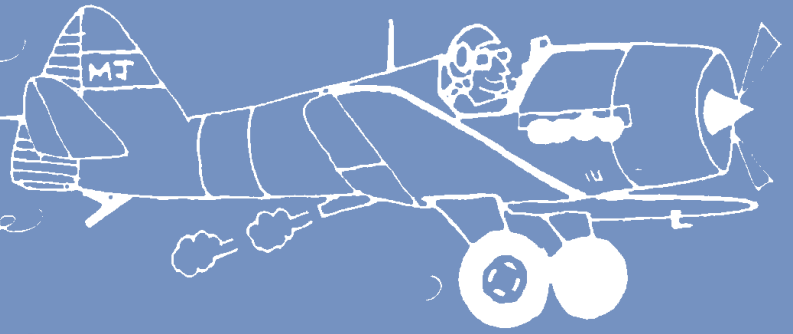


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal (R) Cecil Parker and.....

The Writer's Distaff Line

The first in line was my maternal grandmother who, after marriage, relocated from Bengal to Gujarat in the late 1800s. Her eldest male grandchild (this writer) was born in 1932 at Anand and was thereafter taken to his Nani's home in Surat. Like all grandmothers she doted on her grandchildren and, though she passed away when I was only seven years of age, I have clear memories of her singing me to sleep, teaching me my very first words in Bengali and introducing me to *nankhatais*, a craving for which has never quite gone away!



(Drawing for representation purposes only)

At two years of age I was introduced to my Hindi-speaking paternal grandmother in our family home in the tiny village of Jyotipur in Chhattisgarh. From there my Dadi presided over her family and was always delighted to welcome the 'first born son of her first born son'. I was of course quite spoiled by this matriarch and enjoyed the many holidays spent in the farm house with its large garden. When she learnt that I was going to join the air force, she berated my father, (translated: "*the boy fell out of a tree and will now fall out of an aeroplane*" and how right she was!). She lived to the ripe old age of 96.

Much like my Nani, my mother too was a soft spoken, gentle lady who by profession was a language teacher. Like all mothers she lavished unconditional love on her first born but was equally strict about my studies. We were a nomadic family but wherever we went she personally supervised all my homework and academically 'shepherded' me till I left for boarding school in 1942. Even so, being a prolific letter writer, she never failed to mail me an encouraging letter every week through school and college. Despite my father's opposition, she strongly supported my decision to become a pilot. A quiet lady of great personal faith, she taught me a great deal by example.

I was a lone child till the age of six when my sister arrived and parental attention shifted focus from son to daughter. She was a bright and talented little girl who followed me around like a puppy. Our relationship was interrupted by my years away in school and college. Academically she was always top of her class and in her professional life she was a very successful teacher. Our meetings are intermittent as she settled in Mumbai after marriage while

I kept moving around from air base to air base till 1986.

And then came the only lady I personally invited to join our family. When we met in 1951 she was a 15 year old school girl and I was a flight cadet undergoing pilot training. I courted her for five years and we married in 1956. For the next 30 years in the air force she managed our 15 moves, raised our two children, designed the house we built and continued with her work as a teacher wherever possible. The two wisest choices I made in life were choice of wife and profession. Now in the 65th year of our marriage, she continues to run the house, rules over her husband and only improves with age!

The arrival of a baby girl not only lit up our house for the second time but also completed our family. Which normal father does not dote upon and indulge his little daughter? We know that we have this lovely little lady for only a few years before she leaves home for higher studies, a profession, marriage and the raising of her own family. Of course she keeps in touch regularly and visits whenever possible but we feel the passage of time as our daughter is soon to become a grandmother herself!

And then the four granddaughters who require only grandparental love and a little spoiling to add great delight to our lives. But like all grandchildren they grow too fast; our youngest is about to enter her final year at university while an older one (a doctor) has not only just won the 2020 Fulbright scholarship for medicine, but is soon to be married herself.

These then are the ten ladies who, past, present and future continue to enrich the life of this very fortunate and grateful ancient aviator.

Banking On Continuity



Apart from a vague notion that they had something to do with money, banks did not feature in the lives of my generation which grew up in the 1930s and '40s. Our interest in finance was restricted to receipt of pocket money in boarding school (Rs 2 pm) and college (Rs 20 pm). As flight cadets at the AFA in 1951-52 we were limited to Rs 40 pm, remitted from home direct to the CGI's office and then given to us in cash. As young, newly commissioned officers, we received our salaries in cash. Some of us were fortunate to have trusted *sevadaars* (*desi* Jeeves) who took care of our salaries and tried to keep us financially solvent till the end of the month! When officers messes insisted upon payment of mess bills by cheque, we began to think about banks.

In 1953, as a pilot officer, I was posted to my first squadron at Palam when my father visited Delhi and I sounded him about a 'loan' to purchase a motorcycle. He asked me the name of my bank and,

hearing that I had no bank account, whisked me off to a colonial era building that housed his bank on Parliament Street. I was introduced to the manager, given some forms to sign and asked to pay Rs 10 to open my very first bank account. I was frightfully embarrassed as I had less than that in my wallet! Whereupon my father paid the amount, handed me a cheque book and reminded me that I was now a debtor to him! This was my introduction to the world of banking 67 years ago. (Incidentally, the 'debt' was cleared and in due course a new BSA Golden Flash motor cycle appeared).

As bachelor officers we were moved frequently from one air base to another. In those days there were no banks within the perimeter of any operational air base and, for all banking services we had to open an account with any bank in the nearest town. After 20 years in squadrons / FTEs (Flying

Training Establishments), I was posted to the faculty of the Air Wing at DSSC Wellington in late 1972 and was happy to experience the services of a bank on campus. In 1975 I moved to HQ TC IAF Bangalore but within three months was moved again to take over command of the air base at Hakimpet. My personal bank account now moved from Wellington to Bangalore and on to Hakimpet where a branch of the bank had opened recently. Thereafter my account continued to move with me. In 1980 while attending a years course abroad, the London branch of the bank was very helpful in payment of my income tax back home.

In 1986 I took premature retirement from the air force and was happy to discover that a branch of the bank was located within the AFOCHS Ltd Vayupuri where I had built my retirement home and thus opened my pension account and slowly got to know the names of nearly all the staff. It is now 47 years that I have banked with the same bank which has always had a close association with the defence services. A few years ago, on its annual, give-away desk calendar, the bank had endorsed my name and decorations as its tribute to Indian gallantry awardees of the armed forces. I was of course very touched but even this recognition did not save this octogenarian pensioner from standing long hours in queues during demonetisation!

The recent decision to merge my bank with another larger nationalised one did sadden me somewhat. I can only hope that, though its identity will be lost, the merged entity will continue being a "Faithful, Friendly, Financial Partner". 🐦

