

AS A CUB SCOUT IN THE 1950s, OUR PACK went on a trip to the airport. I remember how big the hangar looked and we got to see the flight deck of a DC-3 and then the control tower. A few years later we visited Washington, DC, and the highlight of the trip was a visit to the Washington National Airport. At the age of 16, I found that I was not only old enough to drive, but also old enough to learn to fly. Every cent I could scrape together went to flying lessons during that summer. All the requirements for a Private Pilots License were completed before my 17th birthday, the minimum

to build an airplane to travel around the country. In 1999, I was named the National Flight Instructor of the Year. In



David Faile, Jr., flying his dream airplane, Stars & Stripes

better, I heard about complex regional pain syndrome from the hand therapist. When the hand surgeon said that I have CRPS, he also told me that “Having a good attitude would be a big part of recovery.”

I decided that I needed to remember those words: “Having a good attitude would be a big part of recovery.” I read that most people recover from CRPS, and I planned to be one of those lucky people. During the next year, I developed carpal tunnel syndrome and an inherited disease called Dupuytren’s in my hand. Several more surgeries and my airplane

Having A Good Attitude Is More Than Half The Battle

By David H. Faile, Jr.

age. During Christmas break, I was old enough and passed the test. At 18, I was old enough and met the experience requirements to pass the Commercial Pilots License. During college, I completed more licenses and became a Certificated Flight Instructor. My days were spent taking classes in the morning and teaching flying in the afternoon.

After college, I found myself working for AT&T for the next 25 years while still flying. I also developed an interest in building airplanes and built a fully aerobatic biplane that I flew for 23 years. After retirement from AT&T, I returned to my first love of teaching flying and flying for a corporation. I also decided

2002, I received the prestigious Spirit of Flight Award from the Society of Experimental Test Pilots for flight test work on experimental airplanes.

During the building process for my second airplane, I injured my elbow. It was called “tennis elbow,” but it sure did not come from playing tennis. While being treated for this injury, I continued to build my new dream airplane until they said surgery was the answer. When my arm came out of the cast, my elbow was frozen. I began five months of physical therapy to get movement back into my elbow, all the time wondering what was happening and why was it so painful! As things got worse rather than

building project was falling behind schedule. I began to wonder if I would be able to finish it at all, let alone complete it in the two and a half years planned. As soon as I was able, I was back at work cutting, shaping, drilling, and riveting aluminum. I was also back giving Flight Instruction and flying for a corporation. Four and a half years after starting my dream airplane, it was in the air. The paint scheme that our daughter helped design led to naming my airplane Stars & Stripes.

CRPS continued to affect my life. I responded well to the nerve blocks and would be in almost complete

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remission for several months. A new problem with my neck from one of the blocks started up. It turned out that there were several damaged vertebrae from a previous injury. Lucky for me, I was well connected with a team of surgeons from Orthopaedic Specialty Group in Fairfield, Connecticut, who also have an experienced CRPS doctor on their staff. They all wanted to avoid surgery but when the problem became acute, they said there was no other choice. Several months after neck surgery, I was back flying Stars & Stripes as well as providing Flight Instruction.

A year after neck surgery, I started to have problems with my shoulders. Every effort was made to avoid surgery because of the CRPS. However, one shoulder had a torn rotator cuff that required repair.

The other shoulder would not improve and also required surgery. Until this time, CRPS was isolated in my right lower arm and hand. Unfortunately, the first shoulder surgery precipitated the spread of the CRPS to both shoulders and both arms. A new type of long term block was used for the several shoulder surgeries and has proved very helpful in keeping the CRPS in almost total remission. Having a good attitude during these long term blocks was a must! They are intense, interrupt all daily activities, and of course precluded any flying.

A year later, now eight years of living with CRPS, it is still lurking and sometimes causing problems. There is burning on a daily basis and sometimes other CRPS manifestations such as swelling in my hand. If the CRPS flares up I curtail my activities and resume when it calms down. I don't think of

where CRPS is going to raise its ugly head next and try not to do anything that might cause an injury that could precipitate more CRPS. I don't limit my activities. Flying and flight instruction are still my passion and rarely a week goes by that I have not put in some flight hours. For the past three years, I have been flying a search and rescue helicopter throughout Connecticut and the surrounding states. The crew is on a 24/7 ready status to assist in locating lost people and boats as well as assisting police departments when needed for surveillance or providing lights from above on raids.

Having a good attitude really is what has gotten me through the CRPS experience in a way that I continue to deal with it and live my life to the fullest. ■

help. The County, and Liberty Resources, assigned me services for help with tasks that aggravated my symptoms, such as some cleaning activities, food shopping, organization, and rides to doctors. They even helped me find ways to eat healthier meals. For example, I found chopping vegetables very difficult, so I received special utensils to help me as well as an aide to help with food preparation. I worked with the aide to make well-balanced meals. It is great finding a support network beyond the family. For other tasks, such as shoveling snow or cutting grass, Patti contacted a consortium of churches, Share Care, that do these kinds of tasks for disabled people. "Look in the blue pages under Social Services. Social agencies are out there and they can help," she says. Going to support groups other than the CRPS group enabled me to find out about additional services.

Nearly two years ago, Patti found additional support in the form of Raven,

a black lab service dog. For example, she often fell and needed help keeping her balance, particularly first thing in the morning before she had taken her medication. Now, Raven takes the water from the refrigerator and brings it to her, so that she can take her medication before getting up. He also can help her open doors if she puts a strap around the handle. More importantly, he is trained to brace, so she can use him to get up if she has fallen. If leaning on him doesn't work, he will go find a phone for her. Generally it is her cell or land line, but once she fell in a public place and Raven returned with someone else's cell phone. Fortunately, the phone's owner was understanding.

He also picks up anything that she drops, including coins, paper money, keys, water bottles, and pens. Also, Patti says Raven is a very good traveler and helps her navigate through airports. On the plane, he curls up

in a ball and sleeps under the seat in front of her seat.

Raven came from the Susquehanna Service Dogs, an organization that specializes in non-traditional needs, such as chronic neurologic or spinal cord injuries. "They knew what CRPS was," she says. Her training class included people who had multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, spina bifida, and spinal cord injuries.

Patti takes Raven to school groups to teach and demonstrate a service dog's capabilities for helping with challenges. She has even spoken at University classes where students are training to work with people with disabilities. Her talks cover topics such as: TBI, nerve injuries, CRPS, and service dogs. These presentations help keep her in front of the classroom, at least until she finishes her doctorate. Right now, Patti is finishing her dissertation and expects to graduate in May 2010. ■