What Others Are Saying About *Landing in My Present*

"Imagine if Indiana Jones had died young leaving a teenage daughter somewhat disenfranchised and vaguely aware of his adventures. Then, fifty years later a box of his things filled with clues and a recording from a friend of her father's sets her on an adventure across the globe to discover the truth about her father's past. This is *Landing in My Present* and the most amazing thing is it is all true! Mary Clark's attention to detail allows you to easily slip into a long gone era without letting the details get in the way of her fast-paced telling of this fascinating World War II story. Her father's adventures seemingly touch on every continent while centered on his perilous flights from India across the Himalayas to resupply the Chinese, a perilous route known as 'The Hump.' It's part mystery thriller, part history class, part travelogue, and 100% page burning awesomeness!"

—*Jeffrey Lehmann, host and producer of the multi Emmy award-winning* Weekend Explorer *travel series on PBS and broadcasters worldwide*

"A true account of a fantastic quest to know a father, a WWII veteran originally from the Texas Panhandle. Like many war veterans, he kept his experience to himself. Mary Clark reveals a growing understanding of the father she'd always wished to know. Since he died when she was sixteen, she'd retained only a teen-aged memory of him and a strong desire to know about his adult life. She gives us step by step evidence—by traveling to remotes parts of his world—of her father's service providing supplies from India to American allies in China. Letters from his friends, and memories from other pilots reveal a quiet hero. 'Flying the Hump,' he endured icy frigid skies 150 times while carrying mostly gasoline and little hope of rescue if he failed. Readers will appreciate Clark's careful investigation and her exemplary style while writing about an emotional journey of discovery."

—*Carolyn Osborn, author of* Durations*:* A Memoir and Personal Essays; *recipient of the Lon Tinkle Lifetime Achievement Award from the Texas Institute of Letters*

"Mary Clark's odyssey of a woman's rediscovery of her father intertwines two compelling stories, her search for a parent who died tragically young, and whom she never really knew, and the shattering realization of her own buried grief as she sets out to learn who he was. She takes a deeply honest look back at the hard-working family who could not bring themselves to voice what she calls 'the unanswered questions that should have been asked.' She unearths unexpected treasure in rare, precious accounts of those who knew him. A moving journey leads her to the other side of the world, where he served as a pilot flying the forbidding Himalayas in the perilous Hump Airlift of World War II. Beautifully remembered, Mary Clark shares her wonder as the 'grainy black and white' picture of her father comes into focus, in this story of a daughter's quest and a daughter's love, and the heroic but endearingly human man she finds."

—*Nedda R. Thomas, author of* Hump Pilot: Defying Death Flying the Himalayas in World War II

"Reading Mary Clark's description of Flying the Hump in *Landing in My Present* brought back many memories. I really don't know how she was able to capture so well the details of her father's experiences flying in India and China." —*Stuart Arnold, former Australian Hump Pilot and retired pilot for Trans-Australian Airlines*

"The pilots that flew the Hump made a huge contribution to China's defense against the Japanese invasion. This history is well known in China and we are grateful to the pilots who helped us. I am happy that Mary Clark wrote about this important story." —*Xiaomei Wu, Chinese citizen*

"*Landing in My Present* is a touching daughter's love letter to her father. Through letters and stories discovered fifty years after his death at a young age, the author 'meets' him through the eyes of an adult. World War II fans will appreciate the stories of his years as a pilot in the Army Air Force flying dangerous transport missions from India to China."

—*Katrina Shawver, author of* Henry: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America.

LANDING IN MY PRESENT

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To my flying father who was more present than I ever imagined and to those who contributed the pieces to make his spirit come to life.

Contents

LANDING IN MY PRESENT

A Father, a Daughter, and the Singular Himalayan Journey that Reunited Them

MARY WALKER CLARK

Hellgate Press Ashland, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

The Mont Jennings Tape

June 2000

"I have something for you," Aunt Helen calls out as she hurries to my side, quickly grabbing my arm and steering me away from the throng of relatives at a rare Walker family reunion. Without any of her usual greetings or hugs, Helen continues: "I've interviewed a man who flew with your father in World War II," she explains, thrusting a microcassette into my hand. "Here's his story. You have to listen to it."

When I did, it changed my life.

Before his death I hardly knew my father. I was sixteen when he died and our relationship until then was superficial, lacking the maturity added age could have provided. He was often absent. He never talked about his war days…or much about his life at all. He certainly never talked about his extraordinary experiences flying the Hump, a treacherous series of US missions that transported supplies over the Himalayas to China in the 1940s.

Aunt Helen recognized the importance of this find for two reasons. As a retired librarian, she knew how rare it was to find information on my father's war days. She was also sensitive to the void in my life from the early loss of my father.

It would take fourteen years before I could begin to experience the full impact on my life of that tiny Dictaphone tape. By then I was retired from my law practice and our children were grown. I finally had the

freedom to let Aunt Helen's gift launch a journey for me that was nearly as incredible in its own way as my dad's had been for him. In the end, it gave me back my father.

* * *

MY FATHER'S BEST friend was on the battleship Utah the day Pearl Harbor was attacked. In the years that followed, Lee never missed an opportunity to describe the horror of his experiences or to reunite with fellow survivors. Other veterans spoke of World War II only with close friends and family, often at the end of their lives. When my husband's father was dying of lung cancer, he opened up for the first time about being a physician in Europe as the Allies moved north to Germany. Still, most vets allowed the memories to remain submerged as the challenges of rebuilding the world filled their days.

My father was comfortable in the latter category. He returned to his hometown to marry, have children, start numerous businesses and blend into postwar prosperity. He had enough new distractions without needing to dwell on the past.

I was aware of some of Dad's war history when I launched my journey, but not much. My mother had kept two important documents: his draft card and his discharge summary that listed the dates he joined and left the army and mentioned that he had served abroad for fourteen months. Some years earlier, my brother Morey had tried to get our father's army records only to receive a disheartening reply that they had been destroyed in a fire, closing off an obvious source of Dad's history. What I did know starting out was that after joining the Army, he became a transport pilot in the Army Air Force, bringing in troops and supplies where needed. That included flying the Hump from India over the Himalayas to China, carrying primarily gasoline to Chinese and American troops. I knew this to have been a challenging and dangerous mission and that the men who carried it out should have been proud.

Yet so many questions remained: Where had Dad been stationed during that time? What had his life been like in those postings? How had he handled the pressure of life-threatening storms over the Himalayas? Had his experiences affected his role as a father? I had no answers to those first questions. As for the last one, I didn't sense that he had been traumatized

by his war years when I was growing up. But how could I know? He never brought it up and neither did I, nor did the rest of my family.

After that June 2000 family reunion, I returned home to Paris, Texas, and transcribed Aunt Helen's tape. The pilot she'd interviewed, the one who had flown with my father over the Hump, was Mont Jennings, who lived across the state in Lubbock, as did Aunt Helen.

As I typed Jennings' words, my father's world in India and China began to come into focus. Even though Jennings had only one personal encounter with Dad, on his last flight over the Hump, they'd shared a base location at Misamari, in the Assam Valley of India. Before the tape, all I knew was that Dad had been "somewhere" in India. With Jennings' words, a picture of my father's war life emerged, with details of living conditions, weather challenges, routes, hazards of gunfire below and turnaround time in China. The grainy black-and-white picture I'd had of Dad's military life began to shift into color with Jennings' stories of flying the Hump. I learned where Dad trained, how he crossed the Atlantic, what planes he flew. The background sharpened as the challenges of landing in China became apparent. At times as I typed, I held my breath with childlike anticipation of the next story or detail. Each revelation brought Dad's past into my present world, erasing years of silence. When the tape ended, I sat quietly, disappointed at the brief glimpse it had given me into his war life, longing for more. Yet I felt a connection to Dad that I had never felt before. His war experience had become accessible, tangible for the first time.

Despite my best intentions, however, I couldn't find time in the next decade and a half to pursue more information about Dad and his military life. My days filled with an active law practice, community involvement and children in high school and college. But the Mont Jennings' interview had created a movie reel of war life in India and China that never stopped playing in my mind, always ending too soon, as though the film had snapped mid-story.

In June 2014, when I had retired and life's pace had abated, I could finally review the Jennings transcript. As I did, two locations beckoned with their foreign names — Misamari, India and Kunming, China: the first, where Dad had been based, and the second, the destination for his air missions. They were real places with real people who still lived there. My Dad had lived there once. Suddenly, I wanted to know more and felt

drawn to make a journey halfway around the world to go where he had gone and where he had flown. My husband, my oldest brother, Mack, and his wife, Jan, agreed to join me on the family pilgrimage.

As plans for the trip progressed, I expanded my search. And I began by reversing the unspoken decision my family made to bury Dad's memories in our unconscious after his death, a silence that had lasted fifty years. I started by reaching out for the first time to an aunt, cousins and my brothers for family stories. Friends helped me remember childhood experiences. I studied old family photos. Research on the Hump operation added needed information that helped me understand and appreciate my father's war experience. And I slowly looked inward for my memories of Dad, realizing that I was a sixty-six-year-old woman who still saw her father through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old.

This became more than a journey to reconstruct Dad's war experience. I sought a means to enlarge my view of him, learn more about how his past contributed to his success, analyze his approach to parenting from my now experienced viewpoint as a mother, appreciate his business acumen from years of working, observe his community involvement and dedication as a husband, and to question his persistent absences and guarded past. I wanted a mature view of him to replace the stunted one formed decades earlier from his premature death and in a more innocent time.

But how do you broaden your relationship with someone who has been dead for fifty years? First, I had to face the past, and the Mont Jennings interview provided the initial step into my father's undiscovered world and mysterious war days.

Looking Back—1917-1966

ONE

Ray Charles Walker Date of Death: November 8, 1966

It is after noon, in my fourth-period physics class. I'm in junior year and have just finished an exam when a student from the central office arrives and quietly asks Mr. Dodd to release me. After gathering my books, I follow her downstairs to the principal's office. I know what has happened and I dread the news.

The small office is filled. Our minister, Rev. Mock, is there in his clerical collar, looking serious. Next to him is my older brother, Mack, and the German exchange student who is living with us, Helmut Gabauer. Mock solemnly delivers the news—my father has died—and then holds me close. Consistent with my controlled nature, I don't burst into tears. I don't ask questions. I don't make eye contact with anyone.

For weeks, since the accident in early October, I have feared this moment. But now I can only wonder if he died when I was in my history class or while I was eating lunch. Was I laughing with friends when he breathed his last? What was I doing when I lost my father?

We wait quietly until my younger brother, Gary, arrives and quickly surveys the sad faces. I tune out the minister's repetition of the same painful news. None of us talks. Only the tenderhearted Gary cries.

Photo of my father, Ray Charles Walker, as used for his obituary, 1966.

* * *

THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED October 5, 1966, in the middle of harvesting month for carrots at Walker Brothers Produce Shed. This time of the fall was the culmination of a year of planning, planting, weeding, fertilizing, watering and, now, bringing to the surface the mature produce. That morning Dad would have cooked his usual bacon and eggs, probably wondering how to fit everything into his schedule for the day.

Summer and Fall and were busy times for my father. Truckloads of freshly dug potatoes, carrots and onions with clumps of dirt still clinging to them were brought to the shed for cleaning and bagging; In the summer it was "running potatoes," as we called the process. Onions were also sorted. Carrots arrived later. Freight railcars waited on the other side of the warehouse for the finished product to be shipped. Dad was an early promoter of growing vegetables in the Texas Panhandle and he was affectionately known around town as Potato Man. With the nearest produce

shed sixty-five miles away, Dad and his brother, Preston, had started the Walker Brothers company to fill that gap.

Inside the shed, large conveyor belts would carry potatoes, onions and carrots through a sorting process, clanging loudly as the produce moved from one level to the next. Lines of Hispanic men and women picked out blighted vegetables, tossing them into another bin. If one tuned out the conveyor belts, a slight hum of Spanish being spoken could be heard. Dad loved this energy, the result of years of growing the business. My brothers and I knew not to get close to the machines, but I always enjoyed watching the scene play out, smelling the freshly washed produce, wondering where each would land. The US Army bought our potatoes and onions. And Walker Brothers had a contract with Campbell Soup, Frito Lay and other large companies for our produce. I liked thinking of our potatoes or carrots being in those soup cans, distributed around the country.

On that October day, Dad had been at the shed since morning but returned home for dinner with the family. Because of the perishable nature of produce, the cleaning process would continue into the night and Dad left after eating to supervise the evening shift. An hour later Mom got a call. I knew something was wrong from the anxiety in her voice and the quick questions she asked: "When?" "What happened again?" "Where is he?" As soon as she hung up, she turned to us: "Dad collapsed at work and is being taken to the hospital. We've got to go."

Mom called a friend to watch my younger siblings and instructed my older brother, Mack, and me to accompany her, even asking Mack to drive, an indication of her nervousness and concern about her ability to concentrate. At the hospital my brother and I remained in the waiting room while Mom disappeared behind swinging doors into an unfamiliar medical world. Mack and I were old enough to join her, but she wasn't sure of Dad's condition and she chose to leave us behind.

Mack and I waited quietly. It was past visiting hours, the waiting room already empty. We knew little of what had happened other than that a piece of machinery had hit Dad in the head as he was repairing a part. But this had happened during the afternoon, and it wasn't clear whether his later collapse was related. The office manager said Dad complained about a blinding headache just before he collapsed. There was also talk of a stroke. It was confusing. After all, he had seemed fine at dinner.

I wanted to cry but couldn't. Even back then, two of my brothers and I were stoic. No wailing or whimpering for us. It wasn't because of any belittling by our parents; they never told us to shape up or to stop crying. It's just that we refused to reveal our feelings to the outside world. It was somehow innate. Because my fallback was silence, I said nothing. Yet my stomach churned, my heart raced and my mind filled with questions. The situation was so disorienting. Even the clock on the waiting room wall seemed to slow down. I tried to concentrate on the lone telephone operator answering calls from her nearby open office. But all I wanted was for Mom to come out and explain it all.

Within the hour my mother's cousin, Bob Horne, emerged with the news that Dad was being taken by ambulance to a larger hospital in Lubbock, forty-five minutes away. He had not regained consciousness and needed more advanced care than our local hospital could provide. Mom would go with him and we were to return home. Bob acknowledged that Dad's condition was serious but he gave no details. He said only that our father was getting good care and tried to smile encouragingly. I didn't know what to think.

I can't remember who stayed with us that night, but someone did and whoever it was must have helped with breakfast the next morning. We were to go to school, keeping life as normal as possible. But how could it be? In a small Texas town like Plainview, many calls would have been made through the night and early morning, spreading word of the incident. That was clear when I walked into my first class: I was immediately surrounded by friends who already knew of Dad's hospitalization. For some reason, I made light of the situation, trying to convince myself that Dad was going to be all right. I told my friends and teachers he was improving. I said the doctors were encouraging. I said we were hopeful. None of that was true and I knew it as I said it. I just couldn't admit the possibility of anything else.

Over the next five weeks, Dad remained in intensive care in a coma with a bleed in his brain. Today, surgery could be an option to stop the bleeding but that advanced technique was not available in 1966. Our only hope was for the bleed to stop on its own and for Dad to wake up.

For the first days after the call, Mom was in Lubbock most of the time during the day, with many friends and family visiting. Dad wasn't progressing, remaining in a coma. During the week, my routine continued: band and twirling practices, football games, physics experiments, English essays,

getting Cokes with girlfriends, listening to the Beatles. Thoughts of my Dad were always close…but not too close. I could feel the fear of his potential death hovering over my everyday life, a shadow at the edge of my consciousness. Gratefully, school provided an important distraction.

After those initial hectic days, Mack would drive my three other brothers and me to Lubbock on weekends. Sometimes, we stayed overnight in a hotel but mostly we just remained for part of a day. Even so, we weren't allowed into the intensive care unit. Instead, we acted as a greeting committee, talking with whomever had come in from Plainview to visit. Part of me wanted to see where Dad was being cared for, but the side that feared seeing him in a diminished capacity was happy to be barred from the ICU.

Surprisingly, Mom didn't try to prepare us for a bad outcome. She saw life in a positive way and was probably concentrating on a hopeful result, at least most of the time. I remember one night at a hotel, though, when my uncle and aunt were visiting. It was just the four of us. I was lying in bed, ready to go to sleep. Mom broke down and cried with a force I had never heard from her, her strangled voice moaning, "He's going to die. He's going to die." My uncle comforted her and I turned to face the wall, allowing some tears to fall, but not wanting to believe her words.

On a visit later that fall, Mom decided Mack, Gary and I needed to see Dad, despite the visiting restrictions. Inside the ICU Dad lay asleep in a bed next to other seriously ill patients, a mask over his mouth, the quiet ventilator pumping life-supporting air into his lungs. The subdued lighting of the unit contributed to a feeling of claustrophobia and I was having trouble breathing, as if experiencing Dad's need for oxygen in a personal way. My father had lost much weight and was hardly recognizable. I recoiled. That person couldn't be my father. I felt I was in the wrong place. I felt like an intruder, staring, and soon looked away. I knew Dad wouldn't want me to see him like this. None of us wanted to stay long and we didn't. Walking out of the hospital, I realized with certainty for the first time that Dad wasn't going to recover. All I wanted to do was run but I didn't. I never saw my father again.

On the evening of November 7, five weeks after the accident, Mom told my brothers and me that Dad was being transferred back to our local hospital. He had never regained consciousness and my mother wanted him closer. At breakfast the following morning, Mom seemed distant and

distracted but didn't reveal any inner worries or concerns. She simply said it was time to move Dad. Intuitively, I knew something was serious about this change but was afraid to ask. Our local hospital wasn't as advanced as the one in Lubbock. Dad was still in a coma. Why was she bringing him home? It was years later before I realized she must have known she was bringing him home to die but chose not to share that with her children. With maturity, I admired her for making that decision and deeply felt the sadness and anxiety that would have accompanied the choice she didn't want to make. I wished we had talked during that emotional time but we didn't, an early indication of my family's tilt toward silence, choosing to let traumatic events sink below consciousness.

Other than the fact that Mom's mind was elsewhere, it was an ordinary morning. Marching band practice had ended for the semester, so there was no reason for me to leave early, and the completed homework from my heavy class load was already tucked into my textbooks. Not unusually, I had to rush Gary, our dawdler, to finish eating so that he, Mack, Helmut and I wouldn't be late for school. With Mack driving, we left in the "children's car," a small British Anglia that Dad had brought home for us one day to our surprise and delight, and that was just big enough to hold four teenagers and our books. Mom left to take my younger two brothers to the elementary school and junior high school. It was all so normal until that fourth-period physics class.

After Rev. Mock delivered the news of Dad's death, the principal thoughtfully let us stay in the office until classes changed. After the bell rang, our somber band walked down the empty hall toward the parking lot. My English teacher had just stepped outside a classroom to pin up her attendance sheet. When she saw us, she instinctively knew what must have happened. Everyone on staff was aware of Dad's condition. She caught me in her arms, asking quietly if Dad had died. I could only nod. She said she was sorry and hugged me for a long time, an early indication of what I was soon to face: friends who wanted to be sympathetic and consoling.

When we got home, Mom hurried out of the kitchen, her face stricken, her voice choked with tears. She hugged us individually and was visibly relieved to have her children home. Friends and family members had already begun to arrive, some with food. All I could do was run to my

room and shut the door where it was quiet, where I wouldn't have to confront so many grim faces. I closeted myself there, listening to music, trying to soften the knot in my chest, hoping no one would knock. I didn't know what to say to anyone or how to accept sympathy. I don't remember how I got through the rest of the day. I can't remember talking to anyone, eating dinner or sleeping. All these years later, it is still a painful blur.

The funeral was large, at least by small-town standards. As we approached the church in the funeral home limousine, the streets jammed with cars and pickup trucks, I noted with surprise and then a quiet pride the size of the crowd, which overflowed onto the church grounds. As an older friend of mine says, "If you want a large funeral, die young," an observation that always takes me back to Dad's funeral. Hundreds had come to express their condolences, with the large numbers reflecting our family's involvement in the community. My father was in the prime of his life with business contacts across the state. Mom sat on the school board and stayed active in her children's activities. They had friends and family in the area from childhood on, and we five children were just as involved in school activities and busy social lives. There was also a large contingent from school, including my closest friends. The high school had set out clipboards in the office to make it easy for students and teachers to sign out for the funeral. In fact, the crowd was so large that our small Episcopal church had set up overflow seating in the parish hall with speakers to broadcast the service. Even with that, we passed many mourners waiting outside the church as we entered. Numerous Hispanic men stood slightly apart and behind the crowd, hats in hands, faces cast down, some with wives at their side.

Before we left for the funeral, Mom had come into my room and found me staring at my closet. I told her I didn't know what to wear. I had never been to a funeral. She helped me pick out an appropriate dress and suggested I wear my nice coat. Her calm presence helped settle me and let me feel detached from the anxiety in my heart, which allowed me to do little but go through motions that day—from riding in the limousine to walking down the church aisle with every seat filled except the two rows in front reserved for the family to sitting through an unfamiliar service to standing at the gravesite. Years later, a friend of my mother's told me that watching Mom leave the church after the funeral with her five young children trailing behind was the saddest thing she had ever seen, a picture she never

could shake. Tears fill my eyes as I write this, tears that should have been shed at the funeral but weren't, even as the men and women around me that day were crying.

When Dad died no book had yet been written about the five stages of grief. No counselor from school approached me or my brothers to check on us. While visibly sympathetic, our Episcopal priest couldn't find the words to comfort us. My mother was mature and emotional enough to suffer through the anger, depression and acceptance. She had probably tried the bargaining component when Dad was in the hospital. The rest of us simply denied. We didn't deny his death. We denied its effect on us. And I denied it for fifty years, until the journey that led to this book. My cousin Carolyn calls this "stuffing." You stuff all the bad news down deep and don't allow it to surface. A more proper description is that we lived in a culture of silent grief. Only in the 1970s did expressive grief and grief counseling get their starts.

When I had to talk of my father to strangers or new friends, I could do it in a calm voice, describing his death and the family he had left behind. For the first years, teachers and friends of my parents would give me extra hugs and that "I am so sorry" look. In my maturity I now understand their need to reach out, but as a teenager and young adult, I wanted them to look away.

I was grateful to my friends for not mentioning it. Our self-centered teenage life continued, even on the day of the funeral. When my best friends came by that evening, my mother let me go to the drive-in movies with them. She didn't want me out in public that day, but she intuitively knew I needed a break from the gloom of the house. A drive-in movie provided the cover.

With Dad's death I knew my life had shifted irrevocably, throwing me off balance and into a world untethered. But at age sixteen, my future vision was short-term, based primarily on high school and college. It was only as each major life event happened without my father that the loss painfully reappeared, as a sharp stab of absence.

For years, anger, the second stage of grief, showed up as envy. There were moments of jealousy and resentment of friends and family with fathers: having a gray-haired father to walk them down the aisle at their weddings while my brother Mack accompanied me, seeing cousins inherit

large estates, the results of a full working lifetime, not one truncated by death. Even watching my husband, Ed, drive to Austin for weeks before his father's death to talk and finally hear his war stories made me happy for him, but frustrating for me.

I didn't express these feelings, choosing to ignore them or to look on the bright side of a situation. Mack looked snazzy in his white suit and long hair at my wedding as we walked down the aisle together. Education was the substitute for an inheritance in my family when it came to increased earning capacity. And I didn't have to watch Dad grow old. Because of his early death, he never aged. His skin stayed smooth, his shoulders remained erect and his back was always straight. The energy needed to fuel his work as a farmer and successful businessman, such as starting a field of irrigation pipes, driving a tractor, supervising his growing number of businesses and helping, even tangentially, raise a family never diminished. Dad never grayed, and his knees didn't cripple with arthritis. His eyes never clouded with cataracts. We never had to discuss the need to move him out of the family home nor take away his driving privileges. While my mother diminished in stature, lost firmness in her skin and details of her memory, my father perpetually smiled back at me in the prime of his life.

But the optimistic approach was never enough of a facade to completely mask the absence. Dad wasn't there when I graduated high school. He never visited me in college. My children were without a grandfather. My mother's financial support was more limited. We never had an adult conversation that allowed us to relate on a more mature level, with respect for the other's intellect and beliefs. It all added up to a sizable loss, one that revealed itself unceasingly as I matured.

What I didn't see until later was the biggest loss of all: his story. I couldn't ask him about his growing up on a farm, why he chose Mom to marry, how he started his own business, what his spiritual beliefs were or even what inspired him to fly. The questions are endless today, but I was blind to them for years.

Somehow, my World War II and personal quests took me first to the memories of those two autumn days in 1966, both of which dawned beautifully. The events of only two dates in my teenage life prematurely taught me certain adult lessons about the fragility of life and how quickly it can all change, a lesson my father would have been painfully familiar

with from his World War II experiences. Dad had faced countless dangers in the war, surviving when many didn't. He was saved by his knowledge of flying but also by the machines that carried him. In the end, ironically, it was a mechanical accident that felled him, far from the Himalayas and his war days. His plane finally went down, if only metaphorically, a peacetime casualty…and I became a civilian next of kin.