

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with the story of Walter Osipoff. His story is a powerful illustration of salvation. Paul wrote: **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).** Walter is a perfect example of being powerless and helpless. There was no way he could save himself. While his story involves physical life, we will give it a spiritual application. Jesus died to save us when we were totally powerless to save ourselves. The facts in this letter about Walter Osipoff come from an article in the Reader's Digest by Virginia Kelly.

Our story happened on May 15, 1941. At 9:45 a.m. 23 year old Walter Osipoff, boarded a DC-2 at the naval base in San Diego for a routine parachute jump. Second lieutenant Osipoff was a seasoned parachutist, and also a former collegiate wrestler and gymnast. That morning Osipoff was to supervise practice jumps of 12 men. Three separate canvas cylinders of ammunition and rifles were also to be parachuted that day. Nine men had already jumped when Osipoff, standing only inches from the door, started to cast out the last cargo container. Somehow his automatic release cord became looped over the cylinder and his chute was suddenly deployed. Immediately Osipoff was sucked out of the plane with such force that the impact of his body ripped a 2.5 foot gash in the plane's aluminum fuselage. Instead of falling free, however, his chute wrapped around the plane's tail wheel. The chute's chest strap and one leg strap immediately broke, leaving only one leg strap holding Osipoff and it had slipped down to his ankle. Now he was dangling 12 – 15 feet below the plane. 24 of the 28 parachute shroud lines had snapped and Osipoff was supported by only 4 lines twisted around his left leg. He was twisting and bouncing in the wind at over 100 mph. Two ribs and three vertebrae were already broken. Somehow he remained conscious and realized that to deploy his emergency chute would immediately tear him in two.

The crew inside tried in vain to drag him back into the plane. The pilot, Harold Johnson, had no radio communication with the ground and was running low on fuel. Struggling to control the plane he descended to a mere 300 feet AGL over North Island to attract attention. That's when test pilot Bill Lowrey saw what was going on. He yelled at John McCants, a chief machinist's mate, and soon these two were airborne in an open cockpit SOC-1 observation plane. Even though these men had never flown together, they roared aloft on what seemed an impossible mission. Within minutes they were under the transport but after five attempts the air was too bumpy for the rescue. With no radio communication Lowry hand-signaled Johnson to head over the ocean where the air was smoother. Johnson climbed over the ocean to 3,000 feet MSL and slowed to 100 mph on the ragged edge of a stall. By this time, Osipoff, still hanging by one foot, had blood dripping from his helmet. Lowery had to coordinate his actions perfectly to keep from killing Osipoff with his propeller as his body was swinging back and forth. Finally, Lowery slipped his upper left wing under Osipoff's shroud lines and McCants stood upright and grabbed Osipoff around the waist. Since it was only a two place airplane Osipoff was draped over the fuselage as Lowery eased forward to get some slack in the line. As it was impossible to hold on to Osipoff and cut the lines at the same time, Lowery eased ever closer to the plane and finally cut the shroud lines with his propeller while also cutting a 12 inch gash in the tail of the DC-2. Finally, after 33 minutes of dangling near death, Osipoff was free. Unfortunately, the cut parachute lines were now wrapped around the rudder of the SOC-1. Yet, five minutes later Lowery somehow managed to land safely at North Island and Osipoff finally lost consciousness.

Three weeks later, both Lowery and McCants were flown to Washington, DC, where Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox awarded them the Distinguished Flying Cross for executing “one of the most brilliant and daring rescues in naval history.” After six months in the hospital Osipoff was promoted to first lieutenant and returned to parachute jumping. After all, there was a war going on!

The heroes of Scripture, of course, have a higher calling as they seek to rescue lost souls from eternal destruction. Take Paul as an example. He wrote: **“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jew I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law, so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some”** (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

In the course of saving others Paul was constantly exposed to persecution and danger. In response to his critics he wrote: **“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches** (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

The reward Lowery and McCants received from the Secretary of the Navy was a temporary honor. Heroes like Paul will be rewarded with eternal honors that do not fade away (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly”

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce