

a hundred lines of league bowling. Or selling two hundred and twenty newspapers in bars at a nickel profit a paper, when on an average night you were lucky to sell ten. Or shoveling twenty-one walks and driveways after a heavy snow.

And still he had to have it, and the amount that it cost him, in life's blood, in effort, in *money*, was the reason for the near disaster.

At first he decided he would just hang the kite on the wall in his room.

"... But it just about covered the whole wall," he said later, "and I would lie there at night looking at it in the moonlight, thinking of what it was, what it was for, and I knew what I had to do. I would have to fly the kite."

And that is where we came in. With something as big as the target kite you couldn't just go out and fly it. He would need help to get it in the air and so on an early summer Saturday Emil showed up at Wayne's house on his bicycle with the kite disassembled and rolled up, and a ball of perhaps two hundred yards of thin parachute

cord. He nodded to us and nobody needed to speak.

We all got on our bikes and followed him out east of town, near the same area where Angel had broken the speed record on skis, to the large open spaces along the drainage ditches where there was room for something as big as the target kite.

We had all flown kites, mostly those we'd made ourselves from plans in *Boys' Life* magazine. I'd even tried to make a four-foot-long wing kite and had come close to flying it before it crashed and broke.

But we'd never tried anything this big. Still, as Alan pointed out, the principle was the same.

"We lay the cord out on the ground, Emil holds on to this end, we carry the kite down and shove it up in the air to get it started and Emil hangs on. Wayne, maybe you'd better stay with Emil and hang on with him. The wind is picking up and it might take two of you to hold it."

The wind was picking up a bit, but it didn't seem

that strong. Even so, when we had bolted the kite together it took both Alan and me just to keep it flat.

On the front of the kite was a heavy-duty bridle and there were three different points where you could attach the rope.

"I don't know," Emil confessed. "What do you think?" He turned to Alan.

"It seems like the top attachment would let the kite fly a little flatter when it gets up and take some of the load off."

"All right. Let's hook it there."

Alan was a Boy Scout and knew knots and he attached the parachute line with some kind of double-whammy-sheepshank killer knot that would never come loose and at the other end of the line Emil tied a two-foot piece of hockey stick drilled with holes for the rope to go through.

"So I'll have a handle," he said. "I don't want to lose her."

I confess that right then I had a series of mental images featuring Emil, thin, not overly tall, holding the wooden bar and the kite, wide, big—

huge—catching the rising wind. I must further confess that I had a similar scientific curiosity to that which I'd had right before Carl broke the speed record on skis—just what *would* happen to Emil when the wind caught the kite?—but I didn't want to dampen Emil's enthusiasm so I said nothing.

We were at last ready, with Alan and me walking downwind from Wayne and Emil two hundred yards, holding the kite flat and parallel to the ground, and the cord lined out down the road. This was difficult now that the wind was picking up. We looked back and saw Emil and Wayne holding the handle and Emil waved and nodded and yelled something that I didn't quite get but he told us later that it was "Let her go!"

And we did. Well, not quite. We didn't have that much control. We turned the kite's target face to the wind and raised the front edge so the wind could get under the kite, and it simply left us.

I have never seen anything like it. There was a popping sound, Alan and I were both knocked

back on our butts, and then a kind of *rip-rippling* hiss as the kite shot up into the heavens, dragging the line up with it. In seconds it lifted Wayne and Emil slightly from the ground, swinging them down the road toward us.

There was a moment then, a couple of seconds when we still had some control. The wind had freshened considerably and the line to the kite, attached to the top of the bridle, made the kite head up until it was pulling almost vertically on the two boys. Together Emil and Wayne were just a bit too heavy for the kite, even though it was pulling straight up, and with the wind starting to snap a bit, they achieved a kind of equilibrium.

For a moment.

Then two things happened. The order in which they happened would forever be a subject of controversy with us.

A strong gust of wind caught the kite and jerked on the line.

And Wayne let go of the handle.

For the rest of his life since, Wayne has said that the gust jerked the handle out of his hand.

Emil swears that Wayne let go before the gust came. And that he smiled when he let go.

Whatever. The results were the same.

There was a *whuffing* sound from the sky as the gust hit the kite, and a small scream as Emil realized what was happening. Quicker than anybody could think, Emil was gone with the kite.

Legends are born this way. Willy jumping off the water tower with a small freight parachute to invent base jumping, Angel with that mitten thumb sticking up and Emil hanging from the hockey stick handle as the kite dragged him into the sky.

There were lengthy arguments later about just exactly how high he went and how long he flew. But none of us had a watch or knew how to measure height.

These things happened: The target kite found a kind of balance, lifted on the wind and flew as a sort of glider for an extended period.

Emil said it felt like several hours and it almost pulled his arms out of their sockets, but that, of course, was silly.

Certainly it was several minutes. Wayne thought ten or so; Alan, who was always careful, thought at least seven. I'm sure it was close to fifteen.

It was a very long time to hang on to a piece of old hockey stick.

As for height, Emil cleared a stand of old oak trees near the Larson farm that were over eighty feet tall.

By the time he cleared the oaks he had gone more than a mile and he had been both higher and lower and then higher again than the oaks, and higher than the Larsons' silo, and higher than the Larsons' barn, and higher than the Larsons' granary, and was almost directly over the Larsons' straw pile when he decided it was time to abandon ship and he let go of the hockey stick.

Farms then used threshing machines rather than combines to harvest their grain, which meant they brought the grain in shocks to the farm and fed them through the machines and blew all the straw into huge piles, usually near the barn where it could be used for animal bedding through the

winter. These piles were sometimes higher than the barn itself, and it was over the straw pile that Emil decided to bail out.

"I didn't panic," he said, "at least not then. I looked down, saw the straw, looked up and saw the kite—the blue had disappeared and it looked like I was being hauled by a Japanese Zero—and I let go."

Unfortunately the straw was old and had lost some of its softness and equally unfortunately Emil did not hit square on the top of the pile but on the side, about halfway down.

On the side nearest the pigpen.

We had been running after him, screaming useless advice: "Don't let go!" "Let go!" "Don't let go!" And, from Wayne, "Can you see town from up there?" We arrived nearby just as he let go.

"Oh, man, he's going to hit the straw pile," Wayne said, and, with a resounding *whumph!*, Emil seemed to settle into the straw for a beat, then bounced up in a perfect arc and augered into the mud in the middle of the pigpen.

Something most people don't know about pigs is that they're really clean animals. They pick one corner of their pen for a toilet and they always use that corner. That is, for the solids. For the wetter part they go everywhere.

Emil was lucky in that he missed the corner that was the pigs' toilet.

But pigs love mud, and they root up the dirt and mix it with slop and waste in the middle of the pen until it's a regular quagmire of mulched mud maybe two feet deep. Here Emil came to rest with a great *thwoooocking* sound, head down, tail up, scaring the pigs so badly they tore down the entire back fence and ran to the house looking for help.

The Larsons did not have a water pressure system and so no hose was available, but there was a small stock tank in back of the barn and Emil climbed in, clothes and all, and sloshed around until we could stand to be near him.

Then it took us an hour to round up the hogs and fix the pen with Mrs. Larson, whose husband was in town. She kindly brought us sand-

wiches and glasses of buttermilk before we got our bikes and headed back home.

She seemed to take it all in stride when we explained how the kite had taken Emil over the barn and silo and into the hog pen and I thought that was strange until she smiled gently and said:

"My boy is grown and gone now, off to be a doctor in the city. But he was like you. Just the same as. I once saw him try to fly from the granary to the barn with nothing but some feed sacks and sticks for wings."

Emil wanted to go look for the kite but we'd seen it blow higher and higher when he dropped off, out over the wilderness of the great Oak Leaf Swamp, where it was all peat bogs and thick weeds. It was gone for good.

He sighed, pedaling along. In back of us. Well in back of us. He smelled worse than Willy in the chicken coop. "I'm sure going to miss that kite."

And I thought, I'll bet—it almost killed you. But, just as he had with Carl, it was Alan who thought to ask the right question:

"Why didn't you let go when Wayne let go? Why did you keep hanging on?"

He said nothing for a moment, just pedaling; then he sighed. "I thought about it. Just for a second."

"Then why didn't you?"

"Alan," he said, as if talking to an idiot, "the thing cost me eleven dollars. A man hates to let go of that much money."

### 3

## Orvis Orvisen and the Crash and Bash

There are boys' names that you know will make a boy popular and successful and cool and able to talk to girls (more on this later) and will make him have a wonderful life and probably get rich and marry a cheerleader and have a hot car...

Clint is such a name, and perhaps Steve, although not necessarily Steven, and Brad, and maybe best of all Nick. You just know that somebody named Nick is going to get it all.

And then there are the other names:

Harvey, maybe, and Sidney and Gary and Wesley—names that connote, well, not necessarily a loser, in fact not at all a loser, but somebody