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Fly Me to the Moon on Gossamer Wings: My Journey Through Academia
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My earliest recollections of my emotional engagement in the arts relate to the pencil drawings I made on my family's white porcelain kitchen table when I was five. Using a pencil on a white porcelain table has a number of advantages, not the least of which is that it can be easily wiped off with a damp rag, just like chalk on a blackboard. But the situation was a bit more complex. I have a cousin about eight years older than I who was talented in the visual arts and she would sit at the table with me and make drawings as well. I envied her skill and tried to imitate it. I found that over time with increased experience making drawings that I, too, had developed a bit of a talent in this area and it showed up in school.

Schooling for me at the elementary school level was not a particularly happy academic experience. Drawing and painting were, however, sources of salvation and the locations of acknowledgement. Math was a problem, I could read easily enough, I had friends in school, but school was for me a god-awful bore. I can remember watching the large hand on the clock slowly - too slowly - making its way towards recess and later lunch and then, at last, to signal the end of the school day. It was a relief to leave. Yet there were fine moments related to the arts that I experienced. My fourth grade teacher, Miss Purtel, decided to give me, a nine-year-old, a one "man" show. I had done a large number of paintings and they were collectively displayed in the room. I have some vague recollection at this moment that this display of my talents was not the most endearing event for my peers. Who was I to be given a one-man show!

I also remember being asked by my teacher after I had used colored chalks to create a beautiful flowing American flag on the chalkboard in our room that I do the same for a teacher across the hall. That was quite an acknowledgement of my artistic ability and I took it up with alacrity. I put my chalks together, walked across the hall, went directly to the chalkboard to make this large drawing of an American flag in color, only to learn later that the room I had entered was not the one that my teacher asked me to go to. The flag I drew came as a complete surprise to the teacher there. Nevertheless, I didn't feel a tinge of embarrassment. I guess as a nine-year-old, I had a thick skin.

Perhaps the most important initial influence relating to my relationship to the visual arts was connected with the advice Miss Eva Smith, my third grade teacher, gave to my mother. She said, "Mrs. Eisner, Elliot has artistic talent and you might enroll him in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. There are classes on Saturday in the junior school for people like him." That advice was more than enough to send my mother scurrying for enrollment forms and I was introduced at about eight years of age not only to the School of the Art Institute, but to the Art Institute itself. Each Saturday I would take the 36 Douglas bus from the Westside of Chicago for the twenty-five minute journey to Monroe and State Street, its termination point, in order to walk with portfolio under my arm the five blocks to the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the world's great art museums. That institution became a central element in my life and indeed in my education. I became friends with Giotto, Duccio, with El Greco, Cezanne and Matisse, as well as with the splendid Tang and Song images and ceramic vessels, and pottery horses that the Art Institute owned. I fell in love with the iridescence of the Roman glass collection and the beautiful precision of Assyrian panels located in an obscure section of the building. My engagement in the

School of the Art Institute defined a major portion of my life's interests, one that continued when I went to high school.

I had the good fortune to have two really excellent art teachers at the John Marshall High School in Chicago where I went to school from 1946 to 1950. Mrs. Grace Kapsa recognized my deep engagement in the arts and allowed me to spend extra time in her art room, time that I would otherwise have been compelled to spend in the study hall. I had my own tempera paints, my own locker, and I took seriously the opportunity that she provided for me to dig deeply into the processes of painting. She was a patient woman, viewed my work from a distance, we talked about it. I loved the space and attention that she provided.

But Grace Kapsa was not the Chair of the Art Department and taught mainly beginning students, that is, freshmen and sophomores. The major force teaching art at Marshall High School was Mr. George Wisenberg. Mr. Wisenberg was the Chair of the Department and himself a watercolor painter. He was a good teacher and much of the goodness of his teaching related to the way in which he was able to create a climate, indeed a culture in his classroom that made the visual arts a subject of serious work. In my art classes, which at that time were double periods, or 90 minutes in total, met five days a week. Each of us had our own fishing tackle box in which our paints and brushes and pens, our charcoal and chamois, and kneaded erasers were located. We had our equipment, we were journeymen who were embarked on the serious business of doing serious work under the guidance of a teacher serious about the teaching of art. George Wisenberg taught me the importance of composition; we all made thumbnail sketches and then blew them up into larger sketches in preparation for painting. We worked on murals with other students, and we visited annually the Indiana Sand Dunes in order to spend a day doing watercolors of the Dunes and its habitation.

At Marshall High School, I took four years of art, three years of which were double periods. Indeed, the "A" grades that I received in art at Marshall High School enabled me to graduate in the 32nd percentile of my high school graduating class! As you can see, academic studies were not my top priority, playing soccer and basketball and dating girls was.

When it came to graduating from high school, I needed to decide what I was going to do with my life. Was I going to attend college, was I going to attend the American Academy of Art, a commercial art school on Michigan Boulevard near the Art Institute of Chicago but not connected with it, was I going to go to the Art Institute of Chicago as a student? Just where was I going to go?

After a discussion with one of the counselors at the Marshall High School it became clear to me, in recollection, that my heart would rise whenever I entered the Art Institute of Chicago, that the friends that I had known so many years were all hanging on the walls there, and that the School of the Art Institute was the proper place for me. It had no academics to offer, but it was a fine school of visual art.

I enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and remained there only for one year. My ambition, at that time, was to become a commercial artist and I was impatient with the academic painting, sculpture and even design experiences I was getting there. I, therefore, prepared a number of drawings and paintings, put them into a portfolio and visited art studios in downtown Chicago - cold calling as it were - to see if any of those studios might be interested in hiring on an eager, young apprentice. Alas, no luck. What did get me a job in an art studio was directly related to the efforts of the father of a girl I was dating, Audrey Bronson. Audrey's father owned a barber shop in downtown Chicago and one of his clients was the art director of

the largest art studio in the world; Vogue-Wright Studios. Vogue-Wright Studios did the catalog for Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, which, at that time, used largely drawn images.

Mr. Bronson asked his client if he could use a bright and eager young man as an apprentice. I got an interview. I also got a job.

It wasn't much of a job. My task was to get the garments that were sent from Sears and Roebuck and to bring the appropriate ones to the artists who were working on illustrations of them on the board. I also changed the water in their water containers and did errands, as they needed things done. In between, I had the opportunity to work on drawings like them - but not for real. My drawings were for my own edification, though one of the artists took a special interest in my work. Hank Parizek gave me guidance and advice and encouragement. Yet, I somehow felt that this work as a commercial artist was not all that it was cracked up to be. The artists themselves were eager to get off the board and to do something else. The work was routine and fragmented. Each was a specialist. One was a specialist in drawing hands and heads, another in backgrounds, a third in laying washes, a fourth in making drawings of figures, a fifth in creating texture and so forth. It was a kind of an assembly line. I decided to continue my education and enrolled in a community college, at that time called a junior college, across the street from my home on the Westside of Chicago. I simultaneously enrolled in Roosevelt College, a relatively new institution on Michigan Boulevard. While I was working as an apprentice at Vogue-Wright studios, I was taking classes four evenings a week, two at the Herzl Junior College and two at Roosevelt College. I remember taking the bus home from work, gulping down dinner, and running across the street to make a seven o'clock class.

After a year and a half, I decided to leave Vogue-Wright studios and to attend Roosevelt College full time where I majored in both art and education. While I was at

Roosevelt College and still very much engaged in the arts, I decided to try to get a job working with children in an art setting. In the neighborhood in which I grew up there was a boy's club called The American Boys Commonwealth, or in the vernacular, the ABC. The ABC had an arts and crafts room and since I had grown up myself in that neighborhood, it was a room I knew quite well because I had spent many happy hours in that art room learning to do glass painting, brass tapping, plaster casting and painting, lanyard making, clay modeling and the like.

I had not been to the ABC in perhaps a decade, and although we lived in the same apartment on the Westside of Chicago, the neighborhood had changed from a community that was almost exclusively Jewish, to a community that was largely African American. The boys who attended the ABC were low-income African American boys. I went to the ABC, talked to its director, Harold Griffin, and expressed an interest in working as an arts and crafts instructor in the club. In short order he hired me, and I spent a couple of years working with children from 7 to 14 doing some of the things I had done myself when I was a boy in the same setting, but this time trying to learn from them something about art that would be useful to me as a painter and student of the visual arts.

So the setting I found myself in was one that afforded me an opportunity to work with poor African American boys in a familiar setting under the directorship of a wise and intelligent director who helped me understand far better than I did then the psychosocial importance of the experiences that were being provided to the boys who attended my classes. It helped change my orientation from art to art education.

While this was going on, I was attending Roosevelt College and doing some work in art education - there wasn't much to be offered there - and a substantial amount of work in education, which I liked enormously. Educational problems I have found to be theoretically interesting, intellectually challenging, socially relevant, and addressed value issues that I cared about. The fit between education and my background as a youngster growing up in a family that had strong social concerns was a good one. I did well at Roosevelt but when I graduated, I decided that I was not quite ready to teach. I believed I needed more preparation in art education to advance my understanding to a higher level. The place for me was a school called The Institute of Design. ID, as it was referred to, was a part of the Illinois Institute of Technology, but its roots were in the German Bauhaus. The school in Chicago was originally called the "New Bauhaus" and its director was Maholy-Nagy, a Hungarian artist/designer who was a member of the faculty of the Bauhaus when it was in Dessau in Germany.

The Institute of Design provided a foundation course in which I enrolled that was supplemented by a course in art education taught by a very good art historian who knew vast amounts pertaining to German expressionism, but who knew next to nothing about art education. He had never taught in elementary or secondary schools, he never taught art, and the curriculum that he offered in his art education class focused on a book by Goldwater and Treveas titled, Artists on Art (1945). Basically, what we studied and discussed was what artists had to say about their own development. Not a bad beginning, but only a beginning. In any case, I devoted a year to the Institute of Design, wrote a thesis that earned me a Master of Science degree in Art Education from the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1955. With that degree and the fine experience that I had at ID, I became a certified art teacher and secured a position teaching art at the Carl Schurz High School on Chicago's North-West side.

Before describing my experience at the Carl Schurz High School, it is important to say that my experience at the Institute of Design was particularly significant for it provided an orientation to art that was quite different than the beau art orientation of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The Institute of Design was influenced by the tradition of the German Bauhaus as I indicated, and this tradition emphasized the marriage of the machine and aesthetics. It was much more cognitively oriented, much more problem solving oriented, much more concerned with matters of practical innovation that had aesthetic quality than the painting, sculpture, and art history classes of the School of the Art Institute. It was a wonderful complement to the School of the Art Institute, even though it was something that I fell into rather than planned. The two schools, because they complimented each other so well, left me an important legacy.

We turn now to my first job teaching art in a public school. The location, Chicago; the school, the Carl Schurz High School; its population, 3600 students and 144 teachers.

The Carl Schurz High School is a very large school physically. It occupies almost half a city block. The art rooms, with the exception of the Chairperson', were located on the fourth floor of the building. I was assigned an art room on the fourth floor, a room designed to accommodate approximately 35 students and having storage cabinets on one wall, tables along another, and a teacher's desk. Student work was to be done on the desks in which they sat. Water and sink were available and lighting was by fluorescent tube. When I started, hardly anything in the way of a curriculum guide was made available. The definition of the curriculum was in my hands. I taught six art classes a day, was responsible for one study hall that accommodated about a hundred and fifty high school students, had one prep period, and lunch. These time slots defined the nine period day into which the school organized its life.

In many ways having a location on the fourth floor of a high school when the Chairperson's room is on the first can be something of an advantage, particularly when the Chairperson is very over-weight and disinclined to climb the stairs to the fourth floor to see what's going on. Her absence, and she was a well intentioned good woman, allowed me to offer students projects that I liked, and that made educational sense to me. There were five art teachers in the school and I, with one other new appointee, was the new kid on the block. But as anyone knows who knows much about high schools, being a teacher can be a fairly isolated experience. We never observed the way other art teachers went about their work. This job was for me a maiden voyage. I largely had to figure things out on the basis of prior experience in the colleges I attended or from my experiences as a child in an arts and crafts room in a boys club on the Westside of Chicago.

Looking back at my experience in high school, I had some of the most treasured teaching experiences I have ever had during that period. There is something about the intensity of adolescents, their search for significance in their life, their lack of clarity about destination, their neediness as well as their exuberance that is absolutely captivating. And when one succeeds, as I did, in getting their attention and in seeing them immersed for intrinsic reasons in their work, it was no small source of satisfaction.

I can remember quite clearly testing myself and their engagement by leaving the art classroom to walk the halls for a minute or two to see if, when I returned, they would still be working with the kind of intensity and focus that they had when I left. Over time I would increase the amount of time I was out of the classroom. This was, for me, an empirical test of the meaningfulness of what they were doing. It seemed to be meaningful.

But after a while as a teacher of art on the fourth floor of a 3600 student population school led me to raise questions of myself about what I was really up to as a teacher. What is it that art education is after? What am I trying to accomplish as a teacher? In a sense, I was asking, “Why am I here?”

This uncertainty on my part motivated me to try to think my way clear by writing myself clear. I took myself to one of the Chicago public libraries and began to write an essay titled, “What is Art Education For?” I remember that the essay was not very long, perhaps eight pages, and that it took me about two weeks to write. I was sort of pleased with what I had done and shared it with two or three academic readers who provided some advice for making it better. I made several of the suggested changes and decided that I would try to get it published. I sent it to two journals at the same time; something that anyone connected with the scholarly world of publishing knows is not what you are supposed to do. I did it because I simply didn’t know better. The manuscript was sent to the Chicago Schools’ Journal and to a national journal, The High School Journal. Alas, the piece was accepted and published by both journals. That gave me no small amount of satisfaction, as you might imagine.

It was my first published piece.

What became clear to me as I worked as a teacher of art at Carl Schurz High School was that my professional life space was not wide enough for me. In addition, I wanted to know more about education. I wanted to become more sophisticated about the field of art education. I wanted to deepen my understanding. This led me to make a decision to attend classes at the University of Chicago.

The first course that I took at the University of Chicago was taught by someone I had never heard of. His name was Bruno Bettelheim (1964, 1975, 1979). The course was, “Theory

of Group Work.” It was offered on Monday and Wednesday from 4:05 to 6 p.m. I took it because it was a late afternoon course and I was teaching at the time at the Carl Schurz High School. The year was 1956.

Bettleheim’s course was intellectually demanding and stimulating. After all, he was a Viennese scholar and one of the world’s leading child psychoanalysts. At that time he was Director of the Orthogenic School of the University of Chicago and brought all of his psychoanalytic instincts to bear upon his teaching. The class met in a room that accommodated about twenty-five people seated around a square table. He typically walked into the class a few minutes late, removed his heavy black overcoat, wiped the steam off of his thick glasses and asked in his accented deep voice, “Who would like to begin?” And then he waited. He never had any papers in front of him. The course consisted of dialogue and the dialogue was directed by students’ questions rather than the questions he asked. The University of Chicago was for me like an old shoe. It fit my intellectual instincts and provided an environment in which I could thrive. When I decided to leave Carl Schurz High School, I applied for and got a job as an art teacher working with second, third, fifth, and sixth grade students at the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago. I also worked as a research assistant while completing a second masters degree at the University of Chicago. Upon completion of that second masters degree in 1958, I was encouraged by the Department of Education to continue my work as a doctoral student, which I did. No one on the faculty had any experience in art education. Consequently I had to create my own program. This I did with the help of the library. I received my Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in the summer of 1962.

In 1960, mainly as a result of having published a couple of articles in School Arts magazine, I received a letter from Stanley Czurlies at New York State University at Buffalo,

which at that time had one of the largest art education programs in the country, to see if I might be interested in joining their faculty. I also had a letter of inquiry from Jerome Hausman who, at that time, was Director of the School of Art at the Ohio State University. He, too, wanted to have some conversations with me about joining the faculty at Ohio State University. He, Manny Barkan (1962), and others persuaded me to come to OSU.

My arrival at OSU coincided with the appointment of David Ecker (1966). He and I had extraordinary conversations about art education, education, and philosophy that have served me well over the years. Others at OSU who made a difference were Elizabeth and George Maccia (1963, 1980), and Morris Weitz (1966). It was a spectacular year of discussion, debate, and intellectual engagement.

My work at OSU lasted only one year. I was appointed there as an instructor and during the course of the year had an invitation from the Chairman of my dissertation committee, John Goodlad, who at that time had left Chicago and was a professor at UCLA, to come to UCLA to join their faculty as an assistant professor. Part of the appointment was to be in the School of Education, part in the art department, and part in the university laboratory school. In fact, because OSU, rightfully, would not give me a promotion until I completed my dissertation - which at that time was not yet done - I accepted the offer from UCLA and prepared to make the trip with my wife and child from Ohio State to Los Angeles. During the period of time when I accepted the invitation, from March to the end of May of 1961, some problems emerged at UCLA, which changed the direction of my career.

The Chairperson of the art department at UCLA at that time was Lester Longman, who was also the director of the UCLA Art Museum. Longman had on his faculty a large group of painters, many of whom were abstractionists. Abstract expressionism was in its hay day in the

early sixties. Longman sent a letter to the Letters to the Editor column of the New York Times, stating, basically, that abstract expressionism was essentially a hoax, that it was nothing more than patterned wallpaper and that if museums had not invested so much money in work of this kind they would admit its inadequacies as an art form. Well, as you might imagine, the faculty was not enthralled with Longman's public opinion and, to make a story short, Longman had to resign from his post as Chair. I received a call from John Goodlad telling me of the circumstances, which my colleagues at OSU had already brought to my attention. Goodlad indicated to me that because my appointment was sponsored by Longman and the art department, as well as by education, I might encounter some political difficulties after the first year in getting further advancement or even holding on to the position.

I indicated to my dissertation advisor that the moving trucks were soon to be on the way, arrangements had been made to vacate the premises and that my wife, my son Stephen, and I were going to be making the trek by car to Los Angeles.

My wife, Ellie, and I decided that we would drive from Columbus to Chicago to say good bye to our parents and to touch base with a few friends and former colleagues before leaving for Los Angeles. This we did. I decided I would take a trip south to the University of Chicago to say my good byes to former colleagues there and stopped in to see the Chairman of the Department, Francis Seabury Chase. Chase had been one of my mentors and supporters when I was at Chicago. He asked me how I was doing and where I was going and I told him. I also told him about the circumstances. He said to me that going to UCLA was dicey and then, after a pause, looked at me and asked, "Would you be interested in a position here at Chicago if I can get it?" I looked at him and without missing a beat said, "I certainly would." He said, "Can you give me three days?" "I certainly could," I replied.

Three days later I called him and he said that he could offer me an instructorship if I was interested. Indeed I was. I called UCLA and I suspect to their relief, I indicated I was not coming.

Thus started my life at the University of Chicago, this time as a member of the faculty.

After a year at Chicago I was promoted to assistant professor. There were no courses in art education. My degree was in curriculum studies and those were the courses I taught at Chicago. However, I still continued my writing in the field of art education and published a number of articles during the period that I was there. In 1964, I attended the National Art Education Association conference and in the course of listening to a lecture and attending the question and answer period that followed, I raised a couple of questions about what the speaker had said. I guess these questions were insightful enough to motivate Dan Mendelowitz, Professor of Art Education at Stanford University to seek me out immediately after the session closed and to talk with me about the possibility of coming to Stanford. He was soon followed by Professor Robert Sears, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Stanford who visited me at my office at the University of Chicago. And so, at age 32, I was offered an associate professorship for a five-year period at Stanford beginning in September of 1965. On September, 13, 1965, my wife Ellie, our son Steve, and daughter Linda moved from Chicago to Palo Alto, California where I became an associate professor of education and art at Stanford University, responsible for the art education program in that institution. I have been at Stanford ever since. I became a full professor of education and art at Stanford in 1970.

My appointment at Stanford's School of Education, as I indicated, was to focus on art education. I was a replacement for June McFee who had left a few years earlier. However, my studies at Chicago and the courses that I taught there were in the field of curriculum and I

wanted to maintain a connection with that field by teaching curriculum courses as well. When Professor Paul Hanna, one of the major figures in the School of Education at that time and a specialist in curriculum, decided to give up some of his teaching duties, I requested and was given the opportunity to pick up one of the courses he normally taught, Education 440, the School Curriculum. I have been teaching courses in both curriculum and art education and now arts education almost ever since I arrived at Stanford. For me, the combination is important since my work in education is immeasurably informed by my experience as a painter and by my work in art education. My work in art education is, in a similar fashion, immeasurably influenced by my studies and work in the curriculum field, a field that in my opinion is the most architectonic field in education. The students with whom I work at the doctoral level as well as at the master's level are in one of these two fields. And, in fact, I have had twenty-five Ph.D. advisees in the curriculum area and exactly the same number in the field of art education. As I said, I like it that way.

The habits that I acquired in early publishing have continued throughout my career. As of the last counting, I have authored or edited 15 books and several hundred articles (see annotated reference list at end of lecture). These books and articles are also about equally divided in the field of curriculum and the field of art education. Over the years, I have developed methodological interests that I did not have when I began. I have been very much interested in the uses of art criticism and other practice rooted in the arts as ways of doing educational research. This interest is based on the belief that the arts are vehicles through which understanding is enlarged and that there is no logical reason why methodological processes in education need to be owned exclusively by a scientific paradigm. What I seek is not a replacement of an older set of procedures for ones that are newer, but an expansion of the

methodological pantry. I hope to make it possible for people who want to do research to find approaches congenial to their strengths. The arts may be one of those important approaches.

The particular orientation from the arts that I have applied to research methodology I refer to as “educational connoisseurship” and “educational criticism.” The basic idea is simple to state, but complex to perform well. My argument is that in order to improve the quality of education, one must know something about life in classrooms and that achievement depends upon what I call connoisseurship, the ability to “read” the situation one pays attention to. Connoisseurs are people with very high degrees of sophistication in some domain; they know a lot, and therefore, are able to see a lot of what is going on. Connoisseurship provides the content through which educational criticism is formed. The aim of criticism, said John Dewey (1938), is the reeducation of the perception of the work of art. Educational critics are concerned with reeducating perception of the work of education. That means, paying attention to what teachers do, to what students do, how they do it, and with what outcomes.

The idea that one could develop an approach to research that is rooted in the arts and humanities was not, at least initially, widely accepted. This work began in the mid-seventies and has grown throughout the years. Now it is almost commonplace for educational researchers to want to use narrative, readers’ theater, film, and video to display what they have learned. The basic notion is that the form of representation that one chooses to use sets constraints and provides affordances for what one can see and understand as well as what can be said. Any approach to method has its limitations as well as its strength. My aim is to see to it that artistic

frames of reference are employed in efforts to understand and improve the quality of educational life for students and teachers alike.

My work at Stanford, as I indicated, has focused on both the field of art education and on the field of curriculum studies. In addition, I have contributed to the field of educational evaluation and to theory in qualitative research methods. This work is reflected in books such as The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice (1991, 1998), as well as Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered (1994), and The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs (1979, 1985, 1994).

During the course of my career at Stanford, I have had the honor of serving as President of the National Art Education Association, the International Society for Education Through Art, The American Educational Research Association, and the John Dewey Society. I didn't pursue these offices. The only thing I agreed to do was to have my name put forward when I was invited to do so. It's been a privilege to have had the opportunity to provide leadership to such a broad scope of educational scholars, teachers, and research workers.

I have been gratified at the reception my work has received; I didn't expect it. I have always pursued the ideas that intrigue me and that I thought were most important at the time. This includes my 17-year association with the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (1988, 1989) and my concerns about narrow conceptions of educational objectives and national standards that seem to be so currently prevalent. I have never tried to move forward by looking behind. One of the great privileges of being a university professor is the ability to say what's on your mind, to share it with others and to watch the reaction.

Stanford University has been good to me. It has provided a setting in which I could pursue my ideas - even when they were unpopular. The field has been good to me as well. Over

the course of the years I have received five honorary degrees, been appointed a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and won three major education prizes. Most recently the university conferred upon me an endowed professorship, the Lee Jacks Professorship in Education. I have a lot to be thankful for, not the least of which are the friends that I have made throughout the educational world over the thirty-five years I have been at Stanford. It's been an interesting, gossamer winged journey - and I haven't stopped flying yet.

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