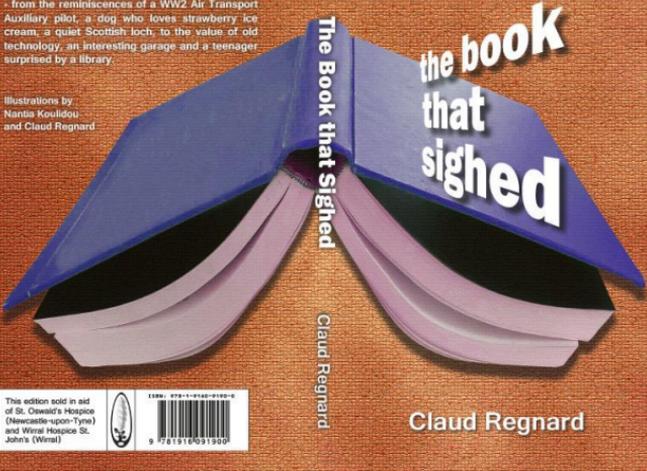


Six stories of hope transport you to different times
- from the reminiscences of a WW2 Air Transport
Auxiliary pilot, a dog who loves strawberry ice
cream, a quiet Scottish loch, to the value of old
technology, an interesting garage and a teenager
surprised by a library.

Illustrations by
Nanase Koullidou
and Claud Regnard

This edition sold in aid
of St. Oswald's Hospice
(Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
and Worsal Hospice St.
John's (Winst)



THE BOOK THAT SIGHED

CLAUD
REGNARD



WILLOW OAK

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ISBN (print) 978-1-9160919-0-0

First printed edition 2019

Illustrations for *Summer Soufflé*, *Even an Old Sun Is Warm*, and *On the Dot* by Nantia Koulidou.

Illustrations for *The Last Train*, *Borrowed Time*, *Midnight Bell* and *The Books That ...* by Claud Regnard

Book cover photo and design by Claud Regnard

Print edition printed in the UK by Beamreach Printing, 22 Pepper Street, Lymm, Cheshire, WA13 0JB.

www.beamreachuk.co.uk

All gross proceeds of the print edition went to help the work of St. Oswald's Hospice, Regent Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1EE

and Wirral Hospice St. John's, Mount Road, Clatterbridge, Wirral, CH63 6JE

Published by WillowOak (logo © 2019 Reg no. 284 728 553)

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About the author

Claud Regnard

Born in London of French parents, his first career ambition, aged five, was to be an astronaut. Two years later he changed his mind and decided to be a doctor. Despite that sensible choice and studying medicine in Scotland his subsequent career decisions were questionable. His first choice of surgery was based solely on his ability to rebuild the engine and gearbox on a Morris 1100. It was not his best career choice. Whilst training in general practice he came across a hospice but was advised that there was little to learn from such places. Consequently, four decades working in hospices and hospitals as a palliative care medicine consultant came as something of a surprise.



Now clinically retired he is proud to be an honorary consultant at St. Oswald's Hospice and to teach at Wirral Hospice St. John's, while maintaining interests in clinical decision making, implementing capacity legislation into clinical practice and identifying distress in individuals with severe communication difficulties. In between these interests and babysitting grandchildren he decided to

translate some thoughts into short stories, some based on his experiences in hospice.

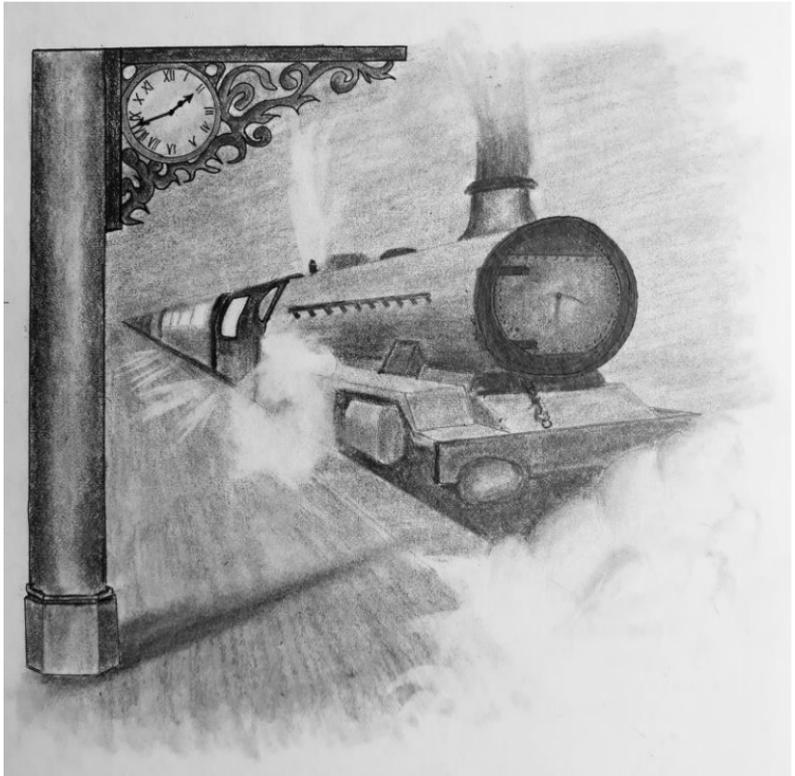
He continues to learn, which means that either there is a great deal more to life, hospice and palliative care than his advisors thought, or that Claud Regnard is a very slow learner.

All gross proceeds from the print edition went to help the work of St. Oswald's Hospice, Regent Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1EE and Wirral Hospice St. John's, Mount Road, Clatterbridge, Wirral, CH63 6JE

When describing a hospice, many patients start with the comment, 'From the moment I came in...' That sense of a safe community is an inspiration and, together with the determination of skilled specialist teams to make a difference to the lives of individuals, it has transformed the lives of many generations. Today, hospice and palliative care teams are involved in the care of 200,000 individuals in the UK every year. Many patients return home from hospice to be cared for in the community.

Hope is the surprise awaiting those in hospice. For many, it is the beginning, not the end.

Please support your local hospice



THE LAST TRAIN

She sat alone on a cold bench in an empty station smothered in languid fog. In the deep damp, even the clock had stopped, its soothing clockwork tick replaced by a steady drip of smoky water condensing from the iron roof beams. The cloud swirled around the single light, condensing into a myriad of fine droplets before hurrying off into the shadows. No name or surroundings were visible in the grey murk and she could not remember how she had got here.

She could remember the foggy autumn days in wartime London when policemen would carry flaming torches in front of buses, the smoke thickening the smog. Unlike others, she found the gloom exciting, a muffled blanket that hid thoughts and actions and made the ordinary mysterious. The shadowy person on the corner could be a spy, a special operative or someone waiting to meet a secret partner. Perhaps she had always found the unusual exciting. When she was sixteen a flying circus had arrived near her village. She had gone with her father who had been fascinated by flying. Her

uncle had encouraged them both, having often regaled them with his adventures on reconnaissance flights in the Great War. They followed the small crowd, paid their entrance fee and walked onto a grass field. The crowd murmurings increased as a distant speck became a noisy set of wings that swung low over the crowd, turned sharply, and reappeared over their heads with sudden noise and smoke. Everyone was thrilled and ran over to meet the pilot.

Captain Percival Phillips jumped out of his biplane, straight into Emily's heart. He pushed back his goggles revealing sky blue eyes that twinkled with joy, 'Welcome to the thrills of flying. Dare to fly and show your courage in the sky! Nowhere else can you feel as free while facing your own mortality with a smile. Fly above the earth and birds and discover the world above the clouds.'

Emily thought he was wonderful, but her father thought he had the gift of the gab and was not keen on the way he was looking at Emily.

'My sturdy Avro defies gravity, races the wind and chases the stars. Now which of you has the gumption, the backbone, the sheer audacity to join me up there?'

Emily threw her hand up in the air.

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‘Well, there is a young lady with the right spirit! Off we go.’

Emily’s father held on to her arm, but he knew that look of determination and let go, envious of her courage.

The captain helped her into the seat, secured her straps and fitted her with a leather flying helmet and goggles. He got into the seat behind her and gave his departure talk:

‘I’m going to start the engine, taxi and take off. We’ll do a few turns of the area. How brave are you feeling?’

‘How good do you think you are?’ replied Emily, with considerably more cheek than courage.

‘Ho, ho! Well spoken, young lady. Let’s go!’

With a roar they were bouncing along the grass and she was suddenly pushed up into the air. It was glorious and frightening at the same time. He banked and she saw her father, uncle, and the crowd like waiting ants. He turned again and her village appeared, a living map of home. The fields stretched to the horizon, a river drawing its silver thread across the woods and ploughed ground. An arrow of geese was drifting below her, calling out their surprise at the interloper. The captain rose towards the clouds. Suddenly everything was grey, and she lost any sense of direction, floating alone with

the moist air pushing against her face in a muffled, beguiling peace, unsure if she would ever see the world again. She turned to look behind her with wide, misty eyes.

‘Come on young lady, snap to it! Time to go home.’

Emily opened her eyes. The greyness swirled around the cold station platform, but her eyes partnered a smile at a past memory.

Unlike many others, her uncle had made wise investments after the Great War and was able to indulge in luxuries. She learnt to drive his Wolsey Hornet and an ageing R32 BMW motorbike, tearing around his farm, and returning with her legs and back splattered like a modernist mud-mural. After a meeting with his accountant her uncle explained that he had a surprise for her and her father. They turned up at his barn as instructed. As they arrived his head popped around one door.

He opened the doors wide. ‘I thought you might both be interested in this.’

Inside was an Avro 504K biplane.

‘Anyone fancy a trip?’

Emily’s uncle had learnt that keeping the plane in a barn generated a tax break as it could be classified as

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farm equipment. It meant Emily could learn to fly. Her father had misgivings, but she soon wore him down with persistence. By the time the Second World War started, she had a pilot's licence and had been flying for over five years, often collecting feed, delivering farm products or just taking pleasure in flight. Joining the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and maintaining aircraft at RAF East Kirkby in Lincolnshire, did nothing to quench her fascination with flying. She was often reprimanded for staring at planes taking off and landing. Her fellow maintenance crew called her 'Airy Fairy Emily', mainly because they disbelieved her insistence that she could fly. Her chance to prove them wrong arrived when the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) finally allowed women to join. It had been established to recruit civilian pilots who could not join the RAF. They needed them to deliver planes from factories to airfields, freeing up pilots for the front line. Because of their age or handicaps the pilots in the ATA were known as 'Ancient and Tattered Airmen'. Once women could join, they were determined to be neither ancient nor tattered and earn the title they were later given, 'Attagirls'.

In 1942 Emily arrived at Haddenham Airfield near Oxford. Each day she and other ATA women would

travel by bus to Barton-le-Clay in Bedfordshire for flying training, returning to Haddenham for lectures and learning mnemonics such as ‘Hot Tempered MP Fancies Girls’ which stood for Hydraulics, Trim, Tension, Mixture, Pitch, Petrol, Flaps, Gills and Gauges. Because of her previous flying experience Emily quickly progressed from the simple two-seater Miles Magsiter to the more complicated Fairey Swordfish. Each step was a thrill, mastering faster and more agile planes. When she completed her cross-country flights and conversion to the modern US-made Harvard trainer, it did not take long for her to get her Class II licence for fast single-engine fighters. Her first flight in the Spitfire Mk5 took her breath away. It had a sleek eager look, itching to leap into the sky. Flying it reminded her of that first flight with Captain Phillips, but with a push in her seat that felt like she was being launched into space. The power was thrilling, but mistakes were easy to make and she had her share of frights. Her instructor used to tell her ‘That was a graveyard approach. Let’s see if we can avoid our coffins, shall we?’

She began to understand why the pioneer of female ATA pilots, Pauline Gower, sometimes called them ‘Always Terrified Airwomen’.

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On the platform, Emily thought she could hear a train whistle in the distance, but it was soon swallowed by the silence. It should have been cold in that swirling haze, but she felt oddly numb and shivered from the lack of feeling. It had been like that after Robert died. On a foggy London street, outside the Lyons Corner House in the Strand, they had literally bumped into each other in the opaque air. As an apology Robert had offered Emily tea. He was a dashing young fighter pilot with the standard handle-bar moustache, and she was a forthright woman whose dark flowing hair hid a gentle smile. Having fallen for flying they were now falling for each other. That week of leave was a round of dances, walks in misty London and snuggling in the cinema. The nights together included one on a London Underground platform during an air raid with no prospect of intimacy. She suspected that her father would have considered it very suitable for a young unmarried woman.

Emily and Robert exchanged goodbyes the next day, each determined to meet again. When she did not hear from him, she wondered if their time had just been a wartime fling. She decided to face Robert, if only to give him a piece of her mind. It was another foggy

evening at his airfield. In the mess she saw a friend of his they had met in London. He had been laughing and drinking until he saw her. His pale face was the warning she had dreaded. Outside, in that dark fog, she learnt that Robert had been shot down over the Channel two days earlier. The plane had exploded and there was no chance he would still be alive. She hugged the tear-streaked face in front of her and ran to the bus. On the way home, her tears were hidden by the condensed rivulets trickling down the window. The return to work was accompanied by a cold steel that numbed her heart.

Within days she picked up a new Supermarine Spitfire for delivery to Hartford Bridge near RAF Farnborough. ATA pilots navigated using maps, a compass, and a watch to estimate how far they had travelled. There were usually enough rivers, roads, and railway lines to indicate the route. They were taught that clouds meant death, but Emily found them more fun than dangerous. Leaving on a dull day and climbing through the grey into bright sunshine was a joy, watching the soft pillows float by below. Even more magical was entering into clear air between two cloud layers with the sensation of speed matched above and below. Heavy cloud was a nuisance, and it was easy to

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get disorientated, but it was usually possible to drop low enough into clearer air. Even fog could not obscure taller buildings or hills. The danger was a combination of the two.

It was a cold, sunny day taking off from Hamble with reasonable weather predicted around Oxford. But within 10 minutes she was in thick cloud. Climbing above the cloud was strongly discouraged as there was no certainty pilots would find a gap to see land. Dropping as low as she dared to find clear air revealed nothing but grey. More than halfway and with no certainty of finding her way back to Hamble, she climbed to 1100 feet to be sure of clearing the North Wessex Downs. The only choice was to use the compass for direction and the horizontal indicator to make sure she was not plummeting to earth or climbing to a stall. But the grey was beginning to press in on her, followed by that familiar, gentle sensation of floating. Perhaps this was how she was going to meet her beloved Robert, when the voice of Captain Phillips on her first flight shouted, 'Come on young lady, snap to it!'

Realising she was fast losing altitude she pulled up and focused on her watch. A quick calculation told her she should be over the airfield at Hartford Bridge, but there was nothing below. Certain that she was close she

started a series of turns, hoping to see something. Each turn was confusing, pushing her into the seat but scrambling any feeling of which way was up. Using the horizontal indicator to keep her safe she kept trying to see anything in the murk below. Perhaps this was not just going to be a graveyard approach but landing in the grave itself.

Suddenly on her fifth turn she smelt burning fuel. Certain that she was on fire, she checked her instrument panel, but everything was normal. Then in the mirror she saw a sheet of flame shoot up behind her. Turning again, she could see two parallel lines of fire on the ground, running rapidly into the distance. They had lit some sort of beacon. Flying parallel to the lines she turned to head directly back between the burning markers. As she descended, she could see the runway and was suddenly in a tunnel of clear air.

Back in the mess she was met by the squadron leader at Hartford Bridge.

‘I see you’ve met Fido,’ he said with a smile.

Emily looked around for a four-legged friend.

‘Ha! No, FIDO – Fog Intense Dispersal Operation. Damn handy thing too. We heard some idiot circling above us trying to land and lit the fuel pipes. The heat

lifts the fog up to 300 feet. Turns out the idiot was you and a damn pretty and brave one too, I must say!’

Normally Emily would have bristled at the pretty comment, but she could not help feeling that Robert would have been proud to hear her being called brave.

It seemed impossible that a fog could get any thicker and yet this one began to creep over the platform edge like a snake on the prowl. She missed her blue Ferry Pilots book. That told you what to do. At least it told you how to fly dozens of different aircraft types. The handling notes made clear which controls did what, with advice on what you could do and must never do. On occasions the notes were the only instruction she had about a plane. As Emily’s experience grew, she progressed to a Class V licence which allowed her to fly bombers. Compared to the Spitfire they were lumbering giants, but the sound of several mighty engines at full throttle was a thrill. She had been tasked with delivering a bomber to the same airfield where she had once worked in the maintenance crews. Making sure the weather was good all the way, she took off and landed without problems. As she came to a stop, she gathered her belongings, made sure she looked presentable, opened the exit hatch, and climbed down the ladder.

The two ground crew were busy placing the wheel chocks and only saw a pair of leather boots appear and descend the ladder. She marched to the mess and before entering took off her helmet, brushing her long hair away from her face. Everyone had heard the bomber arriving but were surprised by the attractive female passenger. Their eyes remained on the doorway.

‘Are you waiting for someone, lads?’ asked Emily sweetly.

Silence descended as realisation dawned.

Emily’s smile grew wider with the satisfaction of knowing that ‘Airy Fairy’ Emily was in the past. ‘Come on, which one of you lovely boys is going to buy me a beer?’

Not even the fog could slow the progress of Emily’s laughter as it echoed along the station roof. She remembered the laughter with Robert, her nephews and nieces, the pupils at the aero club she set up after the war, her friends, and colleagues. She lived long enough to see television, computers, Star Wars, and mobile phones. Even in the hospice she remembered laughing at the memories she shared with family and nurses, but few events had given her as much pleasure as stepping off that bomber.

As the laughter faded, she heard a train clank and screech its way slowly into the station. A large black shape hissed and spat, its cab glowing orange from the burning coals. The carriages eased gently to a halt. They were light, warm and welcoming. Some people were making their way onto the train. She had not noticed them before, hidden by the fog. Emily got up and opened one of the doors, to see others sitting there silently, some smiling at her. It was too much. She stepped back onto the platform into the numb, floating but familiar greyness. Thinking she might stay there for a while longer, she was roused by remembered voices:

‘Anyone fancy a trip?’

‘Young lady, snap to it! Time to go home.’

Then she noticed someone gripping her elbow and felt her father let go all those years ago. She climbed into the carriage and sat in the comfortable seat. Almost immediately the train started to move and at the same time the second hand on the station clock begun its journey around the numbers. She was going to see Robert at last.

NOTES

- Emily is an amalgamation of two hospice patients. One (called Emily) was the reason the author spent 40 years working in hospices. The other was an elderly lady who regaled staff with her stories of flying when she was a teenager. Both were remarkable women.

- The Air Transport Auxiliary was a collection of pilots, women and men, whose courage and skills delivered planes to the front line.

- The Avro 504K biplane was in common use between the wars and attracted tax relief if it was housed in a farm barn.

- Captain Percival Phillips had been a captain in the Royal Flying Corps and later RAF who had flown during WW1, receiving the honour of a DFC. After the war he had decided to bring flying to the masses and over a 15-year period he carried 91,000 passengers.

- FIDO (Fog Intense Dispersal Operation) was developed at the University of Birmingham and its invention is attributed to Dr John David Smith at the RAF Establishment at Farnborough. It was first trialled at Hartford airfield in Surrey. It had two pipelines either side of the runway through which fuel was pumped to burner jets. The resultant wall of flame made a visible marker as well as lifting the fog, allowing pilots to see the runway.

- C.S. Lewis was the author of the *Narnia* series. In real life he met and married an American poet and writer, Joy Davidman. After she died of breast cancer his loss prompted him to write *A Grief Observed*, still one of the most poignant observations of bereavement. In it he compares grief to being on a train that has stopped at a station and will never move again. But, as he observes, 'trains move'.