

FLYER



M.G. HIGGINS

1 HAWK

There is a hawk outside the classroom window. It floats in the sky. Rises in a circle. Up. Out. Away. Weightless. Free.

Flying.

I want to know what that feels like.

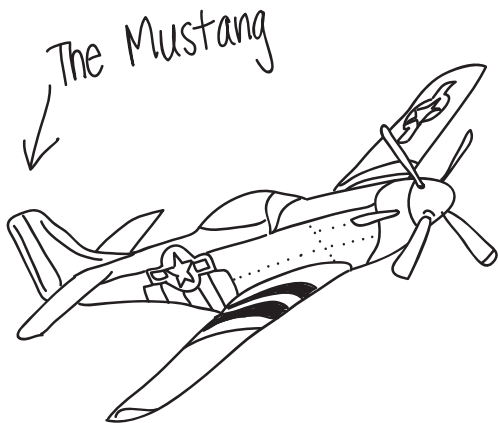
“Eric,” Mrs. Lund says. “Focus, please.”

Head in the clouds...



I sigh. Look back at my history book. There are so many words on the page. Boring. I like the pictures, though. Soldiers in helmets. They're on small boats. They're running onto a beach. The chapter is about World War II. My great-grandfather fought in that war. I didn't know him. He died before I was born.

Mrs. Lund asks a question. The smart kids raise their hands. Not me. I turn to the next page. Look for more pictures. Planes. Oh, wow. Fighters! My heart speeds up. They're so cool. I read a caption: *P-51 Mustang*.



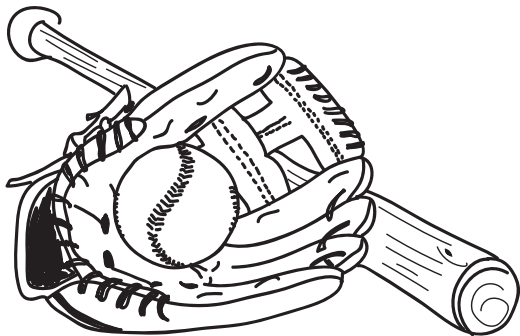
“A five-page report,” Mrs. Lund is saying. “Due in three weeks. Any topic from the two world wars or Korea.”

I hate writing reports. But not this time.

“Fighter planes,” I tell my friend Todd after school. We’re walking to the baseball field. “What are you going to write about?”

“U-Boats,” he says.

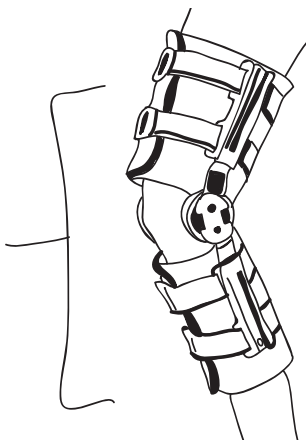
We’ve reached the field. Dad is already there. He’s unloading bats, balls, and helmets from the van. “Hi, Todd,” he says with a smile. “Big game today. Ready?”



“Sure,” Todd says.

“Hi, Eric,” Dad says to me. He hands me a few bats. I carry them to the dugout. Dad coaches our baseball team. I’m his assistant. I wear a leg brace. So I can’t play. Todd is first baseman. He’s also our best hitter.

The reason
I don't play
baseball



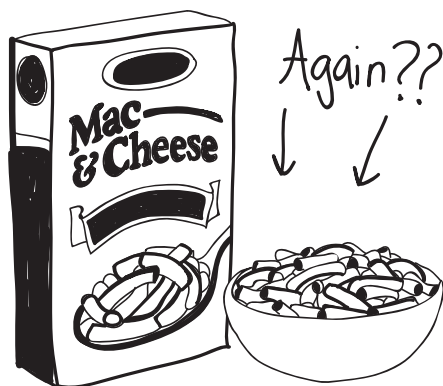
The game starts. I collect balls. Pick up bats. Cheer for our guys. It kills me that I can’t play. It also kills me when Dad slaps players on the back. Grins at them. “Good throw!” he shouts. “Way to hit!” “Great eye!”

Dad thinks I like baseball. That I like being his assistant. I'm afraid to tell him I don't.

Our team wins. Dad is happy. I carry equipment back to the van. We drive home. We're both quiet. Finally he says, "How was school?"

I think about my report. About the cool planes I saw in my history book. But we're already pulling into the driveway. He doesn't care about planes anyway. So I just say, "Fine."

"Mac and cheese for dinner?" he asks.



“Okay.”

I head to my room. Sit at my computer. Type P-51 Mustang. *Click*. I go to link after link. Then I find an old newspaper article. It’s about a guy. Leo Foster. He fought in World War II. And he *owns* a P-51. What’s really great? He lives in our town. In a nursing home.

I want to see that plane.



Jackpot!
I have to
find this guy..

2 MR. FOSTER

There's no ball game the next afternoon. So I take a bus to Shadow Lane Nursing Home. I walk through the front door. Cringe. The place has a sharp smell. Like pee. And strong cleaners. Yuck. I think of leaving. But that plane has been on my mind all day. I have to find out if he still has it. If I can see it.



I go to the counter. A lady in a nurse's uniform looks at me. "Hi there, young man. May I help you?"

"I'm here to see Leo Foster."

She raises an eyebrow. "Oh? Are you a relative?"

"No. I read about him. In an article. I'd like to talk to him."

She glances at my brace. I can tell she has more questions. But she says, "Okay. He's in the day room. Walk through those doors."

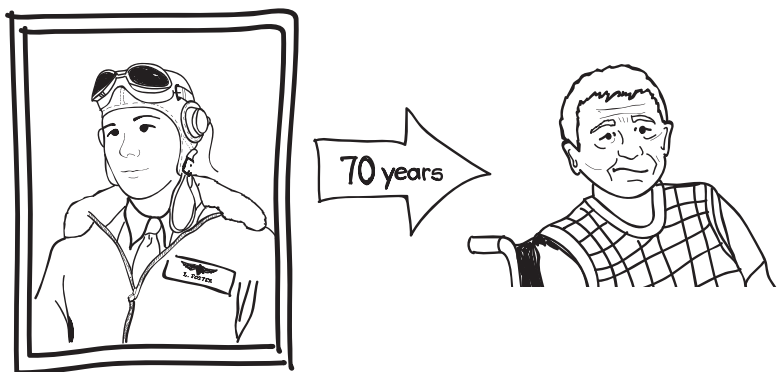
I go where she points. There are about twenty old people in a big room. Most are women. Half are in wheelchairs. There's a TV on. No one seems to be watching. A few people raise their heads as I walk by.

"Bert?" a woman waves at me. "Bert, is that you?"

I shake my head. “No, ma’am. I’m Eric. I’m looking for Leo Foster.”

“What you want with him?” a guy asks. His voice is gruff. He’s in a wheelchair. Looking out a window.

I stand where I can see his face. The newspaper article had a photo. This could be him. But the man in the picture had darker hair. Fewer wrinkles. “I want to talk to him about planes. Are you Mister Foster?”



“Who’s asking?” the man says.

“Eric Peters.”

He squints at me. Looks out the window again. “You want my autograph?”

“No. I’m doing a report on World War II planes. I read you have a P-51 Mustang. I’d like to see it.”

“Search the internet. Loads of pictures on the internet.”

“I already have. I want to see the real thing. Do you still have it?”

He shifts in his chair. Winces, as if he’s in pain. “Yes.” He eyes me. “Plane junkie, eh?”



I shrug.

“Nothing wrong with that. Just that I can’t help you.”

“Why not?”

“Why do you think?” he yells. He pounds his leg with his fist.

“Sorry,” I mutter. It was a mistake to come here. A major mistake. I turn to leave.

“You’re giving up pretty easy,” he says. “Pilots don’t give up so easy.”

“I’m not a pilot.”

He waves me back. “How gimpy is that leg? Can you push me?”

“I don’t know. I think so.”

“Well, come on, then. Meatloaf for dinner. I don’t want to be late.”



Meatloaf beats
mac and cheese
every time

“You mean we’re going to see your plane?
Right now? Where is it?”

He rolls his eyes. “You know the big field
down the street? The one with a runway?”

“Yeah, but ...” I sigh. I have a bad feeling
about this. But I grab the handles of his
wheelchair. And push.