

## MY NEIGHBOR'S AIRPLANE.

By James Collins.

Did you ever have an annoying neighbor? I mean a really annoying neighbor. When I bought our house in Queens, I inherited one. The houses were on 40 by 100 lots with a ten-foot driveway and an eight-foot space between the adjacent building walls. We were close together. Luckily, there was a six-foot privet hedge between the two properties.

Slivovitz was a retired fighter pilot from World War II. He was obviously lucky because he had survived combat but still had an inordinate love of aircraft. So much in love with small two-seater aircraft that he decided to build a seaplane using his back yard and garage. At the same time, he ran a very busy garage so that his hobby activity only occurred from six to ten o'clock at night. The banging and heavy-duty work with electric power tools was distracting at a minimum. I had four children, the youngest of which was an infant. The noise continued to wake them up every night. He and I discussed this and for a day or so after every meeting, the noise would abate or occur earlier. Eventually the din would start again between eight and ten.

The seaplane was a 'pusher. That meant the single engine was mounted on the overhead wings with the propeller facing the rear. When you are building, what the FAA describes as an experimental aircraft, you are subject to weekly and monthly inspections. Usually these occurred during the week and Slivovitz arranged to be available for these visits. Month after month, the interminable noise and racket continued as the aircraft fuselage slowly took form. Eventually, there was a full-scale fuselage with landing gear sitting in the backyard. He attached and detached the wings numerous times. Finally, one Friday night with spotlights all over the backyard, using a crane, Slivovitz attached the engine and the propeller to the fuselage without the wings. At 10 o'clock that night, the noise ceased and quiet descended on the neighborhood.

Saturday afternoon, my parents, who were in their late 60s, came out to the house for the day to play with grandchildren and to have dinner with us. Coming from the heart of the Bronx, they loved to be in Queens in our backyard sitting on lawn chairs warming themselves in the sun. We were all having a lovely time. Next door, without notifying us in advance, they decided to run a full-scale engine test. We later learned that the FAA required the engine to undergo a ten-hour full speed run up.

My mother and my blind father were each sitting in a folding lawn chair holding ice tea. In front of them was a small table with cookies and milk, and there were three tiny chairs with the children sitting off to the side. I had just stepped inside to get something from the kitchen when I heard the aircraft engine start to rev up. Initially, it was at a slow speed to allow the engine to warm up, but the noise made it difficult to hear. I glanced out the window and saw that the engine was exhibiting a small amount of exhaust smoke and since the prop wash was hitting my house, the smell arrived very quickly. My wife and I quickly went from room to room closing the windows on that side to keep the smoke out of the house. Then the engine speed increased dramatically. I glanced out the window. The prop wash was now like a mini-tornado. The hedge was leaning over at a 30° angle, leaves and dust blew everywhere while all the windowpanes in the house were vibrating. I rushed outside and as I turned the

corner, I saw both my parents lying on the ground with all the chairs blowing down the driveway. The children were crying and they had run into the garage. I helped my parents up, took them inside the house, and rushed next door hollering at my neighbor telling him he was destroying my property, my house and my parents. He shrugged and said there was nothing he could do about it. He had to have this test run for the FAA by Saturday night.

Calls to the police brought a squad car to investigate. They indicated there was no ordinance against running an aircraft engine in the city of New York and the noise was not considered a problem until after nine o'clock at night. Then they left, but the noise, the torrents of wind and the overall chaos remained. Saturday was a total disaster.

Sunday I was out with two by fours trying to prop the hedge back in place when Slivovitz showed up on the other side of the hedge.

"Jim, I notice you've been on edge recently; you look like you're stressed. You really should get a hobby like mine, which can use up your excess energy and focus your attention on something which is less stressful."

"Leon, you know, I've been thinking the same thing and I have decided on a new hobby. I'm going to get all the material for it over the next week or two, and start building it in the backyard."

"Jim, that's marvelous, what you planning to build?"

"An anti-aircraft gun!"

He did not talk to me for the next two years. His seaplane was completed and he transported it up to Ardsley to dock it and fly it on the Hudson River. On one of his landings, he hit a submerged tree. He and the plane both went down, but lucky for him he survived. Then I moved.

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