

## **Up, Up and Away! Almost...**

A recent warm, windy day reminded me of a funny thing I did back when I was around 11-12 years old. My mother had heard from a neighbor that you could get truck loads of topsoil delivered to your home for a good price, so she ordered some for our yard. When the man arrived with the dirt, he deposited it in 4-5 large piles at various locations around our yard. To my dad, these dirt piles represented future hours of back-breaking labor with a pick, shovel, and wheel-barrow; but to me as a young boy, these dirt piles were my new playground -- at least while they lasted!

On one particular windy day, probably in late March or early April, I went outside and tried to shoot basketball. The wind was blowing so hard my foul shots were all going foul! I tried to compensate by shooting the ball into the wind and hoping it would curve back toward the goal -- but it was quite frustrating. Even layups were almost impossible in this intense wind! Finally, I came to the conclusion that basketball was just not going to happen on this day.

Looking for something else to do, I noticed the huge pile of dirt closest to the house. I had always wanted to be able to fly -- I even had dreams about flying. I wondered -- with the high wind's help -- what would it take for me to fly? First, as a sort of baseline test, I climbed up on top of the dirt pile, held my arms out like wings, and jumped off... nothing. No lift at all. I needed something that could really catch the wind.

I went into our shed and found one of those plastic wading pools my kid-sister had used the previous Summer. It was probably 4-5 feet in diameter -- this thing would really catch the wind! In fact, when I held the open end of the pool into the wind, it was a little difficult to hold onto -- the wind blew it out of my hands a few times and it rolled away like a huge, wobbly wheel!

I remember once again climbing to the top of the pile of dirt -- this time holding the plastic swimming pool with the opening facing into the wind, and all the while trying to maintain my balance on the dirt pile... it wasn't easy! The wind would push me back or almost knock me down as it blew into the open bowl of the pool, and it was difficult to find stable ground for my feet on the pile of loose dirt. The wind would blow me backwards, and I would struggle to put myself into optimal position -- preparing for my maiden launch!

Looking back on this little experiment, I can't help but be impressed with my own innovation -- the Wright brother's at Kitty Hawk would have been proud of me! But unlike the Wright brother's at Kitty Hawk, a few important questions never crossed my mind. Important questions like: "What if I am actually able to make this swimming pool fly -- is there any way to steer this thing while in flight? What if I end up in the top of a tree, or on top of the house? Or worse yet, what if the wind lifts me up 50 feet into the air and then dumps me? How does one land when flying on top of a swimming pool?" No, I never seriously considered any of those questions. I can almost hear myself saying: "One problem at a time -- I have to get off the ground first!"

Well, needless to say, I grappled with the large plastic swimming pool, scaled the big pile of dirt, and "launched" myself into the wind several times that day... and, sad to say, I never did really

fly -- well, not that I could tell anyway. But looking back on it, it was great fun, and I think I learned a little something about the physics of wind resistance that day as well. I wish someone could have videoed my little wind-experiment -- it would have been award-winning footage, I'm sure!

Today, almost without fail, when we have a windy, Spring-like day, I think back on my flying experiment and laugh a little... and sometimes I wonder to myself, "What if I had really been able to fly on that swimming pool that day? Would I even still be here?"

Maybe not... but what a way to go!

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