Flight Plan

This one had some kinks to work out.

IT WAS THE 1940s, and for a nickel, we could buy moments of fantasy with the Human Torch or Captain America. We could soar over Metropolis with our puff-chested hero Superman, aka mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent.

Of course, I did have fleeting doubts about Superman when he started paying attention to Lois Lane. I was only 9 years old and didn't go for that girl-boy stuff.

My 10th birthday provided me with the usual presents until my mother's presentation of my last gift. My two older sisters had that look that said Mom was spoiling me again.

My mother, a skilled seamstress, had made me a complete Superman outfit that would have made George Reeves proud. The blue and red shades were just right, and the *S* was attached neatly, although it turned out that it was over my stomach more than it was over my chest.

For the next few days, I was walking on air. Fully clad in my Superman outfit, I was convinced that I was reaching heights previously unthinkable as I leaped over obstacles and flew off banks of grass.

After a while, my mom stopped running out to see my latest flight; I had been beckoning her each time I performed some new aerial wonder.

On Mom's last trip out to see me, she remarked that with my cape billowing out behind me, she could almost believe I could fly. That tied right in with what I had been thinking all along but was too afraid to believe—I could fly!

I was ready to put my faith on the line, and I thought the 10-foot drop from the roof of our porch would give me time to adjust to the intricacies of flying.

A voice of reason within me urged some degree of caution, as I had memories of falling off bicycles and out of trees. In Dad's scrap pile, I found two rusty coil springs from a Buick. They could be attached to boards that, in turn, could be attached to the bottoms of my feet.

After several days of hard labor, I had my "safety shoes" up on the roof. Wearing my Superman outfit, I attached my special footwear and yelled down at the family to come see what miracles are made of.

I was back from the edge of the roof so that my mother and sisters could not see the springs. One of my sisters yelled up at me, "Why do you look so tall?"

As soon as I saw the look on my mother's face below me, I knew I had chosen wisely to do this while Dad was at work.

In her most authoritative tone, my mother said, "Come down here this instant!"

With a few *Frankenstein*-style steps, thanks to the weight on my feet, I made it to the edge of the roof. I took a deep breath and gazed down at my Earth-bound family.

I don't remember being airborne. I hadn't really jumped but, rather, stumbled off the edge of the roof. Before I could think about being in space, I was lying in the flower bed surrounding the porch. Nearby were my safety shoes, half buried in the soft soil, with the broken bindings still around my legs. My ankles were throbbing.

I waited for the scolding from my mother, but she hugged me and said that I was lucky I hadn't broken any bones. Even my sisters didn't tease me, and even though I didn't think Superman would

approve, I cried.

I made that brave attempt 62 years ago. I think back to those moments before my disastrous takeoff and recall how free and full of hope I was for my dream.