

When Peace is a Priority

By Kern Hagg

(#17 in a Series)

From time to time, we all have moments in life when we crave some level of peace in our lives. It might be at night with insomnia or it could be after a long stressful day at work, but there are moments when each of us wishes we could just find peace. For me, I think about a day in May and in the year of 1960. My friends and I often were involved with “fad” ideas like whiffle ball, baseball, playing Four Square, shooting hoops, competitive badminton, throwing lawn darts, yoyos and the like. In that one particular year, we were all immersed in the hobby of kite flying. I had worked in my dad’s work working shop in our basement to fashion a wooden spool on which I could wind up a great number of balls of kite string. It was a rectangular wooden frame with this huge spool of string in the middle, and I could turn a wooden crank on the side to roll the kite string in. I had bought about 10 rolls of kite string at 500 feet each, and I had all 10 rolls knotted together on this one massive spool. S.S. Kresge at the Arlington Market sold a wide array of kites and kite string products.

It was a particularly beautiful day in late spring with blue skies, little wind, white clouds and generous amounts of sunshine. I walked through the bushes at the back of our property and emerged into the vacant lot at 111 South Brighton. In 1960, there was no house there, so we used the vacant property for all types of recreational purposes.

Using 2’ strips of bedsheets, I had tied a modest amount of tail section to my paper kite, and I was amazed at how easily it elevated and stayed upright with just the perfect amount of tail. Then, I started unwinding string, and it was not long before the kite completely disappeared over Brighton, over Dryden, over Northwest Highway, and directly into the skies above downtown Arlington Heights. It was weird to have the kite so far and so high that I could not possibly even see it. The kite string laid atop the roof of a home on the west side of Brighton, but it arched up into the sky from there. The string rarely pulled or vibrated in any perceptible way. When the string (about one mile) was completely run out, I put the wooden reel under my back, and I laid in the grass in that vacant lot for another hour. I cannot remember a time in my life when I felt such utter peace. The soft spring breeze and the bright yellow sun warmed me, and I had to marvel at the success of this flight. After an hour or so, I started reeling in the string, and it took me about another hour to get it all in. At its fullest extension, I would guess that my kite was many hundreds of feet above Bowen Hardware! When my kite eventually yielded to the forces of gravity as well as my wooden hand crank, I felt such a rush of accomplishment. I had done it all myself, and I had an hour of indescribable peace laying in the grass of that vacant lot.