

*Above the Beaten Path: Adventures in High Flying and High Finance*  
Memoir, aviation travel adventure

9,000 feet above the ocean, radio contact lost, I connected with a Delta 135 pilot. “You’re a single-engine Cessna 182?” he burst out. “Man, you’ve got balls of steel. I’m glad I’m up here and not down there.” Gutsy or foolhardy? Even ferry pilots don’t try this so late in the season. Still, I had to make a second attempt at a North Atlantic passage after my first one had failed.

Flying was my passion. So was my career. I started out as an accounting clerk taking flying lessons in early morning darkness. Years later as CEO of a multinational bank in chaotic Bangkok I was flying into remote corners of Southeast Asia. It would be hard to say which drove me more to see the world, my job or my plane.

As my career took me and my family from Canada to the United States, Scotland, England, India and Thailand, my plane carried us—and will take the reader—into high-adventure, high-risk flying, even virgin territory for a foreign-registered Cessna. Challenges, excitement, joys abounded both in the air and on the ground.

In Bombay my days were packed with the pressures of stabilizing a bank in the aftermath of scandal. I sought respite in flights like the one I took with my family over the bleak, stunningly beautiful salt wastes of Kutch in Gujarat to see some of the last remaining Asian lions of India. All too soon, though, India’s hide-bound rules grounded my plane. Devastated, I fought to keep flying. With luck, fortitude and a new outward-looking minister, I finally succeeded.

I landed in Bangkok in the spring of 1997, just three months before the Asian Economic Crisis erupted. The Thai baht plunged. The country teetered on the verge of bankruptcy. As CEO of Standard Chartered Bank I had to help deal with this horrific crisis. An unexpected opportunity arose: the chance to acquire a major local bank struggling with insolvency. I now worked feverishly with heads of government, financial institutions and business to shore up this bank and spearhead its acquisition.

I continued to thirst for adventure and flew with my family into remote parts of Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar where we were the first foreign-registered single-engine Cessna to land. We faced surprising obstacles—requests for “protection” money, sky-high landing fees and heat-seeking missiles in the hands of suspicious warlords. Another time I inadvertently flew over the Thai king’s summer palace while he was in residence. This was lese majeste, which potentially threatened both my career and my ability to fly in the country as a foreigner. Excitement never flagged.

I was unable to compromise. I wanted it all, a high-powered career, fascinating flying adventures and life with my family close at my side. This difficult balancing act between competing passions, ambitions and demands proved ultimately impossible. Slowly but surely my private life was being squeezed to death.

*Above the Beaten Path* traces this path of struggle, high achievement, rising doubt.

A moment of bliss haunted me: “I glanced around at the airstrip, at our lone aircraft outside the hut. There was not a soul in sight, not a sound. Nothing but prairie peace and tranquility and gently rolling farmland as far as the eye could see. This was the Mayerthorpe that I yearned for often during later supercharged years and here it was in its fullness.... As I climbed higher and higher, the farm, the fields and roads, the whole solid world beneath me shrank and the sky expanded until I was drenched in blue, nothing but blue, brilliant, clear and endless.” I wanted to recapture some of that.

At a high point in my career, I chose to stop. I resigned.

*Above the Beaten Path* charts this journey, its soaring flights and sometimes rocky landings. It is a book about grabbing opportunities and making them fit into one’s life, and knowing when to leave and look for new ones. This is a book for people thirsting for travel adventure, for intrepid pilots, for all those curious to know how it can be done, while working, with family. Above all, it is a book crammed with fascinating stories of a life lived to its fullest.