The Half Mile I Didn't Ask For

Today I won't be writing about markets.

On Sunday, November 1, shortly before 1 p.m., a Learjet 60 flying from Austin to the Bahamas went down in Greenacres, Palm Beach County, a few minutes from where many of you live. All nine people on board died. According to CBC News, they included a couple with their two young children and a 20-year-old co-pilot. Forbes reported that one of the pilots had reported icing, and the NTSB said the aircraft likely began breaking apart before it hit the ground.

Several of you wrote to me on Monday. You know I fly, and that I fly with my family, and you wanted to know what I thought. It took me a while to answer.

The investigation will take months, and it isn't my place to get ahead of it. I don't want to point fingers either. No pilot takes off intending to make a mistake. We all want to get there, to deliver, to see our passengers step off at ease. And that is exactly where, sometimes, the problem hides: in good intentions.

An afternoon at Tamiami

A couple of months ago I was flying back from Key West with Lorena and the kids. A beautiful day, the kind South Florida seems to guarantee until it doesn't. As we approached Tamiami I saw storm cells building north of the field. The tower assigned me the instrument approach to Runway 9 Left. For those who don't fly: an instrument approach is like walking down an invisible staircase that the airplane follows using radio signals, even when the runway isn't visible.

I knew the storm was a few miles north, that we wouldn't fly into it, that technically the risk wasn't immediate. I accepted.

The turbulence was severe. The kind that empties the seat pocket. I glanced back and saw faces on my children I never want to see again. We landed safely. Shortly after, lightning struck nearby and the airport closed.

Nothing happened. Even so, that night I couldn't shake one thought: the south runway was clear. That extra half mile to the south made a real difference. I could have asked for a runway change, or diverted to an alternate. It would have meant inconveniencing the controller, delaying a few other aircraft, saying on the radio that I preferred something else. I chose not to bother anyone. I chose to comply.

The chain

I believe many accidents start this way, with decisions that are each reasonable on their own. A forecast that looks manageable, a schedule that's tight, a passenger who's waiting, a clearance already given. In aviation we talk about the error chain: there is rarely a single cause, and there is almost always a link where someone could have said "no, thank you" and didn't. Not out of recklessness. Out of the very desire to do things well.

What weighs on me most about Sunday isn't the technical side. It's trust. That family boarded the airplane because they trusted the people up front. When you carry people behind you, the margin is no longer yours alone.

I came away with a new, simple rule: if something will frighten my passengers more than it frightens me, that alone is reason enough to change the plan. I would rather ask for another runway, be the one who ties up the frequency for an extra ten minutes, or land somewhere else and rent a car. The discomfort of saying no lasts a little while. The alternative can't be undone.

I'm sharing this because it applies to any cockpit: an airplane's, a company's, a family's. Sometimes we do the reasonable thing in the wrong context. Understanding how we fail, and under what circumstances, is the only way to avoid taking with us the people who trusted us.

Today my thoughts are with the families of the nine people aboard that Learjet, and with everyone who, every day, holds the lives of others in their hands.

Warm regards,

[Signature]

Sources: CBC News, Forbes and CNN, November 1–2, 2026.

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