



# Prairie Sky: A Pilot's Reflections on Flying and the Grace of Altitude

*W. Scott Olsen*

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“It’s almost like ballet. Preflight. Starting. Warm-up. The voices from the control tower—the instructions. Taxiing. The rush down the runway. Airborne. There are names for every move. The run-up. Position and hold. Every move needs to be learned, practiced, made so familiar you feel the patterns in every other thing you do. It’s technical, yes. But there is a grace to getting metal and bone into the sky.”

*Prairie Sky* is a celebration of curiosity and a book for explorers. In this collection of contemplative essays, Scott Olsen invites readers to view the world from a pilot’s seat, demonstrating how, with just a little bit of altitude, the world changes, new relationships become visible, and new questions seem to rise up from the ground.

Whether searching for the still-evident shores of ancient lakes, the dustbowl-era shelterbelt supposed to run the length of the country, or the even more elusive understandings of physics and theology, Olsen shares the unique perspective and insight allowed to pilots.

*Prairie Sky* explores the reality as well as the metaphor of flight: notions of ceaseless time and boundless space, personal interior and exterior vision, social history, meteorology, and geology. Olsen takes readers along as he chases a new way of looking at the physical world and wonders aloud about how the whole planet moves in interconnected ways not visible from the ground. While the northern prairie may call to mind images of golden harvests and summer twilight such images do not define the region. The land bears marks left by gut-shaking thunderstorms, hard-frozen rivers, sweeping floods, and hurricane-size storms. Olsen takes to the midwestern sky to confront the ordinary world and reveals the magic--the wondrous and unique sights visible from the pilot’s seat of a Cessna.

Like Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s classic work *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Olsen’s *Prairie Sky* reveals the heart of what it means to fly. In the grand romantic tradition of the travel essay, it opens the dramatic paradoxes of self and collective, linear and circular, the heart and the border.

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