

Swing Rope for Fun and Profit

By Larry Collins

The early morning sun reflected off the ocean creating patterns of light on the upper supports and underside of the oil platform production deck. Some forty feet below, our water taxi waited to transfer the next crew shift to the rig. The waves, sweeping through the steel structure, splashed against each pillar in turn, creating a mist that gave the lower portion of the platform a surreal look. The swell, running about eight feet, would make this morning's transfer somewhat difficult. I stood, wearing life jacket, construction hardhat and forty pound pack, with four others who were about to make the transition. *Well, at least it's not raining,* I thought to myself.

The boat edged closer to the oilrig's lower transfer platforms with their swing ropes dangling from the superstructure above. This ingenious method (some call it diabolical) would allow personnel to swing from the platform to a waiting craft, and vice versa, without the boat getting too close to the structure, thus avoiding collision and possible damage to either.

I had practiced on the swing-test equipment on shore and been certified, but this would be my first actual experience over water. The words of my instructor reverberated in my head, "Timing is everything," he had said. "To be safe, one must plan the swing as the rising boat reaches the top of its arc and before it begins its descent."



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First, the returning crew would swing from the platform to our vessel. I stood back to watch. Several made the exchange without difficulty. The last stood on the platform and waited as our boat began to rise on the swell. *Too soon*, I thought, as he pushed off from the platform. His feet landed on our deck, but the boat continued to rise and he, off balance, leaned further and further back, still holding the rope. Quick leg grabs by the boat crew prevented a cold, wet dunking.

"OK, Larry, you're next," said Mark, the crew chief I had met an hour earlier. You might think I'd be worried as I stepped forward and grasped the rope. Not at all! I was about to fulfill one of the fantasies of my youth. My adventures as a youngster were about to come in handy.

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In the far corner of my backyard, when I was about eight or nine, stood a telephone pole. A six-foot-high wooden fence, with a 2x4 cap on top, wrapped the yard. The pole sat in the crook between the back and side sections. As a youngster, I often climbed the fence to walk along the top, tightrope style.

One day I had a great idea. Why not connect a rope to the top rung of the pole and swing from the rear fence across the yard to the side fence? Maybe I had watched too many Tarzan movies. I could just reach the bottom pole rung, with a short jump, from the top of the fence. Finding an adequate piece of rope in the garage, the attachment was accomplished.

Now nine-year-old boys are fearless, but not too smart. Taking the other end of the line in hand and walking out the fence as far as possible, I launched toward the other side with much confidence, only to crash to the ground in between. More planning was necessary.

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After many trials, I finally developed a successful method. I had to leap away from the pole so as to arc across to the other fence, simultaneously climb the rope to keep from striking the ground midway, and finally rappel back down the rope to allow a controlled landing on the opposite fence.

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This day, fifty years later, standing on a tossing boat, rope in hand, faced with a simple flat glide to the platform, I smiled. All I could think of was, *They pay me to do this*, as I launched toward my goal.

And I get to do it again, on the return this evening.