



PHOTO: COREY STRUB  
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# The Wings Of Triumph



ABOVE: Springfield native Brian Thomas sits next to the Cessna 177 that he flew from Lincoln, Neb., into Chan Gurney Airport at Yankton. Thomas nearly died from an illness and was left a triple amputee but has fulfilled his lifelong dream of becoming a pilot RIGHT: The plane's tail carries the cover of Thomas' book, "Modified Flight Plan," with hopes of making the story into a movie. His parents, Ray and Trish Thomas of Springfield, are both pilots, and the plane belongs to Ray Thomas.

RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D



■ A Springfield Native Writes A Book Detailing His Battles Against A Debilitating – And Nearly Fatal – Illness And His Pursuit Of His Dream Of Flying

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF  
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SPRINGFIELD — While his Bon Homme High School classmates were playing on the football field, Brian Thomas was flying planes over it.

Thomas' love for the heavens could be considered hereditary. Both of his parents — Ray and Trish Thomas of Springfield — are pilots, and his older brother is in the Air Force.

"I started lessons with Falcon Aviation when I was 15. I had the flying bug," he said. "My classmates had a car by then, but I would fly as a hobby, to do something different."

Thomas' dream of becoming a pilot came to a screeching halt when he was sidelined by the bleeding disorder he had battled since he was 2 years old. Then, in 2009, he developed an illness that nearly killed him and left him a triple amputee.

But he persevered and recovered from a personal hell. With the same resolute determination, he has achieved his dream of soaring through the sky as an aviator.

Now, Thomas is telling his story through his first book, "Modified Flight Plan," and a script that could be turned into a major movie. He and co-author Lisa Kovanda both live in Lincoln, Neb., and will sign copies of the book at Norm's Liquor of Springfield from 2-4 p.m. Saturday. The book will be available to purchase at the event.

Those who miss Saturday's book signing can catch Thomas and Kovanda during next month's appearance at the Yankton Community Library.

## LIFELONG BATTLES

Thomas spoke with gritty honesty about his lifelong health battles.

His bleeding disorder worsened in high school. The bleeding left large bruises, and he spent extensive time receiving a wide variety of medical treatments. He missed large amounts of school, and he couldn't participate in sports because of the disorders.

After several failed chemotherapy treatments, Thomas opted for a potentially disease-curing, but risky spleen removal. After more chemotherapy, he regained his flight status, but now he was left with an altered immune system.

Thomas moved to Lincoln in 2007 to work for Duncan Aviation as a mechanic.

"My bleeding disorder haunted me at work. I worked on planes and had bruises all over my arms, chest and knees," he said. "People asked me, 'Were you in a bar fight?' They thought I had the crap beat out of me."

In April 2009, Thomas left work early with what he thought were flu symptoms. Four hours later, he was comatose and on life-support. His hands, feet and face developed gangrene. His face had turned blue, and his hands had turned black. His body had literally turned against him.

"According to my medical records, I should never have survived that first weekend," he said.

Ten days later, he woke up

THOMAS | PAGE 12B

## Riverboat Days

# We're Just One Week Away From RBD 2013!

BY KATIE GREENE  
Yankton Riverboat Days

The 30th year of Riverboat Days is just a week away! I feel like I need to give credit to all current and past board members, all volunteers, and sponsors for helping to make our event bigger and better every single year. Countless hours of work and planning go into Riverboat Days every year. Not everything will go perfectly. Some people will complain. Most people will spend the weekend doing exactly what has been intended by board members for the last 30 years—spending time with family and friends and simply enjoying the community that we all help to build every single day.

The entire board and the staff at the *Press & Dakotan* have been working to get the schedule of events ready to print. As soon as all the kinks have been worked out, we'll drop them off at various locations around town. If you'd like the most up-to-date information the best place to go is our website—[www.riverboatdays.com](http://www.riverboatdays.com)—and click on the schedule link. A special thanks goes out to Nancy Teachout for staying positive and continuing to work on the schedule week after week.

Just a reminder that raffle tickets are now being sold! If you would like to purchase tickets, find a board member, a Pink Lady, or stop by the Services Center Federal Credit Union to do so. The

drawing will take place Sunday at 4 p.m. down at Riverside Park in the information booth. You do not need to be in the park to win, but you do need to purchase tickets to win!

Once again, River City Transit is scheduled to give rides from various locations around town. You can catch a ride on Friday from 6 p.m.-midnight, Saturday from 9 a.m.-midnight, and Sunday from noon-6 p.m. The five locations that you can catch the transit are as follows: The Yankton Mall, The Summit Center, Avera Rehabilitation and Wellness Center, The Center and Riverside Park. River City Transit has been great to work with and we appreciate their professionalism.

Finally, I feel the need to thank our Captain and Belle, Gary & Velma Kuchta. They have been traveling the area visiting local festivals have done an amazing job representing Yankton and Riverboat Days. The Board of Directors knows that being Captain and Belle takes time and energy and we appreciate all their efforts.

Remember to mark your calendars for Aug. 16-18 at Riverside Park for Riverboat Days 2013: "Comic Book Heroes!" The 2013 Board of Directors are: John Kraft (Co-chair), Randy Oliver (Co-chair), Bonnie Pinkelman, Nancy Teachout, Bob Byrke-land, Rick Stone, Chad Miller, Dick Hunhoff, Chopper Johnson, Donna Madson, Cliff Madson, Rich Andre, and Mike Gullikson.



# TRAVIS

**PERFORMING OUTDOORS  
RAIN OR SHINE**

**FRIDAY,  
AUGUST 30<sup>TH</sup>  
8:30PM**

**TICKETS AVAILABLE  
JUNE 1<sup>ST</sup>**

Tickets will be available for sale in the casino gift shop for \$30 in advance or \$40 day of show.

Tickets can be purchased by credit card by calling 800-362-6333

For more information contact Marketing at 605-487-7871 ext. 473

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