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Emilio F. Iodice
efiodice@yahoo.com

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The Passion to Fly and to the Courage to Lead

The Saga of Amelia Earhart – Leading Women into Flight

EMILIO IODICE, ROME, ITALY



Amelia Earhart, 1937, Courtesy, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

In Her Own Words

Everyone has oceans to fly, if they have the heart to do it. Is it reckless? Maybe. But what do dreams know of boundaries?

Never interrupt someone doing something you said couldn't be done.

Some of us have great runways already built for us. If you have one, take off! But if you don't have one, realize it is your responsibility to grab a shovel and build one for yourself and for those who will follow after you.

There's more to life than being a passenger.

The most effective way to do it, is to do it.

Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace.

The woman who can create her own job is the woman who will win fame and fortune.

Adventure is worthwhile in itself.

The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers. You can do anything you decide to do. You can act to change and control your life; and the procedure, the process is its own reward.

I believe that a girl should not do what she thinks she should do, but should find out through experience what she wants to do.

Decide whether or not the goal is worth the risks involved. If it is, stop worrying.

Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.

She was born in Kansas in 1897, a year before the start of the Spanish American War. She was two and a half when the century turned. It was a time when a woman's place was fixed in stone. They were housewives, mothers, and partners to their husbands who labored to help them succeed in their careers. Women were the unsung heroines of the family. They could not vote and had few rights.

Amelia Mary Earhart was born in such a setting. Yet it was her mother, Amy, who created an unconventional environment where her daughter could think and act freely, running against the grain of the times. She was imbibed with a spirit of adventure. Amelia loved the outdoors and was an avid explorer of wild life and flora and fauna in the woods and forests surrounding the family homestead. Her parents encouraged her to be fearless and not afraid of challenges. They prepared her for the emergence of an age that would sweep away many traditions and beliefs of the past, especially concerning the role of women.



Amelia Earhart as a Child, Courtesy the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College

Education

It was during this time that Amelia Earhart grew and changed. The family moved constantly in search of jobs for her father.

“Part of Amelia's independent nature was inborn. When she was a toddler, she once told her mother, ‘If you are not here to talk to, I just whisper into my own ears.’ When she was seven, the family visited the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Amelia asked if she could ride the roller coaster, and her mother declined. So the child went home and built her own: a death trap made of a pair of two-by-fours, nailed to the edge of the toolshed roof with a wooden crate and roller skate wheels attached. She was the first to test it, and the wipeout at the bottom—busted lip, torn dress—deterred her not at all. ‘Oh, Pidge,’ she said to her sister, ‘it was just like flying.’”¹

She was educated at home until she was 12 and then began going to public schools in Des Moines, Iowa, the family's new home. It was not long after this that her father fell into alcoholism. He was forced to leave his job. The family home was auctioned off. They were destitute. By the

¹ Ibid Karbo

age of 17, she realized her childhood was over. For the rest of her life, Amelia Earhart would hate alcohol with a passion, and constantly worry about financial security.

“From her very proper grandmother—yet *another* Amelia, who disapproved of her granddaughter’s tomboy high jinks—Amelia learned a very valuable skill...: Tell people what they want to hear, then do whatever... you want. From her frustrated mother, Amelia learned the price a wife pays for relying on her husband for her happiness and financial well-being. From her charming father, Edwin, she learned to do whatever made her happy.”²



Amelia Earhart,
Courtesy Wikipedia Commons

Eventually, the family settled in Chicago. Amelia wanted to enroll in the best science program in the City. She went to Hyde Park High School and graduated in 1916. She was an avid reader and learned all she could about mechanics and engineering and successful females. She believed that women could do anything men did. For years, she kept a scrap book of articles about women who excelled in all fields, particularly those dominated by men. They would be her models and benchmarks and would shape her ideas and ideals.

“Gracious and somewhat shy on the outside, she was willful and independent on the inside: polite, yet freewheeling, a person who answered to no one. She took the position that adventure is a worthwhile pursuit in and of itself—a radical stance for a woman.”³

War

With the outbreak of World War I, Amelia decided it was time to make a difference. She left school and went to Canada to live with her sister in Toronto. She trained as a nurse to help soldiers wounded on the battlefield. Many came without limbs. Others were blinded from poison gas and yet others insane from battle fatigue. It was a sobering experience. She saw pain, blood, suffering and death for the first time. It transformed and aged her. It also swept away her fear of death.

As the war raged, a new tragedy fell upon humanity. The Spanish Influenza engulfed Europe and the world. Amelia struggled to heal the ill and save lives until she became a victim. She nearly died from pneumonia and severe sinusitis. The disease ravaged and suffocated her. It took a year to recover. For then on, she suffered from constant headaches and sinus infections, in an age before antibiotics. At times, she wore a bandage to cover her cheek to hide a drainage tube. The illness affected her activities and made her passion for flying more difficult and challenging.



Red Cross Nurse's Aide Amelia Mary Earhart, circa 1917–1918. (Courtesy, Amelia Earhart Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University).

Flying

In 1919, Amelia visited the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. There she had a strange experience that altered the direction of her life. A flying exhibition by a World War I ace was the

² Ibid Karbo

³ Karen Karbo, Culture and History, How Amelia Earhart navigated the skies and society, January 25, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/01/Amelia-Earhart-praise-difficult-women-book-excerpt/>

highlight of the event. As the pilot maneuvered and swooped down along the crowded grounds, he saw Amelia and a friend standing alone. He dived at them. "I am sure he said to himself, 'Watch me make them scamper,'" she stated. Amelia stood her ground as the aircraft closed in. "I did not understand it at the time," she said, "but I believe that little red airplane said something to me as it swished by."⁴

After a short time in college, Earhart left to join her parents in California. "In 1920, when Amelia was 23, she and her father took in an air show in Long Beach, California. At that time, aviation was all the rage. Fighter pilots who'd perfected their skills and daring during the First World War barnstormed around the country, showing off their barrel rolls and loop-de-loops...the whole business was insanely dangerous. Engines dropped out of planes at a moment's notice, propellers ceased turning for reasons no one could explain. Because formal runways were things of the future, landing in a field that looked flat from the air but was in fact studded with gopher holes could spell death. In 1920, 40 pilots had been hired by the government to deliver "aerial" mail, and by 1921, all but nine of them had died. Amelia was undeterred; the risk inherent in flying was part of the magic. Her father paid for her 10-minute introductory flight, and five minutes into the spin around the Southern Californian sky, she knew she had found her passion."⁵ "By the time I had got two or three hundred feet off the ground," she said, "I knew I had to fly."⁶



Courtesy Air Force Historical Support Division



Amelia Earhart, Courtesy Library of Congress

Amelia was determined. The urge to fly was part of her. To indulge in her new desire, she needed money. The young lady took on all types of jobs from stenographer to truck



Nets Snook with plane, c. 1920, Courtesy Gilder Lehrman Collection

⁴ Portrait of Amelia Earhart as a volunteer nurse in Toronto, September 24, 1917, *Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America* Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

⁵ Ibid Karbo,

⁶ Ibid Portrait of Amelia Earhart, p.4.

driver to photographer. She managed to save a \$1000. It was an enormous sum. Her first lesson was on January 3, 1921.

To reach the airfield in Long Beach she took a long bus ride and then walked several miles. She arrived with her father and met a pioneer female aviator. “I want to fly. Will you teach me?”⁷ And so it began.

“Her first flight instructor was also a woman, Anita “Neta” Snook. She was not pretty...Neta was gruff, smelled of engine oil, and was a little weird, living and breathing... this... new mania called flying. Amelia showed up for her first lesson in her horseback-riding outfit. The jodhpurs, leather jacket, and boots would become the foundation of her signature style.”⁸

“Earhart’s commitment to flying required her to accept the frequent hard work and rudimentary conditions that accompanied early aviation training. She chose a leather jacket, but aware that other aviators would be judging her, she slept in it for three nights to give the jacket a ‘worn’ look. To complete her image transformation, she also cropped her hair short in the style of other female flyers.⁹ Six months later, Earhart purchased a secondhand, bright yellow Kinner Airster biplane she nicknamed “The Canary” (since it was yellow). On October 22, 1922, Earhart flew the Airster to an altitude of 14,000 feet (4,300 m), setting a world record for female pilots. On May 15, 1923, Earhart became the 16th woman in the United States to be issued a pilot’s license by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI).”¹⁰



Amelia Earhart’s First Pilot’s License, issued May 16, 1923, Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

New Beginnings

For Amelia Earhart, the decade of the 1920s was a period of exhilaration, hard work, sacrifice, satisfaction, disappointment, risk, pain, achievement, notoriety, and growth. During this time, the family finances dwindled. Her parents divorced. Her sinus problems grew worse. She underwent an operation. After her recovery, she was determined to earn as much money as possible.

“By the time Amelia was 24, she had a plane of her own and a series of odd jobs to support her habit. She worked at the phone company, then drove a gravel truck. She took up photography as a sideline, and developed an interest in photographing garbage cans. She wrote, ‘I can’t name all the moods of which a garbage can is capable.’”¹¹

Despite her effort, she suffered one financial setback after another. Amelia was forced to sell her plane, “The Canary.” It was heart breaking.

⁷ Marshall, Patti (January 2007). *Aviation History*. 17 (3): 21–22.

⁸ Ibid Karbo

⁹ Blau, Melinda (1977). *Whatever Happened to Amelia Earhart? Contemporary Perspectives*.

¹⁰ As quoted from the Wikipedia article on Amelia Earhart with the following references for the passage:

- Long, Marie K.; Long, Elgen M. (1999). *Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved*. Simon and Schuster.
- U-S-History.com. Retrieved: June 3, 2012.
- One Life, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170528125615/http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/earhart/pop-ups/02.html>

¹¹ Ibid Karbo

It was time for a new direction.

She went to the East Coast. She studied at MIT and Columbia University but stopped her education because her mother could no longer help her. Problems accumulated. In 1925, in Massachusetts, Amelia worked as a teacher and social worker to assist others. Even so, she kept her passion for flight fresh. She saved the little money she could earn for flying.

Earhart joined the Boston Chapter of the American Aeronautical Society. Later, she was elected Vice President. She worked to develop local aviation. Earhart helped finance the construction of the first airport in Quincy, Massachusetts and, on September 3, 1927, was the first person to fly out of the airport.

Amelia represented Kinner Airplane & Motor Corp in the Boston area. The firm was a pioneer in the creation of aircraft engines. It helped her understand the complex mechanics of airplane motors and the essentials of flying and flight.

Amelia wrote newspaper columns about flying and became well known in the regional circles of aviation. It was at this time that Earhart laid the foundation to promote herself and women as aviators.



Reproduction of "The Canary," Courtesy US Marine Corps



Charles Lindbergh, Courtesy, Library of Congress

Trans-Atlantic Flight

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh electrified the world by flying non-stop from New York to Paris. The following year, interest grew about a woman flying across the Atlantic. Few accomplished female pilots wanted to do it because of the peril involved. Amelia Earhart was asked to take on the role. Flying the Atlantic was not only astonishingly dangerous, it was also expensive. Pilots needed mechanics, facilities, backers, sponsors, and promoters.

"Amy Phipps Guest, a freewheeling middle-aged heiress and daughter of Henry Phipps, Jr., Andrew Carnegie's business partner, was worth literally billions. She fancied herself an adventuress and saw no reason she shouldn't be the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. She leased an at the time elite plane from Donald Woodward, heir to the Jell-O fortune, hired a couple of pilots, and then succumbed to family pressure that the whole enterprise

was simply too dangerous... Through her connections, Guest reached out to renowned publisher George Putnam, and brought him on board as one of the project coordinators."¹²

They prepared a list of women who had experience flying and who could be a passenger on a trans-Atlantic flight. Female aviators like Neta Snook did not have the grace and feminine image which could spark a publicity campaign and captivate the public.

¹² Ibid Karbo

“Amelia’s reputation as an up-and-coming star of aviation, with more than 500 hours in the air under her belt and no serious accidents, preceded her. Also, and equally important, her daredevil tomboy soul was hidden beneath a soft-spoken, ladylike exterior. She sported a tousled head of blond curls (although her hair was actually board straight; her look of weather-beaten aviatrix chic required that she curl her hair daily), along with a sprinkling of freckles and a friendly gap-toothed smile. More important, perhaps critically, her body was the body of the times; she was built like a flapper: tall, flat-chested, reed thin. She wore pants—not to be contrary, but to hide her fat ankles—her only serious figure flaw.”¹³



Amelia Earhart Prior to her Trans-Atlantic Flight, June, 1928,
Courtesy World Wide Photos

Amelia was, understandably apprehensive. It was a huge gamble. The chance of success was slim. The odds were against her. Numerous pilots tried to fly the same route as Lindbergh. All failed. Most ended tragically. Three attempts had already been made in 1928. Each ended in death.

Amelia weighed the risks and the benefits. If she succeeded, Earhart could make a difference for aviation and for women, in particular. This was her goal. “She went along with it, because she was passionate about flying—and being the first woman, even if she wasn’t in control, was nevertheless awesome.”¹⁴

The venture received widespread media coverage because of her, the campaign of Putnam and Guest, and the danger involved. The Atlantic was a death trap for

aviators and might be for the first women air traveler.

Amelia Earhart was suddenly cast in the image of the female Charles Lindbergh.

Putnam, Guest, and others helped finance the flight. Earhart agreed to fly as a passenger, take photos, assist the pilots, and keep a log that would eventually be turned into a book.

Before her departure she prepared letters to her loved ones to be opened in the event of her death.

On June 17, 1928, the sea plane carrying Amelia Earhart, a pilot and co-pilot, departed from Trepassey, Newfoundland in Canada. “She was stowed in the back of the *Friendship*, (between deadly gas tanks)... behind pilot Wilmer “Bill” Stultz and co-pilot Louis “Slim” Gordon. Amelia... endured the discomfort of the 20-hour, 40-minute flight from Trepassey Harbour, Newfoundland, to Burry Port, Wales”¹⁵ while recording her memoirs with little or no light.

They encountered storms, lethal winds, freezing rain, and violent air currents. For a time, they were lost at sea. Their radio died. They were unable to communicate.

The plane’s fuel dwindled dangerously low. Reluctantly, they jettisoned gas tanks and other heavy objects to lighten the aircraft. They panicked as the plane consumed the last drops of



George Putnam and Amelia Earhart, Courtesy
Purdue University Library

¹³ Ibid Karbo

¹⁴ Ibid Karbo

¹⁵ Ibid Karbo

gasoline. They were about to crash. Out of the blue, with only minutes of petrol left, they saw a fishing vessel and then the shore. It seemed like a miracle.



Amelia Earhart, June 14, 1928, Trepassey, Newfoundland,
Courtesy Forney Museum

They set down in the water off the coast of South Wales 20 hours and 40 minutes after takeoff. The team was exhausted, happy and exhilarated and still alive. They made it.

It took hours before they reached land and civilization. When they did, thousands were waiting to give them a royal welcome.

Amelia minimized her role. “Stultz (the pilot) did all the flying—had to. I was just baggage, like a sack of potatoes.” She added, “... maybe someday I’ll try it alone.”¹⁶

Earhart wrote about her trans-Atlantic adventure in “*20 hours and 40 minutes.*” In essence, the book was her daily and hourly

flight log for the journey. It became an instant best seller. Amelia’s observations reveal much about her tenacity, practicality, steadfastness, and sense of wonder.

Excerpts from “*20 Hrs. 40 Minutes*” – by Amelia Earhart¹⁷

Friendship

When I first saw Friendship she was jacked up in a hangar in East Boston. Mechanics and welders worked nearby on the struts for the pontoons...the ship's golden wings, 72 feet...red orange fuselage...was chosen for practical use...if we had come down orange could be seen (In the water).

Broken Door Opens During Flight

Slim came within inches of falling out when the (cabin) door suddenly slid open. And when I dived for that gasoline can, edging towards the opening door, I too had a narrow escape. However a string tied through the leather thong in the door itself and fastened to a brace...held it shut.

Crammed Between the Cabin Gas Tanks

Friendship is equipped with two special tanks, elliptical affairs, which bulged into the space just aft of the cockpit...There was room between these to squeeze through...It was between these tanks I spent many hours...part of the cabin was unheated and reached low temperatures (she froze).

Taking Photographs

The clouds are tinted pink with the setting sun. Bill just got the time. “OK” sez he. 10:20 London time my watch. Pemmican (dried jerky) is being passed or just has been. What stuff! The pink vastness reminds me of the Mojave Desert.... Bill gets position, we are out 1096 miles at 10:30 London time... the view is too vast and lovely for words. I think I am happy-sad admission of scant intellectual equipment. I am getting housemaid's knee kneeling here at the table gulping beauty.

Flying in the Dark, No Lights in the Cabin

Slim has just hung a flashlight for illuminating the compass...the faint light of the radium instruments is almost impossible to see... I write without light... I wouldn't turn on the electric light in the cabin lest it blind Bill at the controls... the thumb of my left hand was used to mark the starting point... often lines piled up one on the other.

¹⁶ Goldstein, Donald M.; Dillon, Katherine V. (1997). *Amelia: The Centennial Biography of an Aviation Pioneer*. Brassey's, p. 54.

¹⁷ Amelia Earhart, *20 Hours and 40 Minutes*, *National Geographic*; Reprint edition (June 1, 2003).

Dropping an Orange with a Note on the Passenger Liner America

The course of (the SS America) perplexed us (it wasn't going in the right direction). Where were we? We circled the America, although having no idea of her identity...with the radio crippled, in an effort to get our position, Bill scribbled a note. The note and an orange to weight it, I tied in a bag with an absurd piece of silver cord. As we circled America, the bag was dropped through the hatch... we tried another shot, using our remaining orange. No luck.

Takes a Photo of the Ship

Before the hatch closed, I lay flat and took a photograph. This, I am told, is the first one made of a vessel at sea from a plane in trans-Atlantic flight.

Danger: Gas Tanks Almost Empty, Unless They Reach Land, They Will Crash

Half an hour later (we saw) a fishing vessel... although the gas in the tanks was vanishing fast, we began to feel land - some land - must be near. It might not be Ireland, but any land would do. Bill was at the controls. Slim, gnawing a sandwich, sat beside him, when out of the mists grew a blue shadow...nebulous "landscapes" - Slim studied it, then called Bill's attention to it; it was land! I think Slim yelled. I know the sandwich went flying out the window. Bill permitted himself a smile.



SS America, c. 1928, Courtesy United State Lines

Arrival. Sea Plane Friendship Lands Off the Coast of Northern Ireland

Slim dropped down on the starboard pontoon and made fast to the buoy with the length of rope we had on board... Slim yelled lustily for service. Finally they noticed us, straightened up and even went so far as to walk down to the shore and look us over. Then...they went back to work.

3 or 4 people gathered to look at us. To Slim's call for a boat we had no answer. I waved a towel desperately out the front window and one friendly soul pulled off his coat and waved back.

It must have been nearly an hour before the first boats came out. Our first visitor was Norman Fisher who arrived in a dory. Bill went ashore with him and telephoned our friends at Southampton...while we waited Slim contrived a nap.



Amelia Earhart and the pilot and co-pilot of the Friendship in Southampton, Courtesy, Forney Museum

Mooring the Plane, Rowing to Shore, Thousands Greet Them

Late in the afternoon... Captain Bailey of the Imperial Airways and Allen Raymond of the New York Times (arrived)... Bill moored...and we rowed ashore. There

were six policemen to handle the crowd...in their enthusiasm...the Welsh people nearly tore our clothes off.

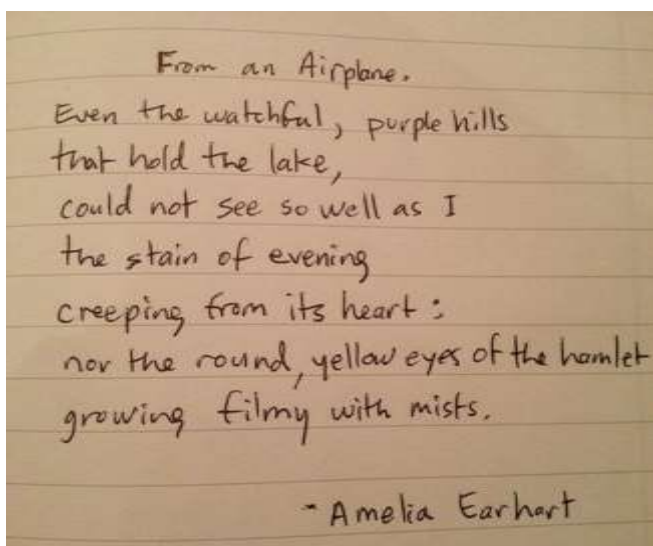
Amelia Earhart did not realize, at the time, that she was a global celebrity and a symbol for equal rights for women, around the world. After she landed in the United Kingdom, she received a tremendous welcome and was handed the following telegram:

TO THE FIRST WOMAN SUCCESSFULLY TO SPAN THE NORTH ATLANTIC BY AIR, THE GREAT ADMIRATION OF MYSELF AND THE UNITED STATES. CALVIN COOLIDGE, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

"When she returned to New York, Amelia was thrown a ticker tape parade. Afterward, a limo had been hired to take her to another appearance. It was a scorching day, the traffic thick. Automotive air-conditioning had yet to be invented. Amelia took one look at the car and imagined being stuck in the backseat in a pool of her own sweat. But then she spied an empty sidecar attached to the motorcycle ridden by one of her police escorts. Without a thought, and without asking any of her minders' or managers' permission, she hopped in. The cop flipped on his lights and siren, and away they roared."¹⁸



The New York Times, June 18, 1929, Courtesy New York Times Company



Courtesy Pinterest



Amelia Earhart at the White House, November, 1928 with Porter S. Adams, President of the National Aeronautic Association, Courtesy Library of Congress

¹⁸ Ibid Karbo

In addition to her bestselling books and articles, Amelia wrote poetry which remained unpublished until after her death.

Fighting for Women to Fly and for Equal Rights

After returning from her historic flight, Amelia began an exhausting lecture tour in 1928 and 1929. Putnam was determined to turn Amelia Earhart into an American icon. It worked. Amelia used her fame and growing fortune to help promote aviation and, in particular, the equal right of women to fly and do whatever they wanted in life. Earhart was a shy person but forced to take on a more assertive role with her increasing notoriety and responsibility as an advocate for women.



Amelia Earhart with female aviators, Courtesy St Louis University Library

nevertheless get in an airplane and fly away. Men remained unthreatened, and women...were encouraged and inspired...The same preternatural patience and stamina that allowed Amelia to sit for many long hours in the cockpit of a plane made her a self-promotion warrior. In the early 1930s, she devoted herself to advocating for women in aviation (once, she gave 13 speeches in 12 days) and served on committees... She founded the Ninety-Nines, an organization for female pilots... She was made an honorary major of the U.S. Air Service and given a pair



Ad for Amelia Earhart Luggage, Courtesy Cosmopolitan Magazine

that bore her name.

“Amelia was a traditionally feminine woman who could



Amelia Earhart with the luggage she helped design, Courtesy A. E. Luggage Company

of silver wings, which she often wore with her pearls. She struck up a friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. The first lady had an adventurous streak herself, and was keen to take flying lessons. Amelia hooked her up, but the President vetoed it as too dangerous, even as he was publicly saluting Amelia's efforts to convince the country that air transportation was the wave of the future.”¹⁹

She was called “Lady Lindy” and “Queen of the Air.” Interviews and advertising endorsements came with her rising celebrity image. She even had a line of products

¹⁹ Ibid Karbo

She advertised a line of luggage that amplified her aura as a promoter of travel by air. Earhart participated in the design and manufacture of the suitcases bearing her trademark. Amelia insisted they follow certain standards of quality, be produced with excellent materials and offered at a fair price. They would continue to be sold for sixty years.

Earhart was named Associate Editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. She used the publication as a forum to encourage public acceptance of aviation and the new role of women.

In 1929, commercial aviation was still in its infancy yet Amelia worked to create airline passenger services and start the first regional air shuttle between New York City and Washington, DC and flights in the US Northeast corridor.



Ruth Elder, Courtesy San Diego Air and Space Museum

“The marketing campaign by both Earhart and Putnam was successful in establishing the Earhart mystique in the public psyche. Rather than simply endorsing the products, Earhart actively became involved in the promotions, especially in women's fashions.²⁰ For a number of years, she had sewn her own clothes, but the ‘active living’ lines that were sold in 50 stores such as Macy’s in metropolitan areas were an expression of a new Earhart image.²¹ Her concept of simple, natural lines matched with wrinkle-proof, washable materials was the embodiment of a sleek, purposeful but feminine ‘A.E.’ (the familiar name she went by with family and friends).”²²

By 1930, a group of women, including Amelia, had gained distinction in flying. Ruth Elder was known as the Miss America of Aviation. Along with Earhart, she was a founding member of the Ninety-

Nines, an organization of female fliers. In 1927, she attempted to fly the Atlantic from New York and failed. She crashed into the water less than 400 miles from land. She was miraculously saved by a passing ship. Even so, Elder established a new over-water endurance record. It was the longest flight made by a woman. She and her co-pilot received a ticker tape parade.

As Ruth Elder departed from New York, another courageous female took on the same challenge. Frances Grayson, the niece of President Woodrow Wilson, was determined to be the first woman to fly the route of Charles Lindbergh. “I would rather give my life to something big and worthwhile than to live longer and do less,”²³ she said.

“Elder and Grayson emerged at a unique moment in American history: air fever. In the summer of 1927, stories of daring flights filled newspapers across the country. And radio broadcasters followed the newly minted American hero Lindbergh everywhere



Frances Wilson Grayson, 1927, Courtesy Gallery of History

This paragraph and the subsequent quotations came from the Wikipedia article on Amelia Earhart with the following footnotes:

²⁰ Crouch, Tom D. “Searching for Amelia Earhart,” *Invention & Technology*, summer 2007 via americanheritage.com.

²¹ V Morell (1998) Amelia Earhart. National Geographic.

²² Rich, Doris L. (1989). Amelia Earhart: A Biography. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

²³ Keith O’Brien, The Culture War that was Fought in the Sky, September 23, 2018, Politico Magazine.

as he flew the *Spirit of St. Louis* in a goodwill tour across America. Now, improbably, came two heroines—Elder and Grayson—elbowing their way into the national conversation. Reporters loved writing about their plans—and their planes. They also enjoyed belittling them every chance they got. They called Grayson ‘The Flying Matron.’ And they doubted whether Elder was truly serious about her trans-Atlantic flight.”²⁴

Grayson’s plane departed from Curtiss Field in Long Island bound for Harbor Grace on the evening of December 23, 1927. Several hours in the flight she radioed that something was wrong. High winds and a storm engulfed the aircraft in the darkness. The plane disappeared. It went down off the coast of Canada and was never found. Frances Grayson was 35 years old. She was among the heroic women who pioneered aviation. Like Grayson, many were prepared to take enormous risks to gain recognition to defend the right of women to fly.

Elinor Smith was one of them.

Smith struggled to overcome the barriers of inequality that women faced for most of the 20th century. Her appearance



Elinor Smith, c. 1928-29, Courtesy, Pop History Dig

on the Wheaties cereal box was a case in point. Her

image was placed on the back of the box. It would take another 50 years before a woman appeared on the front. Flying, in particular, was a man’s sport and women were given few opportunities to show their skill.

Elinor was born in New York in 1911. She was six when she took her first flight. The emotion and sensation stayed with her forever. “‘I could see out over the Atlantic Ocean, I could see the fields, I could even see the [Long Island] Sound,’ she recalled. ‘And the clouds on that particular day had just broken open so there were these shafts of light coming down and lighting up this whole landscape in various greens and yellows.’ Young Elinor was hooked: from that point on, all she wanted to do was fly.”²⁵

By the age of 12, Smith could fly a plane and do everything except takeoff and land. At 15, she made her first solo. “Three months later, she set her first of many altitude records – an unofficial women’s light aircraft altitude record of 11,889 feet in a Waco 9 plane. A year later, in 1928, she received her pilot’s certificate, then becoming the youngest pilot at age 16 to receive a license from the Federal Aviation Administration. Orville Wright signed the document.”²⁶

A month after Elinor received her license she set out to do something so daring that she would make headlines around the world. It was the fall of 1928. Elinor spent a great deal of time at Curtiss Air Field in Long Island. She was surrounded by male pilots. They ridiculed her. One claimed he failed in his attempt to fly under a bridge and dared Elinor to try it. The 17-year-old female aviator took on the test in a way that would change history.



Elinor Smith was the first woman to appear on a Wheaties Box, 1934, Courtesy, Pop History Dig

²⁴ Ibid O’Brien

²⁵ Jack Doyle, “The Flying Flapper, 1920-1930s,” *PopHistoryDig.com*, April 6, 2015.

²⁶ Ibid Doyle



Elinor Smith & plane (circled) flying beneath New York City's Manhattan Bridge on the East River, October 21, 1928. Photo by Nick Petersen, NY Daily News, Courtesy Pop History

She decided she would not only go under one of New York City's bridges but four. "Smith undertook her plan with careful preparation. She visited all four locations of the bridges, and studied their structures, suspension features, and pillars. She also noted the surroundings of each bridge, their use, the river tides, and especially the extent and nature of the river traffic below each bridge.



Artist's rendition of Elinor Smith's plane approaching the Queensboro Bridge... Adapted from an illustration by Francois Roca in Tami Lewis Brown's 2010 book, "Soar, Elinor." Courtesy Pop History

Smith had also done some aerial reconnaissance above the East River and the four bridges to plot the route she would fly in approaching the bridges. She had also practiced low-level flying around ship masts on western Long Island's Manhasset Bay. Still, the feat was daring and filled with risk. There could be unpredictable winds, and ships and boats on the river could move in unpredictable directions. And there was also a big professional risk even if successful: she could lose her pilot's license for the stunt, regarded as a threat to public safety."²⁷

It was the morning of October 21, 1928. The sun rose brightly over the Big Apple. Weather conditions were perfect for flying. There was little wind and clear visibility. She prepared her plane to fly from her airfield in Long Island bound for New York's East River. Elinor was disappointed that none of the reporters or pilots who knew of her adventure were there to see her off. "As she was seated in her cockpit making preparations for her flight, someone tapped on her shoulder. When she turned around, she would later recount, 'I found myself staring into the handsome face of the world's hero, Charles Lindbergh.' Lindbergh gave her a big smile and said, 'Good luck, kid. Keep your nose down in the turns.' Lindbergh's support and encouragement was [sic] just what she needed."²⁸

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that her small plane dodged ships and flew under the Queensboro, Williamsburg and Manhattan bridges and completed her daredevil maneuver. The *New York Daily News* of October 22, 1928 — which gave the event front-page coverage with photos — reported: "Elinor Smith, Freeport's 17-year-old aviatrix, nonchalantly ducked under four

²⁷ Ibid Doyle

²⁸ Ibid Doyle

East River bridges yesterday afternoon in a Waco biplane and reported the stunt was easy... ‘I had to dodge a couple of ships near the bridges, but there was plenty of room,’ the high school aviatrix reported.”²⁹ Elinor became an instant celebrity and was known as “The Flying Flapper.”



New York Mayor Jimmy Walker, c. 1928,
Courtesy New York Historical Society

New York Mayor “Gentleman” Jimmy Walker successfully interceded with the US Department of Commerce to prevent Smith’s license suspension.³⁰

Less than a year after her stunning flight under New York’s bridges, Elinor set a women’s solo endurance record of 13.5 hours. In April, 1929, she broke her own record by staying aloft over 26 hours.

Six months later she clocked over 42 hours and also did a sensational mid-air refueling. In the same year she set the women’s world speed record of 190.8 miles per

hour. The following year Smith broke the world altitude record by reaching 27,419. She was 18 years old.



Elinor Smith on NBC Radio, Courtesy Pop History



Elinor Smith and another female aviator doing a mid-air refueling, 1930.
Courtesy Pop History

Smith went on to fame and fortune as an icon of aviation and as a writer and aviation consultant. She fought for women’s rights and was inducted in the Women in Aviation International Pioneer Hall of Fame, in 1981. “At age 89, in April 2001, she flew an experimental C33 Raytheon AGATE, Beech Bonanza at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. A year earlier, in March 2000, with an all-woman crew, she had piloted NASA’s Space Shuttle vertical motion simulator, becoming the oldest pilot to navigate a simulated shuttle landing.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid Doyle

³⁰ (A You Tube Video about Elinor, her Four Bridges Stunt, and her life as a pilot can be found at this site <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6DlIx8RA>.)

³¹ Ibid Doyle



Amelia Earhart, 1926, Courtesy AP and Encyclopedia Britannica

U.S. Presidential Election of 1928

The Presidential Election of 1928 was seen as an opportunity for women to push for legislation giving them the rights they deserved. Herbert Hoover, the Republican candidate, promised to pass an equal rights amendment (ERA) to the American Constitution. “And Earhart herself personally lobbied the President after he took office, making perhaps the most compelling case of all. ‘I know from practical experience,’ Earhart said, ‘of the discriminations that confront women when they enter an occupation where men have priority in opportunity, advancement and protection.’”

“The legislation did not pass—not under Hoover, nor under Franklin Roosevelt, who would come next, or other presidents to come. As late as the 1970s, men were still dismissing women’s demands for equal rights. One male critic called it a ‘lunatic proposal.’ After all, he noted, ‘women

do not need special protection.’”³² (ERA was finally passed and announced in the Congressional Record on September 12, 2018, sixty years after Amelia Earhart pushed for it.)

Amelia was not discouraged despite the failure to pass an equal rights amendment. Her goal was to attain equality in the skies. Female pilots kept proving themselves throughout the 1920s and into the 30s. Now they wanted to compete on the same terms as men. They fought to be included in the National Air Races and created their own transcontinental air derby from Cleveland to Santa Monica, California. “Race organizers agreed to let them race, but on their terms. Under the proposed rules, each woman would have to be accompanied by a man. And they wouldn’t be allowed to fly across the Rocky Mountains. ‘It would be too much of a task on the ladies,’ one race organizer said, suggesting the women fly to Cleveland from Nebraska or Minnesota.”³³

America’s most prominent female aviators decided to boycott the races unless they changed the rules to allow women to compete on equal terms. The men realized the races had little meaning and practically no appeal without the nation’s greatest female aviators participating. Organizers eliminated the foolish regulations. Women were permitted to fly in the first National Women’s Air Derby. Earhart and other female aviators insisted that the competitors be at their best since the country and world was watching. During the race, one woman crashed and died. An avalanche of criticism came from men and



Courtesy Cleveland Plain Dealer, August, 1929

³² Ibid Doyle

³³ Ibid Doyle

the media. Despite the social and press condemnation, Earhart and other female aviators continued to pursue their goals.

20,000 spectators came to the Derby in August, 1929. It made many aviators famous. In the ensuing years, female pilots competed directly with men in racing and long-distance challenges including flying across the continental US and the Atlantic.



Documentary Commemorating the First Women's National Air Derby, Courtesy, www.Breakingthroughtheclouds.com

Marriage to George Putnam

She grew fond and fell in love with George Putnam. He was married and then divorced. He proposed to her several times until she eventually accepted. Amelia was more afraid of marriage than flying. Her mother had suffered considerably. Earhart was terrified of facing the same fate. On February 7, 1931 the couple married in a simple ceremony. Amelia wore one of her casual brown outfits with little make up. Her dark, blond hair was wind-swept, disheveled and tangled as usual.

"On the morning of their marriage, full of fear and dread, Amelia presented George with a letter that read in part: *You must know again my reluctance to marry, my feeling that I shatter thereby chances in work which means most to me . . . On our life together . . . I shall not hold you to any medieval code of faithfulness to me nor shall I consider myself bound to you similarly . . .*

Please let us not interfere with the others' work or play, nor let the world see our private joys or disagreements. In this connection I may have to keep some place where I can go to be myself, now and then, for I cannot guarantee to endure at all times the confinement of even an attractive cage."³⁴

George Putnam loved his wife and respected her desire for freedom, privacy and independence. Putnam said he read Amelia's letter frequently and revealed it after she disappeared. He said it was an example of her "gallant inward spirit."



Amelia Earhart, 1931, Photo by Edward Steichen, Courtesy Pinterest

³⁴ Ibid Karbo

Earhart decided that it was time for her to set her own flying records and achievements. In 1932 she embarked on huge endeavor. She would fly the Atlantic.



Amelia Earhart's Lockheed Model 5B Vega, at the Smithsonian Institution National Air and Space Museum

Trans-Atlantic Solo Flight

"On May 20, 1932, five years to the day after Lindbergh made his historic transatlantic flight, Amelia Earhart finally made her own solo flight. During those five years, many women had taken up flying, and a lot of female pilots were angling for the record."³⁵ They all failed.

"Amelia, not wishing to alert the press, prepared for her own

attempt in secret. Days before her flight, she puttered around the house with George. She raked leaves (her sole form of exercise). She went over the proofs of her next book, *The Fun of It...* Bernt Balchen, one of her flight advisers, busied himself every day at the private New Jersey airport Teterboro, prepping her Lockheed Vega; the press reported he was borrowing the plane to fly to the North Pole. Then, on the morning of May 20, 1932, Amelia moseyed over to the airport, hopped in her plane, and took off alone across the ocean, headed for Paris."³⁶

It was a clear day. Perfect flying weather. She took off and landed in Newfoundland to refuel. She rose to 12,000 feet and carefully followed the polar route east to Western Europe. As she approached the continent, she saw icebergs with prism like colors in the setting sun. Suddenly, her altimeter stopped. Earhart was not worried. She was an experienced pilot. She could determine her altitude by her distance from the water. Minutes later, a flame surged from her exhaust manifold. She could not turn back. It was as dangerous as continuing her journey. The sky grew black. Her visibility disappeared. She was flying in darkness when thunder, lightning and hurricane like winds engulfed her plane. She could not gain altitude.



Courtesy, The Kingston Daily Freeman, May, 1932

"There was nothing for Amelia to do but fly through them, jouncing around in the wind and rain, continuing along her fixed-compass course. Soon the rain turned to ice, and the controls froze, sending her tiny plane into a spin. As she hurtled toward the green-gray whitecaps, the ice melted, and she was able to regain control. But minutes after she regained her cruising altitude, the rain turned to ice again, the windshield frosted over, the gears froze, and the plane spun. Once again, she plummeted toward the sea, the

³⁵ Ibid Karbo

³⁶ Ibid Karbo

ice again melted during the descent, and she flew low over the churning sea until she hoped it was safe to ascend once more. As the sun rose, she found herself on the other side of the storm, gliding into the dawn. All the unanticipated descending and ascending had used up fuel; she flipped the switch on an auxiliary gas tank, only to feel fuel trickling down the side of her neck from an invisible leak overhead.”³⁷

Amelia realized she could not make it to Paris. Her altimeter was frozen and her plane was on fire. “At 13:46 GMT, she landed in a pasture on a farm outside Londonderry, Ireland. The flight had lasted 14 hours, 56 minutes. A farmer came running as she crawled out of the cockpit. “Have you flown far?” he asked. She said, “From America.” If she was frazzled and freaked out, you’d never know it. Amelia could be as laconic as a cowboy. Even though she didn’t make it to Paris, as Lindbergh had done, the world saluted her achievement. Amelia received a Gold Medal

from the National Geographic Society, and Congress presented her with a Distinguished Flying Cross.”³⁸



Amelia Earhart departing for London from Derry field after her historic trans-Atlantic flight, Courtesy AP and the BBC

Amelia landed in a field near a farm house in Derry. The home was owned by the Gallagher family. Mrs. Gallagher recalled

how calm Earhart was. She had a matter of fact voice and seemed like she just completed a short motor car trip and not flown across an ocean. Amelia had no luggage or clothes besides what she was wearing. The family invited her to stay. Amelia agreed as long as they did not mind her simple appearance. The Gallaghers were delighted and recalled the kindness and generosity of their distinguished visitor.³⁹

Flying Solo Across North America

She would be the first woman to fly solo across the continent of North America.

On August 25, 1932, “Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly across the U.S. nonstop. Earhart piloted her Lockheed Vega 5B from Los Angeles to Newark in a record 19 hours and 5 minutes. The 3,986-kilometer (2,477-mile) flight set an official U.S record for women’s distance and time. Earhart’s average speed for this record-breaking flight was 206.42 kilometers per hour (128.27 miles per hour), and she flew most of the way at an altitude of 3,048 meters (10,000 feet). Less than a year later, Earhart would set a new transcontinental speed record, making the same flight in a record 17 hours and 7 minutes.”⁴⁰

From 1930 to 1935, Amelia Earhart set seven women’s speed and distance records.

³⁷ Ibid Karbo

³⁸ Ibid Karbo

³⁹ BBC, When Amelia Earhart landed in Derry field, May 31, 1932, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-32934928>

⁴⁰ National Air and Space Museum, 1932: Amelia Earhart Flies Nonstop Across U.S., August 25, 2016



Amelia Earhart with her Lockheed Vega after her record-setting solo nonstop flight across North America, 25 August 1932. Courtesy, Encyclopedia Britannica

“On January 11, 1935, Earhart became the first aviator to fly solo from Honolulu, Hawaii to Oakland, California. Although this transoceanic flight had been attempted by many others, notably by the unfortunate participants in the 1927 Dole Air Race (10 of the 18 pilots died, only two completed the trip) that had reversed the route, her trailblazing flight had been mainly routine, with no mechanical breakdowns. In her final hours, she even relaxed and listened to “the broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera from New York.”⁴¹ A few months later she flew solo from Los Angeles to Mexico City and then from Mexico City to New York. Amelia participated in long distance air races that year that took the lives of several aviators.

She decided it was time to pursue the ultimate challenge: circle the earth.

The Last Flight

Pilots had circumnavigated the globe six times when Amelia Earhart decided to fly around the world. Each

took shorter, safer routes. Instead, Amelia wanted to go farther than any man. Hers would be the longest at 29,000 miles. It was her dream.



Amelia Earhart's Flight Path, 1937, Courtesy the Chicago Tribune

She began preparation in 1935. She was a visiting faculty member in the Department of Aeronautics at Purdue University where she gave advice, taught and counseled women on careers. In 1936, she planned the details her round-the-world flight. The University helped finance the venture along with George Putnam and an array of investors. She would circle the globe following the route of the equator.

It was a daring and daunting enterprise and exceedingly expensive. She needed a new plane, designed for the challenge. Lockheed Aircraft Company built a custom made, Electra 10E for her. Additional fuel tanks and modifications to the fuselage were made to provide for extensive long distance flying under varying weather conditions.

Fred Noonan was chosen as her navigator. He was skilled at celestial navigation and had experience with marine and flight navigation. Noonan established the routes of Pan American Airlines China Clipper seaplanes that crisscrossed the ocean. He trained navigators to fly from Manila to San Francisco. Noonan knew the Pacific well. Amelia's plan was for him to navigate from Hawaii to Howland Island. It was the most dangerous part of the trip. At that point, Captain

⁴¹ This Day in Aviation, January 11, 2017, “Hawaii Aviation; Amelia Earhart.” Archived July 14, 2017. Goldstein, Donald M.; Dillon, Katherine V. (1997). *Amelia: The Centennial Biography of an Aviation Pioneer*. Brassey's, p.132.

Harry Manning, a talented navigator and radio operator, would join Amelia until they reached Australia and then she would continue alone.

Technical glitches started immediately. On the first leg of the trip from Oakland to Honolulu, propeller and lubrication snags happened. Later the forward landing gear collapsed, the propellers were damaged and the plane skidded on its belly. The flight was called off. The Electra returned to Lockheed.



Amelia Earhart with her Lockheed Electra, 1937, Courtesy the Voice of America



Courtesy Purdue University



Amelia and George Putnam studying the map for her Round the World Flight, 1937, Courtesy International Center of Photography, Life Magazine Collection

A second attempt was made with secret preparations. Earhart flew from Oakland to Miami and publicly announced her plans to circumnavigate the globe. She would fly from East to West. The new plan was the result of changes in wind and weather patterns. She and Fred Noonan departed on June 1, 1937. Numerous stops were made in South America, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia. They arrived in Lae, New Guinea on June 29th. They had flown 22,000 miles. The longest anyone had flown. The end of their adventure was in sight. The last leg was a final 7,000-mile passage across the Pacific.



Amelia Earhart at Lae, Courtesy PNG Museum, July 2, 1937

They departed from Lae airfield for Howland Island on July 2, 1937. It was a small mass of 1.7 square miles in the middle of the Pacific. The test facing Earhart and Noonan was to reach the island, with only a compass as their guide. It was described as “standing atop the Empire State Building and trying to hit a bull’s-eye on a dartboard hanging on the Statue of Liberty, five miles away.”⁴²

Moored off Howland Island was the US Coast Guard cutter Itasca. The ship set off a column of thick black smoke as a signal for Amelia to help her as she approached the island. The cutter received a few radio transmissions but the plane never arrived.



Courtesy New York Daily News, July 3, 1937.



Courtesy San Mateo Times, 1960

It disappeared and set off the greatest and longest search in world history.

Theories about the disappearance ranged from survival to a crash in the Pacific to her being murdered by the Japanese on the island of Saipan, which was reported in 1960.

Fred Goerner author of *The Search for Amelia Earhart*, (1966) had an

exchange of letters with Leo Bellarts, Chief Radioman of the Itasca after Goerner made a request for information via the newspapers. What follows is Bellarts' 1961 letter to Goerner:⁴³

28 November 1961
1920 State St.
Everett, Washington

Mr. Fred Goerner,
% KCBS
San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Mr. Goerner,
I have just received a letter and an article from a San Diego paper relative to your attempt to establish identity of some bones and teeth you found on Saipan. Having a long time interest in the Earhart story I am



Amelia Earhart's Last Flight, Courtesy National Aeronautics and Space Museum

⁴² Ibid Karbo

⁴³ Archives: coast Guard Cutter Itasca, Fred Goerner-Leo Bellarts, early 1960s letters: Revisiting roots of the real search for Amelia, February 6, 2017, <https://earharttruth.wordpress.com/tag/coast-guard-cutter-itasca/>

curious just to know why you believe Earhart wound up on Saipan.

Last year I believe that you attempted to identify an airplane generator as belonging to the Earhart plane. I'm sure that if a search was made around Saipan that many planes could be found and parts by the thousands could be located, but none from the Earhart plane.

My curiosity stems from the fact that I believe I was one of the very few people that heard the last message from the Earhart plane. I was the Chief Radioman on the USCG Itasca at Howland Island during her ill-fated trip. Having heard practically every transmission she made from about 0200 till her crash when she was very loud and clear, I can assure you that she crashed very near Howland Island. The only island near Howland that it would have been possible for her to land would have been Baker Island and she didn't land there.

Considering the increase in her signal strength from her first to her last transmission there leaves no doubt in my mind that she now rests peacefully on the bottom of the sea, no farther than 100 miles from Howland. If you could have heard the last transmission, the frantic note and near hysteria in her voice you also would be convinced of her fate but not on Saipan.

I firmly believe that she died a hero in the public eye and that is the way I believe that she would like it to be.

*Sincerely yours,
Leo G. Bellarts
Lieut. USCG (Ret)
November 30, 1961*



Chief Radioman Leo Bellarts led the radio team aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca* during the final flight of Amelia Earhart. Courtesy Dave Bellarts

Conclusion

"Amelia Earhart is the most celebrated aviatrix in history and was one of the most famous women of her time. As America's charismatic 'Lady of the Air,' she set many aviation records, including becoming the first woman to fly across the Atlantic in 1928 as a passenger, the first woman (and second person after Lindbergh) to fly solo across the Atlantic in 1932, and the first person to fly alone across the Pacific, from Honolulu, Hawaii, to Oakland, California, in 1935. In an era when men dominated aviation, she was truly a pioneer."⁴⁴

Her accomplishments include:⁴⁵

- Woman's world altitude record: 14,000 ft. (1922)
- First woman to fly the Atlantic Ocean (1928)
- Speed records for 100 km (and with 500 lb. (230 kg) cargo) (1931)



Amelia Earhart, National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution

⁴⁴ Info please, the Columbia Encyclopedia, 2012, Amelia Earhart, <https://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/people/science/aviation/earhart-amelia>

⁴⁵ Amelia Earhart Museum site, <https://www.ameliaearhartmuseum.org/AmeliaEarhart/AEAccomplishments.htm>, National Aeronautics and Space Museum site, <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/objects/amelia-earhart-setting-records> and Wikipedia Commons. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amelia_Earhart

- First woman to fly an Autogyro plane (1931)
- Altitude record for Autogyros: 18,415 ft (1931)
- First person to cross the United States in an Autogyro (1932)
- First woman to fly the Atlantic solo (1932)
- First person to fly the Atlantic twice (1932)
- First woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross (1932)
- First woman to fly nonstop, coast-to-coast across the U.S. (1933)
- Women's speed transcontinental record (1933)
- First person to fly solo between Honolulu, Hawaii and Oakland, California (1935)
- First person to fly solo from Los Angeles, California to Mexico City, Mexico (1935)
- First person to fly solo, nonstop from Mexico City, Mexico to Newark, New Jersey (1935)
- Speed record for east-to-west flight from Oakland, California to Honolulu, Hawaii (1937)
- First person to fly solo from the Red Sea to Karachi (1937)

Amelia was more than just a flier and a feminist. She was a leader. She took responsibility for her statements, beliefs and led with action. She was honest and, in spite of the tremendous media hype that surrounded her, maintained a sense of integrity. Of course, she made mistakes. She was human, but she set high standards of honor for herself, which she did not often find in others. Amelia was hurt and disappointed many times. It did not change her or make her lose sight of her destiny and mission and obligation to those who looked up to her. Amelia Earhart was a model to millions of devoted fans who followed her every word and adventure.

Her success was not breaking aviation records and overcoming barriers for women. It was all of this and more. She set an example of courage, achievement, and not being afraid of envy, criticism, ignorance, and indifference. She succeeded without arrogance. Amelia was always herself.

To say, as critics have, that her legend continues because of the media, promotion of her iconic image, and the mystique of her tragic disappearance is disingenuous. It minimizes the qualities of a remarkable person who still reigns as a benchmark for people of all ages and professions, across time and space.

Amelia Earhart's asset was humility. It sprang from knowing herself, her weaknesses and limitations and realizing, perhaps, she was not the best female aviator. She never said so or claimed to be. Instead, she constantly praised her peers, even when they denigrated her successes.

She minimized her feats and set them in a larger context of human achievement. Amelia's role as a woman was her vision of attaining what was natural and meant to be. Equality, for Amelia Earhart, was as normal as the rising and setting sun and the position of the stars in the universe.

Earhart was an inspiration for young women who were raised for only one profession, marriage and motherhood. She gave them hope.

After her amazing solo flight from Honolulu to San Francisco, Earhart returned to her hometown of Chicago. She addressed a crowd at the Chicago Symphony. Her talk exhibited her genuine modesty and sense of humor. This is what was written about that evening:



[Story about Amelia Earhart at the Chicago Symphony in 1932, Courtesy Chicago Tribune](#)

"In the *Chicago Tribune*, Wayne Thomas reported that the Orchestra Hall audience, comprised largely of women, heard Earhart speak, 'deprecatingly' of her flight's value as an advancement for aviation.... Although Miss Earhart spoke appreciatively of a few grim moments when she took off with a heavy load of gasoline downwind from a muddy field on her Pacific flight, it was the lighter side of 'my pleasant evening in the air' that she stressed. There was a bit of pride, too, in her reference to the fact that she had flown exactly on her course throughout the 2,038-mile voyage although she made the flight by dead reckoning. Soon after leaving the islands behind, the commercial program broadcast from a Honolulu radio station on which she was tuned was interrupted, she said. 'I was listening to the music and then the announcer said: 'Miss Earhart has taken off on her flight to San Francisco.' And as I sat up there at 8,000 feet with the motor just in front of me, I thought: 'How impertinent of that radio man to be telling me.' "46

Those who listened to her were struck by her wit, calmness, charm, dignity and unassuming nature and respect for her audience. Qualities often found in true heroes and heroines.

Almost a century after she vanished, Amelia Earhart still inspires. She speaks to us. She encourages us to seek our aspirations and to jump into the cockpit of our dreams and fly.

We need her now more than ever.



Amelia Earhart's Poem about Courage, Courtesy www.atchisonkansas.net

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⁴⁶ From the Archives of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, <https://csoarchives.wordpress.com/2017/07/05/remembering-amelia-earhart/>

⁴⁷ In addition to the sources cited in the footnotes, The Bibliography has been compiled by a variety of sources including: Biographies & Memoirs, <https://erenow.net/biographies/amelia-earhart-a-biography/23.php>, Wikipedia Bio on Amelia Earhart, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amelia_Earhart

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Amelia’s speech about women going into Science: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDreaW2cEUI>

The Smithsonian showed her in color before her last flight. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7unHEeJkKww>

Reception in New York, 1932, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW7EXQUjKeE>

Heroine of the Skies 1932, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-583lqvKKY>

The Last Flight: National Geographic 1937, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4n4tWJu-A>

Amelia Earhart 2017 full documentary (The Lost Evidence), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCS4s4lo9lc>

URLs (External Videos)*

Tour of the “One Life: Amelia Earhart” exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery, September 5, 2012, C-SPAN

Tour of the George Palmer Putnam Collection of Amelia Earhart Papers at Purdue University, November 18, 2014, C-SPAN



Presentation by Dr. White Wallenborn on the 75th anniversary of the disappearance of Amelia Earhart, July 21, 2012, C-SPAN

**Numerous movies have also been made about Amelia Earhart.*

About the Author



Emilio Iodice is Director Emeritus, Professor of Leadership, Loyola University Chicago, John Felice Rome Center, Former Executive and US Diplomat Award Winning Author, Public Speaker, and Presidential Historian.

Iodice was born in the South Bronx in 1946. He was the son of immigrants from the island of Ponza in Italy. He grew up in a truly bi-cultural environment: living in Little Italy and America at the same time. He worked full time while studying to pay for his education from elementary school to graduate school and still managed to complete his studies at the top of his class. Iodice received his BS in Business from Fordham University, his MBA from the Bernard

Baruch School of the City University of New York, and was named to BETA GAMMA SIGMA, the honorary society of distinguished graduates in Business. He conducted doctoral work in international business and applied finance at George Washington University in Washington, DC. Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive in the public and private sectors, as an educator and as a university administrator. Those forty years of experience included being a key official in Washington working for several Administrations, reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in American history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal for Exemplary Service, nominations for the Bronze Medal and numerous commendations and citations. He served as Minister in key US missions abroad including Brasilia, Mexico City, Rome, Madrid and Paris and departed after being named to the list of future Ambassadors.

Among his honors were being knighted by the former King of Italy and also named an honorary Guard of the Pantheon and a Senator for the Royal Family. He received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President of the United States to the prestigious Senior Executive Service as a Charter Member. He was the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola, he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of operations in numerous countries and later taught full time as an Assistant Professor at Trinity College in Washington, DC. He joined Loyola in 2007 as Director of the John Felice Rome Center. After one year he was promoted to Vice President. After serving for nine years as Vice President and Director, he was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership on June 30, 2016.

He spoke several languages and traveled across the globe. His passions in life were writing and educating others; assisting those in need; the Loyola Rome Center, its students, faculty and staff;

good music; reading; his family and, in particular, his four grandchildren and god children. His academic field of study was “leadership.”

He wrote and published numerous peer reviewed articles on leadership in the *Journal of Values Based Leadership* of Valparaiso University in Indiana that have been read across the globe. He was also a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal and is a member of the Board of Regents of Marymount International in Rome, Italy. In 2019, he was given the prestigious Premio Imagine (Image Award) to honor his contributions in the field of diplomacy, international relations and leadership.

In 2012, his bestselling book on tenor Mario Lanza was published entitled, “*A Kid from Philadelphia, Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets.*” In 2013 his second book, “*Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times*” was published by North American Business Press along with “*Sisters*,” the story of two extraordinary people, his mother and aunt. In 2014 he published “*Future Shock 2.0, The Dragon Brief 2020,*” and “*Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion.*” In 2016 he launched, “*2016, Selecting the President, The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make. 2016.*” In 2017, his new book was published: “*When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History*,” reached number one bestseller status in the world in the field of leadership. In 2019, the new edition of the book was launched with equal success. *Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times* and *Reflections* were translated into Italian and published in 2017 and immediately reached best seller status. His works can be found on this Amazon site: https://www.amazon.com/Emilio-Iodice/e/B00HR6PNFW/ref=dbp_p_bk_rwt_abau

In March, 2019, the *Iodice Leadership Center* was established in St. Barnabas High School in the Bronx to train young female students in the art and science of leadership.

Emilio Iodice can be reached at efiodice@yahoo.com.