

Pathfinder

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Amelia Earhart



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Amelia Once Tried to Bake Manna

A trivial incident turns a person from one direction to another. Fate gives a nudge and a career is altered. There have been many such incidents and nudges in the life of Amelia Earhart.

One was the sight of four one-legged soldiers awkwardly attempting to help each other walk a Toronto street during the World war. Another was the fortunate fact that as a child she "belly-whopped" on a sled instead of primly sitting up as a young miss of the early 1900's should have. Still another was the sudden glow she experienced in 1918 when the propellor from the first army plane she had ever seen whipped snow from the blanketed field into her face.

More than likely it was a combination of these that gave final direction to the 39-year-old woman awaiting the take-off signal for her greatest air exploit. Any day now, this 120-pound woman with rumpled blonde hair should be stepping into a monoplane at Oakland, Calif., for a flight toward Honolulu, 2,700 miles away.

From there her course will be ever westward, another 25,000 miles around the world. Barring ill-luck, within three weeks after the start, Miss Earhart should be the first pilot, male or female, ever to have completed an around-the-world flight along the equator route.

Success would cap a record already standing alone in the number of female "firsts" in aviation (PATH-FINDER, Feb. 27).

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Asked the stock question, "To what do you attribute your success, Miss Earhart?" her grey eyes twinkle and her full mouth readily parts in a smile as she gives her equally stock answer. The answer is in four parts: (1) Father, (2) a liking for boys' games, (3) a bent for experimentation, and (4) a dislike for feminine clothes.

Father was Edwin S. Earhart, a railroad claims agent and attorney, who liked nothing better than to bring Amelia and her sister, Muriel, on business trips with him. That was one fine thing from the girls' point of view. The other fine thing was that he could tell very thrilling Western stories with little regard for truth or anything but blood and thunder.

Miss Earhart can still quote an early Christmas letter she wrote to prove part (2) of her answer. It read: "Dear Dad: Muriel and I would like footballs this year, please. We need them specially as we have plenty of baseballs, bats, etc. . . ."

As for the well-remembered "belly-whop," Miss Earhart contends it saved her life 30 years ago. With a running start and a thumping one-point landing on her stomach, the girl careened down an ice-covered hill in her home town of Atchison, Kansas. At the bottom of the hill, a horse-drawn junk wagon moved directly in her path. She clutched the sled more tightly, ducked her head, went straight for the horse, and passed safely between the fore and hind legs. Miss Earhart asserts that if she had sat up her first smash-up—with the horse's ribs—might well have been her last.

To prove her experimental nature, Miss Earhart offers her novel if unorthodox attempts at cooking. As regular church and Sunday school attendant, the girl of early 'teen age was much impressed by the story of the Children of Israel. Nothing would do but that Amelia should bake a dish of manna.

She tried many times to reproduce her idea of what manna should be—"small, white, round muffins, a cross between popover and angel food cake. She admits ruefully that she never quite succeeded. "Perhaps," she says now, "when I give up aviation, I'll attempt the production of manna again."

Her dislike for feminine clothes was disconcerting more to other mothers of Atchison than to her own mother. Muriel and Amelia were the only girls in the town to wear sports bloomers in full public view. But even Muriel did not follow Amelia all the way—vaulting fences and riding waddling truck wagon horses.

Amelia liked school and she liked reading—Scott, Dickens, George Eliot and Thackeray. She liked dancing but doesn't recall that "the boys cared particularly for me nor do I remember being very sad about it."

After Atchison, there were no less

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than seven schools in Kansas City, Des Moines, St. Paul, Chicago and Philadelphia. During a Christmas vacation visit from the last of these to her sister attending school in Toronto, Amelia saw the four one-legged soldiers. That settled it. She was going to do her part.

As a nurse's aide in Toronto, she scrubbed floors and washed wounded soldiers' backs. Then she was put to work in the dispensary, "not for my knowledge of chemistry but probably because I could be trusted not to drink up the medical supply of whiskey."

It was in 1918 that the 20-year-old girl caught the germ of flying. An army plane whirred in the snow as Amelia stood by and by the time she left the field, she was in love with aviation. Her next move was to Smith College in Northampton, Mass., where she studied auto engine repair and laid the basis for her mechanical knowledge of planes.

Then her thoughts turned to medicine. After a few months at Columbia University, pursuing this inclination, she changed her mind again and showed up one day at a California air field. To pay for flying lessons, she worked as a file clerk. In 1920 she made her first solo flight and came down, she says, to a "rotten" landing.

She kept at her flying while she worked and studied. The work, in 1922, was commercial photography done after study hours at the University of California. Her photography, while artistic, was somewhat limited in scope, usually confined to posing a garbage can in various combinations of lights and shadows.

After she had exhausted the variety of settings for the garbage can, she went to Harvard University. Then came years of social service work at Boston's Denison House, and more flying. One April day in 1928 she was supervising children at play when a call came from a Capt. H. H. Railey.

"Would you like to fly the Atlantic?" he asked. She would and did, in the "Friendship," with Wilmer Stultz and Louis Edward Gordon at the controls.

Of her solo trip across the Atlantic, Miss Earhart says simply: "Starting from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, on the afternoon of May 20, 1932, I landed near Londonderry in the north of Ireland the next morning, 13½ hours after the take-off. That, briefly, is the story of my solo flight across the Atlantic."

To be married to a woman with such a record of accomplishment is an experience unique among husbands and George Palmer Putnam, author and publisher, would be the last to deny that his is a strange home life. But it works out and has worked out ever since their marriage in February, 1931, her first and his second.

Putnam and "A.E.," as he calls her,

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have a home in Rye, N. Y. Sometimes, when Putnam has a business appointment in California, "A.E." like a super-modern commuter's wife, will fly him there. He is, she says, a "good sport" even though he sometimes laughingly insists he belongs to the Order of the Forgotten Husband.

There are no children. Putnam says they will have to wait until "a streamlined stork develops enough speed to catch up with a Lockheed Vega monoplane."

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