

Remembering Zontian Amelia Earhart

To Amelia Earhart

*Earthbound, we watched, enthralled,
As unafraid you climbed the cloud-strewn sky;
Your flight a symbol of that great heart
That dared apathy and prejudice defy.*

*"Own your soul!" your voice rings clear.
So gaily began your last long flight.
Circling the globe, Electra's gallant crew
Through wind and fog, missed finding Howland light.
For us, AE you'll never die.
The world, fleetingly, became less sad and drear
For the courage and concern we saw
In your brief, joyous sojourn here.*

-Muriel Morrissey, sister of Amelia Earhart and charter member of the Zonta Club of Medford, Massachusetts



On 2 July 1928, as Amelia Earhart, world-famed aviator and the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean as a passenger, approached the shores of the United States on her triumphant return home, she was handed this radiogram:

Boston Zonta Club is proud to welcome you as a member.
Signed Alice Bradley, President

A few weeks later, she was inducted into Zonta International and served as an active member first in the Boston club and later in the New York club until her tragic and untimely disappearance in 1937. An outstanding woman with a charismatic personality, Earhart was universally admired around the world for her "wildly daring" but "never reckless" courage.

Over the years 1928 to 1937, she organized the Ninety-Nines, an organization for women pilots, and became the first woman to:

- Fly the Atlantic alone.
- Fly an autogiro.
- Receive the United States Distinguished Flying Cross.
- Fly from Hawaii to the mainland.

Epitomizing the ideals of Zonta International by actively promoting women to take on non-traditional fields, she wrote articles about aviation for Cosmopolitan magazine as an associate editor, served as a career counselor to women university students, and lectured at Zonta club meetings, urging members to interest themselves in aviation. In these years, Zonta was the only non-aviation organization to which Earhart belonged, although she was besieged to join and to sponsor numerous organizations at the time.

The story of Earhart's most daring, and ultimately tragic, flight is best retold in the words of Grace Muriel Morrissey, charter member of the Zonta Club of Medford, Massachusetts, and Earhart's sister.

I don't know just when Amelia began to plan for the around-the-world flight. Neither do I know how much various conversations, with then President Roosevelt, had to do with her decision to attempt to circle over the Japanese occupied islands of the Pacific. It may have been merely the desire to conquer the world's seas because they were there and no woman had yet crossed them by air. Anyway, the plan was born and the months of testing and research and discipline followed. Because she was teaching at Purdue University, she was given the wonderful "Flying Laboratory" the Lockheed Electra. After her Hawaii-Oakland flight, the National Geographic gave her their coveted medal for outstanding contributions to science. They recognized the careful research that went into the blueprints for her trip.

The last flight was begun in 1937 in May. On July 3 an S.O.S. was picked up from somewhere between Lae, New Guinea, and Howland Island. Exactly what happened we shall never know. Of this only we are certain: Amelia died as she lived, doing the work she loved with her whole soul. Amelia left a letter to her husband George Putnam saying, "Please know that I am quite aware of the hazards. I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failures must be a challenge to others."

Source: A History of Zonta International, 1919-1999