



Amelia Earhart: Young Air Pioneer

Jane Moore Howe

Cathy Morrison, Illustrator

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Fifty-two years after the boyish-looking pilot, Amelia Earhart, and her navigator, Fred Noonan, mysteriously vanished on an attempt at a record-breaking flight around the world, readers of all ages are still fascinated with her story. It is fitting that Patria Press has reissued Howe's book about a courageous and youthful Amelia as the first volume of its new Young Patriot Series (originally published by Bobbs-Merrill Co.).

What makes this chapter book especially appealing for the eight through twelve year-old group is that the author tells real stories, not fanciful ones, about Earhart's childhood. In conducting her research in the late 1940s, Howe corresponded with Earhart's younger sister, "Pidge." The stories are carefully selected to show Earhart's early interest in aviation, her courage and enjoyment of rough-and-tumble activities that had been restricted to boys. They are not only enjoyable to read, but give even adult readers new insight into the life of the nation's most famous female pilot. Howe, a former journalist and now an octogenarian, went up in a plane in 1949 so she could experience what Earhart must have felt when she first took to the air.

While the senior Earharts traveled, Amelia (Melia) and Muriel (Pidge) and their dog, James Ferocious, spent long periods with their loving, yet sometimes disapproving grandparents. Earhart's parents were sympathetic to her desire to play football, and even sent bloomers to the girls. Grandma Otis shook her head, wondering what the world was coming to as the girls enjoyed small-town childhood adventures. Grandma, however, encouraged Amelia to develop a pioneer spirit. After her father introduced her to the new-fangled aeroplane at a state fair, Earhart was determined to fly.

The last few chapters are devoted to an older Earhart, who returned home after serving her country as a volunteer nurse during the war. She wanted to learn to fly and found a job to pay for her lessons. The book ends with a few milestones from her later life, and a summary of the mystery surrounding her death. Readers are invited to speculate on what they think happened.

There are lessons about courage, following your dreams, kindness to animals and obeying rules, but they are not overdone. Cathy Morrison's sketches help set the time period and capture the action.

The Young Patriots Series is meant to be an introduction to reading biographies. Earhart's story is an excellent introduction to the series.

LINDA SALISBURY (March / April 1999)

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