

AGAINST ALL ODDS

The Dream Takes Flight

Two heroic and inexorably linked quests serve as examples of doggedly chasing a dream despite high odds against success, the skepticism of others, and seemingly all logic.

by Beverly Ingle

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"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." — Amelia Earhart



Portrait of aviatrix Amelia Earhart / 1932



Ric Gillespie, the TIGHAR Group's founder and expedition leader

She was inimitable, an audacious female in an era that didn't quite know what to do with such moxie. She dared to dream without limits, at once challenging convention and herself. Her boldest dream led to one of the biggest mysteries in aviation: What happened to bring about the untimely end of her fateful attempt to be the first woman to fly around the world? We may never find out how far — literally — Amelia Earhart's dream took her. Does that even matter?

The lingering mystery of Earhart's disappearance sparked another improbable quest, this one imagined by the people behind The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR): Ric Gillespie, the group's founder and expedition leader, and Gillespie's wife, Pat Thrasher, who serves as the group's president.

Earlier this year, TIGHAR led a \$2.2-million expedition that initially failed to get the conclusive evidence that it sought about Earhart's disappearance. "As is usually the case with fieldwork, we're coming home with more questions than answers," the group said in a statement posted on its website. "We are, of course, disappointed that we did not make a dra-

matic and conclusive discovery, but we are undaunted in our commitment to keep searching out and assembling the pieces of the Earhart puzzle."

Two impossible dreams — Earhart's and TIGHAR'S — quite possibly now could be inextricably linked through recent events, effectively serving as legendary examples of doggedly chasing a dream despite high odds against success, the skepticism of others, and seemingly all logic.

After all, a dream and logic never have been bedfellows.

Amelia Captures the World's Fancy

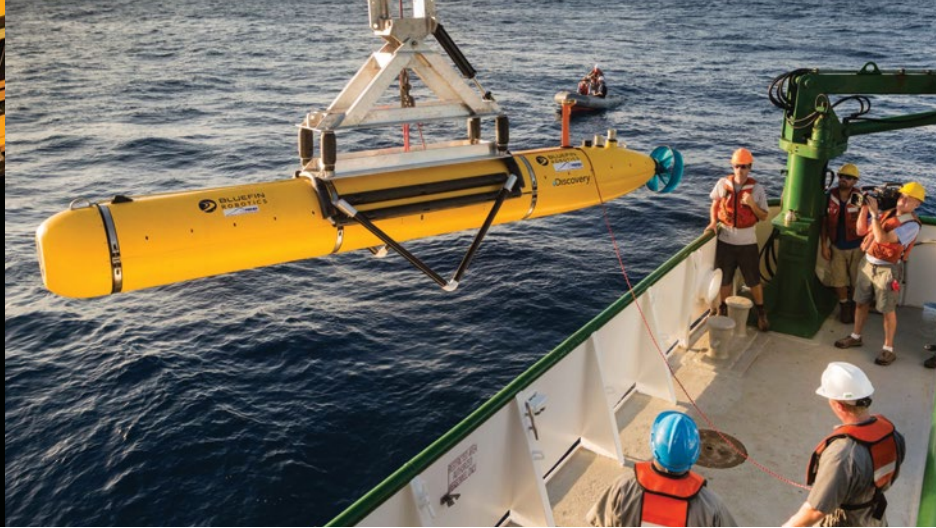
What we do know is the expanse of her dream and the incredible circumstances in which it took flight. It captured the collective imagination then, still holds us captive today, and helps fuel women and men alike to dream the impossible dream.

In 1937, when Amelia Earhart set out on her attempt to circumnavigate the world, her vision loomed large and stared down society's preconceived notions of what women could attempt, much less accomplish. It was an era in which women rarely moved outside of prescribed domestic circles, much less flew at greater than 14,000 feet. Her independence stunned and challenged the mores of her time.

Earhart had already conceived and achieved her goals of becoming the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, the first person to fly solo from Honolulu to California, the first person to fly nonstop across America, and the first woman to set an altitude record. It seemed a logical progression that Earhart would continue to pursue greater challenges.

Amid enthusiasm laced with criticism, and encouragement laced with speculation, Amelia Earhart set off on her most daring adventure, a round-the-world-flight, departing from Miami, Florida, on June 1, 1937, to take on the first leg of the planned 29,000-mile trip. A quote attributed to Earhart on the official Amelia Earhart website, maintained by her family, sums up the aviator's attitude toward her dreams and accomplishments nicely: "... decide ... whether or not the goal is worth the risks involved. If it is, stop worrying ..."

However, unlike Earhart's other dreams, which she managed to achieve notably, this dream was cut short when her Lockheed Electra disappeared over the Pacific Ocean on July 2, 1937. Within hours, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard launched the largest air and sea search in American history. When their efforts failed, Earhart's husband of six



(Above) TIGHAR prepares to deploy technology in the search for Amelia Earhart's plane. (Below) Part of TIGHAR's exploration team wades ashore.

years, George Putnam, financed his own search to no avail. There was to be no trace of Earhart, her navigator, Fred Noonan, or her plane.

In an official report, the U.S. government concluded that the two seasoned flyers, unable to locate their destination of Howland Island, ran out of fuel, crashed into the water, and sank. Earhart was declared legally dead on January 5, 1939. The question of why and where her plane went down, however, has never been put to rest.

A Fruitless Search?

The TIGHAR group had planned to spend 10 days in July of this year searching the area for signs of Earhart, but "due to equipment problems di-

rectly attributable to the severity of the underwater environment at Nikumaroro, we only had five days on site," the group stated.

"In that time we saw no objects that we recognized as aircraft debris, but we have volumes of sonar data and many hours of high-definition video to review before we'll know the results of this expedition definitively," TIGHAR said in its statement.

Even staring in the face of defeat, TIGHAR continued pursuing its dream of discovering what happened to Earhart, and its persistence seems to have paid off. As announced on the group's website on August 26, 2012, after review of the high-definition film footage from the expedition, "... the

Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) captured images of what forensic imaging scientist Jeff Glickman describes as a debris field of man-made objects. The discovery is significant because the debris field is in the place where we had previously reasoned debris from the Earhart aircraft 'should' be."

The newly discovered debris field is in deep water offshore from the spot where an object, thought to be Lockheed Electra landing gear, appears in a photo taken three months after Amelia Earhart disappeared. Items in the debris field appear to be consistent with the object in the 1937 photo.

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really don't think about you at all. How freeing this is to understand!

Consider whether the feeling of regret can be changed to a decision to celebrate the past, embrace the reality of today, yet not give up on a dream about the future. For example, you might say to yourself, "I had a beautiful home and raised my children in it, so it was a place of good memories. I needed to downsize so the money doesn't run out before my time is up on this planet. This choice allows me some margin in my finances so I can still travel to new places."

Count your blessings. During a period of serious regret in my life in 2011, I was challenged by my executive coach to write out 100 things for which I was thankful. Her objective was clearly to get me unstuck from my "poor me" attitude, yet it did so much more than that. I found myself overwhelmed with all the goodness that surrounds me, from something as simple as tasty, cold water straight out of the tap to a 23-year partnership with my spouse.

Considering Laurence Sterne's words, we must work to develop the principles

of contentment within ourselves. I believe these principles include a choice to live in the reality of today, not in the dreams of our past. It is what it is. Next, debunk the myth that "they" care. Be satisfied with your station and free from others "shoulding" all over you. Finally, work on that list of 100 blessings and arrive at the destination where you can be satisfied with what one is or has, not wanting for anything more or anything else. Choose happy. ♦

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A Calculated Risk

Knowing how dangerous the flight would be, Earhart left a letter for her husband in case she didn't return, writing, "Please know 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 failure must be but a challenge to others."

Foreshadowing? Perhaps. Foreboding? One wonders.

"She understood that this represented an opportunity to promote women in aviation and also women to lead independent lives, professional lives outside the home," said Frank Goodyear, associate curator of photographs at the National Portrait Gallery, in an interview with WTOP 103.5 FM, a news radio station in Washington, regarding Earhart's dream.

Dreaming big required serious nerve then and still does today. It is not for the faint of heart. Fortunately, Earhart's legacy continues to provide inspiration, whether the dreamers are young or old, women or men, but most notably when the dreams seem far-fetched. The common denominator among big dreamers is conviction.

As Earhart is credited with saying, "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." ♦

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Bank Manager: So tell me, what's the point of your company?

Owl Person: To scare woodpeckers.

Bank Manager: Did you say to scare woodpeckers?

Owl Person: Yes, you know those birds with jackhammer-like beaks that like to rat-a-tat holes in the sides of your house.

Bank Manager: Hmm ... yes, I see. And what's the ultimate goal of your proposed company?

Owl Person: To make the scariest plastic owl on the planet.

Bank Manager: You're not with *Candid Camera* are you?

To prove to myself that I too once possessed the ability to dream big, I referenced my 27 journals, dating back to 1976, my sophomore year in high school. Bad idea. While reading

about my days of playing goal for my high school and college hockey teams, I was further reminded of the dream-gap that now exists.

Back then I dreamed of riding my "athletic gift" for not flinching to fame and fortune. Despite extreme odds, I fantasized of playing in the NHL and winning the Vezina trophy (awarded to the league's best goaltender). And then parlaying this success into a critically acclaimed acting career and marrying *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model Elle Macpherson, with Mr. T as my best man.

A stark contrast to what I think about today when playing hockey. The lofty dreams of youth have been supplanted with: I hope I don't get hurt. I hope I don't embarrass myself. I hope the ice rink's vending machine sells Twizzlers.

But all is not lost, for they say the first step on the road to recovery is to admit you have a problem. Writing this serves as my own admission. Or at least I hope it does, as much as I hope I can find a new color to paint over those beige kitchen walls. ♦

