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Flights Of Fancy: An Air Of Gratitude

By Maya Talisman Frost

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by: **Maya Talisman Frost**

Feeling cranky about air travel? Get a grip.

Not on the arm of your passenger seat—on reality, history, and the incredible accomplishment of human flight.

We've just celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Although there were certainly others who were experimenting with flying machines—most notably, Alberto Santos-Dumont, a Brazilian who is widely celebrated in his native country as being the father of aviation—the Wright Brothers are generally regarded as the first to get humans off the ground.

The fascinating thing about the Wright brothers is that they were not the idealistic dreamers you might expect them to be. They were serious, studious, and determined to figure things out. It wasn't that they were obsessed with the dream of soaring high above the ground. They were mechanically-inclined brothers who owned a bicycle shop, and they couldn't forget the brief but exciting flight of a cheap toy airplane they'd received as children. They were intrigued by the engineering challenge.

Let's just say it—they were geeks. Good thing. Like geeks everywhere, they dug in, immersing themselves in their research. By following their hunch and testing the heck out of it, they found the key component that enabled them to create that first flying hunk of wood, fabric and wire capable of carrying a man and—key point here—landing without crashing.

The Wright brothers had the same access to records of tried and failed attempts at flight as all other would-be aviators of the time. They studied birds, they analyzed physics properties, and they built wind tunnels—just like everyone else. Sure, it was their dogged persistence that led them to success, but there was something else that really helped them nail it. They took one piece of the puzzle and worked relentlessly to decipher it.

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Instead of focusing on the force needed to lift the contraption, or the engine required to power it, they zeroed in on the concept of control. No sense having a great flight only to crash into the trees after a few moments of jubilation. It was the issue of control that captured their imagination and led to a design featuring both maneuverability and safety.

But as focused as they were on directing the movement of the flying machines, they failed to pay attention to the continued testing and refinement of their ideas. They got distracted by their efforts to control sales, and the research and development division was left flapping in the breeze. While the Wrights got caught up in patent struggles and contracts, adventurers around the world were improving on their original design and savvy businessmen were building airplanes, airports and flight schools. By 1912, Wilbur had died and Orville was losing interest in flying.

Meanwhile, Santos–Dumont continued his passion for being airborne. He is credited with launching the

first public flight as well as designing the first hydroplane. He zipped around Europe, flying to fashionable restaurants and parking his plane out front, right next to the tethered horses. Where the Wrights were methodical and diligent, Santos–Dumont was a flashy man about town known for his daring and his sense of style. He cut a dashing figure and inspired everyone from fashion designers to engineers. His friend, Louis Cartier, created the first wristwatch for him after Santos–Dumont expressed a need to keep track of time while busily flying his plane.

Santos–Dumont didn't give a rip about patents. Instead of spending his time and money on protecting his designs, he freely offered his ideas to anyone interested in copying and improving them. He engaged in the shareware idea: take this, go forth and prosper. We've seen this approach in software (Linux) and hybrid–electric cars (Hunter and Amory Lovins), and though it rarely leads to great wealth for the creators, it dramatically facilitates access and ingenuity.

After years of flying high, Santos–Dumont suffered from ill health and committed suicide in 1932. I guess neither engineering talent nor courageous individualism guarantees a happy ending. The Wrights ran out of passion, and Santos–Dumont lost his mojo. In their own ways, they simply burned out.

It's interesting to think about how we need both the plodding perseverance of the Wrights and the free–thinking generosity of Santos–Dumont in every project we undertake. The greatest invention in the world will never capture the excitement of the population without those who are fearless in their attempts to apply it. Those who create the buzz are admittedly standing on the shoulders of those who quietly developed the technology, but we must have both to bring out the eagerness of the early adopters and the cultural change that hinges upon the mainstream acceptance of any new idea.

Bill Gates, that geek extraordinaire, has said: "The Wright brothers created the single greatest cultural force since the invention of writing. The airplane became the first world wide web, bringing people of different languages, ideas and values together."

The next time you're slogging through security, struggling to put your bag in the overhead compartment, or grouching about the leg room, pause a moment to reflect on the enormity of human

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flight. Recognize it for the magnificent achievement that it is, and pay tribute to those who lived and died for its creation. Appreciate the risk taking required in the last century to get you that window seat.

Please remain seated until the aircraft comes to a complete stop, and whisper words of gratitude to the Wright brothers for their determination in discovering what it takes to make a safe landing.

You may now move freely about the cabin. Please refrain from complaining.

Thank you for flying for us, Wilbur and Orville.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse. Her work has inspired thinkers in over 70 countries around the world. This article appeared previously in the Friday Mind Massage, a free weekly ezine serving up a satisfying blend of clarity, comfort and comic relief. To subscribe, visit

Be Grateful for Gratitude

By Angie Dixon

In Twelve Step meetings, it's traditional to groan when someone says, "Let's have a gratitude meeting." People don't like to talk or think about what they're grateful for. It's not in our nature. We're more tuned to what's going wrong than what's going right. We can't help it. The cave men who sat around and admired how white the teeth on the saber toothed tiger were, didn't last long enough to reproduce. The ones who realized those teeth were a bad thing are our ancestors, so to speak.

But gratitude is important. Sometimes I just sit in my office, which I painted and decorated myself after moving into a wonderful new house, and I look at all the hangings on the wall and the things on my desk and the books on my shelves and I remember growing up in a house where I couldn't sleep in my bedroom in the winter because the north wind blew through the window and the room was uninhabitable. And I feel grateful.

Gratitude gets a bad rap as being some sort of "feel-good" thing, but it's not. Real, true, deep gratitude comes from the soul. It's not some pop-culture thing. It's not something you say to make yourself look good or to make someone else feel good.

Real gratitude is truly appreciating what you have, and feeling it's enough. Sure, there are other things you'd like to have. There always will be. But in gratitude, you realize that if you don't get the new car or the new house, it's enough.

We should be "grateful for gratitude" because it's one of the fastest ways to appreciate our lives and feel happier. This simple technique, practiced every day, can change your life.

Angie Dixon helps small business owners get their acts together. She is a personal development coach

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specializing in helping people integrate their home and work lives so they feel less stretched and more balanced. Get her FREE EBOOK on balance at

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