

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Here's to the Wright Brothers! Now I won't have to miss all of the wonderful centennial festivities and hoopla next week. Thanks to the Wright Brothers, I (along with John Travolta and thousands of locals and visitors) will be here to celebrate. I will have just returned from a conference in South Carolina. Were it not for those enterprising boys lifting off from the sands of the Outer Banks one hundred years ago, I'd still be driving home, stopping to rest and meander around "World of Hats" at *South of the Border*.

It is almost impossible to believe the progress humankind has made in aviation in one short century. We're able to jump on a plane for the coast without a second thought. We visit family, meet old friends, and head to Atlantic City for a weekend of Blackjack. As a country, we set our sights on the moon, and made it there and back. Beyond the enormous gift of manned flight that Orville and Wilbur bestowed, they have given us their story, one that continues to provide a lesson for all of us. It is a story of self-confidence, dreaming big, teamwork, and perseverance.

Evidentially, the brothers' curiosity and willingness to take risks were supported early in their lives. "We were lucky enough to grow up in an environment where there was always much encouragement to children to pursue intellectual interests; to investigate whatever aroused curiosity," Orville wrote of his childhood.

Curiosity -- supported or not! -- was just the beginning. The Wright Brothers learned that success often comes only after many failures. Their 1900 glider floated for only 300 yards (assisted by the ground crew who would run alongside the glider and hold down a wing if the machine turned upwards) before crashing into the sand. In spite of their apparent "failure" to launch a heavier-than-air craft, Wilbur wrote: "Although the hours and hours of practice we had hoped to obtain finally dwindled down to about two minutes, we were very much pleased with the general results of the trip, for setting out as we did, with almost revolutionary theories on many points, and an entirely untried form of machine, we considered it quite a point to be able to return without having our pet theories knocked in the head by the hard logic of experience, and our own brains dashed out in the bargain."

Not getting your brains dashed out remains important today, as does perseverance. In December 1903 the Wright Brothers headed back to the Outer Banks for its prevailing winds and sand (presumably for soft landings). The flight on December 17 -- piloted by Orville -- wasn't wholly impressive, not even long enough for a beverage and tiny bag of pretzels, as I had on my recent flight to Hilton Head. It lasted just 12 seconds, 120 feet. But it was the first controlled, sustained flight in a heavier-than-air craft, and even at 12 seconds, it qualified as one of the great moments of the twentieth century.

The brothers flew three more times that day, covering more distance as they got used to the way the large front rudder responded in flight. Orville's second flight was 200 feet, and Wilbur's before it nearly as long. But the final flight of the day carried Wilbur 852 feet in 59 seconds.

As we all celebrate 100 years of manned flight, I hope that I'll always remember the deeper lessons in the story of the Wright Brothers. Lessons about open-mindedness,

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the passion of curiosity, the power of persistence, pursuing inspiration even in the face of failure, and the importance of encouraging children to live their dreams and soar into the heavens

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