

Postcards  
from the  
Sky



Adventures of an Aviatrix

by

Erin Seidemann



SHE WRITES PRESS

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## Introduction |

*“I am not the same having seen the moon shine  
on the other side of the world.”*

—MARY ANNE RADMACHER HERSHEY

I AM AN UNLIKELY TRAVELER. I’VE BLOWN CHUNKS, puked, hurled, whatever you want to call it, in places all over the world. All too easily, I get carsick, airsick, seasick, and every other kind of sick there is. I also don’t like sitting in one place for very long, and there’s a mind-boggling amount of sitting involved in traveling—an act that seems contradictory to travel itself since travel is *supposed* to be about moving. Furthermore, I am a germophobe, a neat freak, and an obsessive-compulsive—all things that make me cringe at the idea of being stuck in a crowded airplane, bus, train, or boat.

All of which is to say: I should hate traveling. And yet there is something about it—something about seeing the world from a different perspective, the endless variety it has to offer—that keeps me crawling (often literally, given all my extra-special bouts of traveling sickness) back for more.

Case in point: While on a family vacation to Italy one year when I was a teenager, some unknown malady made me delirious to the point of hallucinating, and I apparently tried, in my raving state, to commit suicide in my sleep. Screaming “Dad ran

over my foot!" I ran to the open floor-to-ceiling window and attempted to leap out of our eighth-story hotel room. When my mother grabbed me by the waist of my pants—just in time, my family tells me—I woke with a jolt to find myself teetering at the edge of the opening, one foot planted on the floor, the other dangling in midair. But even as I hung there, one step shy of certain death, my first thought wasn't, "What the hell just happened?" No, as I looked down at the landscape before me, the faint sound of a woman singing opera carrying to me on the breeze, my first thought was, "Damn, this place is beautiful!"

And that's how it's always been for me. Even with travel's many drawbacks—insomnia-inducing time differences, bottled-water-only-even-to-brush-your-teeth-or-you'll-be-sorry locales, spirit-crushing airline delays, and even once having my hard suitcase sliced open by God knows what and then placed on the turnstile as if nothing had happened, my unmentionables spewing out of the jagged edge—I just can't get enough of it.

Given everything I've just told you, it's even harder to explain how, or why, an unlikely traveler like me eventually became a still-more-unlikely pilot. After her first airplane ride, Amelia Earhart said, "As soon as we left the ground, I knew I had to fly." I *wish* I'd had that kind of conviction. Far from it. As a kid, I always got airsick on even the most docile airliner, arriving at my destination sweaty, clammy, pale, dizzy, and lethargic. Who could have guessed that the teenager whose face went white and stomach went green every time she went airborne would go on to want to attempt flying herself—and then fall head over heels in love with it?

You might think that my hatred of commercial airline flights was what motivated me to take flying lessons, but it wasn't. I still have to take them for long trips, and while my disdain for them only grows as time goes on and fares go up,

delays become more frequent, and security searches become more personal, I don't think that alone could have gotten me in the pilot's seat. It wasn't hatred but love—love for seeing new things and meeting new people, by whatever means of transportation—that pushed me to become a pilot.



I TOOK MY FIRST SMALL AIRPLANE RIDE WHEN I WAS seventeen and had just graduated from high school. It was a seaplane outing from Key West to the Dry Tortugas that took us over half a dozen shipwrecks in crystal-clear water. It was an amazing sight that would not have been visible from any other mode of transport. And the little plane brought us, in just a few minutes, to an island that seemed to me like another world—an uninhabited idyll where we snorkeled in pool-colored water full of huge turtles and barracudas (the sight of which prompted screams from my mother to swim back to land), and I floated motionless, in awe of the beauty surrounding me. There was also something I noticed when the seaplane pilot came back to pick us up: he had tan lines on his feet from wearing flip-flops. At the sight of them, I wondered if I could become a seaplane pilot so I could have a job that allowed me to get tan lines like his.

When we landed back in Key West, my parents made a big deal about how, when we were coming in to land at the island, the pilot had been forced to perform a “go around” when a boat crossed his path just before we were to touch down. I was completely oblivious to that near-miss, as I had my face plastered to the plane's side window, making a greasy nose print on the glass, spellbound and wide-eyed by the view outside. All I knew was that I was sad the trip was over.

This small airplane flight showed me that even in a

relatively slow aircraft with limited fuel capacity, you can discover a new world, meet its strange inhabitants, and still be back home in time for dinner. Since becoming a pilot, I've found that flying has not only given me more opportunities to travel but also new experiences in the course of the journey itself. The old saying that the adventure is in the journey must have originated with small airplane pilots, because I've found that my voyages to and from a planned destination are often more adventurous and more memorable than the things I do once I get there, *if I get there*.

And sometimes, solely by virtue of having flown alone to a faraway place in a small plane, things happen differently than if I had arrived there with the masses in an airliner or on a cruise ship. When people hear that I flew my own plane in, they want to know more about me and why I chose to fly there by myself. And because of the extended conversations that ensue, I also learn more about them. Each encounter is more personal than if I had been sitting like a drone on a flight with three hundred other strangers traveling anonymously.

It is for all these reasons and countless more that this unlikely and occasionally still-queasy traveler decided to become a pilot. Through hurricanes, blizzards, volcanic ash clouds, earthquakes, floods, and every other catastrophe Mother Nature can dish out—with the exception, so far, of a tsunami—I have trudged on, hungry for that next adventure, for that experience that is anything but funny at the time, but which makes for extremely funny retelling once I'm safely home. I've had enough adventures born solely of surrendering to the wind to believe that a certain loss of control makes a trip that much more interesting. As Jimmy Dean, a member of the Merchant Marines and Air Force who later came to fame as a country singer, once said: "I can't change the wind, but I can adjust my sails."