

The night I met Lindbergh

Gould, John . The Christian Science Monitor ; Boston, Mass. [Boston, Mass]25 Sep 1987.

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ABSTRACT

At that period, when Colonel Lindbergh was the world's darling for his one-man flight across the Atlantic Ocean, I was the star reporter on our country weekly newspaper (the only reporter, too) and I had an excellent working arrangement with one of the night operators in our telephone exchange.

FULL TEXT

SO FAR, this has been a year of the notables for me. I am recalling various adventures I shared with L.L. Bean on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his Maine Hunting Shoe. Then it is the 35th anniversary of the ascension of Elizabeth II, although I am disappointed that Her Majesty failed to respond to my congratulations. Most of all, however, I prize my brief acquaintance with Charles A. Lindbergh, who flew from New York to Paris 60 years ago, and whose life I saved just about that time in a severe snowstorm. I was not overly impressed by the young man (he was six years older than I) at the time, and felt he was curt, brusque, and ungrateful. I didn't know who he was, and he didn't know me, either, but the circumstances were such that he should have been glad to see me. L.L. Bean, on the other hand, was always affable, even though much older than I. I believe Her Majesty was born the year they let me out of high school.

At that period, when Colonel Lindbergh was the world's darling for his one-man flight across the Atlantic Ocean, I was the star reporter on our country weekly newspaper (the only reporter, too) and I had an excellent working arrangement with one of the night operators in our telephone exchange. In those days the switchboards were manual. Whenever anything happened that the operator felt would want my attention, she would dingle my bedside telephone with three quick coups - ordinary calls were announced by a single ring. On this occasion, the operator in cahoots rang once, and I said hello. An airplane had come down in the David Douglass pasture, and that's all she knew. Mr. Douglass did have a flat pasture, so by pulling a few stumps he had a "flying field" if the cows were in the barn. About once a year a pioneer pilot would come in with an open-cockpit job and take people for a ride over the township at \$2 a flight. The pasture was never dignified in local parlance as any kind of an airport, and was called a pasture more often than a flying field, but it was on the maps as an emergency chance. The pasture was maybe four miles from the center of our town, and as any kind of an airplane was still a novelty in Lindbergh days, I hurried in my 1924 Model T Tudor sedan and arrived well before the police did. Those Model T's were "good in snow." And we were having a considerable snowstorm, even though it was Memorial Day weekend. I found the pilot, who was staking down his plane, and my flashlight revealed his features sufficiently so I recognized him, but Mr. Lindbergh was not expecting me and had no notion of my identity or my importance in the community. As I say, I thought him almost rude in his indifference to my presence, and it was only some time later that upon reflection I realized how humiliating the situation was to him. He was sweet on Anne, the Dwight Morrow girl, and was on his way to North Haven Island in Penobscot Bay, something like Lochinvar coming out of the west, or Porphyro with heart on fire for Madeline. The Morrrows had a summer place there, and anybody who has ever summered at North Haven Island will not be astonished by the vagaries of weather in a Maine May. So here was the hero of the day, the pilot without peer, the veteran of 33 hours and 29 minutes to Paris, put down ingloriously by a freak snowspit, lucky to find a rustic cow pasture, and now discovered in this ignominy by a journalist. This, I

think, explains his reluctance to be enthusiastic over me. Anne Morrow's father, eminent banker, lawyer, and diplomat, had an Amherst College classmate who lived in our town, Prof. Charles T. Burnett, and Colonel Lindbergh became a Burnett houseguest until things moderated and he could take off. The other night an anchorman on TV began his newscast by saying there had been no hearings today, "However ..." and he went on to opine as anchormen do in the absence of news. But back in Lindbergh days reporters were discouraged from such, and when there was no news we could just say, "No story." Nobody was hurt, nothing untoward had happened, and Lindbergh's single moment in my affairs was definitely a "no story." All we have is my infallible memory.

Credit: JOHN GOULD

Illustration

Caption: Illustration, no caption, TOM HUGHES ENGLISH ANNIVERSARIES; AIRCRAFT PILOTS; AIRPORTS; CHARLES A LINDBERGH; UNITED STATES; FRANCE; MASSACHUSETTS, USA; ATLANTIC OCEAN; BOSTON, MA, USA; PARIS, FRANCE; The Christian Science Monitor, September 25, 1987

DETAILS

Subject:	Snow
Business indexing term:	Corporation: L L Bean Inc
Publication title:	The Christian Science Monitor; Boston, Mass.
Publication year:	1987
Publication date:	Sep 25, 1987
Section:	NEWS
Publisher:	The Christian Science Publishing Society (d/b/a "The Christian Science Monitor"), trusteeship under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Place of publication:	Boston, Mass.
Country of publication:	United States, Boston, Mass.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	08827729
e-ISSN:	2166-3262
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News

ProQuest document ID: 1034964626

Document URL: <http://galesupport.com/mainegeo?pl=http://search.proquest.com/newspapers/night-i-met-lindbergh/docview/1034964626/se-2?accountid=17222>

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Last updated: 2020-11-19

Database: Global Newsstream

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