

Author of bestselling
Slipping the Surly Bonds: Great Quotations on Flight

DAVE ENGLISH



THE AIR UP THERE

More Great Quotations on Flight

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Air Up
There ≡*

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More Great Quotations On Flight

DAVE ENGLISH

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For my Mum, who taught me to read.
And my Dad, who showed me aeroplanes.

Introduction

In late July every year, the center of the flying universe is Oshkosh, Wisconsin. For one magical week the busiest airport in the world is Wittman Regional Airport, home of the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture. There are 12,000 airplanes, air shows every afternoon, acres of exhibitors, forums, speakers, and in the corner of the official gift store something appropriately called the "authors corner." Here aviation writers—both well-known and specialized interest—are available to talk about their books and sign copies. I have been fortunate enough to be a small part of this meetingplace thanks to the success of a book I compiled and edited called *Slipping the Surly Bonds: Great Quotations on Flight*.

One of the surprising questions I was most often asked was, "Will there be a second volume?" After several more years of collecting quotes, this book is the answer to that request. I think it is a good answer. This book contains first-hand lines from the many aviation events—good and bad—that have happened since the first book was published, loads of quotations that have been suggested by readers around the world, and some material that was withheld from the first volume due to space considerations. No one was guessing in 1997 that a book of aviation quotations would sell 30,000 copies or that those 200 pages would not be nearly enough to cover all the material.

If the tidbits here induce an appetite for reading about flying, you cannot go wrong by making a meal of books by Richard Bach, Ernest K. Gann, or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Other books that provide a longer sampling of aviation writing from several authors I can happily recommend include *The Greatest Flying Stories Ever Told: Nineteen Amazing Tales from the Sky* (Lamar Underwood, Lyons Press, 2002) and *Wild Blue: Stories of*


Survival from Air and Space (David Fisher and William Garvey, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999). There is also now a definitive book of flying poems, the wonderful *Because I Fly: A Collection of Aviation Poetry* (Helmut H. Reda, McGraw-Hill, 2001). For space enthusiasts the splendid book *Space Shuttle: The First 20 Years—The Astronauts' Experiences in Their Own Words* (Tony Reichhardt, DK Publishing, 2002) contains longer quotations from many astronauts.

This book would not be possible if it were not for the hundreds of e-mails I've received from flying fans around the world. Thank you all for the suggestions and additions to the collection. I would like especially to thank those people who have given me formal permission or personal blessing to reprint their original thoughts. The contact with so many aviation friends has been one of the super experiences I've had since posting a list of first-hand accounts of flight on the Internet many years ago. Excerpts from *Wind, Sand and Stars*, copyright 1939 by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and renewed 1967 by Lewis Galantieri, are reprinted by kind permission of Harcourt Brace & Company.

If you would like to contact me to suggest more quotations or for any other reason, please visit my website at www.skygod.com. Or maybe we will meet one July afternoon, watching airplanes at a small Wisconsin airport . . .

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Magic and Wonder of Flight

The air up there in the clouds is very pure and fine, bracing and delicious. And why shouldn't it be? — it is the same the angels breathe.

— MARK TWAIN
Roughing It, Chapter XXII
1886

Man must rise above the Earth — to the top of the atmosphere and beyond — for only thus will he fully understand the world in which he lives.

— SOCRATES

The desire to reach for the sky runs deep in our human psyche.

— CESAR PELLI
ARCHITECT OF THE TALLEST BUILDING IN THE WORLD,
THE TWIN PETRONAS TOWERS IN KUALA LUMPUR.
Quoted in *The New York Times* after the terrorist attack
on the World Trade Center
20 September 2001

My soul is in the sky.

— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act, Scene I

Those who are able to walk on stilts can roam the earth unstopped by mountains or rivers. They are able to imagine flying and therefore reach the isles of the immortals.

— P'AO-POU TSEU

You haven't seen a tree until you've seen its shadow from the sky.

— AMELIA EARHART

Don't let the fear of falling keep you from knowing the joy of flight.

— LANE WALLACE
Flying magazine
January 2001

I used to have dreams when I was a kid that I'd go running down the street and jump up in the air and go flying and just fly through the air all by myself. That's what weightlessness is like.

—ROBERT "HOOT" GIBSON
ASTRONAUT

I cannot describe the delight, the wonder and intoxication, of this free diagonal movement onward and upward, or onward and downward. . . . The birds have this sensation when they spread their wings and go tobogganing in curves and spirals through the sky.

—ALBERTO SANTOS-DUMONT
First dirigible flight

More than anything else the sensation is one of perfect peace mingled with an excitement that strains every nerve to the utmost, if you can conceive of such a combination.

—WILBUR WRIGHT

So let us raise a cheer . . . for the insatiable spirit of Man eager for all new things! What a tale could have been written by that far off man who first saw a tree trunk roll and made a wheel and cart and harnessed in his mare and cracked his whip and drove away to disappear beyond the hill! Or that first man who made a boat and raised a sail and disappeared hull down to unknown shores!

All this is misty in a distant past. The land and sea are long since named and mapped and parcelled out. Only the air and all beyond, the greatest mystery of all, was still unmastered and unknown when I was young. Now we have learned to shuffle about the house and even plan to visit the neighbours. A million starry mansions wink at us as if they knew our hopes and beckon us abroad. All that I shall not see. But at the start, the little lost beginning, I can say of one small part of it: "Here is a witness from my heart and hand and eye of how it was!

—CECIL LEWIS
new preface for *Sagittarius Rising* (1936)
1965

By day, or on a cloudless night, a pilot may drink the wine of the gods, but it has an earthly taste; he's a god of the earth, like one of the Grecian deities who lives on worldly mountains and descended for intercourse with men. But at night, over a stratus layer, all sense of the planet may disappear. You know that down below, beneath that heavenly blanket is the earth, factual and hard. But it's an intellectual knowledge; it's a knowledge tucked away in the mind; not a feeling that penetrates the body. And if at times you renounce experience and mind's heavy logic, it seems that the world has rushed along on its orbit, leaving you alone flying above a forgotten cloud bank, somewhere in the solitude of interstellar space.

—CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
The Spirit of St. Louis
 1961

These bright roofs, these steep towers, these jewel-lakes, these skeins of railroad line—all spoke to her and she answered. She was glad they were there. She belonged to them and they to her. . . . She had not lost it. She was touching it with her fingertips. This was flying: to go swiftly over the earth you loved, touching it lightly with your fingertips, holding the railroads lines in your hand to guide you, like a skein of wool in a spider-web game—like following Ariadne's thread through the Minotaur's maze, Where would it lead, where?

—ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH
The Steep Ascent
 1944

My father had been opposed to my flying from the first and had never flown himself. However, he had agreed to go up with me at the first opportunity, and one afternoon he climbed into the cockpit and we flew over the Redwood Falls together. From that day on I never heard a word against my flying and he never missed a chance to ride in the plane.

—CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
We
 1928

Sometimes I watch myself fly. For in the history of human flight it is not yet so very late; and a man may still wonder once in a while and ask: how is it that I, poor earth-habituated animal, can fly?

Any young boy can nowadays explain human flight—mechanistically: “. . . and to climb you shove the throttle all the way forward and pull back just a little on the stick. . . .” One might as well explain music by saying that the further over to the right you hit the piano the higher it will sound. The makings of a flight are not in the levers, wheels, and pedals but in the nervous system of the pilot: physical sensations, bits of textbook, deep-rooted instincts, burnt-child memories of trouble aloft, hangar talk.

—WOLFGANG LANGEWIESCHE
A Flyer's World
1943

I ask people who don't fly, “How can you not fly when you live in a time in history when you can fly?”

—WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE (WOLFGANG'S SON)
2001

“Just try and remember,” I said slowly, “that if God had intended men to fly He'd have given us wings. So all flying is flying in the face of nature. It's unnatural, wicked and stuffed with risks all the time. The secret to flying is learning to minimize the risks.”

“Or perhaps—the secret of life is to choose your risks?”

—GAVIN LYALL
Shooting Script
1966

I think a future flight should include a poet, a priest and a philosopher . . . we might get a much better idea of what we saw.

—MICHAEL COLLINS
9 November 1969

“You're on your own” was all he said that day long years ago
So long his name and face are lost in memory's afterglow;

Nor do I recollect of pride or joy or doubt or fright
Or other circumstance which marked that time for solo flight
The cryptic words alone endure : he said “you’re on your own”
And down through time I’ve found it so – the test’s to walk alone
Not that one choose to draw aside in churlish mein or vein,
From common lot of what life holds of pleasure, toil or pain
But that the call’s to rise and cruise alone with dreams unshared
Or plan alone for some far goal, for which none else has cared
Or fight alone for what you hold is worth a warrior’s strife

And ask no gain or fame or aught beyond the joy of life.
I owe a quenchless debt to him who bade me seize my fate
And hang it on the faith that I to it was adequate
For when he said “you’re on your own” and sauntered on away
I knew that here, in four short words, was youth’s first judgement day
Not wit to learn, not test of skill, not pride to satisfy,
But will to walk down life in faith that life is theirs who try.

— GILL ROBB WILSON
Flying magazine
January 1961

I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies,
In the freedom that fills all the space ‘twixt the marsh and the skies.

— SIDNEY LANIER
American poet
in the poem “The Marshes of Glynn”

We who fly are going to get to know that Great Flying Boss in the sky
better and better.

— COLONEL ROBERT L. SCOTT, JR., USAAF
God Is My Copilot
1943

Feathers shall raise men even as they do birds, toward heaven; that is by
letter written with their quills.

— LEONARDO DA VINCI

As you pass from sunlight into darkness and back again every hour and a half, you become startlingly aware how artificial are thousands of boundaries we've created to separate and define. And for the first time in your life you feel in your gut the precious unity of the Earth and all the living things it supports.

—RUSSELL SCHWEICKART
Returning from Apollo 9

Nowadays a businessman can go from his office straight to the airport, get into his airplane and fly six hundred or seven hundred miles without taking off his hat. He probably will not even mention this flight, which a bare twenty-five years ago would have meant wearing leather jacket and helmet and goggles and risking his neck every minute of the way.

No, he probably wouldn't mention it - except to another flier. Then they will talk for hours. They will re-create all the things seen and felt in that wonderful world of air: the sense of remoteness from the busy world below, the feeling of intense brotherhood formed with those who man the radio ranges and control towers and weather stations that bring the pilot home, the clouds and the colors, the surge of the wind on their wings.

They will speak of things that are spiritual and beautiful and of things that are practical and utilitarian; they will mix up angels and engines, sunsets and spark plugs, fraternity and frequencies in one all-encompassing comradeship of interests that makes for the best and most lasting kind of friendship any man can have.

—PERCY KNAUTH
Wind on My Wings
 1960

This was the crystalline moment Dan loved so well, the moment of transition between ground and air, when the laws of aerodynamics took over the job of physical support of the jet. He'd become a pilot for this very moment: the feel of mighty engines and the roar of the slipstream, all converging on the reality of sustained flight on an invisible highway of air. Flying was a thrill in even a single-engine airplane, but to levitate a leviathan—a metallic eggshell longer than a football field and heavier

than a house—was a magic he could never quite comprehend. Every liftoff was a philosophical wonder that left a broad smile on his face.

—JOHN J. NANCE
Blackout
 2000

And if flying, like a glass-bottomed bucket, can give you that vision, that seeing eye, which peers down on the still world below the choppy waves—it will always remain magic.

—ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH
North to the Orient
 1935

More varied than any landscape was the landscape in the sky, with islands of gold and silver, peninsulas of apricot and rose against a background of many shades of turquoise and azure.

—CECIL BEATON
 quoted in *Cecil Beaton*
 Hugo Vickers
regards an Egyptian sunset
 1985

The air is the most mysterious, the most exciting, the most challenging of all the elements. We leave the planet, we leave the sea, we leave the earth. The air is no longer of this world . . .

—DAVID BEATY

As we got further and further away, it [the Earth] diminished in size. Finally it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man.

—JAMES B. IRWIN
Apollo 15

To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves a riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold—brothers who know now they are truly brothers.

—ARCHIBALD MACLEISH