

Right now, May/87, it's exactly 60 years since a 25-year-old laughingly lifted me, age 9, to sign my name on the cowl of his plane, as I'd asked him to do. He'd just crossed the Atlantic alone--in the air! 33½ hours with only a sack lunch.

1. While he was justly celebrated, Lindberg was not in the modern sense a celebrity. Shy, & not long out of his teens, he'd gotten a job as a mailcarrier, eager to show that air-delivered mail had the potential for more than competing with rain-delivered mail. He'd monoplaned in all kinds of weather, & got the idea that he could take on the inevitable all kinds of weather anybody trying to fly the Atlantic would have to be able to fly through.

2. Lindy, like all "real American (white) boys" of his time, had a love-affair with technology. I was growing up in America's first great hinterland industrial area, the Buffalo-Niagara waterfront, which even as early as that year, 1927, was producing & using more electrical power than were most of the nations of the world & more than any other area of the USA. Buffalo, later bypassed by the air age, was a canal-and-railroad-wealthy metropolis of spectacular mansions & huge industrial plants & skyscrapers (Louis Sullivan's first all-steel-frame scraper, the Prudential Bldg., was where my father had worked for Ma Bell before going into hardwood lumber for Buffalo's furniture industry before becoming an insurance broker & judge)....Well, how is Buffalo industry related to Lindy's love affair with technology? There, in the Curtis-Wright Aircraft Corp. across Elmwood Av. from my father's Taylor & Crate Lumber Corp., the Aluminum-cylinder aircraft engine was invented --without which, because of the heaviness of the former steel cylinders, Lindy could not have dreamed the practical dream of crossing the Atlantic....Did he say "I" did it? Not on your tintype (metal photo, preceeding Geo. Eastman's development of the paper photo), as the saying then went. The title of his account of the adventure? WE. The Spirit of St. Louis & I, not I. Technology & I, not just I. The only half blessed marriage of man & machine.

3. Also only half blessed was & is the individualism Lindy imaged & embodied for our people. The hero had not Jos. Campbell's thousand faces but one face, Lindy's boyish but strong face. And there was a numinous quality to his heroism: stepping out of the Spirit of St. Louis, he was deus ex machina, a god stepping out of a machine not as in a Greek tragedy but as an American triumph. He saw himself as the human part of the machine, the nation saw the machine as the mechanical part of him. And identification! Every boy on his bike (before girls biked much), every man in his car (before women drove much), was in fantasy Lindy in a lesser vehicle. I was much older when "we" landed on the moon, so it's hard to judge, but I'm inclined to agree with the historians who say the landing on the moon was less ecstatic for our people than the landing in Paris.

4. Everything got named for Lindy. When my father as schoolboard president suggested naming the new school "Lindberg School," a suggestion adopted, the main objection was that not being dead yet, he might embarrass the board by some (as it was then called) tomfoolery --specifically, with at least one extra woman. (Our ersatz celebrities of today might get away with it, but not a 1927 genuine un-media-made hero, who had done something instead of having something done to him.)

5. Fantasy forms fiction forms fact. Buck Rogers, the world's first scifi hero (on the Rip Van Winkle theme), began two years before Lindy's flight, & made a complete collection of the strip's 1st 7 years.