

Ely Air Lines –

No Bull

by Mike Ely and Linda Street-Ely

There have been some unusual airline “passengers” over the years – racehorses, priceless artwork, even zoo animals – but one of aviation’s most famous flyers had four legs, a tail, and chewed her cud the entire trip.

Meet Nellie Jay (also known as “Elm Farm Ollie”). On February 18, 1930, the gentle Guernsey cow climbed aboard a Ford Tri-Motor in Bismarck, Missouri, bound for the International Aircraft Exposition in St. Louis. The flight was only 72 miles, but it earned Nellie Jay a permanent place in aviation history as the first cow to fly aboard a fixed-wing airplane.

Now, to be fair, she wasn’t at the controls. She didn’t even have a student pilot certificate. But she did have goggles, and that should count for something.

The Ford Tri-Motor was one of the largest and most modern airliners of its day. Nicknamed the “Tin Goose,” its corrugated metal skin and three roaring radial engines made it a familiar sight in early commercial aviation. If an airplane in 1930 was to carry a



full-grown dairy cow, this was probably the one to do it.

This wasn’t a random publicity gimmick. Nellie Jay was known for her calm temperament and exceptional milk production. And yes, that plays a part in her story. Because what she was doing on the plane was intended to help the fledgling aviation industry.

The stunt was organized by the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America, the trade association representing the U.S. aviation industry. Shell Petroleum was the principal sponsor. In 1930, aviation was still trying to earn the public’s trust. Flying was generally viewed as experimental; dangerous. Also consider that this was just

months after the stock market crash of 1929. They needed something that would convince people airplanes were safe, dependable, and useful. The spectacle should speak for itself. People should be talking about it for a long time, and fingers were crossed that they’d start thinking, if a dairy cow can fly comfortably, perhaps people and cargo can too.

Mission accomplished. Nellie Jay: the first cow ever milked in the air. Her milk was sealed into small containers attached to tiny parachutes and dropped over St. Louis for the crowd below. Imagine looking up and seeing milk descending from the sky. It must have made for an interesting breakfast conversation. Probably sent them running for a bowl, a spoon, and a box of cereal. Or Ovaltine.

After landing, Nellie Jay was given a new nickname: Sky Queen. Newspapers proclaimed she had “blazed a trail” for transporting livestock by air, although most cows today still travel with all four feet much closer to the ground, as surely, if

asked, they’d say is their personal preference.

The famous bovine eventually returned home to Sunnymead Farm, where she lived the rest of her life in considerably less adventurous fashion.

Aviation has always inspired people to ask, “Can we do this?” Sometimes the answer changes history. And sometimes...it just gives us a story about a flying cow.

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LCHC to feature VP history

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just 38 years old. The theater group continued to grow and entertain the community.

The construction of the current theater in the Humphreys Cultural Center was made possible by Kalita’s mother, Mrs. Geraldine Davis Humphreys. Before her death, Mrs. Humphreys left portions of her estate to Theater Under the Stars (TUTS) in Houston and the creation of the cultural center in Liberty. Today, the center houses both a library and The Valley Players theater, their permanent home. The cultural center was named in honor of Geraldine Davis Humphreys’ legacy and stands on the land once known as “Seven Pines,” the family home. Thanks to the efforts of Bursons, Mrs. Humphreys and resolute members of the community, the theater continues to be a cultural cornerstone in Liberty and the county, entertaining audiences and preserving a rich history of local performing arts.

The public is welcome to come hear more about The Valley Players, their formation and perseverance and what plans they have for the future.



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Syrila is a native of Louisiana and was raised in Abbeville, Louisiana, by her single parent mom, Clementine Thibaux. She graduated with her BSN from Southeastern Louisiana University. While in nursing school she realized her desire to provide specific care in women’s health. She was blessed to start her first year working as an RN on a Labor and Delivery floor. While working and living in Port Arthur, Texas, she had the opportunity and desire to return to school to become a Nurse Practitioner. After years of experience with women on labor and delivery it was a natural segue to specializing as a Women’s Health Nurse Practitioner. She received her master’s degree from University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston. She and her husband, Dean, live in Dayton and work in Liberty. They have sent three grown children out into the world.

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1201 NORTH TRAVIS STREET - LIBERTY

Next SHC book club meeting July 28

LIBERTY - Tuesday evening, July 28, from 6-7 p.m., the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center (SHC) book club will discuss the biographical novel *My Dear Hamilton* by Stephanie Dary and Laura Kamoie. The selection coincides with the Center’s 250th anniversary this year, as the story focuses on Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, the wife of founding father Alexander Hamilton. The authors used letters and other archival sources to research Eliza’s life and create a dramatic narrative based on true events.

Featuring fictional works with a connection to the world of museums, archives and libraries, the Sam Houston Center book club is open to all with meetings on the fourth Tuesday

in July and October. The Mid-night Library by Matt Haig will be featured October 27.

Home to extensive archival holdings documenting Southeast Texas, a library collection, and a museum, the Sam Houston Center offers an ideal setting for discussions about novels tied to these fields. Each meeting will be led by SHC staff.

Interested participants may obtain a copy of SHC book club titles through their local library or favorite bookstore to prepare for the conversation. For more information, contact SHC staff at (936) 336-8821 or via email at SamHoustonCenter@tsl.texas.gov.

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