

Amy M. Kleppner

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15 April 2008

Dear Vivian,

Once again, thank you for sending me information about your performances of *Amelia, My Courageous Sister*. It is wonderful to know that you are keeping AE's memory alive.

We are just back from a trip to New Zealand with a detour to San Diego for the christening of USNS *Amelia Earhart*, which was a most exciting event.

Thanks again for the update.

Amy

**Note: Amy M. Kleppner is Amelia Earhart's niece. This letter, and the review that follows beginning on the next page, stand as testimony to Vivian Farrell's eminence as a contributor to the preservation of the memory of one of America's most prominent woman aviators, Amelia Earhart.**



### Vivian Farrell Portrays Amelia Earhart

Hanging at-the-ready on a coat tree are the accoutrements Amelia Earhart would grab before each flying expedition. Her vintage leather flight jacket and aviator's helmet and goggles appear well worn. Her signature white silk scarf is also slung on a hook. It seems that time has stood still and Amelia Earhart herself might cross the threshold. In a strange twist of reality, that is exactly what happens at every performance of *Amelia Earhart, Her Story*, except that when Amelia Earhart dons her flying attire, it is Vivian Farrell's portrayal.

Amelia Earhart continues to be remembered as a celebrity, a hero, and a legend. Her image as a female aviator is identifiable to even the most recent generations. Her life and death were the stuff of headlines. Her disappearance somewhere over the Pacific Ocean on her July 1937 round-the-world flight has continued to be a newsworthy mystery. In her performance, Vivian Farrell incorporates the answer she obtained from her personal interview with Amelia's younger sister Muriel, "It was not a mystery. It was history. It was a tragedy of the sea. A tragedy of the sea."

That interview with Muriel Earhart Morrissey was part of Vivian Farrell's four years of extensive original research and writing for this one-woman theatrical production in which she, as the author, producer, director, and actress, magically transforms herself from one sister to the other. The show opens and closes with 94-year-old Muriel sharing recollections of life with Amelia. The heart of the play is Vivian's portrayal of a vibrant and youthful Amelia, talking directly to the audience. With Muriel Earhart Morrissey's permission, Vivian's play *Amelia, My Courageous Sister* debuted in 1994, replicating the original title of the biography that Muriel co-authored with aviation historian, Carol Osborne.

Vivian Farrell also corresponded with Muriel's daughter Amy M. Kleppner. Amy, who referred to her Aunt Amelia as AE, approved of the direction of Vivian Farrell's script, and wrote, "It is wonderful that AE's story will live on through performances such as yours and that [audiences] will have a chance to hear an accurate version of the legend." The 70th anniversary of Amelia Earhart's disappearance was in 2007. Her image remains iconic of an era, a courageous feminist depiction, captured forever by evolving photography at that juncture in history. However, it was not mere happenstance. Instead, George P. Putnam, a publisher who was a decade older than she, carefully orchestrated her image starting in 1928, and married her less than three years later. A telling detail was in an article

"Amelia Earhart Weds G.P. Putnam," printed in the *New York Times*, "Miss Earhart asked to have it known that she will retain her own name for business and writing purposes."

In 1921, seven years prior to the George Putnam era, Amelia Earhart was a young woman in her early twenties. She took her first flying lesson and received a pilot's certificate by the end of that year. In 1928 she was the first woman to fly solo across the continent and back. The same year, a trans-Atlantic flight with a woman passenger was in the works, and George Putnam selected Amelia Earhart. He had been looking for "the right sort of girl," a pilot who was well educated and physically attractive. He ambiguously publicized the event as the first woman to cross the Atlantic. This was a year after Charles Lindbergh's 1927 flight, and Putnam nicknamed her "Lady Lindy." Her aviation notoriety had begun, but she did not consider herself a heroine since she hadn't piloted the plane. In fact, in her book *20 Hrs. 40 Min.* Amelia Earhart wrote that she had felt like a sack of potatoes! She made up for it when, five years to the day after Lindy's flight, she became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

A licensed pilot herself, Vivian Farrell writes and performs from first-hand knowledge of the kinds of challenges that Amelia faced as an aviator. While growing up, Vivian had never dreamt of becoming a pilot, but when her then-husband decided to take flying lessons, she opted to join him in the endeavor. Her first flying lesson was at Deer Park Aviation Center on Long Island, NY. Much to her surprise, she found it very exciting and enjoyable. Vivian became enamored of the thing that she thought she was afraid of: fear of heights. Instead, she discovered her misplaced anxiety was actually fear of falling, but she felt secure when ensconced in her cocoon of a cockpit. Soon, with a group of families, Vivian became a part owner of a Piper J3. Her log pinpoints her first solo and, two-and-a-half years later, her first cross-country solo. "I never intended to get more than a solo pilot's license, but I wanted to finish the project," she admitted. She also relayed an anecdote about her practical exam when she suddenly became cold, nervous, and nauseous. Her instructor took over the controls while she made use of the notorious whoopee bag. They alit briefly at Islip MacArthur Airport for a cup of tea, after which Vivian continued without further incident, and passed her test.

Vivian Farrell's full-time profession was educator, writer, and professional actor. She had begun writing radio and television programs in her college years at Syracuse University. While pursuing her teaching career, she also added a Masters degree in Educational Theatre from New York University. Simultaneously, in her acting career, she performed in films, television commercials, and soap operas. She also participated in children's theater, dinner theater, summer stock, and touring companies. Finally, in 1977, Vivian Farrell found a way to combine her many loves and talents in her one-woman theatrical productions.

She currently showcases three productions. The *Musical Storyteller* is an introduction to classical music through storytelling, inspired by and set to the music of familiar classic pieces of some great composers, such as Beethoven, Chopin, and Debussy. In another show, *Robert's Tall Friend: A Story of the Fire Island Lighthouse*, Vivian Farrell acts out the children's book she wrote to save the inactive Fire Island Lighthouse, which was in disrepair and in danger of demolition. Her tale is based on the Rocky Norris family when they were actually stationed there. In her now-famous book, Vivian anthropomorphized the Fire Island Lighthouse so that this beacon could share her nautical history and her current plight with their son Robert.

Nevertheless, it is Vivian Farrell's Amelia Earhart... play that is most appreciated by adults. Since Vivian is the author of everything she performs, she has the freedom to gear her productions to the ages of her audiences and adapts it for middle and high school audiences. Since the 1994 debut of *Amelia Earhart, Her Story*, Vivian has given hundreds of performances in universities, schools, libraries, and theaters across the northeast, from Ohio to Connecticut, and from New Jersey to Long Island and the five boroughs of New York City, including Lincoln Center and Carnegie Recital Hall. She has appeared on CBS Television's *PM Magazine*, and other television and radio talk shows. She is currently a member of Actors Equity Association, Screen Actors Guild, and American Federation of Radio and TV Artists. Her website is [www.vivianfarrell.com](http://www.vivianfarrell.com). She can be reached at [vivianfarrell@optonline.net](mailto:vivianfarrell@optonline.net) or (631) 226-2724.

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