

X-Prize AMA: My name is Erik Lindbergh, grandson to famous aviator Charles Lindbergh. 75 years later, I retraced my Grandfather's historic journey by solo flying a single-engine plane across the Atlantic. AMA!

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April 17, 2023

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#### CORRESPONDENCE:

##### DATE RECEIVED:

September 20, 2016

##### DOI:

10.15200/winn.147428.85846

##### ARCHIVED:

September 19, 2016

##### CITATION:

Erik\_Lindbergh , r/Science , X-Prize AMA: My name is Erik Lindbergh, grandson to famous aviator Charles Lindbergh. 75 years later, I retraced my Grandfather's historic journey by solo flying a single-engine plane across the Atlantic. AMA!, *The Winnower* 3:e147428.85846 , 2016 , DOI: [10.15200/winn.147428.85846](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.147428.85846)

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I'm going to ask you three questions based on my 15 seconds of internet knowledge, forgive me if they are silly.

1. Was your father upset you chose the sky over exploring the ocean?
2. Can you talk about your straw house? How long did it take to design and build?
3. Do you remember anything about your grandfather or do you have any fun stories you would care to share?

[flammablepenguins](#)

1. No, I love the sea also.
2. My strawbale house took about the same to design and build as a normal house, but with a few hiccups that were different, but similar to any custom design build process. The house is incredibly strong, quiet, healthy, and has an old world feel.
3. My Grandfather incentivized me to learn how to wiggle my ears – seriously! When he would visit we would always bug him to show us how he could wiggle his ears without touching them. Finally one day he said “I’ll give you 50 cents if you can learn how to wiggle your ears” so I spent the next six months twitching all my various facial muscles. When he came to visit again I couldn’t wait to show him, and not only could I wiggle my ears, I could raise one eyebrow and flare my nostrils – and do them all at once! He was sufficiently impressed and gave me a buck! It wasn’t till later that I realized he offered me a prize and got all those extra behaviors in addition to the one he incentivized. Just like the Orteig Prize and the XPRIZE... Prizes are powerful

My questions come from a few "holy shitballs" moments I had while ready Bill Bryson's "One Summer: America 1927"

Have you met any of Charles Lindbergh's extensive European family?

When did you learn and what were you told about the kid napping/murder of Charles Lindbergh Jr.?

Do you think the way some people view commercial space flight as frivolous mirrors what people must of thought when Charles Lindbergh made the solo flight?

Apologies in advance if these questions offend.

[janeyjian](#)

I have not met any of CAL's (my) European family members – but I understand they are wonderful and look forward to meeting them. Kind of a weird thing to learn about – but life is weird.

I love that we modeled the xprize after the orteig prize and shifted the worlds perspective on spaceflight – just like CAL changed the worlds perspective on aviation. I like to say: Before Grandfather flew across the atlantic people who flew in airplanes were called daredevils and barnstormers and flyin' fools – after he flew across the atlantic people who flew in airplanes were called pilots and passengers! Space is a tough challenge, so it has taken longer to commercialize, but we achieved our goal and soon the cost of buying a ticket and flying into space will become affordable to more and more people. All forms of transportation are expensive at first...

How does your family feel about Charles Lindbergh's nazi ties, his views on race and eugenics?

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All I can tell you is to read his book autobiography of values and his wartime journals to gain insight into the man and his motivations during ww2. Very interesting history but not somewhere i choose to spend my life. I prefer to look forward and try to focus on creating the breakthroughs to the grand challenges facing the planet. My guess is that his views on eugenics came from growing up on a farm and he applied it to humans. Again, this is not a topic that I care to focus my life energy on...

Would you be willing to comment on your grandfather's support of Adolf Hitler and anti-Semitic writings? He was a hero to me until I read about those aspects of his character.

[zekeb](#)

I was upset to learn about CAL's anti-semitic comments especially prior to ww2. Listening to A. Scott Berg (who is Jewish and wrote the Pulitzer prize winning biography Lindbergh) thoughtfully answer this question helped me to understand that his reputation for anti-semitism was much worse than his actual bias. Nice to have some comfort from a respected jewish researcher that CAL wasn't totally evil... When I researched deeper and understood the politics, the context of that time period and his disagreement(s) with President Roosevelt and his anti-war stance I began understand better where he was coming from. But the bottom line is that it sucks, because I am affected by it today – sometimes with a vitriol that makes me want to raise up a mirror and reply to people that the anger and bias that they are voicing to me is the same sort of thing that they are purportedly railing against. \*ironic isn't it? The good thing is that I am not him and I get to choose how to live my life, and I choose to focus on creating positive change on the planet. Somehow, against all odds we jump-started the private spaceflight industry – that is cool and incredibly empowering. Every day I ask myself: how do we do that again?

That is great! Did you meet your grandfather? What kind of a person was he?

[portuga](#)

I was nine when my grandfather died. I thought he was a pretty interesting and fun guy. I think because he felt more comfortable with kids than with adults. Many adults have an agenda or adulation and he hated the hero worship thing. Kids are authentic. My Grandfather incentivized me to learn how to wiggle my ears – seriously! When he would visit we would always bug him to show us how he could wiggle his ears without touching them. Finally one day he said “I’ll give you 50 cents if you can learn how to wiggle your ears” so I spent the next six months twitching all my various facial muscles. When he came to visit again I couldn’t wait to show him, and not only could I wiggle my ears, I could raise one eyebrow and flare my nostrils – and do them all at once! He was sufficiently impressed and gave me a buck! It wasn’t till later that I realized he offered me a prize and got all those extra behaviors in addition to the one he incentivized. Just like the Orteig Prize and the XPRIZE... Prizes are powerful

Were you as scared as you suspect your grandfather was despite the technology advancements ? If not, what emotions and thought patterns did you have such as deeply stressed

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On my NYP flight in 2002, I was more intimidated by the ramifications of putting myself out into the public eye than the mission of flying solo from NY to Paris. With a dangerous mission you can use risk management to achieve a high level of success. That approach worked - I survived the flight and it allowed me to free myself from many of the burdens of my legacy at the same time.

Also, what kind of plane did you have any fun stories you would care to share?

[h0ckey\\_kid11](#)

I used a Lancair Columbia 300 for my flight across the Atlantic. One of my favorite moments was talking to the airliners up above and asking them if they had Peter Diamandis aboard - Julian Guthrie writes about it in her book "How to Make a Spaceship"

Can you tell us more about your space project? It sounds awesome!

(And XPRIZE is pretty awesome too; how have you been involved with them? What are your favorite XPRIZE projects?)

[azerspace](#)

I am gestating a new business called Escape From Gravity - its not so much a space project as much as it is about escaping from the gravity of life - with my life being a prime example. Being free from the things that hold you down. I have a basic website up now, but I am psyched by the potential and have several people now helping to bring it to reality. Woohoo!

Have you ever flown a gyrocopter ?

[outrageousbog](#)

No I havent flown a gyrocopter, but I have always been intrigued by them. I love helicopters and the freedom and utility of them. On the downside helicopters are too complex. What do they say? Thousands of moving parts flying in loose formation? They also burn huge quantities of fuel and make disastrous amounts of noise. This is one of the reasons I am so excited about electric propulsion and started Powering Imagination LLC to help accelerate the development of the electric aircraft industry.

Its not an easy task, but if we could launch the private spaceflight industry why cant we jump start the clean, quiet electric aircraft industry?

Hey thanks for doing this AMA. I work on SOFIA and have seen your picture from the the re-christening. If you ever want to stop by for a look see PM me.

As an aviator, what do you think is preventing us from moving the black box to the cloud. In the last few years we have lost 3 commercial flights with no real result from investigation and no recovery of the black box. Why not have aircraft constantly upload to eh cloud? Records could be erased upon safe landing to save space.

[orcrist747](#)

Right on - The Stratospheric Observatory For Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) is amazing! I would love to see it again... Two reasons for not having black box info on the cloud: Money and privacy. But, with the crashes you mention I think it is coming. The money saved by not installing equipment and systems to do this is negated by the costs of trying to find and understand what happened to these aircraft. Keep up the great work!

What was the most difficult thing for you on that flight? How did the plane you flew compare to his plane?

[paper\\_lover](#)

The most dangerous parts of my flight across the Atlantic were the training flights across the country and back and forth to the Lancair factory. Icing, turbulence, fatigue, weather and mechanical issues... But it really prepared me for the flight from NY to Paris! The Lancair is a dream to fly compared to the Spirit of St. Louis (I've flown the EAA replica).

Have you read [The Plot Against America](#)?

[jones77](#)

No - I have been told that this "Historical Fiction" perpetuates distortion, and negativity. I like to focus on creating solutions.

Eric, your (edit: great) grandfather was a hero and one of the last of the true American patriots. His comments at the time of the passing of the 1913 US Federal Reserve Act were among the most important statements ever read before Congress.

Just had to seize the opportunity to say that to you. Cheers.

[catsfive](#)

Ha! I have an amazing and complex family history. I believe you are referring to my Great Grandfather who spoke out about the creation of the Federal Reserve. I have heard about the book he wrote on the subject, but have never seen or read it. Need to put it on my list...