



# Walking on Air: The Aerial Adventures of Phoebe Omlie (Willie Morris Books in Memoir and Biography)

*Janann Sherman*

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Aviation pioneer Phoebe Fairgrave Omlie (1902-1975) was once one of the most famous women in America. In the 1930s, her words and photographs were splashed across the front pages of newspapers across the nation. The press labeled her "second only to Amelia Earhart among America's women pilots," and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt named her among the "eleven women whose achievements make it safe to say that the world is progressing."

Omlie began her career in the early 1920s when aviation was unregulated and open to those daring enough to take it on, male or female. She earned the first commercial pilot's license issued to a woman and became a successful air racer. During the New Deal, she became the first woman to hold an executive position in federal aeronautics.

In *Walking on Air*, author Janann Sherman presents a thorough and entertaining biography of Omlie. In 1920, the Des Moines, Iowa, native bought herself a Curtiss JN-4D airplane and began learning how to fly and perform stunts with her future husband, pilot Vernon Omlie. She danced the Charleston on the top wing, hung by her teeth below the plane, and performed parachute jumps in the Phoebe Fairgrave Flying Circus.

Using interviews, contemporary newspaper articles, archived radio transcripts, and other archival materials, Sherman creates a complex portrait of a daring aviator struggling for recognition in the early days of flight and a detailed examination of how American flying changed over the twentieth century.

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