

State's famous aviatrix brought to life at humanities talk

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Evelyn Sharp biographer, others share memories.

Thelma Peterson of Gothenburg remembers “Sharpie,” a famous Nebraska woman pilot who barnstormed the state and pioneered aviation for women, especially during World War II.

So does Bev Soller whose cousin flew with Evelyn Sharp in an open-air cockpit during the summer of 1939.

Peterson rode with Sharpie, as she preferred to be called, when Peterson was 17 and the aviatrix gave 15-minute rides for \$1 in Cozad during a summer festival.

“What a hero she was to me because she could fly,” Peterson said.

Sharpie was brought back to life Monday at Gothenburg Public Library when Diane Bartels, author of *Sharpie: The Life Story of Evelyn Sharp* talked about Nebraska’s “queen of the air.”

Her speech was sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council and the Gothenburg Library Foundation.

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"She was truly remarkable," said Bartels, about Sharpie who became one of the first women to ferry U.S. Army Air Force fighters during World War II.



At one time, Sharpie was also the nation's youngest licensed pilot—soloing at age 16.

Born in Melstone, MT, in 1919, Evelyn Sharp was adopted at age 2 and later moved with her mother and father to Nebraska. They ended up in Ord.

Bartels, who is also a pilot, said Sharpie started to fly at age 15 when a flight instructor from Broken Bow began giving her lessons.

"John and Mary Sharp ran a boarding house and restaurant where Jack Jefford (the instructor) stayed," she said. "He was not making enough money to pay room and board so John suggested he give his daughter free flying lessons."

A natural athlete, who lettered in sports four years at Ord High, Sharpie also taught 250 children and adults how to swim in the North Loup River.

In January of 1936, while accumulating flying hours, Sharpie would land Jefford's Aeronca C-3 on the frozen river.

"When Evelyn first started to fly reporters started writing stories about her because she was female," Bartels said. "Her best boyfriend was her dog Scottie who flew with her."

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City's history with other historians that will be held at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, March 5, at the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library. The talk is part of the "Women in Aviation" series, which is a collaboration between the University of Utah and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).