

Determined to Succeed

Orville and Wilbur Wright: Pioneers in Flight

Orville and Wilbur Wright were good students and received good grades, but teachers reported that they “could not sit for very long” and paid “poor attention”. Even in class, the Wright Brothers were constantly at work on their inventions.

At home, their parents encouraged discovery. Susan Wright, the daughter of a carriage maker, gave her sons mechanical advice. Their father, a writer and minister, gave them a toy helicopter powered by a rubber band. From this, the boys decided they would build a real airplane, the first airplane, and they would do it together.

Historians claim that the boys’ “explosive” behavior may have been the result of attention deficit or learning difference. And like many children who sometimes struggle in school, Wilbur and Orville had rare and astonishing gifts. Theirs was the ability to visualize a mechanical device, take it apart and put it together, and transfer working parts from other machines – without a single tool.

When the race for flight was on, Wilbur and Orville, without a high school or college diploma, were up against some of the most well-educated, well-financed engineers in the world. When they were not selling bicycles in their shop, the Wright brothers were studying birds and building airplanes.

They failed three times at Kitty Hawk before they succeeded in December 1903. Since then, aircraft have crossed the Atlantic, circled the earth, and lifted astronauts into space. We have a century of flight, ushered in by Orville and Wilbur Wright, the ordinary boys with extraordinary determination to fly.

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