

In Her Own Wright

Part 1: Introducing the Wright Sister

[HARRY HASKELL:] This is the story of a woman who was as remarkable in her way as her brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, were in theirs. Her name was Katharine Wright--but don't be surprised if it doesn't ring a bell. Until a few years ago, most biographers and historians treated her as a minor character in the Wright Brothers saga, the loyal, self-sacrificing sister who kept the home fires burning while the menfolk were out inventing the airplane. But dig a little deeper and a very different picture emerges. The real Katharine Wright played second fiddle to no one. She embodied, in a very public and prominent way, the worldly, independent, and self-fulfilled New Woman who turned traditional gender roles on their heads at the turn of the twentieth century.

I'm Harry Haskell, Katharine's step-grandson, and in *In Her Own Wright* we're shining a light on the extraordinary woman who has long stood in the shadow of the world-renowned fathers of powered flight. Part 1: Introducing the Wright Sister.

[ACTOR:] I've always lived with men and don't look on them as such a wonderful "treat"! But you know perfectly well how the world has always been managed by men to promote that very idea. Women have always had to get what they wanted by wheedling or scheming. It makes women so dependent on the opinion of men in a way that men wouldn't tolerate for one second if things were reversed. Are we always discussing what kind of men women like, whether we like their smoking or this or that? No. But I am sick of hearing forever that women must do this or mustn't do that or the men won't like them. There isn't any sense in it and it wouldn't be as it is except that the men do have the final control of most things, because *they handle the money*, and if women want the things money can buy, and they do, they must please the men or fool the men into giving them what they want. It's a game that *I despise*. [Katharine Wright (KW) to Henry J. Haskell (HJH), 11.6.24]

[HH:] The middle-aged firebrand who launched that salvo in 1924, in a letter to her future husband—my grandfather--was a veteran of the gender wars. Don't get me wrong. Despite her fondness for up-to-date slang like "nuff said," "go-getter," and "pretty hot stuff," Katharine Wright was no Jazz Age flapper. But growing up in an all-male household had opened her eyes to the ways of the world. The word "feminist" was just entering the lexicon when Katharine reached adulthood, and I doubt she would have applied it to herself. Still, she had a lot in common with the first-wave feminists, women who struggled to balance the strictures of Victorian domesticity against the laxer mores of the modern era and their own pent-up desire for what Virginia Woolf called "a room of one's own." Cindy Wilkey is a historian of the women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[CINDY WILKEY:] Katharine came of age in an exciting period when new ideas were being put forth, but a lot of really, really traditional ideas were still very deeply embedded, and gender ideology was one in particular. That notion of separate spheres, that there was an appropriate role for women and men and their spheres simply did not cross, and if women stepped outside their sphere--and that's literally language they would have used at the time, "that's outside your sphere"—women would have paid a price in a variety of ways for stepping outside that sphere.

So women got very clever and tried to argue things like, well, we're not stepping outside our sphere. We're, we're continuing to nurture and take care, but we're just stretching our sphere. Notions like civic housekeeping or extended housekeeping that women argued was still within the confines of what society expected women to do. And Katharine is a really good example of all of that. She very much cared for her family. She took great pleasure in caring for her family. But it also was not lost on her that it was expected of her to do that. Whereas when Wilbur cared for the family, people were concerned and upset--this isn't right for a man to be doing these things--but making those types of sacrifices of self for a woman was not even to be commented upon. It was expected. And sometimes she resented things like that.

[HH:] Katharine's notion of what Cindy referred to as the "woman's sphere" was conditioned by her place in the Wright household. Family was the center of her universe: everything—and I mean everything--revolved around it. The relationships she formed while growing up in Dayton, Ohio, in the late 1800s, and the experiences she had in her formative years, remained the yardsticks by which she measured the world for the rest of her life. She sometimes chafed at her domestic obligations, grumbling that [ACTOR:] "the more you do for a family the more they take as a matter of course." [HH:] But her devotion to her older brothers never wavered, even after she accompanied Will and Orv on an expedition to Europe in 1909 and became an international celebrity in her own right. Over the years, the Wright Sister was mostly forgotten, awaiting rediscovery by a generation more attuned to women's history. Andrea Fellows Fineberg, the librettist of a new opera about Katharine, almost literally stumbled across her several years ago on a trip to the Midwest from her home in New Mexico.

[ANDREA FELLOWS FINEBERG:] I was in Dayton, Ohio, for a production of *The Magic Flute*, for which I'd written the dialogue, and among the things that people said to do while I was waiting for the premiere was to go to the Woodland Cemetery and to the grave sites of Orville and Wilbur Wright. It's a historic place, a living cemetery, so it's a very interesting place--and I came up the hill and looked down and saw Orville, Wilbur, and Katharine between them. I was with Kathleen Clawson, who was the stage director, and we looked at each other and said, who's Katharine Wright? And from that point it became a bit of a rabbit hole for me, wanting to know more about Katharine Wright. And the more I knew about her, the more I wanted to know, and the more I wanted other people to know about her.

[HH:] Lois Walker is a retired historian with the US Air Force. Her interest in Katharine was piqued while she was researching the history of Dayton's Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in the 1980s.

[LOIS WALKER:] Katharine first caught my eye when I was examining photographs of the Wright Brothers in Europe. And there she was standing with the crowned heads of Europe, the elite of European society, the only woman at the banquet given by the Royal Aeronautical Society in London, going up in the airplane herself with Wilbur on three different occasions, going up in a hot-air balloon, going up in the dirigible, things that few women would have imagined doing. It occurred to me that her brothers were pretty thoroughly focused on their work. They were doing what they needed to do to give their flying demonstrations to the French, to the British, to the Germans. But Katharine was not only acting as their social secretary, she was looking at the big picture. She was smart. She was very observant. Her brothers were busy

making history, and meanwhile she's watching the impact that these events have on the observers that are there. I'm sure she's imagining the effect that this is going to have on the rulers and the governments of those countries, interactions between countries. She knew a lot about European history, I'm sure. So these were very momentous happenings, and Katharine's just getting swept right along with all of it. So I asked myself, who is this diminutive woman in these big hats and with so much on her shoulders?

[HH:] For each of these modern-day women, the Wright Sister has been a source of ongoing inspiration and curiosity. My own connection to Katharine's story has a personal aspect as well: she married my grandfather in 1926, not long after his first wife died. Along with my own impressions, this three-part podcast include the voices of other scholars, historians, family members, and interpreters, who offer their own illuminating perspectives on Katharine and her times. So let's begin at the beginning: who was Katharine Wright?

Well, she was born in 1874, the youngest of five surviving Wright siblings. They grew up in a modest wood-frame house on Dayton's West Side, a bustling, densely packed neighborhood across the Miami River from downtown. The two eldest Wright brothers, Reuchlin and Lorin, married while Katharine was in her teens and left her at home with Wilbur and Orville. Milton Wright, the patriarch of the clan, was an affectionate but domineering father, a bishop in the Church of the United Brethren who spent much of his time traveling on church business. When his beloved wife Susan died in 1889, after a long bout with tuberculosis, Katharine was thrust into the hugely demanding role of mother, sister, and surrogate spouse all rolled into one spunky fifteen-year-old package.

[AMANDA WRIGHT LANE:] My name is Amanda Wright Lane, and I am a great-grandniece of Orville, Wilbur, and Katharine Wright. I believe the family was everything to Katharine and I think she was the heartbeat of the family. I think growing up with four older brothers, Katharine was the spark, and she definitely loved having family around her. She loved preparing for family occasions, and she always was interested in having the nieces and nephews around. She and her brothers would play some pranks on those children. I know she so felt the loss when her mother died. It was a particularly hard time for her. And when I think about that for all those kids that were at home at the time Susan was dying--that would have been Orville, Wilbur, and Aunt Katharine--Susan was slowly, and I do mean slowly, succumbing to tuberculosis. For seven years she was weakened, but then she spent five years bedridden and died when Katharine was 15. So really this serious disease struck her when Katharine was just a little thing. And I think it made the whole family really pull together and care about each other and take on tasks and work together to hold the family together, to make both their mother and father proud of them during this time.

I know that for a while, Uncle Will had trouble deciding. He was in the middle of these five siblings, and there were days when he would run off with his two older brothers, and there were days when he was with the younger two, with Orville and Katharine. But Susan's illness solidified their relationships even more. Katharine had such a spirit of fun and was so vivacious, and I think she was very happy to take on the role of managing some of the comings and goings of all the men in her family. Her older brothers were a bit worried about her. And the Bishop particularly was concerned about her, as the youngest and a young woman in the family. He was

very adamant about her going to Oberlin, and I think that was for a couple of reasons: to allow her to broaden her horizons, which was something he always talked about with many of the nieces and nephews, as well as his own children; but he was [also] concerned, would she be able to have some sort of livelihood when he passed on? How would she care for herself if her brothers were all off on their own adventures?

[HH:] Bishop Wright was a firm believer in higher education for women, and Oberlin's distinction as the first co-educational college in the country undoubtedly appealed to him. But I suspect there was another reason he chose it for his only daughter. In the late 1800s, the small rural college in northern Ohio was an important center of religious revivalism and the Protestant missionary movement. (My grandfather, who graduated from Oberlin two years before Katharine, came from a large clan of missionaries to the Balkans. He liked to joke that he became a newspaperman because somebody had to pay the bills for his family's good works.) Katharine took the required courses on theology, moral philosophy, and so on, but her favorite subject was classics--Latin and Greek literature. The Oberlin connection caught the eye of composer Laura Kaminsky when Andrea Fellows Fineberg proposed that they collaborate on an opera about the Wright Sister.

[LAURA KAMINSKY:] I had never heard of Katharine Wright and received a message from Andrea saying, I may have an opera project and I think you would be interested in this. It would be for Dayton, Ohio, and it would be about the relatively unknown-to-the-world sister of Orville and Wilbur Wright. And I thought, wow. I mean, I grew up, as did most kids--you go to school, it's a piece of your American history and science history--never heard of her. Andrea started to tell me about her discovery at the cemetery and what she had already begun researching. And when I learned that Katharine Wright was an Oberlin alumna, that was exciting to me because I also went to Oberlin. One of the things I was most proud of, of Oberlin's legacy, was that it was the first college to admit Black and white students together and the first college to be co-ed. It had this sort of progressive, utopian vision of the way the world could be. So I said, of course she went there!

[HH:] Later in life, Katharine would put her Oberlin education to work on behalf of numerous progressive causes and civic projects. As the only member of her high-achieving family to earn a college degree, she prized her intellectual independence--the same independence that enabled Wilbur and Orville, who were largely self-taught, to question the received scientific wisdom of the day. No doubt to their father's dismay, the three siblings' free-thinking ways spilled over into the religious sphere. While Katharine's exacting code of morals and ethics faithfully mirrored her fundamentalist upbringing, neither she nor her brothers were regular churchgoers as adults. Like many of her contemporaries, she was deeply disillusioned by the First World War—a war that she had actively advocated for the United States to enter. Ultimately, she came to see the Bishop's old-time religion as little more than brainwashing.

[ACTOR:] I think many of the religious ideas are like many of the ideas that were manufactured and put out in such a convincing way to get the young men to go to the War willingly. A very little time has shown how untrue those ideas were. No one is really grateful to the boys who went. Every one who could made money any old way but no one who staid at home has a grateful thought for those who went and created the demand for the things out of which money

was made. No one has any thought of doing anything for those who suffered by going. But at the time it was a good way to get what was needed. It eased the feelings of all concerned. So I think many of the ideas of religion are just for that purpose. They persist because human feelings seem to remain a good deal the same—the same need for a feeling of confidence in the world, the same need to believe that if things aren't fair for these few years of life, they will be made so for eternity—the same need to feel that dear ones will never really go out of existence—away from us forever. And so it has been easy to believe that those things are all taken care of in the scheme of the Universe. [KW to HJH, 9.23.25]

[HH:] Katharine's sense of independence and fair play wasn't just a matter of faith; it was instilled in her from the cradle. By giving her an Oberlin education, Milton Wright ensured that she could support herself as a teacher, one of the few professions open to women in the early 1900s. Later he deeded the family house over to her so she never need worry about having a roof over her head. At the same time, the Bishop brooded over his daughter like a mother hen, constantly nagging her about keeping up appearances and behaving with womanly decorum. It wasn't until she graduated from college in 1898 that Katharine got her first taste of financial independence, as a teacher of high-school Latin and history. The job also gave her a taste of inequality in the workplace: as a woman, she earned less than the male teachers at Dayton's Steele High School and was expected to run herd over more than her fair share of rowdy, inattentive teenagers. For all that, she insisted that teaching gave her a greater sense of satisfaction than anything else she ever did. I asked classicist Judith Peller Hallett, who's made a special study of women in her field, what might have attracted someone of Katharine's background and temperament to Latin literature and the ancient world.

[JUDITH HALLETT:] We mustn't forget that anyone who was seeking higher education, that is, college preparatory education, particularly with an eye to entering the learned professions--the clergy, law, medicine, teaching--needed to take Latin in secondary school. Whether one achieved great things in Latin or barely scraped through--and we know people who did both--this was something that one did. [Katharine] was of that first generation of women that, in the public schools of Dayton, Ohio, had this opportunity to go to college. So obviously she was going to take great advantage of this opportunity. When she got to Oberlin, this is a very strong, distinguished department, well known for influential teaching, and I'm sure that the kind of teaching she experienced there played a big role in her deciding to become a Latin as well as a history teacher. One of her contemporaries, her dear friend Louis Lord, was a classics major with her and then went on and did graduate degrees and came back and was a professor there. [Lord was] a very important figure in the history of classical studies in the US because he was very international in his outlook and put a lot of valuable energy into the establishment of both the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and the American Academy in Rome.

It should be emphasized that Oberlin was the first co-ed college in the country, and the first to admit Blacks. Some of its most distinguished Black graduates had studied classics there too, and [Katharine] would have known all about them. She might have met them. So I think it was kind of an intoxicating atmosphere for studying classics at Oberlin, and she was very well prepared for the challenges she faced. Two people who preceded her are these two amazing Black women leaders, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper. They were huge beneficiaries of that Oberlin classics education. But if one looks at who else studied there and what they took from

those Oberlin years, it's quite clear she was very, very lucky. She could have gone to some other places that would have been much less inspirational for her.

For the most part, the women who trained and worked as Latin teachers did not marry. This was a profession in which a single woman could support herself handsomely. The joke is, of course, that she flunked Dayton's future leaders. And the point is that anyone in Dayton who wanted to have a future as a leader, male or female, was in a Latin class, at least for a few years. She would have taught perhaps more boys than girls, which was very unusual. And these were not necessarily, in a public high school, from elite families. Some of these are people who come from modest backgrounds, but through their academic achievement were able to do great things. We don't want to discount her situation in this all-male household. She was probably extremely well equipped because of her family situation and [because] she'd gone to the same kind of public co-educational high school herself. And [because] she'd gone to co-educational Oberlin. I think this admirably equipped her for handling the interpersonal dynamics of the classroom. All these male students were very different from her brothers in terms of their worldly ambitions and their aesthetic sensibilities and all that.

[HH:] If Katharine's professional career opened new horizons, her domestic life as a young adult reinforced the time-honored, family-centered values that Oberlin had ingrained in her. At the same time, college life offered Katharine a sense of community and common purpose beyond the family. The novelty of living in all-female boarding houses kindled a lifelong commitment to women's rights and education that culminated in 1923, when she was elected to Oberlin's board of trustees, only the second woman to hold that position in the college's 90-year history. Here's Judith Peter Hallett again:

[JUDITH HALLETT:] The other thing is, she became an Oberlin trustee, and that's absolutely unique. This a co-ed school, and a very progressive, inclusive one. I would love to see the minutes of these meetings and the kind of policy decisions that she was involved with. So she ended up playing a decisive role in the history of higher education and America in ways that she might not have if she had gotten her Ph.D. and gone out to teach at Vassar. I guess if she had gone out to teach at someplace like Vassar, she would have ended up on the board of the American School with Louis Lord, and she would have worked in this very specialized research institution. The graduates of Oberlin had such an impact, not only on that part of the US at that time, but [on] the world. I mean, Oberlin graduates are just an extraordinary group of people, and she was there making decisions that helped form them.

[HH:] Katharine earned a reputation as an outspoken gadfly who relished butting heads with Oberlin's male establishment. Equal pay for women faculty was high on her agenda, but she had no qualms about taking up the cudgels on behalf of men. Shortly after taking her seat on the board, she had a run-in with the college's formidable president, Henry C. King. He had made the mistake of expecting the trustees to rubber-stamp his decision to accept the resignation of an eminent physics professor. An indignant Katharine gave him a piece of her mind, as she reported with gusto in a letter to my grandfather:

[ACTOR:] I object to being on the Board just to O.K. what the Administration does. I replied to President King that I thought it was a calamity to lose Professor Williams and that I had heard no

different opinion from anyone. If it was too late to keep Williams it seemed to me that the Physics Department was in great need of improvement . . . and I thought that we ought to do something there right away if we were hoping to attract and keep the kind of boys we were always making so much effort to get. (Of course that's a sore point with me. The talk is ALWAYS about the conditions for the boys!) I also said, gratuitously, that Professor Williams was the kind we couldn't afford to lose when men of his caliber were so scarce and that it gave me great concern because I had given a good deal of thought to the question of the general tone of our faculty! He can put that in his pipe and smoke it! But the nerve of telling us that it was too late now to do anything about Williams leaving and then asking us for suggestions! Well, he got one from me. [KW to HJH, 4.3.24]

[HH:] Another front in Katharine's campaign to put the sexes on an equal footing was the fight to win women the vote. Ohio at the turn of the twentieth century was a hotbed of suffragist activism. The movement crested in a 1914 suffrage parade through downtown Dayton, in which Katharine's eighty-five-year-old father and her brother Orville marched side by side. (Wilbur undoubtedly would have shown up too, if he hadn't died tragically two years earlier.) A few days before the parade, the Wrights hosted a suffrage fête—a kind of kick-off party—for some 1,200 supporters on the spacious grounds of their suburban mansion. Six years later, in 1920, ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment finally gave women access to the ballot box in national as well as state and local elections.

[CINDY WILKEY:] The suffrage movement in Ohio was shaped in part by the fact that Ohio was a very progressive state. The wave of progressivism that was so large in the late 19th, early 20th century--Ohio was a big part of that. [HH:] This is Cindy Wilkey again. As an associate professor at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, she's studied Katharine's role in the suffrage movement. [CW:] Oberlin being the first institution of higher education to admit women, [and] very proud of that history, it is definitely a recurring theme in the early woman's suffrage movement. Several of the big early leaders--Lucy Stone was one of the famous ones, and her sister-in-law, Antoinette Brown Blackwell--also attended. The Anti-Saloon League was born at Oberlin. The crossovers between the woman's suffrage movement and the temperance movement were very deep—although of all the different organizations that Katharine was involved in, I've never come across her going to a temperance meeting. But being at Oberlin, that history at Oberlin, definitely would have been encouraging. Again, the mere fact that she was receiving a college education when it was increasingly common for women. Obviously, the more educated a woman was, the more likely she was to want the right to vote. So one of the things we see with the woman's suffrage movement increasingly throughout the early 20th century is the number of college-level chapters. These young women out there were willing to go on train tours and really push the envelope in ways that some of the older women were a little less willing and a little less able to do because of the demands of family.

The other thing that definitely fueled Katharine and the woman's suffrage movement was the club movement. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women's clubs were huge, and [there were] all different types of clubs. In fact, in one of her letters Katharine talks about the significance of the club movement and how it affected women. Back to that notion of separate spheres, really curtailing what women could and could not do, clubs were one area where it was

perfectly acceptable for them to leave their homes and spend time with other women. In these clubs, women picked up a number of leadership skills, everything from being treasurer to running meetings, to recruitment, to advertising. Whether intentionally or not, those clubs became a breeding ground for the woman's suffrage movement. As these women came to understand that they were capable of [exercising] these types of formal, institutionalized power, many of them lent these skills to the woman's suffrage movement. So it may have looked like it was a recipe-exchange club, and indeed it was. But they do become a breeding ground and Katharine was involved in many of these organizations, so her experience in that way would have been very typical for a woman of her time and her social class.

The woman's suffrage movement itself, of course, was still fighting those Victorian notions of separate spheres and what is an appropriate place for women and what is not. The Wrights are actually a really fascinating example of individuals who kind of had one foot in the 19th century and one foot in the growing 20th century. Katharine herself, and certainly her father, [were] oddly progressive in some ways, but literally in the next breath very, very traditional. Like he was fine with Katharine being educated, but then she needed to be a teacher. That would be in keeping with the notion of separate spheres that the suffrage movement itself had to battle against.

[HH:] Katharine's staunch advocacy of women's rights didn't blind her to what she saw as the foibles and follies of her sex; she referred to women in the old-fashioned way as her "sect," almost as if womanhood were a religious denomination. As far as she was concerned, though, it was self-evident that men called the shots--and the odds were stacked against women.

[ACTOR:] I get all "het up" over living forever in a "man's world," with so much discussion about what kind of women men like and so little concern over what kind of men women like, that it's a good deal like the particular subject of woman suffrage used to be with me. Orv always teased me about that. When we were working for it, he used to say that woman suffrage was like Rome, in one respect: all roads led to it, with me. No matter however where the conversation started, I always managed to switch it off on to the woman suffrage track. It wasn't quite as bad as that but I was very much "in earnest" about it, to put it mildly. No one takes a woman's work seriously unless she is extraordinary. No wonder few women do serious work, unless there is some special gift or great need of some sort. When women don't do anything but give orders to servants and dress and fill up their time with nothing, of course, they are not very interesting. And when women are so occupied with taking care of houses and children that they can't think of any thing else and never get out among other people, of course, they are not interesting. I don't know what can be done but I know that already, having the vote has done a lot toward making men take us seriously. [KW to HJH, 11.11.24]

[HH:] Katharine's attitude toward what she called "a woman's work" changed dramatically after she gave up her teaching job and devoted all her time to the family, as we'll hear in Part 2 of this podcast. Outwardly, she embraced the traditional female roles of caregiver and social secretary as her lot in life. Privately, however, she grew increasingly restless, resentful, and determined to emancipate herself. As the genteel Victorian cult of family morphed into the anything-goes individualism of the Roaring Twenties, the Wright Sister was tugged in opposite directions, a thoroughly modern Millie who clung to the middle-class values of her youth. Katharine had a

long list of pet peeves: the shallowness and vulgarity of postwar culture, Americans' insatiable craving to be entertained rather than educated, the faddish unconventionality of Jazz Age rebels, whom she mocked as "parlor radicals." But waging a moral crusade wasn't in her nature. Live and let live was her philosophy, on one condition: that she had the freedom to be herself.

[ACTOR:] Well, if we are the kind of creatures that "modern thought" assumes we all are (because some of the "modern thoughters" are), all I've got to say is, I think the old way of pretending we aren't what we are is better than the new way of having no shame about being as we are. I don't know where we are or what the truth is in the controversy. I only know that, far from getting any sense or loveliness out of the new ideas, the world is getting ideas much uglier than the ugly things we see when there is no sense of beauty for things. I can't understand it. There is no use to talk. One might as well try to sweep back the Atlantic with a broom. But I grow more determined every day to live my own life and do as I please. It need not disturb any one else. I don't want to force my ideas on any one else. I may be wrong, you know. [KW to HJH, 9.25.24]

[HH:] "To live my own life and do as I please": Katharine shared that revolutionary credo with countless women of her day, from liberated flappers to pioneering social reformers like Jane Addams and Margaret Sanger and independent-minded writers and artists like Virginia Woolf and Georgia O'Keeffe. But does Katharine still have something to say to women in the twenty-first century? Judging from the burgeoning interest in her story, the answer is a resounding yes. Just googling her name yields nearly 40,000 results. The rediscovery of the Wright Sister has taken many forms—scholarly books and articles, novels, films, blog posts, school papers, and now an opera, titled, appropriately enough, *Finding Wright*. So it seems natural to ask if Katharine can serve as a role model for women today. I put that question to composer Laura Kaminsky and librettist Andrea Fellows Fineberg. Here's Laura:

[LAURA KAMINSKY:] She was such an engaged citizen. And I think that is something, at this juncture in our cultural, social, political history that we're living through, [that] is very relevant to your daughter and my nieces and nephews. People in their twenties look at the world and they're not just thinking about their personal little lives anymore. They're thinking about being a committed, engaged citizen. The term we use now is social justice. I think Katharine thought about making the world a better place. I think that her being a trustee at her college was a position of power that was leading policy, that was about education and equality and engagement for the students to go out and make the world better. A college that has the motto "Learning and Labor"—she completely embraced that. And being a woman didn't stop her. Of course, she lived through the flapper age, but she was certainly not a flapper and a party girl, although she may have had a good time. But I think what was so important was how convicted she was about doing good in the world.

[ANDREA FELLOWS FINEBERG:] For me--this is Andrea-- activism takes many forms. I think people have in their minds that there's only the one form, which is peaceful protest, being out in the public eye. The other form is advocacy and allyship. I think that's what [Katharine] did exceptionally well. It's not as if she accepted things. She wrote about them. She spoke up when things were . . . unacceptable is a big word, but when things could be different, let's say, when there was another way to look at something. And she was very good at steering people to another

way of looking at something. She was a life force. We can't always be the single person that makes huge change immediately. We can, however, be people who continue to speak up, show up, and keep dropping pebbles in the water. I think she was exceptional in that way.

[LAURA KAMINSKY:] If she was in the first wave of feminism in the sixties through the late seventies, she might not have been one of the women who burned their bras, but she might have been working in some kinds of social-action groups that would be advocating for equal pay. If she were alive today, of all the many issues that feminists of today are dealing with, [I think] that she would have the one or two that resonated for her, and she would do what she could within the way that she operates. Like then it was letter writing, now she would have an Instagram post or whatever she would do. But whatever her social media mechanism would be, she would be herself. I mean, there's always this conversation about why should we look at the past, because it's irrelevant, it's not today, those people [are] dead, they are not part of our contemporary culture, and why should we learn their work or read it or listen to it? I'm a composer. If any of the music that I write has any kind of humanistic story in it that speaks to people in 200 years, I don't want people to say, well, I don't need to listen to that because she's dead. That's just so antihumanitarian. We live in the time that we live in, but these issues are the same issues. The stories that keep getting played out generation after generation--there's variations on a theme and there's the new thing that's happened that changes the scope, but we're always, as human beings, going to be struggling to make some version of a better world, or there's always going to be some kind of technological advance or breakthrough that's going to change how we do our daily life, that brings up issues, that gets pushed against and needs to be addressed. So given how [Katharine] lived her life then, she would probably be choosing the issues of--as the sister of the Wright Brothers, I don't know whether she would be an environmental activist today and concerned about, oh my God, these are planes and the carbon footprint! My guess is [that] she would be taking her story and her truths and looking at the world in which she's now living, and she would grab the issues that just spoke to her.

[HH:] As a member of Katharine's extended family, and the author of a novel called *Maiden Flight* about her marriage to my grandfather, I often find myself wondering what she would think and do if she were alive today. Where would she stand on hot-button issues like the MeToo movement, the Equal Rights Amendment, the glass ceiling, abortion rights, and wages for housework? Would she identify with the modern feminist movement? Or would she feel more in step with women who support gender equality but criticize today's feminist agenda as reductive and divisive? Those questions are well worth asking, but at the end of the day they seem less important to me than the universality of Katharine's story. Like other women of many different eras, cultures, and social backgrounds, she struggled to reconcile the competing roles and expectations that society imposed upon her. She was torn between devotion to family and home and the siren call of the rapidly modernizing world—a world that her pioneering brothers helped bring about.

I'm Harry Haskell. Thanks for listening to *In Her Own Wright*. In Part 2, we'll explore Katharine's intense and complicated relationship with Orville and Wilbur.