

Text Version of Audio Story: Idiots

Well, there we were, a number of extended family, sitting around at Grandma and Grandpa's house.

"Well, did you hear so-and-so wrote a book?" one old uncle asked.

An old aunt said, "What business does he have writing a book? Who's he think he is?"

The group pretty much agreed that so-and-so was an idiot for thinking he had anything worthwhile to share with the world, if for no other reason than he was one of us — just an ordinary person from around these parts, certainly no one special.

My thoughts immediately turned to a couple of other so-called idiots, brothers named Orville and Wilbur. Like most of the folks sitting around at Grandma and Grandpa's house that day, Orville and Wilbur didn't have high school diplomas. They were ordinary, everyday fellows, no one special. Not from around here, but not too far away — Dayton, Ohio.

It was along about the turn of the century, 1900, that Orville and Wilbur became idiots for thinking they had something to share with the world. Idiots, for thinking that maybe, just maybe, they could do something no one else had done before, and certainly, something that no one from their neck of the woods had any business even thinking about.

Orville and Wilbur, bachelor brothers who owned a bicycle shop there in Dayton — remember, no high school diploma, no formal engineering school — took it upon themselves, being the idiots they were, to attempt to build a flying machine.

Now, at this time, some of the greatest minds in the world had attempted to conquer flight, names like Langley, Lilienthal, Chanute — pretty important-sounding names. But then again, "They ain't from around here." Even Edison took a stab at it.

So these idiot brothers start working feverishly in, of all places, their bicycle shop. Their ideas were revolutionary and not born of accident, either ... but through painstaking trial and error, documentation of data, testing, retesting. Their problem-solving skills were ingenious. When there was a problem to be solved, they argued about it. And then they would swap points, switch sides and argue just as hard in the other direction. People walking past the bicycle shop who heard this must have thought to themselves, "These guys are a couple of idiots."

So anyhow, being the idiots they were, they needed a place to test their prototypes. Based on information gathered from the National Weather Service, they decided on Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The sand there along the Atlantic Coast was ideal for when things didn't go right the first time, or the second, or the third. It made for a softer landing.

Time and again, these idiots had to go back to the Dayton, back to the bicycle shop, back to the drawing board. Little by little, they were mastering flight. Little by little, they were achieving what no other idiot had achieved before.

Finally, in 1903, after seven years of trying, two brothers, two bicycle-shop owners, two fellows lacking a high school diploma, two idiots named Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first sustained flight.

And, of course, the rest is aviation history.

So, you're probably thinking this is a story about the Wright brothers, or a story about the guy back home who thought he could write a book, regardless of what my family or other locals had to say about it. Nope, that's not what this story is about at all. It's actually about you and my sincere hope that, if it hasn't already happened, that someday a bunch of people will be sitting around a room somewhere, talking about what an idiot you are.

I can't speak for Johnny X, but from somewhere behind the radio, I hope I'm an idiot, too.