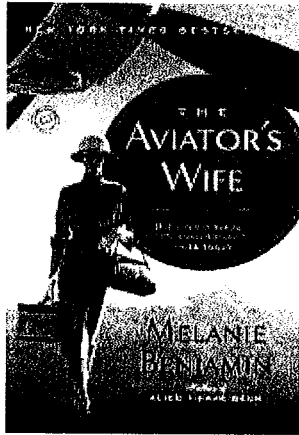


The Aviator's Wife

by Melanie Benjamin



About the Book

In the spirit of *LOVING FRANK* and *THE PARIS WIFE*, acclaimed novelist Melanie Benjamin pulls back the curtain on the marriage of one of America's most extraordinary couples: Charles Lindbergh and Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

"The history [is] exhilarating. . . . *THE AVIATOR'S WIFE* soars."—*USA Today*

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

When Anne Morrow, a shy college senior with hidden literary aspirations, travels to Mexico City to spend Christmas with her family, she meets Colonel Charles Lindbergh, fresh off his celebrated 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic. Enthralled by Charles's assurance and fame, Anne is certain the aviator has scarcely noticed her. But she is wrong. Charles sees in Anne a kindred spirit, a fellow adventurer, and her world will be changed forever. The two marry in a headline-making wedding. In the years that follow, Anne becomes the first licensed female glider pilot in the United States. But despite this and other major achievements, she is viewed merely as the aviator's wife. The fairy-tale life she once longed for will bring heartbreak and hardships, ultimately pushing her to reconcile her need for love and her desire for independence, and to embrace, at last, life's infinite possibilities for change and happiness.

Discussion Guide

1. The epigraph for this novel is from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry who, like Anne Morrow Lindbergh, was both a celebrated author and a noted aviator. Do you agree with his statement, "One must look with the heart"? What do you think that means? And do you think it means something different to an artist (author) as opposed to a scientist (aviator)?

2. One of the recurring themes is how Anne will choose to remember Charles. How do you think she concludes she'll remember him by the end? How does it change?
3. Anne's father says, "And there's Anne. Reliable Anne. You never change, my daughter." (page 11) How does Anne change over the course of this novel? Or does she?
4. How does Anne's nomadic lifestyle as the daughter of an ambassador later influence her concept of "home" with Charles? What do you think defines home?
5. Anne seems to think of herself as an outsider—someone too shy and insular to make a big impression. Do you agree, or do you think Anne miscalculates herself? Do you think this insularity made Anne appealing to Charles, or do you think he was drawn to her because he saw past it? Is Charles an insular character himself, whether by nature or because he was forced into a "celebrity bubble"?
6. "Had there ever been a hero like him, in all of history?" (page 16) Anne starts her description of Charles with hero worship, comparing him to Columbus and Marco Polo. How does her opinion evolve as she comes to know him better? How did your opinion of Charles Lindbergh evolve throughout Anne's story?
7. The title of this book is, of course, **The Aviator's Wife**. Do you think that's how Anne views herself upon marrying Charles? Do you think she sees that as a role she's playing, or as a defining characteristic of who she is? Does it change over the course of the book?
8. Have you ever been up in a biplane? Do you think you would ever go, even with an expert aviator at the controls?
9. Compare the relationships Anne has with the men in her life: her brother, Dwight; her father; and Charles.
10. What right to privacy do you think a public figure should have? Can a public figure decide what parts of his or her life stay private?
11. Have you ever met someone famous? Did he/she live up to your expectations?
12. Do you think Charles and Anne were in love? Why or why not? Did that change over time?
13. Do you think you could keep the secrets that Anne keeps from her children? Why or why not?
14. What do you think flying represents to Anne? How does it compare with writing? Which do you think is more important to Anne?
15. Do you think Charles Lindbergh was a good husband in any ways? What do you think makes for a good partner?
16. Is Anne a hero? Why or why not?
17. If you could ask Anne one question, what would it be?

18. How does Anne's relationship with her family change after she marries Charles?

19. How would you react to the scrutiny by the press that Anne and Charles endured? Would you want to be famous if it meant being constantly under the microscope? Would you answer differently if there weren't social media outlets but the same type of newspapers and newsreels from Anne and Charles's lifetime?

Author Bio

Melanie Benjamin is a pseudonym for Melanie Hauser, who has written two contemporary novels. She is the author of the nationally bestselling *ALICE I HAVE BEEN* and *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MRS. TOM THUMB*. Benjamin lives in Chicago, where she is at work on her next historical novel.

Critical Praise

"The history is exhilarating. . . . **The Aviator's Wife** soars. . . . Anne Morrow Lindbergh narrates the story of the Lindberghs' troubled marriage in all its triumph and tragedy."

— *USA Today*

"Remarkable . . . **The Aviator's Wife** succeeds [in] putting the reader inside Anne Lindbergh's life with her famous husband."

— *The Denver Post*

"[This novel] will fascinate history buffs and surprise those who know of her only as 'the aviator's wife.' "

— *People*

"It's hard to quit reading this intimate historical fiction."

— *The Dallas Morning News*

"Fictional biography at its finest"

— *Booklist* (starred review)

"Utterly unforgettable."

— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"An intimate examination of the life and emotional mettle of Anne Morrow."

— *The Washington Post*

"A story of both triumph and pain that will take your breath away."

— Kate Alcott, author of **The Dressmaker**

"Melanie Benjamin inhabits Anne Morrow Lindbergh completely, freeing her from the shadows of her husband's

stratospheric fame."

— Isabel Wolff, author of **A Vintage Affair**

The Aviator's Wife

by Melanie Benjamin

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The Aviator's Wife

Melanie Benjamin, 2013

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Summary

For much of her life, Anne Morrow, the shy daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, has stood in the shadows of those around her, including her millionaire father and vibrant older sister, who often steals the spotlight. Then Anne, a college senior with hidden literary aspirations, travels to Mexico City to spend Christmas with her family. There she meets Colonel Charles Lindbergh, fresh off his celebrated 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic. Enthralled by Charles's assurance and fame, Anne is certain the celebrated aviator has scarcely noticed her. But she is wrong.

Charles sees in Anne a kindred spirit, a fellow adventurer, and her world will be changed forever. The two marry in a headline-making wedding. Hounded by adoring crowds and hunted by an insatiable press, Charles shields himself and his new bride from prying eyes, leaving Anne to feel her life falling back into the shadows. In the years that follow, despite her own major achievements—she becomes the first licensed female glider pilot in the United States—Anne is viewed merely as the aviator's wife. The fairy-tale life she once longed for will bring heartbreak and hardships, ultimately pushing her to reconcile her need for love and her desire for independence, and to embrace, at last, life's infinite possibilities for change and happiness.

Drawing on the rich history of the twentieth century—from the late twenties to the mid-sixties—and featuring cameos from such notable characters as Joseph Kennedy and Amelia Earhart, *The Aviator's Wife* is a vividly imagined novel of a complicated marriage—revealing both its dizzying highs and its devastating lows. With stunning power and grace, Melanie Benjamin provides new insight into what made this remarkable relationship endure. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Aka—Melanie Hauser
- Birth—November 24, 1962
- Where—Indianapolis, Indiana, USA
- Education—Indiana University (Purdue University at Indianapolis)
- Currently—lives near Chicago, Illinois

Melanie Benjamin is the pen name of American writer, Melanie Hauser (nee Miller). Born in Indianapolis, Indiana, Melanie is one of three children. Her brother Michael Miller is a published non-fiction author and musician. Melanie attended Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis then married Dennis Hauser in 1988; they presently reside in the Chicago, Illinois area with their two sons.

Early writing

As Melanie Hauser, she published short stories in the *In Posse Review* and *The Adirondack Review*. Her short story "Prodigy on Ice" won the 2001 "Now Hear This" short story competition that was part of a WBEZ (Chicago Public Radio) program called *Stories on Stage*, where short stories were performed and broadcast.

When Melanie sold her first of two contemporary novels, she had to add Lynne to her name (Melanie Lynne Hauser) to distinguish her from the published sports journalist Melanie Hauser.

The first of Melanie's contemporary novels, *Confessions of Super Mom* was published in 2005; the sequel *Super Mom Saves the World* came out in 2007. In addition to her two contemporary novels, Melanie also contributed an essay to the anthology *IT'S A BOY* and maintained a popular mom blog called The Refrigerator Door.

Fictional biographies

Under the pen name Melanie Benjamin (a combination of her first name and her son's first name), she shifted genres to historical fiction. Her third novel, *Alice I Have Been*, was inspired by Alice Liddell Hargreaves's life (the real-life Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*). Published in 2010, *Alice I Have Been* was a national bestseller and reached the extended list of *The New York Times* Best Seller list.

In 2011, Benjamin fictionalized another historical female. Her novel *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb* focuses on the life of Lavinia Warren Bump, a proportionate dwarf featured in P.T. Barnum's shows.

Her third fictionalized biography, *The Aviator's Wife*, was released in 2013 and centers on Anne Morrow Lindbergh, wife of famed aviator, Charles Lindberg. (*From Wikipedia.*)

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Aviator's Wife (Benjamin) - Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Talented historical novelist Benjamin has a knack for picking intriguing, if somewhat obscure, women in history and making them utterly unforgettable.... In true Benjamin style, it's Anne who captures us all in this exquisite fictional take on an iconic marriage.

Publishers Weekly

Delivers another stellar historical novel based on the experiences of an extraordinary woman...fictional biography at its finest.

Booklist

Biographical novel of Anne Morrow and her troubled marriage to pioneering aviator Charles Lindbergh. Anne, self-effacing daughter of a suffragette and an ambassador, is surprised when Charles, already a celebrity thanks to his first trans-Atlantic flight in 1927, asks her—instead of her blonde, outgoing older sister Elisabeth—to go flying with him. And it is Anne whom Charles will marry.... Although the portrayal of such a passive character could easily turn tepid, Benjamin maintains interest, even suspense, as readers wonder when Anne's healthy rebellious instincts will burst the bonds of her dutiful deference. A thoughtful examination of the forces which shaped the author of *Gift from the Sea*.

Kirkus Reviews

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Entry Updated : 04/18/2013

Awards:

WBEZ Stories on Stage contest winner, National Public Radio, for "Prodigy on Ice."

Personal Information:

Born 1965, in Indianapolis, IN; married; children: two sons. **Education:** Studied at Indiana University and Purdue University. **Addresses:** Home: Chicago, IL. **E-mail:** melanie@melanielynnehauser.com, melanie@melaniebenjamin.com.

Career Information:

Writer. Previously worked in telemarketing, acting, and as a features writer and columnist for local parenting publications.

Writings:

NOVELS

- *Confessions of Super Mom*, Dutton Adult (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Super Mom Saves the World*, NAL Trade (New York, NY), 2007.
- (Under pseudonym Melanie Benjamin) *Alice I Have Been*, Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2009.
- (Under pseudonym Melanie Benjamin) *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb*, Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2011.
- (Under pseudonym Melanie Benjamin) *The Aviator's Wife*, Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2013.

Contributor to the book *It's a Boy: Women Writers on Raising Sons*, edited by Andrea J. Buchanan. Contributor of short stories to periodicals, including the *Adirondack Review*. Author of the Web log *The Refrigerator Door*.

Media Adaptions:

Confessions of Super Mom has been optioned for film.

Sidelights:

Melanie Lynne Hauser was a stay-at-home mom who decided to begin writing after her two young boys grew up and needed less attention. In fact, a specific episode turned Hauser to a writing career. "When asked what his mommy did for a living, Melanie's wise cracking little boy replied, 'My mom cleans houses,'" reported a contributor to the *Moms of Reinvention* Web site. "Melanie says that with that fateful comment, 'Perhaps it was time to look around for something else to do.' And so, with her family as her comedic inspiration, Melanie embarked on a career as an author."

Hauser wrote three novels that went unpublished before turning to her experience as a homemaker to pen *Confessions of Super Mom*. The novel introduces readers to middle-aged Birdie, who has a surly ex-husband

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and two teenagers, Martin and Kelly. She also works as a checkout person in the local grocery store. One day Birdie has an accident that turns her life around. Working with several cleaning chemicals, Birdie is overcome and passes out only to awaken with strange superpowers, including superhearing abilities and a sixth sense that tells her whenever a child is in trouble. These rather mundane abilities as far as superpowers go are enhanced, however, by her ability to spew Swiffer supercleaning fluid from her fingertips to clean anything instantly. She can also use her right hand as a superabsorbent sponge. Before long, she has a superhero costume made by her geeky son, Martin, who also serves as his mom's sidekick. Like all superheroes, Birdie has an evil nemesis. His name is Lex Osborne, a self-made millionaire and husband of the local parent-teacher association president, who continues to make a fortune producing junk food for kids. His evil plan is to use video games to hook even more kids on his nutritionally valueless food.

"From the book's very first page you find yourself grinning," wrote Jill McAfee on *Bookreporter.com*. "Every mom can relate to the daily challenges of multitasking and navigating kids and household chores." *Blogcritics.org* contributor Staci Schoff advised: "Be warned, the plot is a little silly if you're measuring the book next to reality, but if you look at it for what it is--a feel-good comic book for grown-ups--it's both charming and fun." Several other reviewers also noted that the book is a fun read, adding that there is an underlying theme to the tale. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor observed that *Confessions of Super Mom* is "unexpectedly poignant and packs an emotional punch despite the cheery veneer." Writing in *Booklist*, Beth Leistenrider commented that the story includes "a socially responsible message about consumerism, but it doesn't get in the way of the high jinks."

Hauser continues the adventures of Birdie in her next book, *Super Mom Saves the World*. "When I wrote *Confessions of Super Mom*, I wrote it as a stand alone book," the author stated on the *Backstory* Web site. "Meaning I had no thought of continuing the story further." The author wrote of her characters: "In a way, I loved them too much. So much that I was afraid to mess with their minds and lives again!" Nevertheless, her publisher, family, friends, and readers eventually convinced her to write a sequel.

In *Super Mom Saves the World*, Birdie is now a member of the famed Justice League of America, whose members include Batman, Superman, and the Green Lantern. As she tries to adjust to her new life, Birdie becomes engaged to a local scientist named Carl Sayers, who has a teenage son of his own. There are problems, however, including the fact that Birdie's son does not like Carl's son. Furthermore, Birdie's ex-husband is divorcing his second wife and wants Birdie back. All the while, Birdie senses trouble at the Little League stadium in Astro Park involving corrupt politicians and a disgruntled school janitor. Also on hand is Carrie Peters, who works a day job with Birdie at the grocery store in order to hide her true identity as a therapist to superheroes. The book reveals more of Birdie's superpowers, which include the "Merciless Gaze," which causes people to automatically tell the truth, and the "Apron of Anticipation," which produces snacks for hungry kids.

A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called *Super Mom Saves the World* "a quaint behind-the-scenes look into the modern-day problems of middle age." Mary Ward Menke noted for *January* magazine that, while the "satire of the super hero genre is silly but entertaining, the book's strengths lie in the real world." Menke explained: "Birdie's relationships with her children, her fiancé and his son, her ex-husband and her friends are complex and all-too-real. The combination of humor and pathos works well in making the characters believable and likable."

Writing under the pseudonym Melanie Benjamin, Hauser published the novel *Alice I Have Been* in 2009. The novel reimagines the relationship between Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) and seven-year-old Alice Liddell, who served as his muse for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Writing in *Washington Post Book World*, Elizabeth Hand commented that even though the novel's opening section has "little in the way of new or tantalizing insight into the relationship between the mild-tempered Oxford don and his child muse, Benjamin does a decent job of evoking the overstuffed atmosphere of the Liddell household and the dance of shifting loyalties between the three sisters and their odd gentleman friend." *A.V. Club* reviewer Todd VanDerWerff lamented that the novel is not "bad so much as bland, but that blandness creates a novel that gradually runs out of steam. The early portions, featuring Alice as a child, are shot through with verve and a sense of impending loss, but the book loses that verve as it turns into a generic Victorian romance."

Reviewing the novel for National Public Radio's *Fresh Air*, Maureen Corrigan opined that "what really sets this latest Victorian fictional resurrection apart is its awareness of the demonic dimension of great literature. Powerful stories captivate their readers--and sometimes also their muses. As Benjamin vividly depicts here, the young girl who became the muse for one of the most rollicking children's tales of all time may have also become, to some extent, its prisoner, pressed into the looking glass of its fictions." *Booklist* critic Michael Cart stated: "As for Benjamin's deliciously melodramatic portrait of art historian John Ruskin, it's almost worth the price of admission." *Library Journal* contributor Joy Humphrey remarked that "although the shadow of inappropriateness always lingers, this is truly a love story," adding that it "will have wide appeal."

Again writing as Benjamin, Hauser published the novel *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb* in 2011. The story is based on the life of Lavinia "Vinnie" Warren Bump, the wife of Gen. Tom Thumb. Benjamin traces Vinnie's early childhood through her days as a P.T. Barnum circus attraction and arranged marriage to Tom.

Reviewing the novel in *Library Journal*, Christine DeZelar-Tiedman noticed that Vinnie's "narration grabs you." DeZelar-Tiedman also felt that "those interested in 'behind the scenes' of show business will be ... entranced."

Hauser told CA: "I've always lived in different worlds, through my imagination and then, later, through my love of theater and acting. Storytelling is the main constant in my life; I think that's what acting really is about. So it was a natural evolution to go from telling stories with others' words, to telling them with my own. Plus, I have always been a bookworm, a voracious reader, and that has been the best training I could have hoped for as a writer."

"Good storytellers who concentrate on characters, who write of real people, influence my work. Yes, I know my book is about a superhero, but at heart, it's about a very real, very ordinary woman trying to make the best of her life as a single mother. So I'm drawn to authors who also explore characters who are not sensational, highly stylized people. Some of my favorite authors include Sue Miller, Elinor Lipman, and Anne Tyler.

"I tend to percolate an idea for a long time before I realize I'm ready to write about it. I'll have a passing idea, think that it should be a book, and then I walk around with it for a while, letting it take shape in my mind. Once this is done--and it tends to overwhelm me, almost violently, the moment it's crystal clear--I can write fairly quickly. I like to write something every day, but I won't put a time limit or a word limit on it. I find this very intimidating, to sit down with some sort of arbitrary deadline hanging over me on a daily basis. I tend to write in short amounts of time, at first--a couple of hours a day, at most. However, at some point, usually about two-thirds of the way through, I'll not be able to stop myself, and will write all day, at any time of the day, whatever it takes to get it all down.

"The most surprising thing I have learned as a writer is how many people desire to be an author, too--usually because of a very idealistic, unrealistic idea of what the life is actually like. But it is also surprising that so many people desire it--when, at the same time, so few of them are actually reading what's already been written. That's perplexing to me, coming to this first from a reader's point of view.

"My favorite book of my works is *Confessions of Super Mom*. I had a lot I wanted to say with this book. Yes, the superhero conceit was catchy and fun, but I really envisioned the book as being about so many other things that women of a certain age start to face, particularly those who have contentedly given themselves over to motherhood, only to suddenly realize that one day, their children will leave. And suddenly they'll be faced with the terrifying question of, "Who am I, now, if I'm not "The Mom?" That is the heart of the book, to me. Being given the wonderful opportunity to explore this in a way that has given so many women joy and humor, that's been my greatest blessing.

"I'm a great believer in making people laugh, while also giving them something to think about, something that touches them, too. Entertainment is a good thing, and I hope my books have had that effect. I don't believe that reading has to be a painful endeavor; I don't believe that funny books deserve the scant respect that they seem to get. So I'm hoping that people will laugh a lot, cry a little, and simply enjoy reading my work."

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Gale Database: *Contemporary Authors Online*