

## Glenn's Speech for Levy Induction

I would like to thank all of you for coming to help celebrate Farmingdale, NJ resident Howard Levy's life and career, and a special thank-you to Director Shea Oakley and the NJAHOF museum for recognizing Howard's rare contribution to aviation history.

Unfortunately his wife Shirley and only child Janice predeceased him, but his two niece's Phyllis Murray and Judy Futterman are here, as well as his son in law and executor, David Daniel. So too are friends from EAA chapters 315 and 898, friends from Old Bridge and Eagles Nest airport. A big thank-you to my wife Patti Stott, Phyllis Murray, Kurt & Sue Hofschneider, Jack & Esta-Ann Elliot, and EAA chapter 315 for all your help with Howard Levy Day and the many projects over the last eighteen months that bring us here tonight.

Let me introduce you to my friend and mentor Howard Levy. I'm proud to be here on behalf of my good friend Howard. He recognized my interest in aviation photography, became my mentor, and taught me everything I know about the subject. He graciously answered my questions and invited me to symposiums, interviews and photo-shoots to learn more. I enjoyed his company, and soon became his second cameraman, his tech support guy, personal driver, and occasionally his baggage handler.

I loved asking him questions about aviation pioneers and events in history because he was such a wealth of knowledge and had a remarkable memory for details.

Here are some fast facts about Howard Levy's career;

He was a founding member of the American Aviation Historical Society

A founding member of the Aviation/Space Writers Association.

He was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Symposium of Aviation Photographers.

The staff of Kitplanes presented him with their Silver Anniversary Lifetime Achievement Award.

The American Helicopter Society presented him with their Gold Circle Award.

The Smithsonian Air & Space Museum created "The Howard Levy Collection" and shipped his entire life's work to Washington, DC. Of the over 1200 photography collections at the Smithsonian, the Howard Levy Collection more than twice the size of the second largest collection they have.

The New Jersey Aviation Hall of Fame Museum unveiled a permanent exhibit of several photos, and tonight inducted him into their Hall of Fame.

To many of us, he was a quiet man who informally shared some of his stories on Sundays with friends at Claudio Toninni's hangar at Old Bridge Airport. Claudio is a well know aircraft builder and Oshkosh Award winner who spent years building three of his own aircraft. Howard was also a regular at the "3<sup>rd</sup>

Wednesday' pilot dinner each month, and attended the monthly meetings of EAA Chapter 315 and 898. Until recently, very few people were aware of the international significance of his life's work.

It all started back in 1936 when his father gave him a Kodak box camera for his fifteenth birthday. One day his father took Howard and his sister to Floyd Bennett Field to see what was going on. Howard posed his sister in front of a Waco, pulled out his box camera, and started snapping pictures.

Although it started off as a hobby, his twin passions of photography and aviation earned him \$1.50 when his very first photo was published in the *Air Trails* magazine in 1937. In the late 30's while still a teenager he was earning two, three, and sometimes even five dollars for a photo. Remember, this is back in the days when a subway ride was only five cents. Editors were impressed, and his pictures began to show up magazines like *The Flying Aces*, *Model Airplane News*, *Bill Barnes' Air Trails*, and *Popular Aviation*. (You know *popular Aviation*, it's now the magazine called *Flying*.) This early success as a teenager launched his seventy-two year career as a professional aviation photographer. Think about that for a minute, seventy two years.

As Howard was snapping away, he met other kids doing the same thing. These airport "bums" as he called them, began trading photos and negatives amongst themselves. The group expanded by word of mouth, and soon Howard was sending and receiving photos from Kodak kids around the country. I saw some beautiful photos of Russian airfields taken during WWII. I knew they weren't his photos but I didn't know who took them. The Smithsonian told me these "Kodak kids" grew into a select group of photographers that would meet in smoke filled hotel rooms after the Paris Airshow. There they traded photos and negatives from their respective countries like baseball cards, just like the old days.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Howard enlisted in the Army with the hope of going to photo school through the Army Air Corps or Signal Corps. He had his letter of recommendation from Editor Max Karant but the Army was not impressed. They sent Private Levy to learn cryp tography, not pho tography. Eventually, he worked the system and got a transfer to the Air Corps shooting and processing pictures.

Private "Shorty" Levy, was now in uniform and armed with a Speed Graphic. He was stationed in Africa, the Middle East, Sicily, Italy and India so his collection now had P-40's, B-24's, B-25's, Thunderbolts, Mustangs, Spitfires, Mosquitoes, Beaufighters, and captured Messerschmitt. This was heaven.

When I asked what his scariest experience in aviation photography was he said it didn't happen in the air. He was tasked to stand near the runway in Egypt to photograph a crippled bomber returning to base after an aborted mission. The pilot lost control of the badly damaged airplane as it touched down and the bomber exploded right in front of Howard, nearly killing him. Howard said the only reason he survived the blast was because he instinctively hit the ground and was shielded by a small berm. Then in typical Howard fashion he proudly announced "but I got the shot".

He told me he was assigned to photograph the first "air to air" missile prototype. It was two Bazooka hand-held rockets bolted together, with a set mounted under each wing of a B-25 and fired remotely from

the cockpit. He said every day during the war there was something new to see, something new to shoot. Then, two weeks after VJ Day he was back in America married to his sweetheart, Shirley, and working in the photo lab for *Look* magazine. His passion for airplanes continued and on weekends, days off and vacations he was everywhere, shooting rollouts, first flights, fly-ins and conventions. He told me about young Stan, the diligent apprentice who worked for him in the darkroom. The kid was sharp, loved photography, but left to get into the movie business. His name was Stan, Stanley Kubrick, the director of 2001 A Space Odyssey, Spartacus, The Shining, Full Metal Jacket, and Eyes Wide Shut.

He told me that my excitement regarding the new F35 Joint Strike fighter reminded him of his excitement back in the 30's when he witnessed the new B17's rolling off the production line. He told me stories of how the whole nation was enthralled by the new technology in the B17.

Over the years he interviewed and photographed numerous aviators such as Frank Hawks, Amelia Earhart, Igor Sikorsky, Dick Merrill, Jackie Cochran, Stanley Hiller, Jimmy Doolittle, and Howard Hughes. His work was featured in aviation publications such as *Jane's*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Smithsonian Air & Space*, *AOPA Pilot*, *Sport Pilot*, *Private Pilot*, *Flying*, *Kitplanes*, *Pro Pilot*, and *Air Progress*.

When Leonardo DiCaprio starred in the life story of Howard Hughes I asked how accurate the portrayal was. Howard told me of sitting at a picnic table with his notepad interviewing Howard Hughes about his new aircraft projects. At that time he said Hughes was a regular guy, just a businessman trying to promote his company through the media.

Meanwhile, as the photo credits kept pouring in, and his name appeared as a contributor on the mastheads of foreign publications in German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, and the King's own English.

For someone who had completely mastered the use of film he floundered when forced to use a digital camera. As photography entered the digital age he became increasingly frustrated with computers and new technology. He stubbornly stuck to film and mailed his photos and typewritten stories to the magazines the same way he had done for fifty years. Sadly, when the senior editors he'd known for decades either retired or passed away, the young new "hotshots" who replaced them demanded digital content. I remember many a panicked phone call for help with his computer to find lost files, or to retouch or reformat a set of photos for an impatient editor. I'm an IT Director, my specialty is computers, and I'm a member of the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. I guess in a way, that's when I kind of became his mentor. I was one of a very few individuals invited to Howard's home, albeit initially for tech support, as he never entertained there. The place was pretty cluttered and might be easily mistaken as a candidate for an episode of "hoarders" Paper, magazines, and photos filled every available inch of his house, and covered the furniture, chairs, floors and stairways. There were boxes and filing cabinets everywhere, all packed with priceless photos, articles and memorabilia.

As I worked on the latest computer problem he would set off for a few minutes through the narrow pathways on the ground floor and return with a box or envelope he thought would interest me.

He showed me an aerial photo of a single hangar at a grass strip. There are a couple of single-engine high-winged airplanes and a few antique cars parked off to the side of a dirt road.

He said "Do you recognize this?"

"No sorry, I have no idea," I admitted.

"I shot this in 1946. It's Jamaica Seaport. Today they call it Kennedy International Airport."

He showed me a photo of Quonset Hut at Seversky Field on Long Island. I remember him telling that's where the Grumman Aircraft Company started.

In my hangar at OldBridge airport Howard would relax in my rolling office chair. He would leisurely push himself around the hangar as I worked on my Velocity aircraft as we discussed aviation, photography, and historical events. On Sunday mornings we would gather in Claudio's hangar to see the progress on his RV 8, and later his RV 12. Howard was inspired by people and their flying machines, not just the machines themselves. Yes, he called them flying machines, so one day I asked him why he didn't use the term 'airplanes'. He said when someone hears the word "airplane" they have a very narrow expectation of how it should look. A flying machine on the other hand, can be unconventional and more accurately describes the scope of his subject matter. He didn't care how odd it looked, if it flew, or even attempted to fly, he photographed it. People familiar with his love of aviation often wondered why he never wanted to become a pilot. His explanation was simple, I'm a photographer, and you can't shoot and fly at the same time.

At Oshkosh 2009 Howard would pick me up before 7am for each days photoshoot which lasted until 5 or 6 o'clock. I knew he was a good natured, even tempered professional, and very well respected in his field, but at Oshkosh he was a "rock star". Everybody paid tribute to him and he was treated like royalty everywhere we went. They even gave him a vehicle and the coveted "all areas pass" to roam the grounds without restraint.

In May of 2009, when he was 88 years old he invited me to assist him on an interview and photo shoot in Delaware for the European Today's Pilot magazine. We met Joe Gano who's collection of Soviet MIG fighter jets includes several MIG 21's and MIG 23's capable of Mach 2 plus. After a full afterburner takeoff and 30 minutes of air-air photography the formation taxied back to the ramp. Howard un-strapped, took off his helmet, and started down the 7 foot ladder to the ground. I reached up to steady him and he told me "I'm OK. I said "hand me your camera." He replied sternly "that's OK, I can manage" and climbed down by himself. When his feet touched the ground he immediately started taking closeup pictures of the MIG's landing gear as if the whole flight never happened. I know most pilots half his age would have been queasy and a little unsteady after a ride like that, but not Howard.

When Howard passed away I asked his family not to sell the house until I found a permanent home for his so called "stuff". To me, the house was a treasure trove representing his entire life's work. I asked the executor, David Daniel, to please just give me a few months, and he agreed to let me try. Many thought I was crazy. They thought a few local libraries might take some magazines, but the house just needed a few dumpsters and a fresh coat of paint. Back then few people seemed to appreciate the historical significance of his work, but Howard taught me well. I had to save it.

I remember the day I invited Executive Director Shea Oakley to the house to view the contents. I wanted a Levy presence in Teterboro and watched his face light up as he recognized some of the treasures in the collection. I remember playfully teasing him that day when I said, " As the director of a museum I think you of all people should know to properly examine these photos. Please lean back a little bit so you don't drool over the artifacts."

Many editors had the impression the house was filled with unorganized junk. When the new generation of young editors asked Howard for old photos he said he had them, but it might take a while. They'd say, "just look them up in your database and send them tomorrow, or the next day at the latest." Of course he didn't have a computer database, I don't think he knew what a database was. He had to search through the boxes and even then, the pictures were often large negatives from the 30's and 40's. They wanted each picture digitally scanned in high resolution, retouched, color corrected, and attached to an email. When he couldn't produce what they were looking for they misunderstood and thought he either never had them or lost them in all the clutter. When I invited the Smithsonian's archive people to come and examine the collection for themselves they asked me how much material there was. I told them approximately 280 - 300 cubic feet. I could hear the sarcasm when they asked, and exactly how did you come up with that estimate? I told them, "with a tape measure of course." They responded, 'That's impossible. You can't fit 300 cubic feet of photos in a single family dwelling, it would have to be piled from floor to ceiling in every room.' "You are exactly right" I replied, "It is piled in every room. From floor to ceiling." I selected over one hundred photos to scan and then researched captions for each one. Then I photographed every room, scanned a sample of his notebooks, and uploaded it all to their servers in Washington. I pleaded with them again to come see for themselves, and they did.

The Smithsonian's "Howard Levy Collection" is now recognized by aviation experts as a national treasure and a rare contribution to American history.

I speak for all his friends and family when I say how proud we are to see him inducted into the NJAHOF. The most compelling reason for honoring Howard is not just his impressive portfolio, it's his dedication, humility, and enthusiasm. He was a true gentleman. Unlike most people he never retired, he continued his love for aviation photography until the day he passed away. His idea was to die young, but as late as possible. For those of us here who were lucky enough to know him, he was one of this country's last aviation pioneers, a good friend, and a magnificent person.