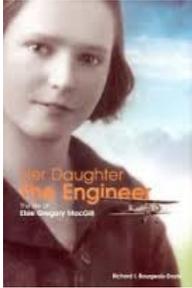


Women in Innovation – Two Good Reads



Her Daughter the Engineer: The Life of Elsie Gregory MacGill
by Richard I. Bourgeois-Doyle



Rocket Girl: The Story of Mary Sherman Morgan, America's First Female Rocket Scientist
by George D. Martin

As a society, we recognize that we are not achieving our full innovative potential if we don't encourage and support all potential innovators. And more and more we are looking at what innovative contributions could be coming from groups underrepresented in the innovation ecosystem, such as women, and racial and ethnic minorities. These two books are fascinating insights into the lives of two early women innovators who had very different support systems and trajectories.

Elsie Gregory MacGill (1905-1980) was the daughter of a female Canadian judge who fully believed in education for her girls. She is described as the world's first female aeronautical engineer and professional aircraft designer, and she guided the production of famous World War II aircraft. She was well known, recognized through awards, and involved in Canadian efforts for women's equality. Her book is an informative biography from the National Research Council of Canada. Mary Sherman Morgan (1921-2004) ran away to college from her North Dakota family farm, having fought every step for her education. She invented hydne, the propellant that boosted the US's first satellite into orbit, while working for North American Aviation, and she retired in 1955 to raise a family, declining to talk to anyone about her engineering accomplishments. Her book is an attempt by her son, after her death, to identify, document, and disseminate the stories of her work.

The abilities and intelligence of both of these women are inspirational, and the varied challenges that they faced (both as individuals and as women) are instructional to learn about. The contrasting outcomes in their lives, both professional and personal, make for an interesting comparison. Elsie suffered a physical injury while in college that may have helped her decide to concentrate more on her research than on a family. She did eventually marry a colleague, raised step-children, and remained

active in aeronautics while becoming more active in advocacy for women. She had the example of her mother and support of her sister in her life. Mary was quite alone in her struggle to get a college education, and although her abilities and hard work resulted in successful career moves, she was mostly alone until she married a colleague. Her son wonders if raising a family really was the reason for her retirement as while she had a mostly happy life, she did not seem fully comfortable in either role.

Besides being entertaining and educational, I think these two stories help us remember that our efforts to encourage any group to more fully participate in innovation is not just about that group and opportunities, but is also about complicated individuals with many different goals, support structures, and circumstances.

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