

HIGH FLIGHT

By John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds—
and done a hundred things You have not dreamed of—
wheeled and soared and swung high in the sunlit silence.
Hovering there I've chased the shouting wind along
and flung my eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
where never lark, or even eagle, flew;
and, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
the high untrespassed sanctity of space,
put out my hand and touched the face of God.

High Flight was composed by Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, Jr., an American serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was born in Shanghai, China in 1922, the son of missionary parents, Reverend and Mrs. John Gillespie Magee; his father was an American and his mother was originally a British citizen.

He came to the U.S. in 1939 and earned a scholarship to Yale, but in September 1940 he enlisted in the RCAF and was graduated as a pilot. He was sent to England for combat duty in July 1941.

In August or September 1941, Pilot Officer Magee composed High Flight and sent a copy to his parents. Several months later, on December 11, 1941 his Spitfire collided with another plane over England and Magee, only 19 years of age, crashed to his death.

His remains are buried in the churchyard cemetery at Scopwick, Lincolnshire.

