# **BIG JACK, COWBOY AVIATOR Q & A**

***Where did you get the idea for the story?***

Going through my mother’s belongings after her death in 1992, I came across two scrapbooks of old articles, a poster for an air meet, family histories, letters, and several photographs. The articles were about Jack Ashcraft, a great uncle who was an aviator in the 1920s. I remembered Mom mentioning him growing up, but I wasn’t interested at the time. I had no idea she had all this information. My adult curiosity engaged; I became engrossed in finding out all I could about this amazing relative.

From the articles, descriptions of him in books, and family histories, I pieced together a narrative for his life. I knew what he did and where, but how it all came down is conjecture on my part. The result is *Big Jack, Cowboy Aviator*.

***Where did you get the photos?***

While I found several photos, I thought there must be more somewhere. Jack had five brothers and five sisters. Upon returning from vacation one summer, there was a telephone message from a distant cousin, Allen Keller, on my answering machine. Allen is a descendent of Jack’s oldest sister, Lillian. He found my name from a photo I had posted on the internet. When I excitedly returned the call, Allen told me that he had found a family photograph album in a trunk in his grandparents’ basement in Greensburg, KS. This town was destroyed by an EF-5 tornado on May 4, 2007, but the album survived. Allen has graciously shared many of the photos to use in the book. I located more photos while visiting museums and university collections.

Allen also found other artifacts in the family home. The current owner had hoped a family member might come for the artifacts. The items included his pilot’s license signed by Orville Wright in 1929, and trophies.

***How much of the story is true and how much is fiction?***

Most of the events in this book regarding the life of Jack Ashcraft occurred, but dialogue and circumstances, and in a few instances chronology, are fictionalized for the sake of narrative. I also created fictional characters to tell his story.

***The novel has news articles that seem real. Are they? What was your thinking about including these elements?***

The news articles are real. Jack lived a very itinerate life, yet he took the time to cut out the articles and save them. This told me that they were important to him. He wanted his family and others to know what he did and accomplished in his life. Maybe he sensed that he was making history. He and the Gates Flying Circus made headline and front-page news wherever they went. I saw the articles as a journal of sorts. In the story, Jack reads some of them, so in essence he’s telling his story. The articles are real time accounts and give the story authenticity. From the hundreds available, I used those that I believe helped tell his story. Also, the journalism in the 1920s was quite colorful.

 As I mentioned, Jack had five brothers and sisters, so I have relatives that I have not nor possibly will ever meet. They may not know about this amazing relative and not have access to the information that I had. Hopefully they will hear about the book and learn more about “Big Jack” Ashcraft, Cowboy Aviator.

***Do you have similar stories planned or possible a series?***

 I have thought about it. Who or what would you like to know more about?