

Reno man on trail of Amelia Earhart mystery

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

A Reno man, who for more than 30 years has been searching for Amelia Earhart, has come up with a way that scientists may be able to isolate the lost aviator's DNA from spit left on seals of envelopes.

If Earhart's DNA is available, it can be compared with a bone fragment found two years ago on a remote Pacific island near where Earhart vanished in 1937.

"I watch the TV show 'CSI Miami' and thought about how they are always extracting DNA from evidence," said Elgen M. Long, an Amelia Earhart scholar and author of "Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved." "I said, 'hey, I've got these personal letters she wrote and probably sealed herself.' People used letter openers back then, and sure enough the envelope seals were never broken."

Long called Justin Long, his grandson and a student at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada. Justin pitched the project to Dongya Yang, a genetic archaeologist at the university. Yang agreed to attempt to extract DNA from mouth-lining cells that would have been in the saliva Earhart used to seal the envelopes.

"One of the letters was written by Amelia on airline letterhead while waiting for a flight, so we can be fairly certain that she is the one who sealed the envelope," said Justin Long, whose public relations and design agency ACG Corp. is partially funding the research.

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