

= Wings for My Flight =

Wings for My Flight : The Peregrine Falcons of Chimney Rock is a 1991 book by American wildlife biologist Marcy Cottrell Houle . The book focuses on Houle 's efforts to save the then @-@ endangered peregrine falcons from extinction . By 1975 , peregrine falcons had been reduced to 324 pairs in North America , primarily as a result of DDT , a widely used pesticide . DDT inhibited the production of calcium and caused eggs to thin and break during incubation . Recovery efforts for the peregrine have been successful : DDT was banned by the U.S. in 1972 and efforts to breed and train peregrine falcons in captivity to later release to the wild were effective . In 1999 , the peregrine falcon was removed from the U.S. Endangered Species list .

After graduating from Colorado College in the 1970s , Houle was employed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife and assigned to Chimney Rock , a prominent rock formation where one of the last pairs of peregrine falcons had been discovered . *Wings for My Flight* documents Houle 's observations of the Chimney Rock peregrine falcons , as well as the Chimney Rock community , in the summer of 1975 . To protect the falcons , Houle had to halt a million @-@ dollar project turn ancient Anasazi ruins in the area into a tourist attraction and faced opposition and harassment by the Chimney Rock community as a result . The community eventually showed concern for Houle , however , after her trailer was broken into and vandalized .

Wings for My Flight was originally published in hardcover by Addison @-@ Wesley in 1991 . The book was republished in 1999 by Pruett Publishing with a foreword by Robert Michael Pyle and a new preface and epilogue by Houle . The book was updated again in 2014 and republished by the University of New Mexico Press with photographs and a preface by Houle touching upon the recovery of the peregrine falcon . In May 1996 , the children 's magazine *Cricket* published a short story written by Houle titled " Albert " , adapted from *Wings for My Flight* . Reception to *Wings for My Flight* has generally been positive . In 1991 , the book co @-@ received the Oregon Book Award , which promotes literature by Oregon @-@ based authors . *Wings for My Flight* was also awarded a Christopher Award for books in 1992 , which recognizes works that " affirm the highest values of the human spirit " . The *Library Journal* described it as " well @-@ crafted and compelling " , while the *Los Angeles Times* referred to it as " heartfelt " , although " naive and overdrawn at times " .

= = Background = =

Marcy Cottrell Houle wrote *Wings for My Flight* in the several decades following a major decline in the peregrine falcon population , which occurred between 1950 and 1970 . During the 1930s and 1940s , an estimated 1000 breeding pairs of peregrine falcons inhabited the western United States and Mexico , coupled with 500 pairs in the eastern U.S. By the 1970s , no peregrine falcons were discovered east of the Rocky Mountains , and in the west , peregrine falcon populations had declined by 80 to 90 percent . By 1975 , the year in which the events of *Wings for My Flight* take place , only 324 pairs of peregrine falcons were known to reside in North America , with only seven pairs in the Rocky Mountains region , and one at Chimney Rock National Monument in southwestern Colorado .

During the peregrine falcon decline , Houle studied biology at Colorado College in Colorado Springs . The institution 's block scheduling system meant that Houle had fewer classes each day , allowing her to travel frequently to experience various ecosystems in addition to her academic studies . Upon leaving college , Houle began working for the Colorado Division of Wildlife , and her first field assignment was to observe peregrine falcon activity along the Rocky Mountains for four summers , two of which were spent at Chimney Rock . Following her experience with the peregrine falcons , Houle had to decide whether to continue pursuing wildlife biology or to commit instead to her passion of writing . *Wings for My Flight* combined both of Houle 's interests ; it recounted her observations of the peregrines as well as her interaction with the community at Chimney Rock during her first summer there .

The peregrine falcon became an endangered species primarily due to the use of organochlorine pesticides , especially DDT , the breakdown of which lowered estrogen levels in the female

peregrine bloodstream and inhibited the production of calcium , causing eggs to grow thinner by up to 20 percent . Since peregrine falcons lay their eggs on rocky ledges rather than nests , the thinned shells break under the stress of both the rocky ledge and the weight of the parents during incubation . Following 1970 , recovery efforts for the peregrine falcon population have been successful . The agricultural use of DDT was banned in the United States in 1972 , and recovery teams in the eastern United States were successful in breeding and training peregrines in captivity to later release to the wild , a procedure called hacking . In 1999 , the peregrine falcon was removed from the U.S. Endangered Species list .

= = Content summary = =

The events of *Wings for My Flight* take place throughout 1975 . Marcy Cottrell Houle (then " Marcy Cottrell ") , a 21 @-@ year @-@ old wildlife biologist , is sent by her supervisor , Barry Layne , to the U.S. Forest Service office near Chimney Rock in Colorado , where a pair of peregrine falcons reside . The pair is one of only seven pairs remaining in the Rocky Mountains region . Mr. Preston Fitch , an administrator involved with the peregrine falcon project , criticizes Houle for her lack of experience in the field upon meeting her . Nevertheless , Mr. Fitch introduces Houle to Chimney Rock . He explains that the Forest Service spent more than half a million dollars building a road which led to Chimney Rock ; work on the road had to be discontinued upon discovery of the falcons . Further , the Chimney Rock area is home to 250 Anasazi ruins dated between 900 and 1100 . The Chimney Rock community had been planning a million @-@ dollar development to build a tourist attraction for the ruins . Houle spends several weeks with the peregrine falcons , recording her observations in her notebook . In spite of her initial attempt at maintaining an impersonal relationship with the falcons , Houle names the female peregrine " Jenny " and the male " King Arthur " . In the middle of June , after Houle had spent several days of making field observations alone and with limited equipment , Mr. Fitch introduces Houle to her teammate , Alex Porter . He also provides them with a garbage truck for transportation .

Meanwhile , Houle faces indignation and harassment from the residents of the Chimney Rock community , who view her presence as impeding the progress of the construction of a tourist attraction for the Anasazi ruins . At one point , Maurice Richards , a high @-@ ranking official of the Colorado Division of Wildlife , attempts to host a picnic on an area restricted for the peregrines . When Houle forces him to leave , Richards threatens to fire her . Later , the female peregrine , Jenny , disappears and never returns . A local resident claims she was shot and killed by a member of the Chimney Rock community.As a result of Jenny 's disappearance , King Arthur spends several days ignoring the hatchlings . After this period of " grief " , King Arthur begins to raise the young falcons singlehandedly . Following this , Houle discovers that of five nestlings hatched by the pair , only two received enough food to survive . Houle names the surviving pair of nestlings " Bold Leopold " and " Albert " after their distinct personalities ; Leopold was more courageous and was always the first to try new things , such as flying , whereas Albert was more hesitant . In spite of all the attempts to intimidate her , the people of Chimney Rock eventually sympathize with Houle after her trailer , containing valuable field equipment as well as personal items , is broken into and vandalized .

= = Publication history = =

Wings for My Flight was first published in 1991 in hardcover by Addison @-@ Wesley . Houle later wrote a short story titled " Albert " that was adapted from *Wings for My Flight* , focusing on Albert and Leopold 's first attempts at flying . The story was published in the May 1996 issue of the children 's magazine *Cricket* . *Wings for My Flight* was republished , this time in paperback , in 1999 by Pruett Publishing . This edition included a foreword by Robert Michael Pyle and a new preface and epilogue by Houle . In 2014 , the book was updated and republished again by University of New Mexico Press . The updated edition contained photographs of the Chimney Rock landscape , as well as a preface by Houle that addressed the recovery of the peregrine falcon population since the

book was first published in 1991 . Houle highlighted the 1972 agricultural prohibition of DDT , which was the chemical primarily responsible for the peregrine decline ; the Endangered Species Act of 1973 , which allowed the pursuit of wildlife conservation to take precedence over land issues ; and successful attempts to raise peregrines in captivity and later release them to the wild . While writing the book , Houle changed the names of various people and places , explaining the choice by saying " I felt more comfortable changing the names because I worked for so long with those people , it was impossible to be honest about them if I named them " .

= = Reception = =

Wings for My Flight was generally well received . In 1991 , the book received the Oregon Book Award for literary nonfiction , co -@-@ receiving the award with *My Country , My Right to Serve* by Mary Ann Humphrey . The Oregon Book Award , presented annually by Literary Arts , a non @-@ profit organization that promotes literature , intends to recognize the works of Oregon @-@ based authors in a variety of literary genres . Additionally , in 1992 , the book received a Christopher Award , which is presented annually by The Christophers , a non @-@ profit Christian inspirational group , and recognizes creators of books , motion pictures , and television specials that " affirm the highest values of the human spirit " .

Dolores and Roger Flaherty wrote a positive review in the *Chicago Sun @-@ Times* , noting how " Houle blends elements of adventure , romance , humor and pathos in the story of her rookie summer as a wildlife biologist . Along the way she offers vivid descriptions of her skydiving subjects and the seductive beauty of the wilderness . " David M. Schwartz , in the May 1992 edition of *Smithsonian* , praised Houle 's prose in *Wings for My Flight* , and wrote that the story is " told with a charming simplicity in fewer than 200 pages " . Schwartz also praised Houle for including her notational system for documenting field observations , stating that it " opens a window on field biology " . Writing in the *Library Journal* , Henry T. Armistead referred to the book as " well crafted and compelling , a dramatization of the classic conflict between the legitimate interests of conservationists and developers " , and , " highly recommended on several levels , as science , sociology , or a story " . Andrew Gulliford , a professor of history and environmental studies at Fort Lewis College , noted in the *Durango Herald* the significance of Houle 's efforts to prevent " inappropriate development " at Chimney Rock , which was proclaimed a U.S. National Monument by President Barack Obama in 2012 . " *Wings for My Flight* is a personal story " , wrote Gulliford , " but also a chronicle of environmental success . Without a doubt , peregrines saved Chimney Rock for the rest of us . "

Freehance writer Paul De Witte wrote a mixed review in *The Record* (now the *Waterloo Region Record*) , writing that although the book " will certainly find its audience , its Disneyesque sensibilities will kill its broader appeal . The topics of wildlife conservation and global ecological accountability warrant a depth that the author seems unwilling to give her book . " *Kirkus Reviews* referred to the book as " an enlightening cautionary take " and " a charmingly personal account " , but also as " loosely organized and occasionally sparse on detail " . John Wilkes , in the *Los Angeles Times* , wrote , " Although naive and overdrawn at times , this heartfelt tale will bring tears and smiles to even the most stubbornly objective reader . " Donna Mitchell , writing in *The Wilson Bulletin* (now *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*) , wrote that Houle 's interpretation of the falcons ' behavior is excessively " anthropomorphic " , but also that " Ms. Houle 's perseverance and dedication to the protection of the Peregrine Falcon is admirable and an incentive not only to young biologists just getting started but to those of us who get a little more than discouraged with the struggle to protect endangered species and their habitats . "