



Jenny Beatty, Ambassador Chapter

Because of my short stature and imperfect vision, a well-intentioned but misinformed high school career counselor tried to steer me away from a pilot career. Today I stand five-foot-three-inches tall and look out my office windows with eyesight corrected to 20/20. My office is the cockpit of a sleek MD-80 jet, which I fly for a national airline.

While all rewarding careers require dedication and sacrifice, aviation in particular demands a great deal of its aspirants--both women and men. When asked how I achieved my goal of becoming an airline pilot, I sometimes relate the above story to show the dedication: I didn't allow "nay-sayers" to impede my progress. Or I might mention the sacrifices: I have moved six times in the last four years. Or I might reveal the pin kept hidden in my uniform hat, which features a woman saying: "I can't believe it! I forgot to have children!"

But this career is too difficult and competitive to face alone--I also counted on support from my family, friends, and mentors. Our parents encouraged my sisters and I to become professionals--in any field. My interest in aviation came from my mother, who flew when she was a teenager in the 1940s, and my grandmother, now deceased, who flew with my grandfather in the glory days of aviation in the 1930s and 40s. No one in my family was actively flying as I grew up, but it was something I dreamed of for a long time.

Finally in 1981, I earned the private pilot's license. As I built my hours, I worked part-time as a weather observer, then received advanced pilot training, and returned to finish college. My first aviation job was as flight and ground instructor, until I landed a position flying bank checks. Over the next several years, I built more hours and progressed to larger aircraft, transporting U.S. mail, overnight freight, dead bodies, aerial photographers, as well as charter passengers. Entry into the airline industry came in 1991, when I was hired by a commuter airline to fly the Saab SF-340, a sophisticated turboprop aircraft. After several years as First Officer, it appeared that progression to the Captain seat was not going to be available due to the stagnation in the airline industry and resultant lack of openings. So, to move my career forward, in late 1993 I accepted a Captain position with a new airline. In addition to line flying duties on the Beechcraft BE-1900, I also entered the training department as a Ground Instructor and Line Check Airman.

In the spring of 1995, I was hired by Reno Air, a young airline with scheduled service in the West Coast, Canada, and Alaska, and charter flights across the U.S., Caribbean, and Mexico. My position is First Officer on the McDonnell-Douglas MD-80 jet, but in my "spare time" I also help write training materials and teach ground school, and am an informal counselor to passengers trying to overcome a fear of flying. In addition to the Airline Transport Pilot certificate with the BE-1900 Type Rating, I maintain current Flight Instructor and Ground Instructor certificates. Over the years I have also learned to fly aerobatics, gliders and seaplanes, and achieved the Aircraft Dispatcher certificate. In 1995, I was honored to be awarded the Amelia Earhart Memorial Scholarship for advanced training in flight by The Ninety-Nines, the International Organization of Women Pilots. The special scholarship was donated by United Airlines, and will allow me to earn a Type Rating in one of the jet aircraft operated by the airline. Acquiring all of these new skills expands my love of flying, and also carries over into my everyday airline pilot job.

Networking and mentoring are vital, and it is particularly important to reach out to young women who may otherwise feel isolated. I joined the Ninety-Nines International Organization of Women Pilots as soon as I was licensed. In addition, I am a member of the International Society of Women Airline Pilots, the Experimental Aircraft Association, International Aerobatic Club, Soaring Society of America, Women Soaring Pilots Association, and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

Now it is my turn to help aspiring aviation professionals up the career ladder. To encourage young people to enter the field, I write articles for several aviation journals about the wide variety of aviation careers and the fascinating women who work in them. In other writings, I share my love of flying by describing a particularly interesting flight, an issue between the co-pilot and I, a funny situation with passengers, the beauty of the world as seen from above, or the challenge of mastering a machine or overcoming adverse conditions. My goal is to reach critical mass--to have young women enter aviation careers in such numbers that we will no longer be considered mere curiosities or quota-fillers, but rather are readily accepted as co-workers, peers, and experts in our field.

"But you're so small!" is still a frequent comment made about my suitability as pilot. So I point out that all a pilot is required to do is simply fly, not lift, the airplane.