

“Just watch, all of you men. I’ll show you what a woman can do...I’ll go across the country. I’ll race to the moon...I’ll never look back.” Edna Gardner Whyte 1/1/1931

<https://www.theledger.com/story/entertainment/events/2020/01/20/lakeland-womans-locally-produced-aviation-documentary-fly-like-girl-gets-1st-polk-screening/1864101007/>

FLY LIKE A GIRL begins by spotlighting a young girl who dreams of becoming a pilot, even attending a charter school that offers flight simulation. Playing off the girl's interest in women in aviation, the film provides interviews with such pioneering pilots and astronauts as Shaesta Waiz, the youngest woman to fly solo around the world; Sen. Tammy Duckworth; Capt. Venice Armour, the first Black female naval aviator in the Marine Corps (and the first Black female combat pilot in the U.S. Armed Forces); Patty Wagstaff, the first woman to become a U.S. national aerobatic champion; Nicole Stott, a flight engineer and NASA astronaut who went to space on the Expedition crew; and 90-something Bernice Falk Haydu, a Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) in World War II who had to wait more than 60 years to get her wings from the government for her service. Directed by Katie Wiatt, the movie is a tribute to and chronicle of what these women have accomplished in a male-dominated field.

This insightful, inspiring documentary showcases women aviators who've proven time and time again that flying isn't just for boys and men. By framing the film around young Florida girl Afton Kinkade, an aspiring aviator, Fly Like a Girl is able to show how it's not just the very earliest women pilots who made history. Even in the 1990s and 2000s, women were still breaking barriers, fighting in combat, earning medals, and winning competitions for the first time. All of the women interviewed have fascinating stories. Armour, whose nickname in the Marines apparently was "Fly Girl," is particularly compelling while telling the harrowing story of a mission. Nonagenarian Haydu is fascinating and her story educational: Even many adults likely haven't heard of the WASP initiative and how its pilots were deprived of their full military standing for decades.

Perhaps the only quibble is that with so many women to feature, viewers might wish they had more time to delve into their individual stories, rather than getting snapshots of each one. It's difficult not to want to immediately look up their backgrounds and accomplishments. Wagstaff's incredible aerobatics, Stott's space walk, Duckworth's disciplined service, and Waiz's around-the-world trip are all worthy of fuller investigation. At least Fly Like a Girl shares their names and outstanding achievements with a broad audience. All of them are aware of -- and, in some cases, have experienced -- systemic and personal sexism and discrimination against their abilities. But they persisted, and now Kinkade, like all girls her age, has so many more role models than the generations who came before her.

- Families can talk about how Fly Like a Girl depicts the obstacles and sexism the women aviators overcame to fly. Why do you think it's important to continue to discuss what women have accomplished in fields traditionally dominated by men?
- How are these various aviators role models? What character strengths do they display? Why are courage, perseverance, and teamwork important in a pilot?
- Discuss the intersectionality expressed by women such as Sen. Tammy Duckworth, Shaesta Waiz, and Capt. Vernice Armour. Why is it vital to acknowledge the women's race, ethnicity, disability, and even immigration status when discussing their achievements? What extra challenges did the women face due to their identity?

- What did the documentary teach you about the history of women in aviation, wartime history, and NASA?

In Order of Appearance:

Afton Kinkade

From the aerospace program at Stewart Middle Magnet in Tampa, Afton told us what it is about flying that captured her heart and mind. “What got me interested, well, I think I was about three years old, and I would look up into the sky and see these airplanes flying through the sky. And my mother would tell me, ‘You know, these people are pilots. You can fly these things,’” Afton recalled. My inspirations, actually, I inspire from Patty Wagstaff, a three-time aerobatic champion, which is basically doing stunts in the air, it’s really crazy, but I think that’s one of my paths that I want to do,” Afton said.

Patty Wagstaff

Patty Wagstaff is an American aviator and U.S. national aerobatic champion. Wagstaff was introduced to aviation as a child; her father was a pilot for Japan Airlines.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patty_Wagstaff

Shaesta Waiz

Shaesta Waiz is an American aviator. She is the first female certified civilian pilot born in Afghanistan, and in 2017, became the youngest woman to fly solo around the world in a single-engine aircraft - a record she held until Zara Rutherford completed the flight at the age of 19 in January 2022. Shaesta Waiz is the founder of Dreams Soar, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to inspiring the next generation of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and aviation professionals.

Taylor Richardson

(also known as Astronaut StarBright) is an American advocate, activist, speaker, student and philanthropist. She has crowdfunded over \$40,000 to send girls to see the films A Wrinkle in Time and Hidden Figures. She attended Space Camp and has expressed interest in becoming an astronaut and doctor.

Jessica Ortega

Jessica Ortega has been a Republic First Officer based in New York City’s LaGuardia airport for the last three years and is currently training to become a Captain. Described as her “passion project” Jessica serves as the Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Professional Pilots of Tomorrow, a volunteer Non-Profit geared towards providing structured mentoring and networking opportunities to aspiring aviators. Learn more about Jessica, her path to aviation as a Hispanic woman and her passion in inspiring the next generation of aviators.

Abby Harrison

also known as Astronaut Abby, is an American internet personality and science communicator, particularly in the area of the United States space program. Harrison is the founder and current leader of The Mars Generation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. She is not an astronaut. In 2015, Harrison founded the 501(c)(3) nonprofit called The Mars Generation and currently serves as the President of the Executive Board. The Mars Generation is an American non-governmental nonprofit organization involved in public outreach and advocating for human space exploration and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Olivia Lisbon Stancil

was in the first graduating class from Central Florida Aerospace Academy at Kathleen High School and earned a bachelor's degree from the aerospace program at Polk State College. Stancil is not a pilot but has worked as a flight operations coordinator and an air dispatcher, adding diversity to the documentary's subjects

Vernice Armour

is a former United States Marine Corps officer who was the first African-American female naval aviator in the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps first female combat aviator. She flew the AH-1W SuperCobra attack helicopter in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and eventually served two tours in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Sharmin Kurek

Afton's mom

Bernice "Bee" Haydu

was an American aviator and served as a Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) in World War II. Haydu remained active in aviation and remained an advocate for women pilots.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernice_Falk_Haydu

Tammy Duckworth

Following in the footsteps of her father, who served in World War II and the Vietnam War, and ancestors who served in every major conflict since the Revolutionary War, Duckworth joined the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps in 1990 as a graduate student at George Washington University. She became a commissioned officer in the United States Army Reserve in 1992 and chose to fly helicopters [because it was one of the few combat jobs open to women at that time. As a member of the Army Reserve, she went to flight school, later transferring to the Army National Guard and in 1996 entering the Illinois Army National Guard.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammy_Duckworth

Nicole Stott

Nicole Marie Passonno Stott is an American engineer and a retired NASA astronaut. She served as a Flight Engineer on ISS Expedition 20 and Expedition 21 and was a Mission Specialist on STS-128 and STS-133. After 27 years of working at NASA, the space agency announced her retirement effective June 1, 2015.

Abington Welch

Welch learned to fly back in 2006, when she was just 22 years old. “I dreamed of becoming a pilot ever since I was 14,” when she attended a career seminar near her childhood home in Burbank, Calif. She went for the free food, she recalls, but became enraptured when two pilots spoke about their work. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thestoryexchange/2017/08/14/a-female-pilot-soars-as-a-niche-entrepreneur/?sh=221bbd7711d5>

Heather Alexander

is the Executive Director of the International Women’s Air & Space Museum in Cleveland Ohio.

Questions:

What are the names of two of Afton’s chickens?

What did Patty’s parent think of her dream to be a pilot?

How did Abby’s mom react to her decision to become a pilot?

What drew Vernice to flight school?

What did Afton tell her mom when she was 4? [Hint: “I don’t do fairy tales...”]

How did Bee end up learning how to fly?

What was Tammy’s reasoning for going into a combat slot?

How does Nicole’s family upbringing compare to other women in the film?

Has Shaesta always loved flying?

How much was the demo flight Abington signed up for?

What did Abington do after the demo flight? Did she immediately go into flight school?

How did Afton’s parents support her dream?

Describe some of the experiences Patty had getting to her dream.

Was Bee and the other women accepted? Describe two incidents that occurred.

Describe Vernice’s rescue mission.

What did you think of the clip with “Chip” on supervising women?

What do you think of the phrase “another empty kitchen?”

What does Afton’s t-shirt say? [towards the end of the film]