

Judy Cameron Flies Through Glass Ceiling

by Marilyn Dickson

The Stamp Committee of the East Canada Section of the Ninety-Nines women pilots organization selects one Canadian female pilot each year, to honour with a commemorative stamp.

Judy is the epitome of “breaking the mold”. During her career as Air Canada’ first female pilot, she shattered several stereotypes. She refers to a few lucky breaks. But with sheer persistence, Judy **made** her own good luck.

Born in 1954 Judy was raised by her mother, who strived to give her a good start in life, including attending university. After first year, Judy was hired by Transport Canada to survey pilots about “Itinerant Aircraft Movements”. (They found that pilots, mostly male, were pleased to respond to young women questioners.) When a young man offered to take Judy for a flight, he did aerobatics - showing off, with little regard for his passenger. Judy loved it! Within weeks she applied for Selkirk College’s aviation program. She no doubt impressed the motorcycle enthusiast Program Director, by riding her motorcycle for eight hours (Vancouver to Castlegar).

Though her 29 male classmates accepted her reasonably well, Judy felt isolated at times. The college’s first female graduate in 1975, Judy had various aviation jobs, eventually earning her way into a cockpit. First she was a dispatcher when company directors vetoed a female pilot, next, a reservations agent who doubled as co-pilot with no training, when trips required a co-pilot, and then a DC-3 Co-pilot and Aztec/Cessna 180 Charter Pilot with minimal training and flying poorly maintained equipment with a company which went bankrupt. As a DC-3 Co-pilot she mostly flew charters, which included loading up to 6000 pounds of freight.



When she sought an airline job, a regional carrier offered her a position and invited her to discuss the work. Arriving for the meeting, she was told that the Vice President refused to hire a woman. The company apologetically unhired her.

She continued to apply to airlines. On April 10, 1978 Air Canada hired their first female pilot - Judy! No doubt her experience helped - 1200 hours on a DC-3, an 11,430 kg aircraft with two 1,200 hp engines, which cruises at 370 km/hr!

Air Canada’s male pilots accepted Judy well, likely because of her experience, determination and friendliness. Judy dealt graciously with passengers who frequently mistook her for a flight attendant. Her first pregnancy presented another challenge. There was no pilot maternity uniform. Other pilots never needed one! Soon after Judy’s second daughter’s birth, she divorced and became a single mom.

During her 40 year career Judy logged over 23,000 hours in the DC-3, Twin Otter, Hawker Siddeley 748, DC-9, Lockheed 1011, Airbus 320, Boeing 767 and 777. In 2006 Judy became the first female captain in Canada of the Boeing 767 and in 2010, of the Boeing 777. She flew to destinations including Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tel Aviv, Santiago Chile, Sydney Australia, London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, and most major Canadian and USA cities. Judy credits her mother who inspired her to believe she could do anything she wished. Living her mother’s credo, Judy inspires many other women, particularly those in aviation!

Issued a year after her 2015 retirement, the stamp features a photo taken by Captain Judy’s husband Ron Swaisland. The First Day Cover, designed by Suzanne Wiltshire, includes portraits of Judy in various stages of her career.

