

My story follows ...

Nina Anderson



“Ready about! Hard to lee!” I shouted to my crew as we slam-dunked the Jet 14 around to a starboard tack. We were heading for the final mark and in the lead, assuring that my team would end up second in the Middle Atlantic Intercollegiate Sailing Association for the 1966 season. I was Captain of the Monmouth College (NJ) sailing team and the only female skipper in our league.

It was an ego-trip on one hand, but at the same time proved to be a defensive position. The boys didn’t like girls beating them and my coach used this to our advantage. I sailed in warm weather in a two-piece bathing suit (bikini’s hadn’t been allowed yet). It seemed that the male competition became totally unglued when they were neck and neck with us (the ‘I can’t let a girl beat me’ syndrome), giving our boat a definite psychological advantage. It had been easy for me to earn a skipper designation. I started sailing in ninth grade and there were no restrictions on who had the helm.



As I became better in competition it never dawned on me that I was a novelty. After all, it had been over 40 years since women received the right to vote. My mother, who soloed an airplane in the 1930s, was an opera singer and worked professionally. Women were unleashing their sexuality and blacks were being admitted to universities. Why would I think there would be any discrimination against women in any sense? I hadn’t entered the workplace and had no clue my climb up the business ladder could be thwarted because of my sex.

This naiveté probably helped propel my success. If you believe, and live from that belief, it will manifest. My parents had always instilled positive thinking in their rhetoric and they always encouraged me to do anything I wanted. Although we struggled financially, our parents taught my sisters Kim, Jeanne and me that thoughts were things and to follow your dreams.

My father succeeded in becoming a pilot in the 1920s – a feat in itself, since he was one of a gaggle of children from an immigrant family. Much of his youth had been spent in an orphanage while his parents worked to get enough money for a house.

My dad, Nick Vuyosevich, started a flying club in 1920 with a group of 200 would-be aviators. The Jersey City Flying Club had nary a pilot among them. Within ten years they had collected enough money to build a hangar on 70 acres next to Newark Bay (NJ), which was given to them by Mayor Frank Hague.



A well-known aviator, Clarence Chamberlain, moved his business to Jersey City and the club twisted the arm of the mayor and convinced Mr. Chamberlain to keep his flying school aircraft (Swallows with OX5 and Hesso engines) in their hangar in exchange for flying lessons. That's how my dad began a short aviation career. He always saw the dream, lived the dream even when he didn't have an airplane or even one flight lesson, and eventually his dream came true.

He went on to log over 600 hours of flight time and ended up flying some freight runs to the west coast in a Staggerwing. Once the war began, domestic flying all but ceased and my father, who was employed by a company supplying war goods, was grounded. He never flew as a pilot again, but our house was always filled with airplane photos



and weekly outings seemed to find us at an airport – must be the reason aviation became implanted in my subconscious and triggered my interest later in life.

Back in the '60s I was armed with the belief that I could do anything I wanted. The problem is that like most of my friends, I didn't have a clue what to do after graduation from college. Tie dyes, the Beatles, love-ins, the war (Vietnam) protests, and the shooting of President Kennedy permeated my life. Sailboat racing was my "profession" and I was trying to figure out how to get paid for it. Then I met Neil Shively, who turned out to become my first husband.

I needed a photography instructor for my art thesis in my senior year of college, and Monmouth didn't have one, so they suggested I call Fort Monmouth (Army) nearby and see who they had who could teach. It just so happened that Neil was the guy and, to boot, he was a part-time pilot flying freight runs out of Red Bank airport (NJ), which is currently a shopping center. Now this really impressed a college co-ed who still didn't know what it was like to be a grown-up and really hadn't planned on ever being an adult.

Our first date was a flight to Kennedy Airport in an Aztec (twin engine for you non-aviators) flying the mail – and he let me fly the airplane!!! Now this was really cool and put me one level above all the other college kids I knew. Needless to say I was smitten and now whenever an airplane went overhead I craned my neck upwards. It looked liked this was a great job: you didn't have to wear a desk, went places, people thought you were special because you could fly and you got paid for it! I decide that was for me.

I took most of the money I made from teaching sailing and put it into flying a Cessna 150. One day I found myself on downwind alone in the airplane on my first solo – flying in a dress (I don't think blue jeans had been invented for girls

yet). As most pilots will tell you, the airplane felt empty without a body in the right seat and all the way around the pattern you just keep praying.

So I soloed and then married Neil. He was hired by a corporation to fly a Gulfstream I and then laid off. We ended up living on my yacht broker commissions that basically paid for cat food, so my flying ceased. I still believed I would be a professional pilot someday and looking back it was that conviction that patterned my life. For many years I took whatever job I could to pay for my aviation habit – fueler, bathroom mopper, bookkeeper, scheduler, aircraft broker, secretary, weather briefer and even worked behind the candy counter at the old WWII terminal building at White Plains, NY. Eventually I earned my commercial, multi-engine and instrument ratings and thought, “OK, now I can get a job.” Wrong! This was the first time discrimination reared its ugly head.

Not only did I have a limited number of flight hours, but the ‘good old boy’ cockpit had no room for women. I



needed to build flight time in a multi-engine airplane so I partnered with a few other pilots and bought a Piper Apache. Visiting my aunt and uncle in Lake Placid, NY, was one of my regular cross-country trips. But, that airplane eventually outwitted

my pocketbook and I knew I needed to start flying for free or get paid for it.

At the time, I was working for Ted Healy, owner of the fledgling Panorama Flight Services as a dispatcher, secretary,

bookkeeper, scheduler, phone answerer and cashier behind that proverbial candy counter. I needed to build time and thought that would solve all my problems in getting hired. Wrong again! Ted let me ride as co-pilot on freight runs to Binghamton at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. for a year and then I had enough flight time to get my Airline Transport Rating. He even loaned me a brand new Aztec to use for the flight test. I came back proud as a peacock that I had passed and asked him if I could now be a pilot for him. He actually said yes but restricted my trips to flying cancelled checks, no people. The big fear was that if passengers saw a woman at the helm they wouldn't fly that charter company again. So back and forth to Binghamton I flew by myself, loading bags of checks and encountering all sorts of weather without radar. I can't tell you how many times the airplane, covered with ice and thrashing around in turbulence, had me asking God for my Mommie.

One miraculous day one of the charter airplanes had a mechanical. I was called upon to deliver the defective part but when I got there I found the passengers needed to get back to White Plains. I was their only option as the other pilot had to remain with the airplane and mechanic. When I arrived they told Ted it was a great flight and had no scary stuff to say about being flown by a woman. That was the turning point in my career! I credit Ted as being the one person who gave me the opportunity to make my dream a reality.

At that point I started bombarding the airlines with applications. I discovered that besides being a woman I was too old! At 30! How could this be? So I had to 'settle' for the commuter airlines in hopes they would take an 'old broad.' It was an exercise in vain for a while, even though I had the necessary flight hours and experience of other candidates. Then equal opportunity became the buzzword and companies were forced to hire a certain number of women. Command Airways in 1978 offered me a job as a First Officer on a Twin Otter and a Beech 99 (I assumed they had to hire a minority, and there were fewer blacks than women flying at the time). Not being

proud, I jumped at the chance and I thought it was the best thing that had ever happened. The pay was little more than enough to pay for cat food (I had recently divorced but kept shared custody of our cats). But, I was flying a turbine and I had a uniform. I was definitely cool! What I discovered is that the



pilots had their own set of rules for me. I was a broad and that seemed to threaten their masculinity, so many of them either ignored me or treated me like a child. There were some really supportive pilots though and I made Captain within the year. As most pilots who want the ultimate job – to fly a jet, I started looking around at other companies. I heard Air New England (ANE), another commuter, was looking to hire female pilots. They were dangling the prospect of flying a Boeing 737 in the future, which they dangled each winter to get us to stay around until summer and then mysteriously that prospect evaporated. But I bought their promises, switched jobs and got a crash pad with the other woman pilot that had just been hired.

ANE was actually a great company to work for. Most of the pilots treated us as equals. The Twin Otter had cockpit doors that exited to the outside so we didn't have to go through the passenger cabin. This was an easy out of the airplane as one crew discovered. Hijacking was in full swing and some dude decided to hijack the Twin Otter at Kennedy ... where he thought he could go with an airplane with a few hours range and an airspeed that race cars exceed, I don't know. The crew convinced him they had to close the door between the cabin and the cockpit to taxi, and then just bailed out the front doors leaving the guy sitting in the airplane waiting for the gun-wielding airport police. Anyway, those doors leaked so I spent a good bit of the winter at ANE wearing my ski pants to fly as the cockpit always filled with snow while airborne.

Most pilots flying commuters dream about being an airline pilot, I did too. So again I started with the applications. Women had been forging territory into the right seat with American, Frontier and others so I figured it was my time. Drat! I was still too old. As the airlines upped the age limit, I kept being one year above. When I received a rejection letter from United Airlines, my father wrote me a letter that provided impetus to continue towards my dream.

Dearest Nina,

That dear John type letter from United was their mistake in not taking you on, but knowing you and your drive and determination it is just another cut off on the road to your objective which I feel strongly will soon be realized to your fullest dreams. As I go back over my life, it wasn't the competition that bothered me, though the roadblocks were many as all of us find out. But, just that one little twist of luck that goes along with your efforts to attain something worthwhile; some of us get that bit of mysterious help and rise to the top. This event is one to pass over, but analyze the background of your efforts and gain something out of it for your next step.

Love,

Dad

With my father's support I decided that maybe corporate would be my avenue into a jet. I started my flurry of applications in that direction. To my surprise they were not nearly as receptive as the airlines.

Maybe equal opportunity hadn't filtered down to flight departments yet. I couldn't believe it. I always had set my sights on a goal without even thinking that I couldn't get there, and here was the slamming door before it even opened. Sure I got some

interviews but most were just token. They had to interview but didn't have to hire. Questions that I got asked during the interview process (note that they were always asked by male chief pilots) included "So how long will it take you to split up our pilots families," inferring women are sex maniacs and only want to get hired to have an affair. My retort was that men are the ones that start the affair. They didn't like that reply so I quickly got the boot. Many times I was more qualified than others interviewed but I was a woman – the kiss of death.

Finally a major corporation decided to take a chance on me and flew me down from Boston to an interview in Teterboro, NJ. They put me in the right seat of a Sabreliner jet to see how well I could talk to the controllers and holy *!x*! This airplane happened to be traveling three times faster than our pokey Twin Otter and I was required to do all the radio contact work with the controller. My mouth wasn't used to working that fast and trying to keep up with the quick changes in frequencies was mind-boggling. I thought I'd never be able to fly something that speedy, but they must have thought my mouth met the test so they hired me. I had broken through the corporate glass ceiling!



I befriended a few pilots in that company that helped me when I hit the wall in school and just thought I'd never get through the simulator training. But, a few pilots who were a lot older and definitely not into having their ego's threatened by the fact that a woman could fly their airplane, gave me a real hard time. When they didn't keep their hands to themselves during a flight I went to the Chief Pilot and complained. Remember, this was an era when sexual harassment hadn't been invented so my complaints fell on deaf ears. I had to learn to deal with this kind of assault on my own.

As it turned out, the company also had another agenda by hiring me. They used me for great PR – put me on TV, wrote me into their press releases, company newsletters being made a

news item just like the early women fliers, as I was one of the first female corporate pilots in the USA. I was their poster child that showed the world how liberal they were and how they complied with the equal opportunity directives. Of course, the male pilots hated me for it. This made matters worse and eventually I left for another job. They replaced me with a man (they have since hired many women).



Since that time I have flown well into my sixties in many types of corporate aircraft with many crews, both male and female and as time progressed women became more accepted in the front office of the airplane. My last job, with F1 Air, proved things had definitely changed. There were the occasional personality differences between our crew, but that had nothing to do with gender. When you spend so much time together, (just like having a spouse or sibling), differences of opinion will surface that you have to work out. Fortunately, I can walk away from my new spouse, Charlie, or my sisters if they annoy me or I annoy them, but you can't do that in a cockpit. One of the big lessons in corporate flying is the art of getting along with these constant companions. Occasionally you will run across a male pilot that has a bug up his you know where about flying with a woman, but for the most part today it doesn't seem to matter which gender you are as long as you are professional.

One lesson I learned was that men and women, for the most part, tend to look at the same situation from different positions. A woman normally takes fewer risks and doesn't seem married to the "get-home-itis, complete the mission at any cost" mantra. She is more likely to read and reread checklists and be ultra meticulous about preflights. It could be that the 'mother' in her assumes responsibility for the safe outcome of the flight just as she would if she was on a trip with her children. There may be some women whose egos rival those of their male counterparts, but I haven't met them. All of the women who I interviewed for this book took pride in their occupation and were genuinely caring individuals without obnoxious egos. Maybe this is why they succeeded in their careers.

As I look back on my life I realize I never gave up my dream. Sometimes it looked bleak, but in my mind that was only a hiccup and the silver lining was still in my future. I just had to be patient. For any woman climbing the corporate ladder my words of wisdom are: don't believe anyone when they tell you you're not worth it, put obstacles in your way, or try to undermine your dream. If you believe – it will happen! Just stay on track, be positive and don't listen to those who are negative. In the long run you will win.

