

Lockheed Lodestar 18-56A CF-CPA on which Joan served.

A stewardess' story

Joan Monette Willson, CPA stewardess July 1945 - August 1947

By Marilyn (Willson) Pride

Joan was born June 10, 1922 on a farm south of Bengough, Saskatchewan - six miles from the Montana border.

She received her R.N. after completing a three-year program at the Regina General Hospital in 1945. Her father knew a man named Mr. Ryan who was in charge of the Regina, Saskatchewan Airport and who later became head of Canadian Pacific Airlines. When Joan applied to be a stewardess for Canadian Pacific Airlines, Mr. Ryan hired her. She took her three months training in Edmonton, Alberta to do this.

Joan worked for Canadian Pacific Airlines from July 1, 1945 to August, 1947. She became engaged and had to leave the airline since she was getting married. Stewardesses at that time were not allowed to be married.

She was stationed in Edmonton and flew to the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Eventually she flew into Fairbanks, Alaska. The route to the Yukon was Grand Prairie, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse. Gas and passengers were taken on at these small towns.

It took all day to go from Edmonton, Alberta to Whitehorse, Yukon. They would go up one day and have a lay over at the company staff house in Whitehorse and fly back the next day. The route to the Northwest Territories ended up in Yellowknife.

The plane that she worked on was a twin engine Lockheed Lodestar that held 12 passengers, a pilot and co-pilot and one stewardess.

The registrations of two planes she flew in were CF-CPR, and CF-CPA. There was no seat for the stewardess and Joan would have to sit in a "jump seat" that came down from the wall at the back of the plane.

The planes were not allowed to go over a certain elevation because they weren't pressurized. There was oxygen on board for the flight crew but not for the passengers if it was needed in case of an emergency.

Some of Joan's duties as the only stewardess were to check the plane to be sure all supplies needed for the flight were on board and that there were thermoses of hot coffee and hot water for tea. Boxed lunches that had only cold food were served on flight for meals.

No liquor was available to the passengers and smoking was not permitted on the plane. Only hats and coats were permitted in the overhead racks for the passengers' safety due to heavy turbulence at times. At that time stewardesses were not allowed to fly more than 100 hours a month.

Joan remembers flying over the Canal pipeline which was built from 1942 to 1944 to



Joan Monette Willson in her CPA stewardess uniform.

ensure a supply of oil to the airfields that were on the route to Alaska. These airfields were rest and refuelling points for aircraft bound for Alaska and Russia to aid the U.S. air forces in their fight against WW II enemies.

Looking down she would see the many U.S. aircraft that were part of what was called the Ferry Command. The Ferry Command consisted of men and women who flew the aircraft to Alaska.

If there were problems with the plane, such as low fuel or an oil leak, they would have to land on an alternate landing strip that was basically an emergency strip run by the D.O.T. These strips were fairly short compared to today's landing strips.

There was often just one building beside the strip that the crew would stay over night in. The plane's engines would then have to have tarps covering them, with heaters put in front of each engine due to the extreme cold.

Joan remembers one incident when the pilot said they had to land at a particular landing strip called "Snag" because the outside temperature was 79 degrees below Fahrenheit and the engines would freeze up at such a low temperature.

The ice that formed on the wings could also bring the plane down. When the ice did form, it would break off and hit the cabin and scare everyone on the plane, including the pilots.

On Joan's route were some planes that had crashed due to icing on the wings or a shortage of fuel. There was no de-icing fluid back then. The terrain they flew over was very remote and mountainous and airstrips were few and far between.

Following are some rules and guidelines from Joan's 1945 Canadian Pacific Airlines Stewardess manual:

QUALIFICATIONS

Preference is given to applicants who are Registered Nurses. Applicants are preferred between the height of 60-68 inches.

Applicants are preferred between the ages of 21 to 26 years. Applicants shall not weigh more than 150 pounds and not less than a 105 pounds.

They must have a pleasing personality, good appearance, courteous and efficient manner, practical and level headed.

Must be a British Subject. Eyesight must be such as not to have to wear glasses.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Propellers: Avoid propellers whether engines are running or stationary. When propellers are turning they are practically invisible and there's a possibility of losing sight of this hazard.

Never walk under the wings of a plane when the engines are running. Never jump or run after a hat or object when moving along the ground.

PASSENGERS

Handling: Occasionally passengers will ask you about your air experience. In response, avoid the "thrilling" or "exceptional," keep to the matter of fact routine.

Speak into the passenger's ear, not his face. Use a good mouth wash before and during trips to avoid the possibility of bad breath. Anticipate insofar as possible the passenger's wants.

PERSONALITY AND CONVERSATION

Requisites of a good conversationalist: Develop a general knowledge of various subjects and keep abreast of current events. Read, for example: Readers Digest, Life and Time magazines, newspapers, book reviews of current best sellers, listen to radio news commentators and nationally known radio programs.

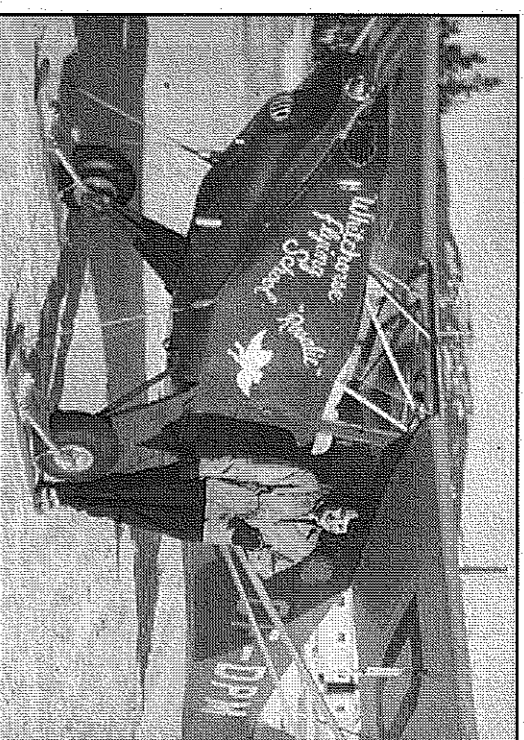
Avoid talking about yourself. Ask "leading" questions which will encourage the passenger to talk about himself. Show interest in what your passenger has to say. Permit him the feeling of importance that comes with talking about oneself. His trip will be more pleasant.

Do not use flippant or smart answers regardless of how foolish or irrelevant questions may be.

Avoid uncouth slang expression or any type of conversation which is unladylike. Quite often, a good impression is lost because of an ill-chosen remark.

FOND MEMORIES

The following are some of Joan's fond memories regarding the crews that she worked with:



Joan Monette in front of a Fleet 80 - Canuck named "Rosalie." The aircraft was used for training people to become pilots in Whitehorse and was also used to fly mail in the Yukon.

Back then, some of the pilots had been trained as mechanics first. Therefore, they knew the plane inside out. On one flight when there were no passengers on board, the pilot told Joan to sit down and do up her seat belt tight. The pilot then proceeded to do a 360 degree loop which was most definitely not on their flight plan.

Another time when there were no passengers, the captain and co-pilot had Joan sit in the cockpit to fly the plane. They went to the back of the plane and had a good laugh as Joan was pulling and pushing on the wheel in panic trying to keep the plane level.

To make things worse, they were also going back and forth from the tail to the front which would make the plane's nose go up and down.

The captain, whose name was George Jarvis had been a boxer. He was a big man who weighed a fair amount which really affected the plane's balance.

When Joan first flew, she discovered that she was prone to air sickness. On her first flight from Edmonton to Whitehorse she had to stay over in Grand Prairie for the night to recover. At times, when she felt nauseous, one of the pilots would serve the meals and make her sit in the cockpit and take oxygen until the seasickness passed.

Joan was invited to go to a New Years Eve party at the D.O.T staff house in Whitehorse one year when she was there on a lay over. It turned out that she was the only CPA staff invited to this party excluding the CPA pilots. Once there it turned out that she was the only woman at the party with six men. She states that they were the nicest fellows!

After this, her CPA crew informed her that she was not permitted to go anywhere without them.

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IFR RENEWALS

(1-2 days - weather permitting)

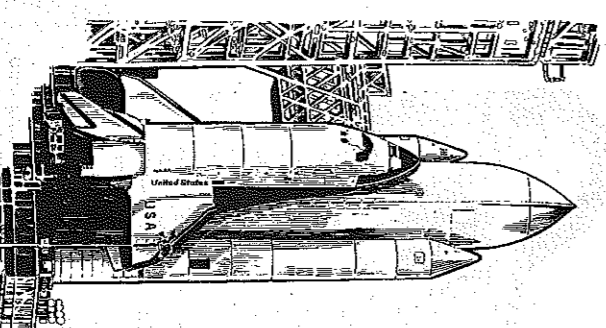
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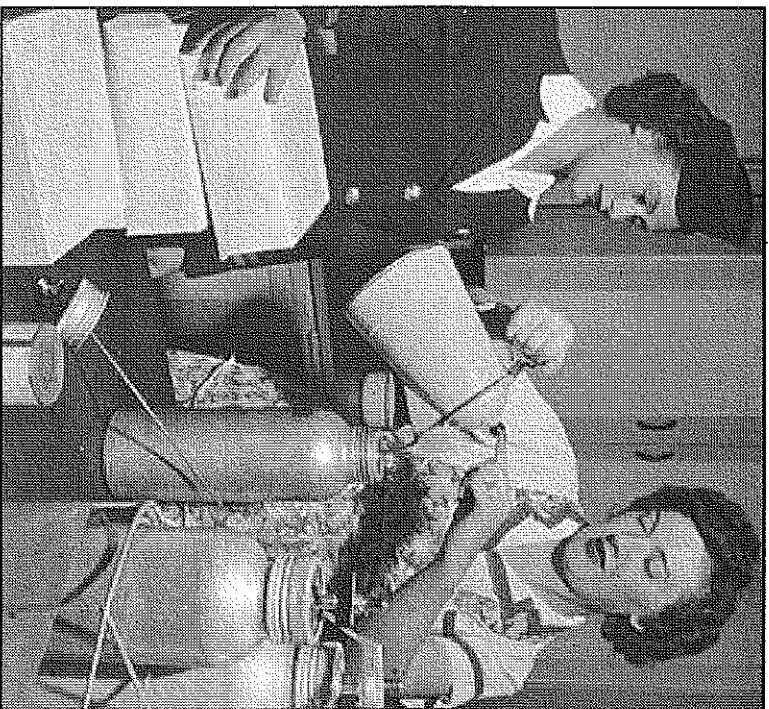
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Joan at the Whitehorse staff house picking up her box lunches and thermoses for the passengers.

Stewardess

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From then on, if one person wanted to go to a movie or do any activity such as bowling, they all went.

On one of Joan's flights were the Labine brothers from Quebec. One of the brothers gave Joan a large placer gold nugget which she later had set into a ring. These two men were famous prospectors.

Gilbert Labine discovered pitchblende in 1930 near Great Bear Lake, N.W.T. This rock housed the precious metal "uranium" which was much sought after by the U.S. government. The uranium from the Labine mine was used by the Americans to help make the first atomic bomb.

Here are some of the pilots of notoriety that Joan flew with:

Herbert Hollick-Kenyon - he was the first chief pilot of CPA. He was in command of all pilot training for CPA in Vancouver, B.C. until his retirement.

Punch Dickins - he was the first person to cross the Arctic Circle in Canada by air. He founded the Atlantic Ferry Command in WW II and became vice-president and general manager of CPA

in his early years.

Wop May - the adventures of Wop May, could and do fill a book. In 1918 the famous "Red Baron," Germany's fighter-plane ace, lined him up as his 81st victim. He was rescued in the nick of time by his friend Captain Roy Brown.

He returned to Edmonton in 1919 to establish one of Canada's first commercial aviation services. In 1947, he earned the Medal of Freedom for his service to American Forces.

In summary, the experience of being a stewardess for two years with CPA was a wonderful opportunity to travel, experience the Canadian and Alaska frontier and work with interesting and dynamic people. She cherishes all of her memories of her two years as a stewardess!

This account was written by Marilyn Willson Pride for Harry Pride at the request of Terry Bruner, executive director of the Canadian Museum of Flight at Langley Airport, B.C. Terry is developing a display of pioneer Canadian stewardesses for the Museum and asked Harry to provide stories from CPA and TCA stewardesses.

Pilot unconscious

Passenger lands airplane

A friend and fellow pilot is about to lose his livelihood. He has a problem with his eyes that will be picked up on his next medical.

As we get older, we become more and more concerned about it happening to us. A few years back, I had a personal experience which fortunately was resolved as a misunderstanding and mix-up in paperwork between physicians. But for about a week, it wasn't a good feeling to think I could be grounded indefinitely.

Perhaps the requirements for a category one medical are a bit too strict. After the age of 40, a commercial pilot is obliged to pass the exam every six months, and face an ECG every 12 months.

On the other hand, who would want to be aboard the aircraft with a pilot who is unable physically and mentally to fly? As far as his emotional condition during a flight is concerned, unfortunately, there's no way to police that under current regulations.

Although it does happen, it is rare that a pilot is disabled to the point where he cannot control his airplane. Heart attacks do occur. Gastrointestinal disorders are in fact, quite common, but rarely totally debilitating.

Insulin shock can render the diabetic helpless, sometimes unconscious. But insulin-dependent diabetics are restricted from holding a cat one medical. Proven cases of diabetes mellitus may be considered fit provided certain specific control criteria are met.

Movies and television play up the possibilities and produce dramatic accounts of an aircraft in distress where the unconscious pilot is tossed aside by a pilot-wanna-be passenger who successfully lands the airplane, which is chased down the runway by a cluster of fire engines.

Only in the movies you say? Documented cases prove that in reality, this type of thing does happen!

In February of 2002, a 10-passenger Cessna 402 was on a flight between the island of Martha's Vineyard and Hyannis, Massachusetts. The short 15 minute commute carried three businessmen, a female security official from the airline, and the pilot.

The security employee became concerned when she noticed the plane was off-course, and the pilot began acting inappropriately. It was obvious that he was unable to control the aircraft. This security employee was also a student pilot, and had about 48 hours logged in small aircraft. The other passengers were non-pilots.

With their assistance, she was able to climb into the right seat, and as the captain was restrained by the passengers, she assumed control. Totally unfamiliar with the radios, twin-

engine operation, retractable gear and instrument procedures, this was about to turn into an experience that could have been a movie script.

Fortunately, the new pilot had done some cross-country work in the area, and recognized a familiar airport below. In the darkness she was able to execute a successful, wheels-up landing at the uncontrolled field, from which everyone aboard walked away uninjured.

The investigation revealed the captain was in a state of insulin shock. He was a diabetic but had somehow managed to keep that fact from the FAA for his entire career.

In his early 50's he controlled his blood sugar levels well enough to stay out of trouble, but as is the case with so many who suffer from the condition, circumstances sometimes catch up and overwhelm the patient before he's able to correct the problems.

In my work as a paramedic, it would be impossible to count the number of diabetics we responded to. Insulin shock occurs when blood-sugar levels drop below the point where the brain can function properly.

The first signs include a decreased level of consciousness. The patient becomes confused, incoherent, and can progress to aggressive and violent behaviour, seizures, unconsciousness and even death. It happens quickly.

Fortunately, the condition is pretty much always reversible just as quickly with administration of IV glucose. In just a few minutes, the paramedics have the situation under control with a fully coherent patient sitting up and wondering what just happened. These calls were usually very gratifying.

The captain of the flight was charged with making false statements to a federal agency (the FAA) and early in 2008 pled guilty. He received a sentence of 16 months in jail and two years probation following the jail term.

He had managed to control and conceal his insulin dependency for many years. It's fortunate no one was injured or killed in this incident.

The next time you're tempted to stretch the truth, omit a few details or actually lie to your aviation medical examiner, remember the consequences can be severe.

The whole adventure makes for good discussion around the coffee table. What would you do if you needed to take control of an airplane and had little or no pilot training?

Barry is a former broadcaster and ambulance paramedic. He is a commercial pilot, has owned several aircraft and pursues interests including writing on various topics at his home in the Gulf Islands. Contact him at bcflyer@propiLOTS.net.

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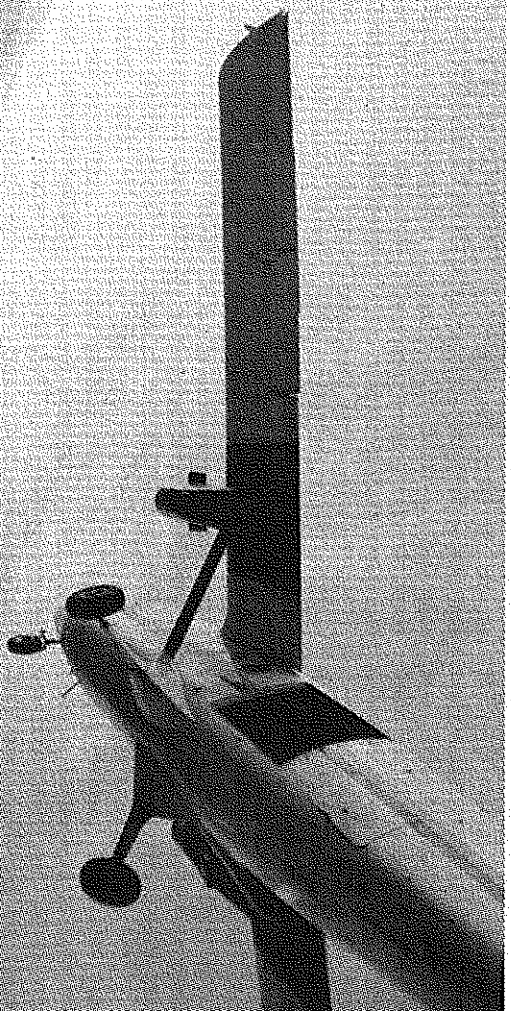
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