



MOVING FORWARD

ALBERTA WOMEN AND WORK

CAPTAIN ROSELLA BJORNSON: AIRLINE PILOT

Rosella Bjornson, Canada's first woman commercial airline jet aircraft pilot, grew up on a farm in southern Alberta. She always knew that she wanted to be a pilot, inspired by flights in her father's airplane. In school she checked the requirements: "I said, I'm going to be a pilot. (The school counselor) looked at me with this strange look on his face and said, but there are no women pilots. I said, oh yes there are. He said, well not with the airlines. I said, well there will be!"

She had her private pilot's licence by the age of 17 and went on to obtain all the ratings needed to fly for an airline. She made history when she was hired by Transair in Winnipeg in 1973 and when she became the first woman member of the airline pilots' union. "I was at a meeting of CALPA in Vancouver.... It was a big room and I was the only female allowed in because I was the only female member of CALPA. They introduced me and I got a standing ovation. I just had goose bumps." She went on to fly for Pacific Western Airlines, Canadian Airlines International (where she was promoted to Captain in 1990) and Air Canada.

In 1997 Capt. Bjornson was inducted in Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. She has been recognized in many other ways, including induction to the Women in Aviation International Pioneer Hall of Fame and receiving the National Transportation Award of Achievement. Another achievement: she helped persuade Transport Canada to change its regulations so that women commercial pilots could continue to fly during pregnancy.

Capt. Bjornson reflects: "The women's movement went a long way in recognizing the fact that women can do a lot of things that they never thought they could do before or were not accepted into different careers. I think the sky's the limit."

ALBERTA WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN AVIATION INCLUDE:

• Gertrude de la Vergne: Alberta's first (Canada's third) licensed woman pilot, December 4, 1928.

• Marjorie Chauvin: Canada's first woman aircraft demonstration pilot, 1930s.

• Margaret Littlewood: based in Edmonton, was the only woman Link Trainer (instrument flight simulator) in Canada during World War II.

• Vera Stradl Dowling: was a ferry pilot in England in World War II, immigrated to Canada in 1952, became the first woman flight instructor in Alberta.

- First woman commercial airline jet aircraft pilot in Canada.
- First woman to be Captain on a Canadian airline.
- First woman in North America to fly as First Officer (co-pilot) on a twin engine jet aircraft.
- First woman member of the Canadian Airline Pilots Association (CALPA).

Find out more about Capt. Rosella Bjornson at www.labourhistory.ca

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible with the generous support of the Edmonton Heritage Council, and the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

Rosella Bjornson makes history by becoming the first woman commercial airline jet aircraft pilot in Canada - April 1973



A Project of the Alberta Labour History Institute