

Deborah Cox Wood

This Whirly-Girl Just Wants to Have Fun...And Do Good in the World

From day one, Deb Wood's mom insisted she could become whatever her dreaming child's heart desired.

"If I wanted to be a wife and mom," says Wood, a naturopathic physician and author, "she told me, 'be the best.' If I wanted to be an astronaut, 'be the best'; if I wanted to be a waitress, 'be the best.'"

Turns out, what she wanted to be was a Whirly-Girl.

And Deborah Cox Wood, Ph.D. – aka "Dr. Deb" – certainly is the best she can be as she whirls through the skies above her home in Virginia Beach, VA; she is piloting her family's personal whirly-bird – a "really cute" Robinson 22. As proud member no. 1095 of the Whirly-Girls, a very select sisterhood of women helicopter pilots, Wood credits whatever good she does in the world to the powerful, life-changing lesson she learned the day as a student pilot she averted sure death in a near-miss helicopter crash.

"We have the ability to attain whatever we seek, because we are meant to be whatever we dream of becoming," says the 52-year-old Wood, who works hard to do good, indeed. As a motivational speaker, seminar leader and author of the book, *Settling With Power, Three Steps to Mastering Life*, the woman who pre-crash was afflicted with a terminal "inability to attain happiness" totally transformed herself and her life post-crash by the grace of a single moment of startling clarity.

"Life mirrors a helicopter flight," she says of the terrifying incident, entirely her error. "Pay attention! Pay attention! And was I?" says Wood of the fateful day in 1998. It was an ordinary training flight; she

and her instructor were preparing to land. Suddenly, she recalls, "the helicopter started to shudder and shake and make a terrible noise" as a tornado-like force formed beneath them and, with sickening speed, began sucking their Robinson R-44 toward the ground. Panic-stricken, Wood



"watched my life pass before my eyes" and did what she thought would help: frantically, she gave the helicopter more power. It merely fell faster. It was her instructor who, by taking over, eased off the power and autorotated the blades to bring the helicopter under control and stop the massive decent. Then he eased in the power and lifted them back into the sky. And not a moment too soon for Wood as she learned here, as in life, that throwing muscle and

power at a situation is not the best solution.

"One minute I'm thinking, 'we're dead' and the next, I'm dumfounded," she says of the day's lesson, which in a flash of insight Wood applied to her own life – at the time a sorrowful thing marked by illness (a lifelong "health nut," she had just received a shocking diagnosis of colon cancer), financial limitation (a business reversal saw her bankrupt), and heartache (her husband had just filed for divorce). The insight? "There is a secret of life," she says, and adds: In much the way a helicopter is saved from danger by an easing-off and redirection of power, the way to 'pull-out' of life's similarly distressing situations – depressions, illness, overwhelms, angers, frustrations and the like, involves a reuse of energy. The author outlines her how-tos in the book, and these include such practices as thinking differently, prayer and re-focused action.

A dazzling testament to power of these practices to totally transform a life, Wood today is an admittedly miraculous reinvention of her former self. Perfectly healthy, she is blissfully remarried to real estate developer Breck Wood; her daughters Dana and Nicole are thriving. What's more, her flourishing business life is a source of endless challenge and joy. No longer limited by old ways of thinking – as she says, "the polluted, depressive, sarcastic broken records of past experiences I could do nothing about" – the author is a study in happiness, achieved. "I learned that taking responsibility for my life – my thoughts – would give me a liberty such as I have never



Dr. Deb with her "little bug" of a Robinson 22. "Hovering in one of these, you can see how beautiful and orderly the world is," she says. "It changes your whole perspective on life"

known before," she says. And then there is her involvement in and devotion to the Whirly-Girls – a network of 1,000-plus women in 28 countries who hobnob at spirited "hoverings" and celebrate their flying lives as they pursue such professions as logging, cropdusting, firefighting and air-rescue work. In the company of women whose "courage and accomplishments completely fascinate me," she says, Wood ever-revels in her helicopter lifestyle.

"I remember my first hovering, when I was the newest Whirly-Girl in the universe," adds the pilot who fell head over heels for flying during a helicopter tour of Hawaii. "The other women welcomed me with a beautiful necklace, a medallion that meant I was one of them. I felt like Miss America! And here's the amazing thing," she laughs: "These are women who don't age! I mean, they may get to a certain point and die, but they don't age!"

In the tradition of self-help star Stephen R. Covey (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*), with whom she apprenticed before launching her own "Settling With Power"

seminars, Wood longs to share with others her newfound understanding of "how to achieve peace, tranquility and joy," as she says. And lest anyone currently being sucked toward a personal crash-and-burn in their life suspect this Whirly-Girl is not operating on all rotors, the popular motivational speaker has plenty of proof that her precepts can indeed see them hovering – and soon – in the realm of perfect health, well-being and happiness.

"Every potential we can possibly imagine is already within us," she says. By thinking differently, prayer and focused action, life limitations can be transcended until ETL is achieved. ETL? "Effective translational lift," she says. "This is a helicopter engaged in high-efficiency performance," which in life translates to high-efficiency balance, peace, joy, flow and any other blessing you care to desire.

"Flying helicopters and getting caught in life's tornadoes taught me that the happiness in my life depends on the quality of my thoughts," says Wood, whose "nutrition and life management" work helps

clients master the steps to their own ETL state of well-being.

Master now of navigating life's tornadoes, Wood has lots more time to focus on her days' more thrilling moments. Like the memory of the Hawaiian helicopter ride that forever changed her life.

"I've never experienced anything like it," she remembers of the magic. "Hovering over the water, looking down on whales and waterfalls. The world looked so beautiful floating at 500 feet – organized and clean." With Ray Charles's *What a Wonderful World* playing through her radio headset, "I just knew," she adds. "I don't want to fly planes, I want to fly one of these! Nothing ever looked or felt as wonderful as being in that helicopter."

"That's what keeps the Whirly-Girls young," Wood laughs and confesses her true inner age – 18 "A helicopter is very unforgiving. You just can't zone out up there." Nor can you in life, echoes her "settling-with-power" life work. She adds: "Ray Charles really said it for me that day. It's a wonderful world, all right." ✕