

Able Flight

People with disabilities get the chance to fly

What do a woman born without arms, a young man who became paralyzed by a robber's bullet, and a veteran who lost a leg in Iraq have in common? Thanks to an innovative scholarship program called Able Flight, they are now licensed pilots. Founded in 2006, Able Flight has awarded 23 scholarships to people with a variety of physical disabilities, from spinal cord injuries to congenital birth defects to wounds sustained in military service. Though they may have come to flying with different challenges, the Able Flight scholarship winners are united by their desire to earn a freedom that can be experienced only in the air.

and support not only from the board but also from the other pilots who have succeeded in the program. The camaraderie is exceptional. Thank you Able Flight for helping me make history as the first licensed pilot to fly with only her feet!"

Recalling the night when a robber shot him as he was making the night deposit for a store he managed, Mal Zackery knew he was paralyzed the moment he hit the ground. In the hospital, and as the initial shock slowly started to fade, he began to wonder if his childhood dream of becoming a pilot was lost. While a patient at Shepherd Center, a spinal rehabilitation hospital in Atlanta, a therapist told him about Able Flight. Now, less than two years since his life was changed in an instant, he has passed his FAA checkride to become a licensed pilot.

Mal says that flying is "the complete expression of mobility in its truest form" and that he has "a desire to rise again, to do all the things I never thought were possible...that this is not the end, and I don't simply have to be 'that person in a wheelchair'... I can continue to live and learn, to grow and mature."

It was July 14th, 2003 when Staff Sergeant Ryan Kelly's unit was making its way to Ramadi, Iraq on a mission of mercy. They were traveling to one of Iraq's most dangerous areas to meet with civilian leaders to plan for the reconstruction of hospitals and schools. Just south of Bagdad his unit was ambushed, and with the explosion of an IED, Kelly's right leg was severed

below the knee. After winning a scholarship in March 2008, Ryan was the first Able Flight Scholarship winner to be trained at Philly Sport Pilot, a new training operation established by Able Flight graduate Sean O'Donnell of Philadelphia, becoming the first wounded veteran scholarship winner to earn a license.

These three stories are just a sample of the life-changing power of learning to fly; made possible by an organization that believes that hard work can overcome challenges. Able Flight is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit that is supported by individual donations, grants and corporate sponsorships. To learn how you can support Able Flight's nonprofit scholarship program, visit www.ableflight.org.



Able Flight Scholarship winner Jessica Cox was born without arms and is the first person to receive a pilot's license flying only with her feet. Aviation Hall of Fame member Patty Wagstaff pins Jessica's Able Flight Wings in a ceremony at AirVenture 2009.

It wasn't just the aviation world that was astounded when Jessica Cox became the first person to earn a license by flying an airplane entirely with her feet. Her story has appeared on television, Internet videos and in print around the world. As with all of her accomplishments, learning to fly is a testament to her determination and willpower.

Of becoming a pilot, Jessica said, "It not only empowers you, but also helps others realize that people with disabilities are adept at attaining privileges that a small percentage of society takes part in. It helps reverse the stereotype that people with disabilities are powerless into the belief that they are powerful and capable of setting high goals and achieving them. What is most incredible about Able Flight is the relentless faith