

# SMART, BEAUTIFUL & TALENTED WOMEN AVIATORS

## Patty Wagstaff

### Best of the Best

It's hard to find anyone to which you can compare Patty Wagstaff. She was the first woman to win the U.S. National Aerobatics Championship when both men and women were allowed to compete against each other. She won the next year, as well. And the next. She would also win gold, silver and bronze medals in the Olympic-level international aerobatic competitions. No one was surprised when the Smithsonian asked to hang her airplane in the National Air & Space Museum.

Of course, Patty grew up around airplanes. Her dad was an airline captain, and when she was 10, he let her take the controls of his DC-6. Eventually, Patty would end up working in Alaska, traveling regularly by bush plane to remote villages. She couldn't think of a single reason why she couldn't be doing the flying herself. A year later, she got her private pilot's license (she did that in a float plane). And then, her commercial, seaplane and helicopter ratings, plus her CFII. Patty might not tell you, but everyone else will tell you—she can fly just about anything that she can coax into the air. She is the most sought-after air-show performer in the world.

An aviator with that level of talent can only dodge fame and recognition for so long. Patty was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame, alongside other inductees—like Neil Armstrong, Amelia Earhart and the Wright Brothers. She has also been honored with the United States Air Force Association Lifetime Achievement Award, the Katherine Wright Award, Bill Barber Award, the Air Show Hall of Fame and countless other awards.



Patty Wagstaff hangs on the straps of her Extra 300. An earlier Extra Patty flew now hangs in the Smithsonian.

In addition to a rigorous air-show performance schedule, Patty gives a lot back. For the last five years she has traveled to Kenya. There, she spends her time teaching pilots of the Kenya Wildlife Service how to fly in the bush, helping them patrol and conserve the country's biodiversity. And wherever you go in the world, there are countless people who will tell you about the time they first saw aviation's first lady of flying and how it inspired them to always give it all you've got.

Find more about Patty at [pattywagstaff.com](http://pattywagstaff.com).



Jana Leigh McWhorter fell in love with flying and her husband at the Flying Circus Aerodrome. When she's not in the air, she's on stage with another love, country music.

## Jana Leigh McWhorter

### Running Off to Join the Circus

Most people don't see a wing walker and think, gee, I'd like to do that. But then, most people aren't Jana.

After watching the performers in the Flying Circus Aerodrome outside of Bealeton, Va., Jana approached a pilot who introduced himself as Jim, and she asked, "Are you all by chance looking for another wing walker?"

Ironically, they were. After hours and hours of training and conditioning on the ground, Jana found herself atop a 450-hp Stearman. Here's what she remembers from her first wing walk: "As weak as I thought I was, I stood up on the seat and managed to muster up the last of my strength to pull myself up out of the cockpit. Every attempt I made to place my foot in the handhold was a struggle. Finally, I succeeded, and after I was in position, I placed my back securely against the stanchion. I fastened the waist belt and gave the signal that I was ready for my next feat... the loop. We began to descend like a roller coaster on its way down a sharp decline, increasing in speed to about 150-plus miles per hour. There was a strong pull as I felt the G forces take control of my body. A few seconds later, I felt weightless as centrifugal force worked its magic.

I watched in amazement as an upside-down world appeared before my eyes. In the midst of my fear, I actually began to laugh as I experienced the beauty of it all. Then all too soon, the strong pull of the G forces were felt once again as we came out of the loop. The plane leveled off, and with wonder and amazement, I was able to take in the moment. I could see for miles, and it was the most beautiful sight I'd ever seen."

Jana Leigh became an official member of the Flying Circus that day, and at the end of the season, that pilot she had met on her first visit to the aerodrome asked her to marry him. Now, you can see Jim and Jana Leigh McWhorter appearing regularly at the Flying Circus Aerodrome. And Jana is the one on top.

See more of Jana Leigh and hear the song she wrote and performed about wing walking at [janaleighmusic.com](http://janaleighmusic.com).



## Amy Beeson

### The Best Summer Job

When she was a young girl, Amy Beeson would fly with her father. "I always loved flying since I was little!" she says.

As she moved into her teenage years, her father set up a demo flight so that his daughter could spend some time on the controls. That's all it took. "I was hooked!" says Amy.

She soloed when she was in high school. But her schedule was crazy. And before she knew it, Amy was starting her freshman year at Harvard. Without finding the time to finish her private pilot's license.

But during the summer after her first year at college, Amy landed a summer job that would change her life forever. She was hired to be a dispatcher, receptionist and all-around girl Friday at the Colorado Flight Center in Grand Junction, Colorado.

"I lived and breathed flying for a couple of months that summer," she remembers. "I spent practically every nickel I earned to finish my license!" In a Cessna 172 affectionately known as Ellie. "It was the perfect summer thing. So much of college is so abstract, and flying is so concrete!"

Amy earned her license just in time to return to college. She is studying International Health and International Relations and wants to always include aviation in some aspect of her career. Amy is also a member of the Harvard Aviation Club. "In the long term, I'd like to do some kind of mission flying, but for now I'm going to concentrate on school!"



Amy Beeson learned to fly during a summer job in Colorado, before returning to school at Harvard. Amy is a pre-med student with an emphasis in social studies. Her ultimate interest is to include flying with her career of international health.

Know An Interesting Aviator?  
Who should we profile?  
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