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English 15-Dewald

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Person of the Year

Dreamer

In 1973 only approximately 25% of the women in the United States were employed full time (Cohen and Bianchi). In contrast, 59.2% of women age 16 or older were employed in the United States throughout 2009 ("WB - Statistics & Data"). There are many explanations for the dramatic increase, but perhaps the most important, are those involving individuals. Over the last half of a century, many women stood up and fought for their rights; one of the most important being Emily Howell Warner. Warner’s dreams in aviation gave her the motivation to become the first female commercial airline pilot; a monumental accomplishment for women’s rights, which would change an industry forever.

Life for women in the United States was vastly different in many aspects during the previous century, but the main difference was the lack of equal rights between sexes. Women were often considered property of men; they were considered to be just daughters who grew up to be wives or mothers. Women were denied the right to a college education until the early 1920’s; even then, most women who were educated were seen as unfit for marriage by society. Women were also denied the right to vote before the 1920’s, and were not represented in government (“First Women's Rights Movement”).

Before the 1960’s, single women did not have the option to seek contraceptives; married women were not granted this right until the early 1970’s. During the 1970’s, women were also granted the right to seek abortion by the Supreme Court. Many strides had been made in women’s rights, but life was far from equal between men and women (“Women’s Rights Movement in the U.S.”).

There were some women who did not accept the fact that they simply could not accomplish feats because they were “women”. The most influential woman of 1973 was Emily Howell Warner. Warner was born on October 30, 1939. She grew up during a decade of radical change in women’s rights, but somehow remained obscure to society’s roles of women. Her original goal was to become a stewardess, following in the steps of another family member. After determining she was too young to train for a stewardess position, she decided to take flying lessons. Warner discovered a passion for aviation, and would unintentionally begin a career that would make history for all women (Wise and Witvliet).

Emily Warner did not come from an aviation family, and began her flight training in 1958, quickly achieving multiple ratings: private, commercial with instrument endorsement, flight instructor, and multi-engine. She was hired as a flight instructor with Clinton Aviation Company. Over the next twelve years, Warner continued working, eventually accruing over 7000 hours of flight time, and receiving numerous promotions. This may not seem substantial, but according to the Federal Aviation Administration, a female can now achieve a commercial pilot’s rating at 17 years old, with less than 250 hours of flight time, pending she completes all the required assignments. A female can also legally become Captain of a commercial airline at the age of 23 with a mere 1500 hours of flight time. The FAA uses age and flight requirements to protect the safety of the public. Warner’s 7000 hours of flight time and years spent flying show that she was clearly over experienced to work for an airline by the FAA’s standards now in 2010 (Wise and Witvliet).

In 1967 Warner decided she had outgrown the aviation school and began applying to airlines. This was unheard of, but Warner had spent years watching less experienced, male coworkers accept positions with commercial airlines. She originally applied to United Airlines, Continental Airlines, and Frontier Airlines (Wise and Witvliet). Even though the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, companies still advertised male only jobs, and often discriminated against women for higher paying positions (“Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.”). This often meant that the small percentage of women that were employed, were limited to working in positions equivalent to a secretary, or stewardess. Warner quickly discovered that being taken seriously would not be easy.

Warner spent years writing letters to the airlines and “camping out” at their offices. Women’s rights were a controversial issue during this time frame and Warner sought out the assistance of women’s right activists. Unfortunately, she was unable to receive any assistance in her quest. The airlines began to acknowledge her as a regular face but it still took several years for her to land an interview with Frontier Airlines (Wise and Witvliet)..

Frontier Airlines made a monumental decision in allowing Warner to interview for the position. The aviation industry survives solely on society, and its economy, as people often make financial decisions based upon their emotions. There were many people within the United States that did not agree with the Civil Rights Act, and Frontier jeopardized the company by interviewing a woman, let alone hiring one. Many companies would only hire women for inferior positions, could it be possible that a woman was strong enough to control a plane? Warner proved to Frontier that not only was she strong enough to control the plane, but she was highly educated and qualified for the position (Wise and Witvliet).

Frontier Airlines offered Emily Warner the position and she began training in January of 1973. She knew the responsibility she was accepting by taking this position; Warner was the first female pilot hired by a commercial airline. In an interview from 2000, Emily Warner remembers advice she was given from a superior at Frontier Airlines,

I will never forget the advice Capt. Ed O’Neil gave me when Frontier Airlines hired me. He told me that when I needed to make certain decisions, to keep the following three things in mind: It has to be good for me. It has to be good for Frontier Airlines. It has to be good for female pilots.

Emily Warner- Interview with Wise and Witvliet

Warner took the advice to heart, and continued to move forward achieving monumental accomplishments for herself, and women’s’ rights. The 1970’s were a controversial and radical time, but Warner’s story was the desperately needed fuel for the women of this country. The Civil Rights Act was simply a piece of legislation passed by our government, but Warner’s story was part of the real fuel behind the changes that took place in this country. Women were no longer talking about change but were making history. Warner’s triumphant first step gave others the courage to embrace their passions without fear of rejection by society.

When Warner became the first female commercial airline pilot she helped push the aviation industry forward. This was a dramatic change and the statistics show it will take time, but Warner gave women options. In 2009, the Federal Aviation Administration reported that there were over 125,000 pilots who held an active commercial certificate, of these over 8000 were held by women. Out of the 8000 women who held commercial pilot certificates, 5000 also held an airline transport certificate, which would make them eligible to be employed by a commercial airline within the United States. This may seem like a small percentage, but just a mere thirty-seven years ago, there were none ("US Civil Airmen Statistics").

The developments in equal rights in employment did not stop with pilots. The FAA reported that in 2009, over 140,000 women were employed in various positions within the Aviation Industry. Although some women are still employed as flight attendants, there are thousands who are mechanics, engineers, or navigators. The sacrifices of Emily Warner, opened the door to endless possibilities. The male and female roles that society once viewed in the early 1970’s are slowly diminishing.

Often times the liberties and freedoms that women have now in the 21st Century are taken for granted. Women are no longer viewed as the property of male relatives, and independent women are considered a value to society, instead of a burden. Women now have the opportunity to purse an education, and 29% of women over the age of 25 have attained a bachelor’s degree. The number of women with a bachelor’s degree is slowly surpassing that of their male peers ("Women's Rights Movement in the U.S”).

The developments in women’s rights are not solely limited to the aviation field. In 2009 the United States Census Bureau reported that women comprise over 60% of the work force in the United States. Women now have equal representation in government, with thousands of women now employed in various government positions. The changes in women’s rights have been astronomical. After decades, women are finally free to make their own decisions regarding their bodies and pregnancy ("Women's Rights Movement in the U.S”).

The monumental developments in women’s rights would not be possible without the accomplishments of individuals. Emily Howell Warner deservedly earned ‘Person—no Woman of the Year for 1973’. Warner was able to turn a simple dream into a passion that would ignite a powerful career, and create a precedent for all women. Warner’s decisions not only were good for her as a female, or even as a female pilot, but they were great for all women.

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