



Alaska's Women Pilots

Jenifer Fratzke

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Alaska's climate, extreme topography, and settlement distribution make airplanes and helicopters a crucial means of transportation. Ninety percent of this state is unreachable by road, and at least one third of Alaska's people live in the bush. In Alaska, travel by air has always been more than just recreational and piloting has always been more than conventional. Alaska pilots are some of the most experienced and skillful aviators in the world, and they run the gamut from commercial pilots to aviation safety inspectors, from big-game guides and bush pilots to aerobatic fliers.

In *Alaska's Women Pilots: Contemporary Portraits*, Jenifer Fratzke has compiled seven interviews of contemporary women aviatrices from nearly every reach of that gamut. This collection begins an important documentation of what women have contributed to the aviation industry in Alaska. Fratzke herself has been a flight attendant, flight engineer, copilot, and pilot. Through her eighteen years of experience flying in Alaska, she has tapped into Alaska's rich and unfolding aviation history by flying with and interviewing many women pilots.

The seven oral histories she includes here explain the women's motivations for flying; they include the descriptions and praises of mentors that made all the difference; and they recall stories of grief and stories of good fortune. Each personal history is remarkable in what it reveals of the history of aviation in Alaska and the individual contributions that history is built on. These stories are unique and inspirational; at the same time they have an echoing quality that compounds, strengthens, and supports the voices of those who have gone before (Harriet Quimby, Beryl Markham, Pancho Barnes, and many others) and those who may come after.

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