



Janis Keown-Blackburn Flight Instructor and Airline Pilot

I am a retired airline pilot and am currently flight instructing. I am also involved with the NJ Aviation Education Council (NJ AEC).

How long have you been involved with aviation?

I began flying airplanes over 50 years ago and love every minute of it.

Where did you work?

I have flown for several different airlines over the years—Princeton Airways out of Princeton, NJ; Summit Airlines in Philadelphia; Sn Country Airlines in Minneapolis; Eastern Air Lines where I was based at Kennedy Airport, LaGuardia Airport, and Newark Airport; KIWI Airlines in Newark; and Spirit, based mostly in Atlantic City.

How do you spend most of your time at work?

Most of my time at work was spent flying passengers from one city to another. My flights included domestic flying, Central and South America, Mexico, and Canada.

Each day was different even if you were flying to the same place. The weather was never the same as the day before. The sights were different with the changing seasons, cloud cover, day or night. It was always exciting to see gigantic thunderstorms off in the distance with lightening shooting towards the ground or from cloud to cloud. At night there were so many stars and when there was a meteor shower, we could count them racing across the sky.

Why did you choose this career?

I chose this career because when I was a little girl, I would always look up at airplanes flying overhead and wish that I was there. My first airplane ride was in a little two seat aircraft, and I fell in love with the adventure and beauty of it.

What did you do to prepare for this career?

When I was growing up females could NOT be airline pilots, so I wanted to be a flight attendant. By the time the airlines began hiring women pilots, I had a flight instructor rating and was teaching flying. As I built hours, I qualified to get hired by the commuter airline (Princeton Airways).

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I enjoyed getting passengers to their destinations for their long-awaited vacation or to start a day's work. I always enjoyed meeting the passengers as they boarded or deplaned.

What do you find most challenging about your job?

The most challenging—maybe not challenging but least favorite part of the job is the checkrides that must be done. A pilot is ALWAYS learning.

What is one piece of advice you would give to a young person who is interested in your profession?

The best piece of advice I can give a young person is to find something that you really love as a career. It is so much easier to go to work every day if you enjoy what you're doing rather than dragging to work because you don't want to be there.

