American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Women's History Month: Leaving the Comfort Zone

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As part of our celebration of Women's History Month, today we recognize International Women's Day, which honors the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women around the world. At American, we are proud to celebrate the contributions women make to our company and our communities by sharing some of their stories and the vital work they do to make us the world's greatest airline.

For Washington, D.C.-based Captain Kelly Brown, success in aviation came with leaving her comfort zone and not listening to the naysayers. Read her story below.

Congress declared March as National Women's History Month in 1987. That same year, Kelly Brown was a sophomore at the U.S. Naval Academy. She graduated two years later, in the first decade of women graduates ever allowed at the Academy since its establishment in 1845. Today, she is a Washington, D.C.-based captain at American Airlines.

Growing up in Prior Lake, Minnesota, a small town of 25,000 and suburb 20 miles southwest of Minneapolis, Kelly was the oldest of three siblings. Her father, a Vietnam War veteran, retired as a Boeing 747 captain for Northwest Airlines. One day at the dining room table, her dad asked her what she wanted to do after graduating from high school. "I recall sharing how fun it might be to be a flight attendant," Kelly said. Her dad replied that such a career would be wonderful but went on to ask if she'd ever thought about being a pilot. "I had never seen a woman pilot, so I did not even know it was an option. But at that moment, with those words of encouragement, I started thinking maybe I could."

And indeed, she pursued and achieved that dream. However, it wasn't always easy. Kelly recalls a few people along the way who just didn't think women belonged at the Naval Academy or in pilot training at the Naval Air Station in

Pensacola, Florida. “But there were always mentors and colleagues along the way who supported and encouraged me and the few other women in the program,” Kelly said, adding that she purposefully avoided negativity and forged ahead with what she wanted.

She served in the U.S. Navy for nine years as a helicopter and King Air pilot before joining American in 1999. Since then, she’s worked her way up from flight engineer on the B727 to Captain on the B737. She remains active in the Navy Reserves and serves as an investigative assistant to the Navy’s Inspector General.

“Most things professionally worthwhile in my life have involved a stretch outside my comfort zone,” Kelly noted. She also said she was driven by her love of the aviation industry. “I’ve never lost sight of what a noble profession we’re in. We connect people and cultures from around the globe. I’ve been blessed, and every day’s a gift.”

As much as Kelly loves flying and taking care of customers and crews, she’s equally content to just be at home. She enjoys cooking and experimenting with recipes as well as summer months on the Chesapeake Bay with friends, family and her partner in Maryland.

Captain Kelly Brown

Captain Brown takes her first pilot seat while attending the Oshkosh Air Show in 1973.

Captain Brown attends her father’s retirement from Northwest Airlines with her mother and father in 2000.