American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Living my dream

2/10/2020



My family has been in the transportation industry for nearly 100 years, starting with my grandfather shoveling coal for the Illinois Railroad Company. My father, Charles Henry Lawson, joined PSA Airlines in 1964 when he retired from the U.S. Navy and made $1.50 an hour as a painter.

I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and at a young age knew that I wanted to work in aviation, too. But getting an education for someone of my gender and race was hard enough, much less wanting to enter a field that was closed off to people of color. But, I didn't let that stop me.

My sister and I were some of the first black students to be bused to an all-white school after segregation ended in the 1960s. I enjoyed school and took it seriously. So seriously, that I was able to graduate at 16 years old.

After graduation, I tried to enroll in a regional occupational program that taught airline transportation, but I was turned down. I was told there were no jobs in aviation for African Americans. But my father and his career at PSA were proof that those administrators were wrong. He went to the Board of Education to plead my case, had it overturned and I was allowed to attend the school.

While I learned more about the airline industry in class by day, I was the first black supervisor at a San Diego hotel by night. When the program ended five months later, on July 22, 1974, I landed my dream job working for PSA. I was the youngest person ever to be hired by PSA, an airline that lived its values and believed in the power of inclusion and diversity long before it was widely considered the right thing to do. I worked hard to offer the best customer service and became known for my bubbly personality and signature smile, and not just the color of my skin.

Working in aviation for the last 45 years has led to some of the most unique experiences of my life. I was featured in PSA's Catch Our Smile advertising campaign. I've been with American through four mergers, each one bringing new opportunities and challenges, but always the same commitment to honoring team members' and customers' unique cultures and customs. I've held dozens of positions that have given me the chance to grow my career and travel the world to experience all types of cultures firsthand.

It has been my pleasure to make our customers feel welcome and at home no matter their age, race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. At American, I'm living out omy dream job every day as I get to care for our customers on their journeys.

Together, my 130,000 colleagues and I have the pleasure of connecting more than 200 million customers each year to the people and moments that matter to them the most.

Pamela Camarena
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