American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Crossing borders and pursuing dreams

3/21/2022

Daisy Soto grew up in Tecate, Baja California, a small town in Mexico, just south of the U. S. border. At 15, she discovered a passion for aviation and began looking into ways to pursue her dream of becoming an airline pilot. With no mentors or connections to the aviation industry, she registered for school in San Diego, where she commuted to for the rest of her high school career.

“For years, I woke up at 4 a.m. to ensure I would reach the border in time for school,” Daisy said. “When my mom asked me if I was tired of waking up so early and driving so far every day, I told her my motivation was my dream of becoming a professional pilot.”

Even outside the hours-long daily commute, Daisy faced other challenges on her path to aviation. Not only did she have to learn to speak English fluently before beginning flight school in the U.S., she had to find a way to take on the expense of flight training.

While studying English, she also applied for student loans, but was denied since she wasn’t yet a U.S. citizen. That all changed in 2018 at the age of 22 when she applied for and was officially granted citizenship. Next up: flight school.

When looking for ways to finance flight training, she found the American Airlines Cadet Academy, a first-of-its-kind program that was offering financing options and a direct path to becoming a pilot for the airline. Since its launch, more than 500 cadets have entered the program, many of them already working on the flight deck.

Daisy is one of the more than 320 aspiring aviators to graduate from the Cadet Academy and is now working as a flight instructor at a flight school in Spokane, Washington.

“I currently have more than 300 hours banked and know I have a long way to go to get to 1,500 before joining one

of American's regional teams," said Daisy. "But I am enjoying every hour of flight time because I get to teach others how to fly, and I get to help them follow their dreams of becoming pilots."

Just last week, Daisy was honored as one of **Women in Aviation International's** (WAI) 2022 scholarship winners at its annual conference to help members reach their goals and advance into the aviation and aerospace careers they've dreamed about. In addition to scholarships, American's Flight Recruiting team met with hundreds of prospective pilots and awarded 36 conditional job offers on-site at the conference, including 31 to female aviators. For Daisy, the WAI scholarship money will allow her to expand her skills and complete her Cirrus aircraft certification, getting her one step closer to joining the American team, too.

"My goal is not only to become a captain for American one day, but also to inspire and guide other girls to follow their dreams," explained Daisy. "It was hard for me to find someone to guide me on the path to becoming a pilot, because there were no pilots in my family nor in my town, so I want to be a mentor for others."

And her advice to her younger self and those women considering a career as a pilot or otherwise is to never give up. "At some point you are going to look back and see that those failures and all that hard work paid off," Daisy said. But even after all the obstacles she's faced and overcome, the views from the flight deck still take her breath away.

"No matter how many times I fly, I'm always amazed at the views," she said. "Flying is my favorite hobby, so the fact that I get paid to do that is just a dream to me."

Daisy Soto

Daisy (center) at the 2022 WAI conference.

Daisy pictured with Chip Long, VP of Flight Operations, and Lori Cline, MD of Flight Training Standards.