American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Five decades of history from the galley

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Cheryl Gaymon has been flying with American for 55 years and holds the No. 1 seniority spot at DFW out of about 6,400 flight attendants based at the hub. When she joined the company in 1967, the United States was in the midst of the Civil Rights movement. Black flight attendants were few and far between because of systematic barriers previously in place at commercial airlines. Despite these barriers, Cheryl earned her wings.

“My aunt Carrie took my sister and me to the airport and paid for us to get a helicopter ride to the Pan Am building and back,” said Cheryl, who grew up in north New Jersey. “I saw all these women in uniform and I thought, ‘I want to be one of them.’ My aunt encouraged me to do it. I saw an ad with American that said ‘Come Fly With Us’ and I applied.”

C.R. Smith was president of the airline at the time and, upon graduation, he awarded Cheryl and her flight attendant class with a “stewardess charm,” a gold American Airlines charm engraved with their names.

“C.R. Smith gave us the charm and $100, then sent us out to conquer,” she said.

Cheryl still loves the travel associated with being a flight attendant. It’s allowed her to rub elbows with everyone from first-time fliers to various celebrities and world-renowned singers. In between her normal trips, she volunteered to fly a Vietnam airlift charter, the first Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) mission American operated.

“We would wait until just about daybreak, fly into Vietnam, board passengers via stairways and take off 15 minutes later,” explained Cheryl. “I did about six of those. It was very harrowing.”

Now, decades later, the most recent **CRAF missions** have evolved, bringing thousands of evacuees to the U.S. from Afghanistan.

Cheryl was also around for the hiring of the very first male flight attendant at American, who she flew with often, and then the first major push for more Black flight attendants in the ‘80s.

“I was very, very pleased when they had a big hiring of Black flight attendants,” said Cheryl. “For years, I would be the only Black team member on my trips. It was nice meeting other Black women who were pursuing the same dream as mine.”

While Cheryl witnessed a fair amount of progress over the years in regard to diversifying the workforce and the way the industry operates, Cheryl faced many challenges along the way, including unwelcoming comments about her hair and rooming situations during layovers.

Today, Cheryl is still happily doing the job she loves, but with a lot fewer barriers in her way. Being one of American’s first Black flight attendants made her a key contributor to the **progress** we’ve made as an airline and the progress the industry has made in diversity and inclusion. Cheryl is proud of her status as a history maker and that many more Black Americans are being hired as flight attendants today thanks to the road she helped pave.

DFW Flight Attendant Cheryl Gaymon at the American Airlines American Airlines Training & Conference Center in Fort Worth, Texas.