

Colorado

C O U N T R Y • L I F E

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**Historical
tribute**

...page 20

A woman at the

Controls

...page 16

**California
out of control**

... page 4

**GUNNISON COUNTY
ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION**



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CONTENTS



19 A woman takes the controls

In 1973, Emily Warner became the first woman in the pilot's seat of a U. S. airline.

in every issue

4 From the Executive Director

Could Colorado become a California?

21 Country Cookin'

Jump start your day a new way.

22 Growin' Concerns

Spring sprouts tender spears.

25 Up the Creek

Icy gathering 'round the cold fishin' hole.

5 Calendar

7 Local co-op news

16 Energy tips

20 Discoveries



About the cover: Editor Mona Neeley photographed Emily Warner in a flight simulator at the United training center.

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When Orville and Wilbur Wright made aviation history on December 17, 1903, they might have had an inkling of how their flying machine would eventually shrink Planet Earth and make virtual neighbors of once remote peoples. But, given the tenor of their times, it would have been beyond imagination to think that a woman could someday be at the controls of even a rudimentary aircraft such as the "Wright Flyer."

And, even if the people of 1903 could have envisioned the modern jetliner, anyone suggesting a woman pilot would probably have been led away by men wearing white coats. But what was unimaginable at the dawn of the 20th Century became reality in 1973. All because a Colorado girl had the spunk to dream of herself as a pilot. Here is how it happened:

Once upon a time, there was a pretty little Denver girl named Emily Hanrahan. And, if you couldn't tell by her red hair, fair skin and blue eyes, her name told you she was very Irish.

One day, back in 1958, she took her first ride on an airplane, flying out to western Colorado to visit a girl friend. For Emily and flying, it was "love at first sight." Emily had thought she wanted to be a stewardess (now known as a flight attendant). But that changed on a bright, clear Monday when she returned to Denver.

It was January 29, 1958, and Emily remembers it distinctly. She was the only passenger on that Frontier DC-3 flight returning from Gunnison. "I asked if I could come up to the cock pit. When I looked through the windshield at the sky and gazed at the control panel, I knew from that moment what I wanted to do. My whole world changed. I still have the ticket from that memorable flight."

Emily had taken one look at the dazzling array of dials, switches and aircraft controls and vowed she would become a pilot. Little did she know that she would do more than that; someday she would make American aviation history.

But, that was a ways off. While in high school, she worked for May Company, a big Denver department store (now known as Foley's). She saved every penny so she could pay for flying lessons.

"Flying was so important to me, I was willing to sacrifice the things that young people normally buy with their hard-earned wages," she remembers. "No records, ice cream, movies."

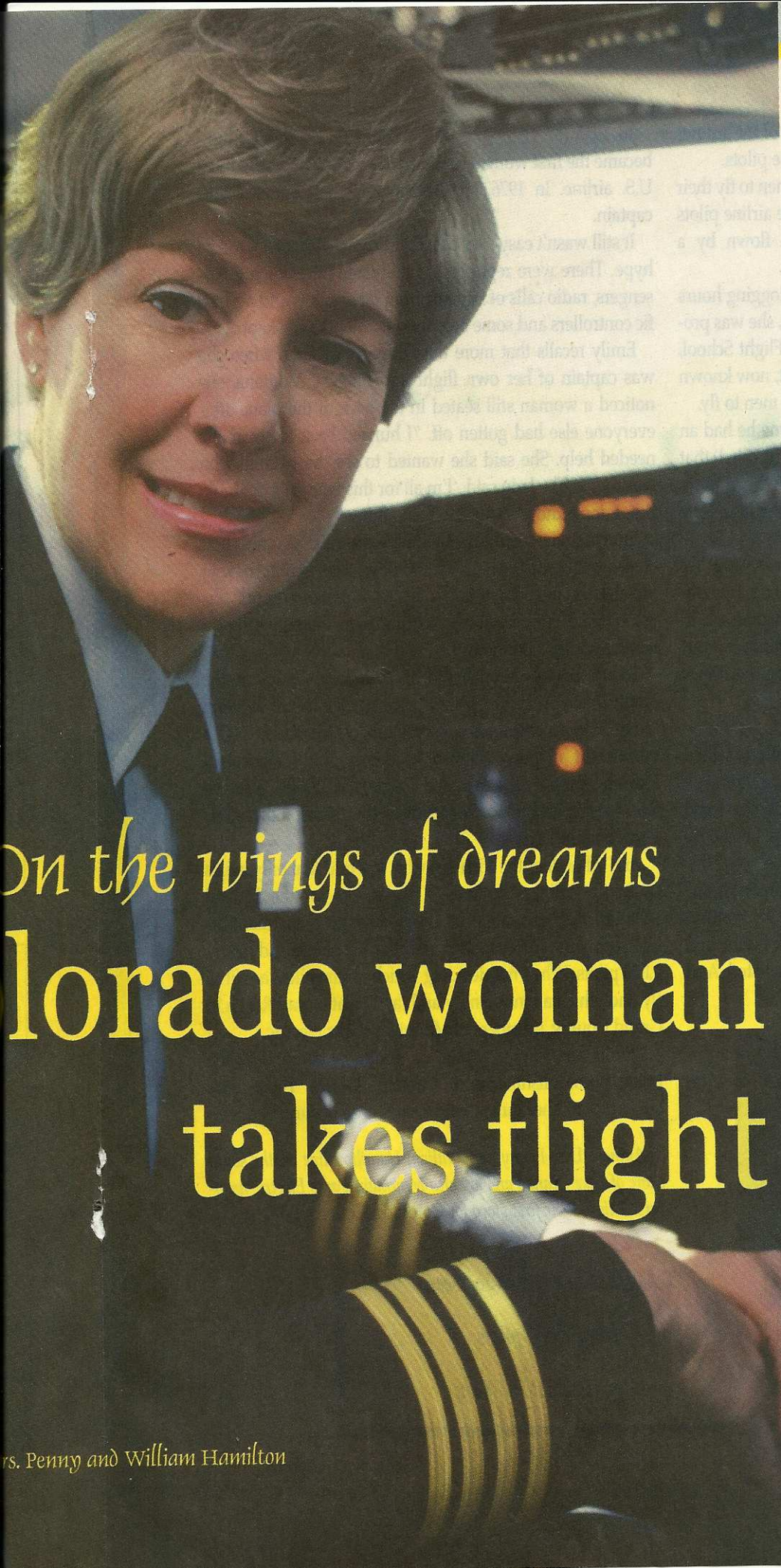
"It was a struggle at first," Emily admits. Not only was she going against tradition because it was unheard of for young women to learn to fly, but it was also expensive. "Flying lessons were \$12.75 an hour. I had to pay \$20 a week for room and board at home. As a retail clerk at the department store, I probably only made \$50 a week. But, I loved flying and was determined."

She took lessons out at Clinton Aviation, the flight school once located at then Stapleton Airport. The owner was so impressed with Emily's winning personality and her obvious gift for flying that he offered her a job as the school's receptionist. She would work for the flight school during the week and then take lessons on her day off. She had her private pilot

Emily Warner just wanted to fly, but her drive and determination earned her a position as a commercial pilot and a place in history.

by Drs. Penny and

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On the wings of dreams
Colorado woman
takes flight

Ms. Penny and William Hamilton

license a year later.

"After I earned my private pilot license, Clinton Aviation would allow me to fly, in good weather, to Greeley or Colorado Springs to pick up airplane parts," Emily recalls. "They couldn't pay me, but I was flying 'free' in my eyes and jumped at every opportunity to build flying experience."

Eventually, she put in enough flight time that Clinton Aviation would send her to Wichita, Kansas, to bring back brand new Cessna 150s. "I would set the compass for 279 degrees out of Wichita and I would dead reckon to Denver," she says. "Often the new airplanes did not have radios because the dealers would install what the customers wanted (later). So before I got to Denver, I would have to land and telephone the control tower that I was coming in. When I got to the runway, I would watch the tower for a green light. I would know I was cleared to land. I did anything because flying was such a joy to me."

She excelled as a receptionist and as a pilot. It wasn't long and she became an instructor. However, she was only allowed to book flying lessons on weekends because Clinton Aviation didn't want to lose her as the flight school secretary. But, the company couldn't hold her back forever. Her reputation as a caring and knowledgeable flight instructor grew and so did her number of students. Eventually, she became a full-time instructor and someone else moved into the office job.

During those years, she amassed over 7,000 flying hours and met Jay Warner, a flight student who later became her husband. She also upgraded her aviation ratings and provided instrument flight instruction to young airline pilots. By 1967, she was ready to move up and she applied to Frontier Airlines (her sentimental favorite), United and Continental

(continued on page 18)

On wings of dreams continued from page 17)

for a job as a commercial pilot. However, none of the airlines were hiring pilots at the time, especially female pilots.

(In those days, the airlines would only hire men to fly their aircraft. Emily was told women could never be airline pilots because passengers wouldn't get on plane flown by a woman.)

But Emily kept at it, teaching her students, logging hours and applying for a job with an airlines. In 1969, she was promoted to chief pilot for the Clinton Aviation Flight School, which had moved to Arapahoe County Airport, now known as Centennial Airport. She taught hundreds of men to fly.

"One day in 1972, one of my students told me he had an interview at Frontier. I was thrilled for him and (thrilled) that the airlines were once again hiring. But, I knew I had more experience and education, after all I was training him," she says.

So, for a solid year Emily was persistent in making her presence known at Frontier. In her pleasant and friendly way, she would "stop by to say hello." She would ask to watch the simulator training. She would constantly fill out application forms. Eventually the staff at Frontier Airlines was calling her by her first name.

Then, in 1973, Frontier announced a new hiring/training class and Emily was not on the list. She literally marched over to Frontier and got a personal and private interview with Ed O'Neil, Frontier's chief pilot. "It was the best and hardest sales job I ever delivered. I convinced him I could do the job," Emily says.

She found herself in an instrument flight simulator she had never seen before, where she was asked to perform dozens of instrument approaches. The test took hours, and when it was over, both she and O'Neil were exhausted. And Emily was hired.



In 1973 (67 years after the "Wright Flyer" flew), Emily, became the first woman to be hired as a pilot by a scheduled U.S. airline. In 1976, she became the first female airline captain.

It still wasn't easy. Her first flight came with lots of media hype. There were reporters on the plane interviewing passengers, radio calls of support from other pilots and air traffic controllers and some negative comments and skepticism.

Emily recalls that more than three years later, when she was captain of her own flight into Billings, Montana, she noticed a woman still seated in the back of the plane after everyone else had gotten off. "I hurried back to see if she needed help. She said she wanted to see the woman who was flying. The lady said, 'I'm all for this women's lib thing. But, I don't know about this flying thing.'"

Emily laughed and explained with the quiet calmness that comes with confidence in your ability, "This may be new to the airlines, but I have flown lots of airplanes before." She recounted all of her ratings and instructor hours. "I think I convinced her," Emily says.

Today, Emily's Frontier Airlines uniform hangs in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. Her list of aviation "firsts" fills an entire page. A year ago, on March 11, 2000, a permanent display honoring Captain Emily Hanrahan Howell Warner was unveiled inside the Wings over the Rockies Air and Space Museum at the former Lowry Air Force Base in Denver.

And what does the Irish girl who was told that only males could fly airliners do today? She works for the Federal Aviation Administration as an aircrew program manager overseeing the 737 fleet, its more than 150 planes and nearly 2,000 pilots. When not deciding which airline pilots are fit to fly and which are not, Emily and Jay live at Ouray Ranch in Grand County, members of Mountain Parks Electric.

Orville and Wilbur would, no doubt, be stunned by the flying accomplishments of Captain Warner. Those who know her and her quiet determination are not surprised. ❖

Authors Drs. Penny and William Hamilton live on the south shore of Lake Granby and are also Mountain Parks Electric members. This is their first story for Colorado Country Life.

Today, Emily Warner oversees

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in the nation's 737 fleet.