

Book Review - "A Hunger for the Sky" by Sparky Barnes Sargent

Review by Gretchen Reed, Education Director,
International Women's Air & Space Museum



Anyone interested in a diverse overview of women aviators who have achieved milestones in their careers should read "A Hunger for the Sky" by Sparky Barnes Sargent. The collection of biographies, averaging 25 pages each, covers a huge range of accomplishments with the book's title being the common thread uniting the nine women.

It's difficult to imagine a better way to begin such a book than with Evelyn Bryan Johnson. At 57,635 logged flight hours, she has more than any other woman and at 98 is still a manager of an airport in Tennessee, a post she has held for 54 years. An auto accident in September 2006 required that Evelyn's leg be amputated below the knee, but her prosthesis allowed her to be on her feet when inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in July 2007.

The remaining chapters in the book cover the following:

- Violet Weller Blowers-Stamm - a veteran of 55 air race derbies and still an active pilot at age 87
- Jeanie Cryor Collins - air racer, ferry pilot, illustrator and drafting specialist for military and commercial aviation manuals, Swift enthusiast
- Elaine Huf - Pennsylvania state police officer promoting aviation, skydiver, airplane restorer, Young Eagles pilot
- Suzanne Asbury-Oliver - the only active female skywriter in the world, a ferry and charter pilot with advanced ratings including ATP, aerial entertainer in the Pepsi SkyDancer (a Chipmunk)
- Sandy Mercandetti - formation flier (safety pilot and flight leader), long-distance cross country pilot, Continental Airlines First Officer
- Catherine Cavagnaro - professor of mathematics, aerobatic instructor and owner of Sewanee Aerobatic School, test pilot, vintage and seaplane pilot
- Sheila Mabbitt - pipeline patrol pilot over five states, DC-3 captain, animal rescue specialist, flight attendant, Remote Area Medical Corps pilot
- Sarah Kelly - long-distance cross country pilot over much of the U.S., towpilot for gliders, owner/operator of a gliderport, holder of record setting soaring flights

"A Hunger for the Sky" achieves unity and depth in describing these ladies in their endeavors. The biographies begin with each woman's remembrances about what sparked an early aviation interest and how it developed from there. In addition to recounting meticulously their philosophies, motivations, and emotions, Sargent uses many quotes for depth. Childhood memories form a part of the ladies' stories. The book is attractively illustrated with many photographs, some of them taken by the author, who is herself a pilot. Accuracy and attention to detail are apparent throughout.