

'You only get one shot at life': The woman paving the way for female pilots

It is safe to say not every 14-year-old is trusted to fly a plane.

But when a teenage Enid Otun, now 57, was asked to do just that at an air show in Kent in 1977, she showed such prowess she was allowed to take over the reins.

That episode sparked a lifetime of breaking down barriers, facing challenges head on and, now, inspiring others to do the same. Now Ms Otun, who now lives in Norwich, looks back on it as a "Sliding Doors" moment.

"It was the only time in my life I was told I was good at anything," she said. "I got chatting to the pilot during a pleasure flight and he let me steer for a bit and then told me I had an aptitude for it and I should seriously consider it as a career."

But Ms Otun, who would regularly fly from Liverpool to Nigeria to visit family, said the praise was "ironic" as she hated flying throughout her childhood.

She said: "I really did not enjoy it at all from the take-off to the landing. It was only when I tried it hands-on that something shifted.

"I had been a bit lost as a child and didn't really know what I wanted to do and then it all clicked into place.

"It was never something I had aspired to do, and I want to reassure young people to not put too much pressure on themselves to find their calling at an early age."

After developing her skills at a flying club in Lagos with her uncle, Ms Otun obtained a private pilot licence aged 18.

She then spent five years at aviation school in San Mateo in California, where she gained a commercial flying licence and a flight instructor licence.

Ms Otun's first job in the industry was at Bristol

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Helicopters Limited in the Lagos operation department.

During that time, Ms Otun was one of a handful of women flying and just one of two women in Nigeria flying commercially.

And at the age of 28, she overcame barriers and prejudices to become the first female chief pilot in Nigeria.

Ms Otun said: "In the 80s and 90s it was difficult as women weren't appreciated and I am also mixed race.

"I was a tough kid and I thought 'I'm not going to be a victim and no one will tell me what I can and can't do'.

"I also had a thick skin and I was determined I wouldn't let anyone else's ideas of what a woman is and should do hold me down. I made a pact with myself that no one would tell me how to live my life as you only get one shot at it.

"I knew I was fighting the good fight. It pushed me to break this mould and make this a place where women can achieve."

Ms Otun's career continued to go from strength to strength and she returned to the UK to take on a series of senior positions, including as an operations manager in Shoreham in Sussex.

She said: "My advice to anyone, particularly women who want to work in male-dominated industries, is to just go for it.

"There is nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it and you should not be afraid or failing or making mistakes. Just keep moving forwards and working hard and good things will happen."

In 2005, Ms Otun moved to



Enid Otun has broken barriers and paved the way for women in aviation and is an active member of the LGBTQ+ community in Norwich

Picture: SONYA DUNCAN

Norwich after meeting her now wife, Lucy, online and falling in love at first sight.

She said: "The first three or four months after we met I was driving back and forth from Hampshire, where I lived, to Norwich. But then I moved and the rest is history."

Ms Otun credits Lucy with sparking the idea to create a podcast, called "If women were meant to fly, the sky would be pink", based on her inspiring career in aviation.

Ms Otun, who currently works as a senior data link engineer at Collins Aerospace, said: "If I touch or inspire just one person with my podcast, my job is done."

For more information on Ms Otun and the podcast visit www.skyispink.co.uk



Enid Otun became the first female chief pilot in Nigeria at the age of 28

Picture: ENID OTUN

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