

Ep 17 If You Wont Listen

2020, Enid Otun
If Women were meant to fly the sky would be pink
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Transcript

[0:00] Hello and welcome to the next episode of if women were meant to fly the sky would be pink. If you won't listen. I'm Enid Otun.

In this episode, training commences at the Lagos flying club, and I fall out with some private members who know better than I do, when it comes to training pilots, even though they have no instructor qualifications, my secondment comes to an end, and I elect to return to Bristow's even though I am offered a permanent job with Mobil Oil. And I address the Peer pressure which is resulting in stressful situations off-duty.

[0:41] Music.

[1:10] Never in my wildest Dreams did I ever think I would get to do what I did.
That may sound strange but in reality this urge to fly did not take root as far back as I can remember.

[1:24] I liked planes when I was younger and loved going to the airport to see my favourite BOAC VC10's, even enjoyed the thought of flying on them, but when it came to actually flying on them, I was petrified. Turbulence upset me, the turns upset me and the takeoffs upset me. All the things that later I would love. There is a lesson in there somewhere. So years later, as I strive to become the best pilot that I could, there were many times when I thought I was not good enough. I struggled through the courses and endured plenty of a inane insults from men who couldn't cope with my existence. So, the fact that I was standing at the door of my office at the Lagos flying club as the chief flying instructor, and I was a fully qualified commercial pilot with some experience under my belt, gave me the warmest glow I could ever imagine. Of course, it could also be the fact that the generator was not working that morning and I was having a hot flush. Whichever it was I was waiting for the arrival of my students and looking forward to imparting the knowledge that would hopefully make them the best pilots that they could be. I wasn't under any illusions that any of this would be plane sailing, pardon the pun.

[2:50] But I did hope that they would enjoy the experience, and that one day we would have a continuous crop of young pilots well trained and anxious to advance African Aviation. I sauntered out to the aircraft parked on the grass to give them all the pre-flight inspection. I wanted to be sure that both our trainers were ready for the days flying, and of course free of our local nesting birds home aircraft vent building project. Oil checked, fuel sampled and tyres kicked, I decided to do a quick inspection of the runway, being so far out in the bush you never knew what you would find. Flying in Africa meant you had to be ready for anything, especially incursions onto the runway when you least expected it.

[3:40] More than once I had experienced what I called the cow incursion, which was when a herd of cows strayed from their grazing fields usually located next to the runway, and decided the grass was greener over the other side. Now this would usually happen as you commenced your takeoff run. You can see them in the distance, but given the noise emanating from the aircrafts engines, it usually had the effect of scaring them back the other way, however on a number of occasions the opposite happened, and they just turned and stared at you, at which point you had to abandon the take before there were beef burgers all over the runway. It certainly made for a interesting entries in the tech log for the engineers.

[4:26] The same would happen on the runway at the club, only more often than not it was a group of goats or a number of snakes. Now in fairness I have only ever once found a snake in the aircraft whilst at the club, there was no doubt about it as I ended up several miles away still screaming snaaaaaaake, for the next several hours.

[4:48] Along with my scheduled students, I also had the pleasure of welcoming some private pilots who were eager to get flying again. Club rules dictated that they would have to have a full check ride with me first, and of course my first encounter was explosive. Here was a man who was used to ordering people around. Strode into my office and demanded the keys to the airplane, announcing in front of everyone that he was qualified to fly anything. Now, anyone that has been following the podcast from the beginning will know roughly how this was going to go. I'm not a Monster, but I'm all fight rather than flight ironically, with the exception of when I meet er spiders and snakes. However, you'll be impressed to hear that contrary to my natural instinct to fight fire with fire, I whispered to him in a measured way that, going forward I would not be one of the people he spoke to like that. He had two choices, he could behave like a professional and follow the rules, or I would have him escorted off the premises and report his behaviour to the Nigerian civil aviation authority with the understanding that his private pilot licence would be suspended.

[6:04] I would not now or in the future be challenged on following the rules.
The rules were in place for a very good reason, and until he could produce a professional flight instructors licence and an employment contract with the Lagos flying club, he would be following the rules. It took him a couple of weeks to come around, but he eventually grew used to the idea that everyone was equal here, and rules were rules, especially where flying was concerned.

[6:32] Music.

[6:46] My secondment was coming to an end, and as much as I'd enjoyed it, I felt that I needed to get back to bristows, where I was very close to promotion to senior first officer. Just before I left, I was asked to see the Chief Pilot, where I was given the very welcome news that they would like to offer me a position with the company. Now even though I turned them down, the offer was welcome because at last I felt that people were beginning to see my worth, and the confidence and satisfaction of having those options was worth it's weight in gold. As my secondment ended for the time being and I was rostered back at bristows, we began doing Lagos direct Port Harcourt runs during the summer season to clear a backlog of luggage and passengers. Down in Port Harcourt it was also this season of The Snake. Our parking area was a secluded patch of airport where we had our passenger lounge. The parking area was separated from it by a patch of open ground with a narrow tarmacked path running the length of it Bush lay either side.

[7:53] Now, bushfires in Nigeria are ignited by farmers during the dry season in the process of land clearance, but at all other times, the Bush was built up. We knew that in that particular bush area there were snakes of the puff adder and carpet viper variety. Now many people had reported seeing them slithering across the path, luckily no one had been bitten, which was just as well as the nearest antidote was about 45 minutes away which was of no help if you did get bitten.

[8:25] There were a number of times that I didn't feel comfortable walking on the path, when the bush was built up, and of course the hapless dispatcher had to run the gauntlet and bring all the paperwork out to us. Snakes were way out of my comfort zone, and the only time I did see a viper slither down the path, was late one evening as we arrived for a nightstop. Instead of freezing, and standing still so as not to draw attention to myself, I dropped everything and ran screaming back to the aircraft. I think the captain I was with remarked sometime later that it was the only time he had seen me lose my mind and my dignity, along with the degree of Street cred.

[9:08] Ok pretty much all my street cred, in the shortest period of time. I had to be flanked on all sides by staff on the walk back to the car, to prevent me sleeping in the aircraft all night. Not my finest hour.

It was a busy few months and I seemed to be flying all the time, with night stops increasing down the line, I was away from home more than usual. The good thing, is that I was building my flight time at a good rate which was instrumental in my promotion to senior first officer once had logged 1,500 hours. My instructor time at the flying club was also helping. What wasn't helping was the full on fallout of just that, not having the time to do anything else. I was determined not to take my eye off the prize of promotion, and work myself even harder to achieve this. I spent more time down route in the pilots mess, trying to keep up with my colleagues. I drank more than I should have, and felt all the worse for it. Whilst I never crossed the line with regard to the rules, bottle to throttle, I began to wonder how much longer I could keep up the charade.

[10:19] On the one hand I wanted to be accepted and on the other hand the peer pressure was intense. What I didn't realise at the time was that I didn't have to prove anything to anyone. What I did decide to do, was approach my friend and colleague, Chris Puddy for help. My drinking was getting out of hand. He had always been an inspiration to me, and someone that I looked up to. Our next flight together was a revelation. We sat down together in downtown Port Harcourt, away from the shell camp where we usually stayed and drank ginger ales. Chris took my concerns on board, and in doing so revealed his own vulnerability. He had also found himself in that position a few years previously where it had affected his flying. He was at a crossroads in his life and was reaching more and more for alcohol to delay the decisions he knew he had to make.

[11:14] He was honest and straightforward about the reasons he had taken this path, and he didn't sugarcoat what the consequences might be.

[11:22] He gave me a very simple and deep piece of advice. Be yourself, you have nothing to prove to anyone, not if you don't want to. Let people see the real you. Don't become someone you're not, you'll not be able to keep up the pretence, and if you go too far, it's a long journey back. You will make mistakes, that's what life is all about. Embrace it and learn from it.

[11:52] In just a few short hours with someone I greatly admired, he had shone a light on the real me, He knew that living with my childhood trauma was in some ways driving my destructive behaviour, but he was telling me that it didn't have to, I could change it if I wanted.

[12:11] I was responsible for my own behaviour, as a result I didn't have to live up to anyone's expectations. The next day on our flight back to Lagos, I felt that a weight had been lifted off my shoulders, I had something to work towards, and although it may take time, I was strong enough to make it happen. Thank you for listening, as always your reviews and comments are very much appreciated. Thank you to Lucy Ashby for the editing of this episode. If you'd like to ask a question or make a comment please do so on our social media sites, we are on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, or send us an email at our email theskyspinkpilot@gmail.com. You can also visit our website www.skyspink.co.uk.

In the next episode, more encounters and emergencies as I near promotion. I get the opportunity to join a ferry crew bringing our Beech King Air 200 back from the UK, and I am faced with an emergency landing and a terrified student, at the Lagos flying club.

Thank you and goodbye.

[13:28] Music.