

S2 E7 Hell Yes She's A Girl EDITED-aup

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SPEAKERS

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Enid Otun 00:01

Hello, and welcome to season two of if women were meant to fly, the sky would be pink. Episode Seven. Hell yes, she's a girl. I'm Enid Otun. In this episode, planning for the new charter department take shape. I set off to the UK for my King Air Training and ferry flight back to Lagos. And after my return, I set about choosing staff and flight crew for my new department. I was buzzing. The opportunity I had been given by Bristow helicopters had been a surprise and out of the blue. It did, however, show the company's faith in me and confirm the support they had shown since I first joined. For me, this opportunity was huge. I may not have known it then. But it ticked so many boxes for my career, my future, and my mental health. Coming so soon after I'd been promoted, gave me something new to focus on. I prided myself on doing the best job possible. And here was the platform with which I could do it. A new department, new aircraft and a clean slate. Arrangements had been made for me to travel back to Redhill for some Beechcraft King Air ground school, followed by the flight training. In a few short months, I was back at the Whitehouse in Crawley, which had served as my accommodation for my earlier training. It was quiet this time around with only a few students and residents for helicopter training. I enjoyed being back at Redhill. It was a vibrant place and always busy, mostly with helicopters. The Beechcraft King Air which I was to manage and operate for the Lagos fixed wing unit, had been with the company for a few years and its main task was to ferry executives between bases in the south of the UK, with bases in Scotland and the North Sea for the oil industry. It didn't see a lot of flight hours, and so it was decided that it would be better utilized elsewhere in the organization. And that just happened to be Nigeria. At that time, Charter

operations were beginning to grow in the industry, and for the most part utilized executive jets like the Hawker Siddeley HS125 in country. Even bristows had one, although that was designed for ferrying executives internationally from the UK. Whichever way you looked at it, the time was ripe to expand operations outside of just the oil industry, and look to harness lucrative new contracts in other industries across the region. I started my ground school in the same classroom, as I'd been in for my Rolls Royce jet engine training course. As I entered the building, I experienced a moment of confusion followed by surprise and recognition. My official company picture had joined the ranks of the cadet pilots who had passed through the training academy over the years. And it took me a while to recognize myself. My beaming round face stared back at me as I walked down the entrance corridor to the facility. It was a bit surreal. My course lasted just under a week and was intense. This was followed by a series of training flights on the actual aircraft instead of a flight simulator. Our training area would be West into Wales, with our temporary base at Cardiff airport. One of my most memorable sessions would be practicing emergency descents from 30,000 feet simulating depressurization. This consisted of steps to get the aircraft to a safe breathable altitude, should your cabin pressurization fail. Pilots have to be able to grab their quick don oxygen masks in order to make sure that they could breathe sufficiently well in order to get the aircraft to a safe altitude. The masks were designed to be above and behind the pilot seat, so that with one hand you could slip the mask over your face and breathe normally. Even under training, it was exhilarating. Everything needed to flow in the correct order, with the final act of pushing the nose down to establish a fast and steep descent to 10,000 feet. Just as a completely unnecessary aside, now that I'm a retired pilot, the only quick don I do these days is from my work clothes into what my wife calls leisure wear at around 6:30pm every evening. I comically pretend to sound a klaxon and call, to no one in particular, 'It's leisure wear time, quick don please'. So amusing. You can take the pilot out of the cockpit, but you can't take the cockpit out of the pilot, I guess. Anyway, with four days of full on training completed, the flight test for my type rating was conducted and I passed. In a few days, we would be headed for home, ferrying the aircraft back to Lagos. Back in Redhill, I had a couple of days to help get the aircraft ready for its ferry flight. There would be three pilots assigned including myself, and the rear of the aircraft was filled with spare parts and supplies for our Nigerian operation. Our route would take us via Alicante in Spain, Tamanrasset in Algeria, and on to Lagos with a fuel stop in Niamey. The flight was uneventful, and I managed to acquire a good amount of left hand seat command time in preparation for my new assignment. I hit the ground running on my return. Whilst I was tasked with setting up the new operation. I was also rostered for duty on the twin otters. It would be a very packed few months, as I also had to set up an office as well as a charter team. One of the best highlights of this process was the opportunity to fly the King Air with one of our most senior captains, Captain Dennis Stoten. Dennis was a tall man standing just over six foot. He was rapidly approaching retirement and had been assigned to the King Air operation with a wealth of

experience on the aircraft. I admired Dennis and we were to become close friends. He was a legend to us and had had the most enviable career. He was one of the humblest men I've ever known, and the times that I spent in his company were never dull. He taught me so much about the Twin Otter, and in the following few months, he would teach me so much about the King Air and flying in general. Dennis had been bitten by the flying bug very early on in life and had flown pretty much anything worth flying. He was also the perfect, suave gentlemen from a different era. His antics off duty, were just as interesting as his antics on duty. He lived every minute of life as an aviator. He had flown for many years with British Airways and this was the airline that he had left in order to fly out his twilight years with Bristows. He was widely traveled as you would expect and had spent many many years on the Indian and African continents. He once recounted a story to me when he flew B747's, about a hard, nosewheel landing in Hong Kong, which had resulted in substantial damage. He had been assigned to fly out there with an engineering team to have the damage repaired, and ferry the aircraft back to the UK. This event at the time had apparently cost the company in excess of \$1 million dollars, and they were not happy. His aviation knowledge was extensive, and he was the most excellent teacher. The time spent flying with him was precious and made me a better pilot. The time spent with him off duty was equally special, as he would regale me with the stories of his misspent youth and shenanigans as a young man. Dennis had dated some of the world's most famous women, actresses and the like in years gone by, and was revered as a dashing young captain. I can just imagine him in days gone by actually, appearing in the passenger cabin of his British Airways Boeing 747 and greeting the passengers. He would have made all the ladies swoon and all men jealous. I even remember a story about Sophia Loren.....!!!! Ever the gentleman to the end though, he never divulged secrets, and many a time I had to work it out for myself. Having Dennis as a senior Captain in the new charter operation was the biggest coup yet. I can't say my life as a pilot was ever as glamorous as Dennis's, although it was certainly eventful. But it was great fun to live vicariously through his colorful stories. I would go on to learn so much more from this amazing man, and as a colleague and friend, I would always remain devoted and thankful to him. In the initial stages of the launch of our new operation, Shell Oil would be our first customer for their executive flights. They liked the idea of having an additional aircraft at their disposal, albeit shared with other customers. At the start, we had a number of high profile customers, driven by our current contracts and safety records, Shell, Ashland Oil and Coca-Cola to name just a few. I flew my first 100 hours with Dennis around the country. As a senior Captain nearing retirement, he had to be crewed with another Captain, and I was so glad that this would be me. I could think of no better team, as we navigated the early stages of this exciting assignment. Dennis was happy to take everything at a slower pace, and leave me to do the bulk of the work. There would be nothing more satisfying than learning from the master. And as he once said to me, "I get to stay in luxurious hotels, whilst accompanying and supporting a most wonderfully competent Captain and friend".

I don't think I've ever blushed so bright red as then. When people queried him as to whether he was flying with a girl, he would reply, "Hell yes, she's a girl". I even feel a sense of warmth and pride whilst typing that. Dennis's faith in my ability was the fuel to keep me airborne, and no, I don't regret how cheesy that may sound. It's all too true, and remains one of the most amazing times in my life. Time and time again, I was being reminded that it was possible not only to achieve amazing things, but to find wonderful inspiring friends willing to support me completely, in contrast to my difficult start in life. With the office setup and staff assigned for the charter operations, we started in earnest. Dennis and I were kept busy almost seven days a week. Now, Dennis would retire about four months later, and as sad as I was to lose him, he was ready for a well earned rest. We held a small celebration for him in the Lagos hangar. He was such a popular and well liked man. Towards the end of the party, he called me over to him and handed me the four bar epaulets that he had himself been presented with many, many, many years previously. I remember being speechless and tearful. Here he was parting with the symbols that defined an extraordinary career. I was determined to make sure that I was worthy of them. I removed my brand new ones and replace them with his, and those would be the ones that I would wear for the rest of my career. I still have them today, and they always remind me of the wonderful man that he was. When Dennis died a few years later, his daughter very kindly contacted me to say that her father spoke of me after he had retired to the Lake District, and she had wanted me to know. I was heartbroken but thankful that I had had the honor to know the exceptional man, that was Captain Dennis Stoton. 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 want to ask a question or make a comment. Please do so on our social media sites, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, or send us an email. Our email addresses is theskyispinkpilot@gmail.com or visit our website www.skyispink.co.uk In the next episode, which will air early in January 2021. My new copilot is rostered with me as permanent crew. We take on more charter contracts and are now very busy operation, and I experience several incidents that start to demand more of me as a captain. From all the crew at the pink sky podcast, we wish you, your families and friends, A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Here's to a brighter, positive and more hopeful 2021. Thank you and goodbye.