

For Jimmy Doolittle and sons (below) and B.J. London and girls (right), flying was a family affair, as it was for the great-grandfathers of flight, the Montgolfier brothers.

COURTESY BARBARA LONDON



PHOTO TREATMENT BY DAVID POVLATIS

by Reina Pennington

It all started with two brothers. Not *those* two. Back in 1783, the Montgolfier boys—Joseph and his kid brother Etienne—sent two Frenchmen skyward in a hot-air balloon and started a tradition taken up over the next two centuries by hundreds of families. The Wright brothers are merely the best known in a category that includes Baron von Richthofen, whose brother, Lothar, shot down 20 enemy planes in a single month of World War I; the Shorts brothers—Eustace, Oswald, and Horace—who established the first aircraft factory in Great Britain; the Stinson sisters, Katherine and Marjorie, flight instructors in the Wright B trainer whose brothers followed in *their* footsteps; and General Jimmy Doolittle, whose piloting skills were so strong that he passed them along to both son and grandson.

In fact, the Famous Families of Flight category is so large that it prompts the question: Is there a flying gene? What

The **FLY** Chromosome

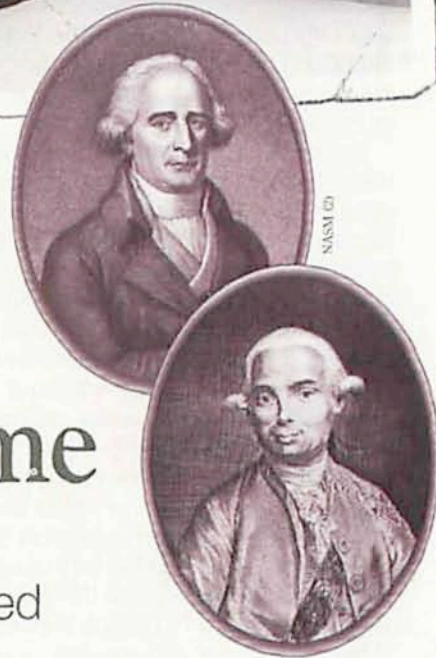
In some families, a pilot's license is as predetermined as eye color.

do people mean exactly when they describe a flier as "a natural pilot"? I canvassed a few of the families flying today to find out whether the love of flying is simply "catching" or something deeper down, a part of a person's makeup, carried in the blood.

The Fabulous Flying Dishart Brothers

You've seen Gregory Dishart fly. A former instructor at the Naval Fighter Weapons School, formerly in Califor-

nia, he flew the F-5 that, playing the role of a Soviet MiG, gave a pilot playing the role of Tom Cruise a run for his money in the movie *Top Gun*. Greg is the middle son of Urban and Theresa Dishart of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and just one of four pilots in a family with five sons. Oldest son Urban III started it off in the early 1970s, eventually serving as an F-16 squadron commander at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. Second-born Danny flew the A-6 as a Marine, one of the few Marines to become a landing signal officer on a





COURTESY PATTY WAGSTAFF (2)



COURTESY ANDREA TART

Left to right: Aerobatic champ Patty Wagstaff, her airline captain sister Toni, and former Air Force pilot Andi Tart all "inherited" flying from Dad. Below: Four out of five Dishart brothers recommend flying careers.



COURTESY THERESA DISHART

carrier, and Jeff joined the Air Force—the only one in his class at Oklahoma's Vance Air Force Base to be assigned the F-16 fighter. Jeff earned his own 15 minutes of fame during a brief tour as a tanker pilot in the Air National Guard when he refueled Captain Scott O'Grady minutes before that fighter pilot was shot down over Bosnia; he later refueled the rescuers. The air services don't keep detailed records of relatives who fly, but my informal survey suggests that the Disharts are very likely the only four brothers ever to fly military jets at the same time.

Jeff claims the whole flying thing was his idea: "It wasn't a case of them infecting me with the flying bug. Urb wanted to be a gangster, Danny a doctor, Greg a vet. I wanted to be a pilot. It was always frustrating for me later when people said, 'You're following in your brothers' footsteps!'"

The sons caught the bug from their dad. Even with no formal background in aviation, Urban II, an ex-Marine who became a chemical engineer, loved airplanes. The boys grew up with airplanes decorating their bedrooms. Dad built

and flew gas-powered model airplanes with them; he paid for them to take rides in real airplanes. Growing up in the 1960s, son Urb recalls, "We didn't have a lot of money, so we used to go out to the Pittsburgh airport. A big jug of Kool-Aid and five little Dishart boys, watching airplanes take off and land. That was fun, for us."

Greg remembers getting an aircraft carrier as a toy, "one of those metal ones with the folding wings on the airplanes. The Navy always had an appeal to me." He was a soft touch for the Navy recruiters at a table in the student union. Urb had also started in college. "The thing that got me into it, really, was the necessity of paying for school," he says. An ROTC scholarship got him the money, and a shot at a pilot slot.

The Dishart boys didn't set out to create a fighter pilot dynasty. "It was never one of these 'One for all and all for one, let's do this together,'" says Greg. Urb adds, "We were all so busy getting through school and training, it didn't really hit me that we were all doing this until the ball was rolling pretty good. We were always very close, always seemed to do well in the same things. I did well as a fighter, so it didn't surprise me that the others also got fighters. That's what we do."

Well, mostly. Youngest brother Steve has kept his feet on the ground, now serving as vice president and director of communications for Mellon Bank. Though he says he felt like "chopped liver" on occasion when the newspapers kept interviewing only the flying

Dishart brothers, Steve adds, "I didn't feel an outcast. We all chose freely what we wanted to do, and we all supported each other."

The pilots have now abandoned their fighter jets, but they can't stay earth-bound: Urb and Jeff are flying for United Airlines, Danny for US Airways, and Greg for Delta.

Dad finally fell in line. "He eventually got his license, after we were all in the military," says Urb. Urban II died in 1996. "He was a damn good aviator," says his oldest son. "I thought he was a natural."

Sisters in Flight

Eddie Stinson was the first pilot to demonstrate spin recovery, but not the first in his family to fly. His sisters Katherine and Marjorie both beat him into the air. Once there, the two women developed completely different flying personalities. Marjorie was known as "the Flying Schoolmarm." Her main interest was the flight school she ran with her sister, where they trained Canadians for the British air service. Katherine, on the other hand, was a performer. In 1915 she flew 80 consecutive loops and performed in Tokyo for an audience of more than 25,000.

Fast-forward a couple of generations: The Combs sisters are also both pilots, but they too have taken different routes

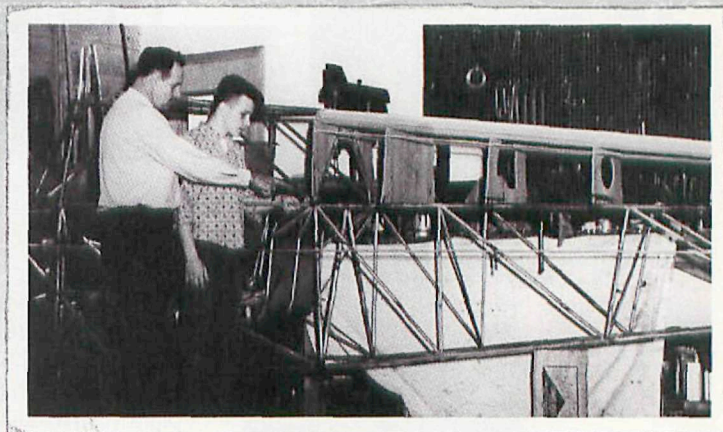


COURTESY PETERSEN FAMILY (2)

Amy Petersen met husband Craig (a Navy pilot's son) on the first day of Navy flight school. Guess what childhood pastime Tom Poberezny shared with his father?



COURTESY TOM POBEREZYNY



into the sky. Toni wanted to fly from an early age. Her father was a pilot as long as she can remember, having followed an Air Force tour with a 24-year career with Japan Airlines. Toni is now a 757 pilot for Continental Airlines.

Patty took a more circuitous route, drifting around the world, living on a sailboat in ports from California to Australia, waitressing in Alaska. You probably know Patty by her married name, Wagstaff, and as a three-time U.S. National Aerobatic Champion. As Toni puts it, "She and I have the yin and yang of piloting careers. Patty gets paid to fly upside down and I get paid to keep it right side up."

Their dad certainly influenced both girls' choices; flying was a bond among them. "It probably made my father and I closer," says Patty. "When I grew up, dads didn't do much with the kids. However, when I was a kid I flew with him. He'd always let me sit in the cockpit and fly the plane, up in the seat. We had a difficult relationship. But I think the best times we ever shared were definitely in the cockpit. And now it's still really the only thing we have in common."

Patty, taking a page from the barn-

storming Stinsons, is more competitive than the other pilots in the family. She says, "When I started, women pilots really were just competing against the other women. I'm here to beat the men too."

Like the Stinsons, whose mother helped purchase their flight school, many of today's fliers got started because of Mom. B.J. London runs an aircraft company in Long Beach, California, and began flying back in the 1940s, when she was one of the original 25 women accepted into the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. Her two daughters fly—one was the first woman hired by Western Airlines, and is now a captain with Delta. "We never went to grandma's in a car, we always flew," says London. "From the time the girls were in a basket, they were always in the back of an airplane."

Look at the family trees of any number of contemporary pilots and you almost always find more than one set of wings. There's airshow performer and Experimental Aircraft Association president Tom Poberezny, whose father, Paul, founded the association. Or Andi Tart, who decided at age nine, when her Navy veteran father took her to her flying lessons, to go to the Air Force Academy. Craig Petersen, former Navy A-6 pilot, is the son of a former Navy pilot—and the husband of a former Navy pilot who now flies for United Airlines.

He says, "I think our little boy was almost four years old before he finally realized that everyone's mommy didn't fly airplanes." Burt Rutan developed the unique Voyager aircraft, and his brother Dick copiled it on the first unrefueled circumnavigation of the globe. Or the Fellowes brothers, all three naval aviators: Jack ended up as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, away from his son John for seven years. And still, John wanted to fly just like his dad (even had his name misspelled on his A-6 like the old man's was on his).

Lindy's Legacy: Nature or Nurture?

The anecdotes from the families all point to the "at the knee" education that was hard to resist. So other forces besides heredity may have been at work.

"I'm not sure it was possible to catch the [flying] bug, because the bug had you surrounded," says Tom Poberezny. "My dad started the EAA in '53, and after that it was aviation 24 hours a day in our family, whether it was building airplanes in the garage or going out to the airport. My dad ate, slept, and dreamed airplanes."

Toni Combs, however, gives a nod to genetics. "At least in my family, flying definitely runs in the blood," she says. "For all of us, flying is a passion, and every time we get to go up we have



COURTESY FELLOWES FAMILY

John Fellowes—Jr. and Sr.—flew Navy A-6 Intruders (left). The senior Fellowes was one of three naval aviator brothers. Mathilde Moisant (right) had a barnstorming brother who got her into the act.



NASM

on the West Coast, removed from most of the historical aspects of flying in my family, I didn't think about it," he says. When he finally did decide, in college, he kept his family connections secret. He recalls, "When I took my Certified Flight In-

structor check ride, I did fine. When we got back we were sitting in the plane, and the instructor was writing up my new ticket, and he asked me how to spell my name. And he said, 'Any relation to Charles Lindbergh?' And I said, 'Yes, he's my grandfather.' And he said, 'Well, you should've told me that before we flew! You wouldn't have even had to fly!' And I said, 'That's why I didn't tell you.'

Erik hopes to become the first Lindbergh to fly in space. He is now promoting the X-Prize, a \$10 million purse that will be awarded to the first privately funded suborbital space launch. Lindbergh also hopes to be one of the first passenger-astronauts.

Lindbergh's descendants may not have made aviation their vocation, but a love of flying is part of the family legacy. Reeve Lindbergh Tripp predicts, "I expect there will always be Lindberghs who are pilots."

And likely Disharts and Wagstaffs and Stinsons. While I was talking to Andi Tart, one of her five-year-old twins tried to answer my questions. Andi told her, "You're not a pilot!" The little girl answered, "Not yet!"

Still not convinced? Think back on those times when you got the urge to fly. Do you suppose you were the first in your family to feel that way? You might have something in common with the generations of sons, fathers, sisters, and brothers who have followed each

other into the sky:

- **Mathilde Moisant**, one of the first women to earn a pilot's license, was inspired by the first barnstormer: her brother John.

- **Edwin Link**, inventor of the famed Link trainer, first used the simulator to teach his brother to fly.

- **Henri Farman** flew solo in 1906 to make the first publicly monitored circular flight of one kilometer. But he later built his aircraft factory and airline in partnership with his pilot brother Maurice.

- **Laurent and Louis Seguin** (cousins of the Montgolfiers) developed the Gnome rotary engine.

- **Léon and Robert Morane**, as well as **Edouard and Charles Nieuport**, developed monoplanes for the French before World War I.

- **Reimar and Walter Horten** built gliders and Luftwaffe aircraft in World War II and designed the first flying wing.

- **Paul Tibbets** was a member of the 509th Composite Group when he piloted the B-29 *Enola Gay* on that 1945 mission to Hiroshima. Today that unit is the 509th Bomb Squadron, and one of its pilots flying B-2 Spirit strategic bombers out of Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, is Paul Tibbets IV, Paul's grandson.

- **Mark and Scott Kelly** have together made over 625 carrier landings in F-14s, F/A-18s, and A-6s. They were both selected as astronauts in April 1996 and are currently qualified for flight assignments. They'd be perfect for a new Gemini mission: The Kellys are NASA's first twins. ✈

smiles on our faces." Sister Patty agrees. "The genetic part is things like good eyesight, and tending to little details while keeping the big picture in sight. We were born with a certain set of skills that happened to be good for flying." Others refer to the competitiveness of flying (especially fighters), the hand-eye coordination, spatial orientation, something physiological. Or an attitude, says Jeff Dishart, a "zest for life."

Still, if there is a gene, it could be recessive. Consider our most famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh. Flying was his life, and he shared the passion with his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh. He took his five children flying, and not one of them chose aviation as a career.

But he did teach them to fly. "I think it was a way of exposing us to a world he loved himself," says daughter Reeve Lindbergh Tripp. "But we were actively discouraged from flying as a profession," she adds. "My father loved flying in the old days, but I think his sense was that the fun was over."

Keep on looking down the family line and you will find that irrepressible urge playing itself out. Lindy's sons Scott and Jon flew small aircraft and ultralights, and Reeve herself set her sights on a private license until a riding accident made it impossible. Jon's son Erik worked as a flight instructor until he was grounded by rheumatoid arthritis.

Erik wasn't encouraged one way or the other to fly. "For me, growing up