

Pilots Marrying Pilots: How Three Flying Families are Making it Work



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As I went through pilot training, I was often asked by other pilots and family members

how I planned to have a family and fly airplanes at the same time. The question always bothered me. Why not? People in other careers manage families while traveling a lot. Female CEOs manage children while working 60 hours each week. Why couldn't I raise a family and be a pilot at the same time?

And then I married a pilot.



And while it would have been challenging enough to be away from home with a husband who had a nine-to-five job, marrying a pilot meant serious challenges, especially when it came to raising a family. Schedules would never be such that we could guarantee one of us would be home to care for the kids, and even if we could arrange it to be that way, we'd never see each other. Something had to give. Or did it?

It turns out that in my own case, something had to give. But it also turns out that if there's a will, there's a way, and while having children presents a challenge for dual-pilot households, it doesn't have to be a game-changer. In fact, many marriages exist in which both partners are pilots. And many of these marriages include children - probably more than you'd think.

I caught up with a few women who are living their dream of being a professional pilot without giving up the hope of having a family. These women are remarkable. They're smart, successful pilots, loving wives and doting mothers.

They've each worked hard and overcome challenges in order to become pilots and moms. They are "living the dream", as they say, and while their situations are not without specific struggles, these women demonstrate that a girl can, indeed, have it all - maybe just not at the same time, and maybe accompanied by a special kind of logistical nightmare. And I didn't ask, but I'd be willing to bet that if they had to do it all over again, they'd do it all the same. Here are their stories.

What's your current family/work situation?

Kim P: I am a Part 91 corporate pilot. I fly the Global Express and Gulfstream 650. My husband works for the Federal Aviation Administration as a pilot and an Aircraft Specialist in the Seattle Aircraft Evaluation Group (AEG). We have a three-year-old daughter.

Laura G: My husband and I are both pilots for the same regional airline. I am almost 2 years senior to him. He has upgraded to captain and is currently commuting half way across the country to a reserve schedule. I have stayed a senior first officer to be able to stay home most days with our one-year-old son.

Katie V: My husband and I both fly for the same major airline, and we're both based in Seattle. He's finishing up new-hire training, and I'm out on maternity leave. We have a two-year-old and a newborn.

How did you and your husband meet?

Kim: My husband was a captain at Air Wisconsin based in Philadelphia and I was a first officer. We were paired up as crew for a turn from PHL to PWM. Since then, we have flown about 300 hours together in the CRJ-200 for Air Wisconsin.

Laura: I taught my husband to fly! We didn't date until I was hired at an airline and he was a flight instructor - we had a very professional student/ instructor relationship during the time we were at the flight school. When I left for the airlines, he continued to email and call with questions about flying and how to handle certain flight students. It always meant a lot to me that he respected my opinions and knowledge so much. We reconnected in person later on and have been together ever since.

Katie: My husband was my captain on the Brasilia at Great Lakes Airlines, our first airline.

How did you prepare for a marriage with two pilots? Did you have a specific plan for starting a family?

Kim: We discussed wanting a family someday but never really planned the specific roles.

Laura: This was always a major discussion for us. Our main priority has always been that we raise our children, so we knew it would not work to both be junior airline pilots at the same time. We discussed staggering our schedules - "handing the baby off in the driveway" - but knew that would be too hard on our marriage. So we decided that my husband would push ahead to advance, to include higher pay, a new aircraft, upgrade, and someday hopefully a major airline. Meanwhile I have stayed a 10-year first officer at the regional level. It gives me the benefit of hand picking my schedule and dropping almost whenever I need. I have worked as little as three days in some months. On average I work one or two day trips per week. These discussions are always happening and while it

works, it is not perfect. But nothing is and we have to be thankful for the positive things. For example, it can be difficult to have someone else watch your children, but you look for the positives. I am so thankful that our friend who watches our little boy has two young boys who say and treat our son as their "younger brother". They have so much love and care for him that it makes leaving him those days easier for us.

Katie: We talked mostly about having a family and how that would logistically work with two working airline pilots. We have always known and planned on having a nanny, with me flying as little as possible, but we lucked out and have family helping us, for now. We also planned to wait until we were both out of the regionals. As for seeing each other and making our relationship work, the airline life is all we've ever known! Both times I've been out on maternity leave, we've had the opportunity to see each other everyday - it's been wonderful! But we know that is not the norm for us with our airline lives, and I think it enables us to really enjoy that time together.

How do you manage your schedules?

Kim: Time management is extremely important. Our daughter is the most important part of our lives. My mother is a huge help watching her when we're both gone flying. I work a rotation of 17 days away and 17 days home, so my husband usually tries to plan his time away based on when I'm home.

Laura: My husband watches our one year old on average one day per week. A friend of mine watches our son the other day.

My main goal has been to be the best mother I can be while keeping my "foot in the door" with flying. I knew by staying a first officer for longer than necessary, I could do both.

Katie: When we were based in Phoenix with Allegiant, I was commuting and he was based there. We had no family to help, and thus had a nanny, whom we loved! She knew that delays or overnights were a possibility and a reality. Now that we're both living in base in Seattle, we're close to his family and his sister helps. We don't even try to bid opposite or same schedules. If there is a certain day off we need, we'll bid around that, but we don't ever want to have totally opposite schedules nor do we want to bid the exact same, so we just take what we end up with. It's usually a good mix of us being home together, both gone, or one of us home.

How do you make time for each other?

Kim: It has to be scheduled. We share an electronic calendar on our individual phones so we are always aware of what the other person is doing and planning.

Laura: This has been a challenge! We recently had grandma and grandpa visit and watch our son while we took a mini vacation just the two of us. We have also had a friend watch our son so that we could do a few short day dates.

Katie: We make sure to go on date nights, usually once a month. My mom moved closer to us, so she's our 'date night' go-to. We usually try and stick to evenings, so we're not missing out on time with our son. And we've only done this once, but now we'll be making it a priority - one trip a year for just us. It's so important to take that time for us in order to keep us, and the family, happy and healthy!

What is the most challenging aspect of a pilot marrying a pilot?

Kim: On several occasions we miss each other at the airport by a matter of minutes sometimes. We jokingly say that we high-five at the airport going opposite directions. That's tough.

Laura: We both understand the industry, but we do not always agree on what the other person thinks is the best move for the other's career.

Katie: Missing each other and coordinating schedules. Obviously we don't get to see each other everyday, so I miss him! But it makes our time together that much sweeter. Coordinating schedules is sometimes tricky, but having family nearby has helped to ease that tremendously.

What is the most satisfying aspect of maintaining a dual pilot marriage?

Kim: We are both doing what we love. And we are always actively getting our daughter involved with our work. She has seen the planes that I fly, has models of the planes, and we have fun games we do on Face Time when we're away.

Laura: Being equal to each other in our careers means we truly understand what the other is going through and can have meaningful discussions about it. And days off together with flight benefits!!

Katie: Having a spouse that understands your career, ambitions, and day-to-day work life. We both understand what is required of each other at work. We both understand the dream that the other had to get here. We know first hand the joy and passion for our career and how much hard work went into getting here. Also, 'talking shop' maybe one of my favorite aspects. I don't have to explain myself - he knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Can women pilots 'have it all'? Family, kids, a flying career and a life?

Kim: It is possible to have it all, but not always all at the same time. I am finishing up my Master's degree, I work full-time and teach undergraduate Aviation Science classes online. I am a wife, a mother, and a daughter. It is difficult to juggle it all, but it can be

done with a support team, including teachers, grandparents and a supportive spouse. And some seriously good time management.

Laura: Yes we can absolutely have it all, but I do think something has to give a little bit. I've put my own career advancement and pay on hold, but I am beyond thankful that I am in a position where I spend every day with my son and still do what I'm passionate about.

Katie: Yes! But timing is everything - and it's not always something we have control over! It takes a lot of flexibility, support from your spouse, and patience, but it can most definitely be done. I am thankful everyday that I have such an amazing, supportive husband to not only support me, but encourage me to keep doing what I love - being a mom and pilot!

Any advice for other pilots who might want to marry another pilot and have a family?

Kim: Get as much work or home "stuff" done while on the road. Do your grocery shopping online on Amazon while away. I schedule a house cleaner to come on my last day of my on rotation. When I get home, it is always to a clean house, which allows me to spend more time with my daughter. If you have Christmas cards to write or birthday parties to plan, do it from your hotel room while on the road. When you're home, try your best to just be there doing fun things with your family.

Laura: It takes a lot of work but is very rewarding. Something may have to give, and you have to decide what that will be. Maybe your career won't advance as fast as you'd like, but that's okay. Just know that it's doable.

Katie: Patience! It takes time. And a supportive partner. Anyone who doesn't encourage you and support you to do the things you love is not worth your time. And I would also recommend trying to live as debt free as possible. The industry is so wild and unpredictable, and having the flexibility that comes with being debt free makes sleeping at night easier, especially if you're both at the same airline.