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# Flying the World

**Kimberly Perkins' global path to corporate aviation**

**D**o you have an interest in international corporate flying? If you do, you might want to get in touch with Kimberly Perkins, WAI 55647, from Seattle, Washington. The 32-year-old with an engaging smile loves to mentor future aviators and she has enough experience and energy to fill the cabin of a Gulfstream.

Kimberly is the second generation in her family to become a pilot. Her grandfather was a pilot during World War II. She has a photo of him on her laptop, and proudly notes, "He flew the China-Burma route without oxygen. He was part of the Flying Tigers." Sadly, her grandfather died when Kimberly was just 3 years old so she didn't get to spend much time with him, but she grew up hearing the family stories from her father.

Kimberly says her interest in aviation grew out of her fondness for traveling. "I've always been passionate about traveling," she explains. "Throughout my high school years, I would travel back and forth from the East Coast to the West Coast because my father lived in New Hampshire and my mother lived in Oregon. Starting at age 13, I made that trip multiple times a year and always did it by myself. The travel bug got me good, and airports became a very comfortable place for me."

In 2002, she enrolled in an aviation program at Daniel Webster College in Nashua, New Hampshire. She was intrigued by its professional pilot program, noting that she wanted to pursue a career that was challenging and would allow her to travel. At the age of 19 she flew her first airplane, a Cessna 172R.

Paying for school was a challenge, she notes, and like so many aspiring aviators, she took out student loans with the understanding that she was mortgaging her future to get the training she needed to achieve her dream of becoming a professional pilot.

"My parents were always very encouraging and they were supportive of me becoming a pilot. I am very lucky in that

regard," Kimberly says. "But, nearly all of my tuition money came from private and federal student loans. I worked as a waitress and a customer service representative at Wiggins Airways, an FBO at Manchester Airport in New Hampshire, to help pay back those loans while I was in school. It took over a decade to pay off all those loans."

After graduating with a bachelor's of science in aviation-flight operations, Kimberly went to the closest FAA Part 61 flight school to obtain her CFI and CFII, then began her professional pilot career as a flight instructor. She needed to build her hours because her goal, at that time, was to become an airline pilot.

"There was not much business at that flight school, so I began driving all around New England working for any flight school that would accept a new flight instructor. I eventually had students at four airports in two states," she recalls.

In order to generate business, she would look through the flight schools' scheduling books and call anyone who had a biennial flight review two years prior or an instrument proficiency check one year prior to remind them that their recurrent training was due and offering her services. She also tried cold calling and setting up discovery flights for potential new pilots.

Her determination paid off, and in September of 2006, Kimberly had enough hours to be hired at Air Wisconsin and found herself based in Philadelphia flying CRJ-200s. Finances were tight, she notes, but she made do. "I packed a lunch, and when I stayed at a hotel that had free breakfast, I would grab an extra apple and a yogurt for later. And it helps to understand that no matter what industry you choose, you will pay your dues. You manage by knowing that it is not forever, it's a transitional period," she says.

It was at Air Wisconsin that she met her husband, Aaron Perkins. "We flew together for approximately 300 hours," she said with a smile. Today the pair have a 3-year-old daughter

**by Meg Godlewski**

# Corporate



*Kimberly credits her parents (below) with being very supportive and encouraging during her flight training at Daniel Webster College.*

*After graduation she worked as a CFI and eventually landed her first airline job with Air Wisconsin in September 2006.*



named Chloe, born on Valentine's Day in 2012, who, Kimberly says, is already a world traveler and enjoys playing dress-up with her mother's pilot gear.

When the 2008 recession gripped the United States, Air Wisconsin began cutting back and furloughing pilots. Kimberly had enough seniority to avoid a furlough, but the time-frame for her upgrade to captain went from "a year to indefinitely never."

"In hopes of alleviating some of the pains of furlough, Air Wisconsin offered a voluntary furlough for six months to anyone interested in taking a leave," Kimberly says. "I was ready for a new adventure, and keeping the safety net of Air Wisconsin was the perfect way to explore new options without losing my seniority number at the airline," she explains.

Kimberly broadened her sights to international flying—something she had never done before—and after an intense interview in London, which included flying a classic Boeing 737 simulator, long division on a computer, and a mental aptitude test, she was offered a position flying CRJ-900s for Arik Air based in Lagos, Nigeria. "With my safety net of Air Wisconsin in my back pocket, I boarded a Delta flight from Atlanta to Lagos in the late summer of 2008," she says.

"Lagos was a fantastic experience, both for my career and

my personal growth," Kimberly says. "Despite getting malaria twice, I would not trade my time in West Africa for anything. I made lifelong friends there, people I still keep in touch with today. The flying there was definitely a challenge. It was demanding," she says. "The tropopause is much higher at the equator, which allows thunderstorms to build significantly higher and much more massive. There are two main seasons in Nigeria: the rainy season and harmattan. If it was not the rainy season with massive thunderstorms, it was harmattan, which meant the winds shifted from the north and brought in sand from the Sahara. At times, the flight visibility was reduced to a mile due to the intense Sahara sand storms blanketing much of Nigeria."

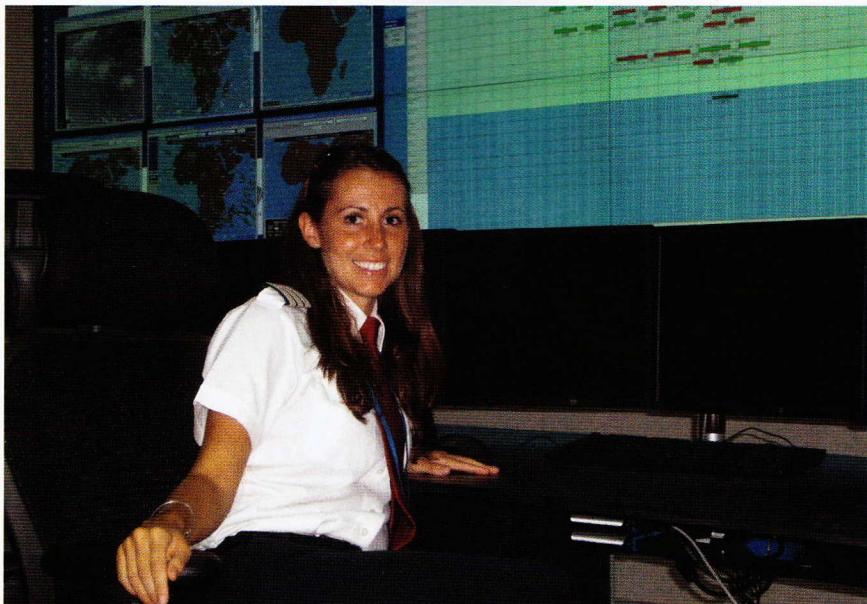
"Flying in West Africa and then traveling during my months off was a wonderful way to gain experience in the airplane and grow as a person," Kimberly says. "I loved my nearly two years in Nigeria, but I needed something more for my career. So, I took a pilot job based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, flying a Lear 60. I traded the airline wings in West Africa for corporate wings in Southeast Asia."

Kimberly traveled all over Southeast Asia as well as China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Sri Lanka.

"I spent many weeks on Borneo Island in the towns that



*Kimberly says her time flying for Arik Air in Lagos, Nigeria, was great for her career and personal growth.*



*Daughter Chloe is already a world traveler and enjoys playing dress-up with her mother's pilot gear.*

line the northern shoreline of Sarawak and Sabah's coast," she says. "When I wasn't flying, I volunteered teaching English to Myanmar refugees. My time in Malaysia was a wonderful experience and important for my personal development. Living in Southeast Asia remains one of my most cherished adventures."

Aaron joined Kimberly in Malaysia for a couple of months then left to take a job with the FAA in Salt Lake City, Utah. Kimberly remained in Malaysia for another year before joining her husband.

While in Utah, she flew a Lear 60 for D&D Aviation, then decided that she needed a new challenge outside of the flight deck. In 2012, she obtained an online professor position at Middle Georgia State University. Today she teaches international airline operations to undergraduate students.

"I love teaching, and being an online professor allows me to connect with my students even when I'm nine time zones away," she says.

Kimberly had always been fond of the Pacific Northwest, so when she returned to the States from Malaysia, she began searching for jobs in Seattle. "There is such an energy here," she said. She started researching potential jobs through the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA). "I looked

up all the potential employers here at Boeing Field in Seattle (KBFI)," she says. "I started at one end of the field and went to the other. I e-mailed everyone, and Vulcan was hiring!"

Kimberly started at Vulcan Inc. in September 2013 as a Part 91 corporate pilot. Today, she has approximately 4,500 hours and holds type ratings in CRJs, the Gulfstream 650, Global Express, Lear 60, and is typed as second-in-command in the Gulfstream III.

Keeping all the schematics and procedures for the airplanes straight is a challenge, Kimberly says. She takes copious amounts of notes; some she types up and others she writes in pencil in a paperbound notebook she jokingly calls her "Dear Diary."

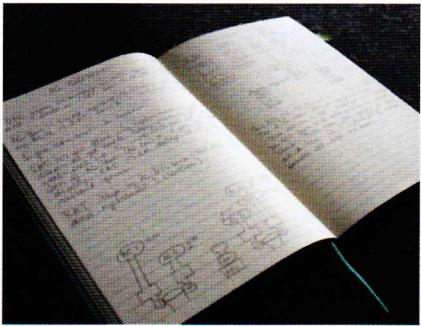
"The airplane is basically a big computer, well, multiple computers," she explains, leafing through the book. "Here I keep track of the quirks of the airplane and procedures. I'm a bit of a note-taking geek."

That attention to detail has also helped her as she's finishing her master's degree in political science with a concentration in international relations through American Military/Public University.

Balancing family, flying, teaching, and graduate studies is a challenge, she notes. She uses FaceTime to communicate



*Kimberly took her first corporate flying job in Malaysia flying a Lear 60. Her travels took her all over Southeast Asia.*



*Today, in her work with Vulcan, Kimberly continues to fly all over the world. Keeping procedures for all of the airplanes straight can be a challenge, so Kimberly keeps notes in her "Dear Diary" to reference as needed.*



with her young daughter, and they have a ritual of looking for notes and drawings left by the “Pilot Fairy.”

“When I am overseas and we are FaceTiming I ask her if the Pilot Fairy left her anything. I tell her where to look. It becomes like a scavenger hunt,” Kimberly says with a smile.

Kimberly also writes the dates of her trip on pieces of paper, which she links together into a paper chain.

“Each day when I say goodnight to her, she breaks one ring so she can count how many more nights I’ll be gone,” she explains.

“There’s no such thing as a typical day at work,” Kimberly says. “As a Part 91 corporate pilot I fly all over the world at all hours of the day and night. While I do not have a regular flight route or a standard departure time, there are some things that remain consistent. For example, before every flight I check the weather, NOTAMs, complete a thorough pre-flight, file a flight plan, complete thorough fuel management planning, and brief with the crew. Whether I am departing from Australia, France, or my home airport, Boeing Field in Seattle, I am consistently completing the same preflight actions in the Gulfstreams and Globals just like I used to years earlier in Seminoles and Skyhawks.”

Kimberly encourages other women to keep an open mind about their careers.

“You never know if you are going to like a particular aspect of aviation until you experience it,” she says. “That leads to a diversified résumé, a must in international corporate flying.”

“The best thing that I ever did for my career was take that airline job in Nigeria, which led me to Malaysia, and eventually to my current job,” she says. “Make your résumé interesting by diversifying it in ways that you feel passionate about. If you love seaplanes, get your seaplane rating. If you love teaching, become not only a flight instructor but also a ground instructor. Do something that makes your résumé stand out,” Kimberly says.

“And, most importantly of all, never allow the inevitable obstacles deter you from pursuing your passion. You won’t get every job that you apply for and you won’t grease every landing. But, make your pilot group the supportive type, encourage each other, focus on your goals, and keep flying!” she says. ✈

*Meg Godlewski, WAI 8165, is a Master CFI and active flight instructor in Washington.*

