

# Mom & Me & Airplane Made Three

A Tribute to Marion Jayne by Patricia Jayne (Pat) Keefer

**Mom** is Marion Jayne, legendary race pilot and founder of the U.S. Air Race. Before she was Mom, she was that little girl from Chicago that took the swimming world by storm and went to the Olympic Swim Trials at age 13. Before she was Mom, she was invited to ride for Elizabeth Taylor in "National Velvet". As a professional equestrienne, she was one of the first to jump a horse over a seven-foot fence. She was already flying high.

She learned to fly at the same time as Dad, so it would be easier for both of them to reach Horse Show judging commitments and she found a new talent. She was 39 and a Mom to four. In short order she was famous for her cross country racing expertise as she earned her Private, Instrument, Commercial, Instructor and ATP licenses in 5 years. Flying Magazine put her in the same category as Amelia Earhart. She was the 12th woman to earn the ATP rating. Who knew that with such a 'late' start in flying she would be recognized as one of the 100 Aviation Heroes in the First Century of Flight at the 2003 Kitty Hawk Centennial Celebration, be inducted into the WAI Pioneer Aviation Hall of Fame and be nominated to the Congressional Aviation Hall of Fame.

She made life look easy even though she had significant challenges, such as when as young parents of 3 children under the age of 5, they returned from a family vacation to find their home burned to the ground. Later, widowed at 44 with 3 children to support with no income, she built, owned and operated an indoor tennis club. She made her own way in the world. She funded her flying by winning and getting sponsorships to compete in events.

Founding four air races and an aviation gift catalog, serving on airport boards and holding the world record for the most speed cross country air races set her apart from other pilots. She won the races with her awesome flight skills and a Civil Air Patrol 172, a rented Cherokee Warrior, a vintage Bonanza and her famed Twin Comanche. She won them: flying solo, with other women pilots, with family members and she won them with me. When I was young, I thought all Moms raced planes.

**Me** is child two of four. Initially, I was the kid who sat in the back of the plane and chewed her nails. It was the 1971 race from Columbus, Ohio to Managua, Nicaragua that made the largest change in my life. It was six months



Marion Jayne (left) , legendary race pilot and founder of the U.S. Air Race, stands next to her daughter, Patricia Jayne Keefer.

after Dad had died. As I visited Mom in Columbus, I recognized her for the first time as an adult. She was a talented pilot and skilled strategist. And I learned that flying is at least half judgment and the other half can be learned. She taught me to fly and it was racing that cemented our relationship as teammates. I was only one of many she inspired and encouraged to do their best at whatever challenge they pursued.

Even now, 11 years after her death, pilots tell me stories of how Mom encouraged them in their flying.

**Airplane** made three. The airplane was and is a 1970 Piper Twin Comanche that my parents purchased for business and took possession of on the date of their 26th wedding anniversary. It will be on exhibit at the start and finish of the races. Before today's electronic navigation aids, racing a fast twin engine plane was a disadvantage because staying on course was so difficult and this also set Marion apart. This plane survived to help us win the FAI Gold Medal in the longest race in history, the 24-day 1994 Round the World Race. So far, it is the only plane and Mom the only U.S. pilot to have raced twice around the world.

Join those that have been inspired by her legacy. Look for her exhibit at the 99's Museum for Women Pilots at the Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City.