

GOLDEN WINGS TRANSCRIPT

00:00:09:12 - 00:00:42:12

Caleb Mills Stewart

Welcome aboard this special flight of Golden Wings. This is your director, Caleb Mills Stewart speaking. While pilots must retire at age 65. Flight attendants can score as long as their wings allow for 53 years. My mother, Robyn Stewart, has done just that through industry turbulence and personal challenges. She's remained airborne. So please fasten your seat belts and prepare for a multi-generational journey through time, all at 30,000ft.

00:00:42:14 - 00:01:09:16

Caleb Mills Stewart

Thank you for joining us. And enjoy the film.

00:01:09:18 - 00:02:00:13

Robyn Stewart

My name is Robyn Stewart, and I'm a flight attendant for American Airlines. I have been applying for American Airlines since 1971. So that's 52 years. I wanted to become a flight attendant because I wanted to fly free. I've been used to flying free with because my dad was was flying for American Airlines when I was a young child, and we were able to go on so many fun trips, and I wanted to continue to do that.

00:02:00:15 - 00:02:09:04

Robyn Stewart

My favorite thing about flying is going wherever I want.

00:02:09:06 - 00:02:09:19

Robyn Stewart

I went to.

00:02:09:19 - 00:02:19:20

Robyn Stewart

Rome last week. I'm going to run again next week.

00:02:19:22 - 00:02:31:21

Robyn Stewart

And the following week, I'll be going to Tokyo.

00:02:31:23 - 00:02:44:06

Robyn Stewart

Frankfurt, Germany.

00:02:44:08 - 00:03:16:16

Robyn Stewart

So, because I have the seniority that I have, I can pick and choose my schedule. And it's taken me a long time to get here, but it's been worth it.

00:03:16:18 - 00:03:19:11

Caleb Mills Stewart

Did you think that you'd be a flight attendant for 50 years when you started?

00:03:19:12 - 00:03:51:02

Robyn Stewart

Oh, no. I did not think I'll be a flight attendant more than 2 to 5 years. Well, I was hired. We had to be a certain way. We could not go over a weight limit. We had to wear girdles. We were subject to girdle checks. We were also subject to a parent's checks to make sure we had our makeup done right and our hair done and our nails done.

00:03:51:04 - 00:04:36:20

Robyn Stewart

They stopped doing girdle checks. Not long after I graduated in 1971. When I graduated. I was issued a stewardess manual, but that changed. We had just merged with Trans Caribbean Airlines and Trans Caribbean Airlines already had male flight attendants, so it was no longer a stewardess manual. Shortly after I graduated, the white, scale continued. I know until the 80s because after each one of my pregnancies and the last one being in 1982, I was subject to being put on a scale and make weight requirement.

00:04:36:22 - 00:04:58:16

Robyn Stewart

And I want to say it was probably close to 1990 when they did away with the white check. And to CR Smith Museum, it has become a very big attraction in the Dallas-Fort worth area. CR Smith was the founder and president of American Airlines

00:04:58:22 - 00:05:02:16

Caleb Mills Stewart

CR Smith became president of American Airlines in 1934.

00:05:02:16 - 00:05:07:11

Robyn Stewart

He was a very innovative hands on leader. He would remember your name.

00:05:07:13 - 00:05:20:13

Caleb Mills Stewart

By the end of his tenure, he knew the name of every American Airlines employee. In spite of the creation of the DC three, the first transcontinental airliner for American Airlines.

00:05:20:15 - 00:05:35:12

Robyn Stewart

If you were fortunate enough to be on a flight that he was on stewardesses, he would give us \$50, which was a very big deal back then.

00:00:01:27 - 00:00:02:20

Caleb Stewart (VO)

In the late 1960s

Caleb Stewart (VO)

The world experienced profound shifts in politics, technology, and social norms, aviation was entering a new era as well. The dawn of the jumbo jet.

00:00:21:11 - 00:00:36:25

Caleb Stewart (VO)

Boeing's introduction of the 747 democratized global air travel, connecting the world in ways previously unimaginable. At the center of American Airlines, preparation for this new era was one of their most skilled flight engineers. My grandfather.

00:00:36:27 - 00:00:48:09

Robyn

My father's name was Jay Ricks. He was with American for 35 years. New.

00:00:48:12 - 00:01:01:23

Robyn

I guess I didn't realize what all he had done and how respected he was until I came to work for American in 1971.

00:01:01:25 - 00:01:05:13

Boeing Announcer

Rollout marks the beginning of a new phase.

00;01;05;15 - 00;01;15;01

Robyn

When I was in high school, the Boeing 747 was being manufactured.

00;01;15;04 - 00;01;22;09

Robyn

He was constantly in Seattle working with Boeing on creating a training program for our pilots.

00;01;22;15 - 00;01;37;07

Caleb Stewart (VO)

To truly understand the scale of Gao's contributions. We turned to one of his key collaborators at the American Airlines Flight Academy, Jack Bethune, a media production specialist that was instrumental in helping Jay bring this groundbreaking initiative to life.

00;01;37;09 - 00;01;46;12

Jock

I started working there on September 16th 1968. Kid out of New York. With a Broadcast Radio. Television degree from Ithica College..

00;01;46;14 - 00;01;52;16

Caleb Stewart (VO)

The 747 with its size and complexity, required an entirely new approach to preparing flight crew.

00;01;52;17 - 00;02;09;08

Jock

We were creating 35 slides, for the 747 training program. Within on month of craeting the 767 training program with your grandfather, we created over 24,000 slides.

00;02;09;10 - 00;02;19;02

Robyn

Groundbreaking in the airline industry, and we ended up training pilots for the other airlines, too, that he basically wrote, designed and directed.

00;02;19;07 - 00;02;26;25

Caleb Stewart (VO)

Jay Ricks' contributions left a lasting legacy, not just for American Airlines, but for everyone who had the chance to work alongside him.

00;02;26;27 - 00;02;33;12

Jock

The show 747 program. He was in charge of that development. He was well-liked and well-respected.

00;02;33;18 - 00;02;47;00

Caleb Stewart (VO)

Bethune serves as a vital keeper of the flame, preserving the legacy of American Airlines most transformative era. With care and passion. His first hand accounts ensure that pioneers like my grandfather are never forgotten.

00;02;47;02 - 00;03;02;18

Jock

I am proud (his voice quivers) I've spent my career with American Airlines.. They call me Mister Anmerican Airlines. Because of my time there I have met people like your mom and I have gotten to know over the years thanks to American. I'm very grateful

00;03;02;20 - 00;03;04;09

Caleb Stewart (VO)
In 1969, Jay had.

00;03;04;09 - 00;03;23;14

Caleb Stewart (VO)
No way of knowing the 747 would become a generational bridge in his own family.

00;03;23;16 - 00;03;30;25

Caleb Stewart (VO)
As a Boeing 747 entered service. It didn't just change the airline industry. It changed lives.

00;03;30;27 - 00;03;42;11

Robyn
In 1971, the 747 had just come into our fleet. When I graduated, I was only trying on the 707.

00;03;42;13 - 00;03;50;13

Caleb Stewart (VO)
The Boeing 707 ushered in the jet age in 1958, making long distance travel accessible to the masses.

00;03;50;15 - 00;03;54;19

Jock

00;03;54;22 - 00;03;56;01

Robyn
I had only been trained on

00;03;56;03 - 00;03;58;00

Robyn
The 727.

00;03;58;03 - 00;04;06;02

Caleb Stewart (VO)
1963 saw the 727 bring jet service to smaller cities. Its distinctive tail a symbol of aviation's reach.

00;04;06;05 - 00;04;31;29

Robyn
And I was sent back to Dallas to train on the 747 to fly out of Kennedy to, San Juan. And I spent the first six months of my career flying the 747 out of JFK to San Juan all night turnarounds. We called it the midnight Rocket, and there were some crazy things that happened on that flight.

00;04;32;01 - 00;04;39;07

Caleb Stewart (VO)
From JFK, the busiest international gateway in North America. Robin would carry countless passengers across oceans and.

00;04;39;07 - 00;04;40;13

Caleb Stewart (VO)
Continents.

00;04;40;15 - 00;04;50;02

Robyn
With its wide body and its double decker design. The 747 redefined air travel, making it possible to carry more passengers farther than ever before.

00;04;50;05 - 00;04;58;01

Robyn

A great experience, and to go back and train out on the the airplane that my father had been so involved with.

00:04:58:06 - 00:05:20:21

Caleb Stewart (VO)

The story of the 747 is more than just the tail of an aircraft. Or my family became the backdrop for five decades of aviation history. Connecting Jay's groundbreaking work to Robin's soaring career. It's a story of innovation, families and how a single machine can connect the world.

00:07:46:17 - 00:07:49:09

Caleb Mills Stewart

Was your father proud of you when you got hired for American?

00:07:49:14 - 00:08:08:17

Robyn Stewart

My my father was so proud of me when I was hired with American. So many women of my era there, their fathers did not want them to become stewardesses. That my father was all for it. And he was so supportive.

00:08:08:21 - 00:08:11:19

Caleb Mills Stewart

Why didn't they want them to become stewardesses?

00:08:11:21 - 00:08:21:14

Robyn Stewart

I guess they thought they were loose women, I don't know. There was a kind of a reputation that stewardesses had.

00:08:21:16 - 00:08:40:14

Narrator:

It was a reputation that, if not perpetuated by the airlines, was definitely condoned for certain types of ads shown in the 70s, like this one you see here from National Airlines.

00:08:40:16 - 00:08:55:17

Robyn Stewart

But it wasn't true. It was. It was fiction. It fictionalized my.

00:08:55:19 - 00:09:03:01

Robyn Stewart

It wasn't real---

(The film seems to distort as loud metallic sounds drown out everything else. We then see a homemade video of the second plane hitting the north tower as seen from a park. People scream and wail)

00:09:03:03 - 00:09:51:04

Robyn Stewart

I was at home. Sleeping in because I was supposed to go to Santiago, Chile that evening. The flight left at 7 p.m., so, I was trying to sleep in and my husband, Henry was getting ready to leave for work when we saw the coverage of what had happened in New York.

00:09:51:06 - 00:10:01:18

Robyn Stewart

And needless to say, we were glued to the TV and. It just I was I was so grateful that I was home.

00:10:01:20 - 00:10:04:04

Caleb Mills Stewart

Why were you grateful you were home?

00:10:04:06 - 00:10:28:15

Robyn Stewart

Because of the uncertainty. Of what? What was happening to my colleagues and because they shut down the, airspace and. They had to land, A.s.a.p., wherever they were. And.

00:10:28:17 - 00:10:56:02

Robyn Stewart

It was quite frightening. And some of them we lost contact with on the radar job changed tremendously after 911. I remember my first flight back, which was also to Santiago. It took. We were four hours late because of all the, checks I had to do. All people, they had to run all kinds of back ground checks on each passenger.

00:10:56:04 - 00:11:22:11

Robyn Stewart

And that that was time consuming and tedious. And also there was, what came about with, all the liquids, the screenings for mental screenings, which they had done previously.

00:11:22:13 - 00:11:28:04

Caleb Mills Stewart

What were some of the life changes you've had during your career? The biggest life changes?

00:11:28:06 - 00:12:00:18

Robyn Stewart

One of the biggest life changes was in, 2013 when, I had a problem with drinking alcohol, which is kind of a, occupational hazard with this job because you want to always you think you always need to go to sleep, and you might have to sleep during the day. So you might have a little drink to help you go to sleep.

00:12:00:20 - 00:12:29:23

Robyn Stewart

In October of 2013, I went to work under the influence and my coworkers noticed. Probably the passengers noticed. And if it's unsafe to have someone that's that doesn't have all their faculties on the airplane, because if something should happen and you have to evacuate, I would have been of no use. I would have been in the way.

00:12:30:01 - 00:13:00:19

Robyn Stewart

So consequently, I was removed from service that day. I was escorted off the airplane by American Airlines Management, and, I was taken to American Airlines Medical, where I was, breathalyzed. And I failed. So consequently, I was, pretty much fired. They took my, I.D. away from me. They took my training manual away from me.

00:13:00:21 - 00:13:38:18

Robyn Stewart

And on the, equipment that had been issued to me by American Airlines was, confiscated, and then I, through the help of my union, I was able to go to rehab. And upon completion of four weeks of rehab and passing a medical exam, I would be reinstated with the stipulation that I would be drug and drug and alcohol tested, for two years, which could even be before I fly.

00:13:38:20 - 00:14:02:05

Robyn Stewart

And if I, if I failed, then that was the end of my career.

(the screen glitches and goes dark.)

(the sound of the interior of an airplane a cruising altitude fades in)

(more darkness)

(the scene change to a bright blue sky with birds chirping. inspirational music plays)

00:14:02:07 - 00:14:15:19

Robyn Stewart

So I did successfully go to rehab, and it's been the best thing that ever happened to me. I can't thank American Airlines enough for giving me that the second chance.

00:14:15:21 - 00:14:17:20

Caleb Mills Stewart

And how long have you been sober now?

00:14:17:22 - 00:14:27:01

Robyn Stewart

I've been. I've been sober now for, ten year, almost ten years, maybe ten years. October 10th, 2023.

00:14:27:03 - 00:14:31:09

Caleb Mills Stewart

Great.

00:14:31:11 - 00:14:38:15

Caleb Mills Stewart

What was another, big life change that happened around 2014?

00:14:38:17 - 00:15:13:11

Robyn Stewart

And, February 24th, to be exact. I had just gotten to Frankfurt, Germany, as every flight attendant crew members. Worst nightmare. That something happens at home and you're way far away.

(a video of an empty hotel room plays. It is a lonely place)

Which I was. And I'd gone to the hotel and I tried to call my husband, which we always. We talked to each other several times during my time away on layovers, and I was unable to get Ahold of him.

00:15:13:13 - 00:15:56:14

Robyn Stewart

And deep down, I knew right then that something bad had happened. And then I called his work and he had not shown up for work. So deep down in my heart, I knew that probably the worst thing that can happen was, was it was about to become true. And sure enough, he was found in our home. I found out that that he had passed away.

00:15:56:16 - 00:16:19:16

Robyn Stewart

(Somber music plays over a slideshow of Stewart family photos featuring Henry Stewart at various stages of his life.)

00:16:19:18 - 00:16:52:12

Robyn Stewart

And then I had to make that long flight home alone. And it was tough, but I, I I can't thank my, my colleagues and and the people that work for American Airlines, which is so kind. The people in the hotel were so kind. You really know how how much people care when something like that happens. It was just the good that came out of such a bad situation.

00:16:52:14 - 00:17:21:07

Robyn Stewart

When I arrived at DFW airport, I was met by, management from American Airlines. I was met by, people from the union. I was met by coworkers with plane with flowers. And it was it was just incredible, the pouring out of love that they showed from. And at that time.

(We see a picture of Henry and Robyn together circa 2012. Posing for the camera inside a restaurant. Happy and in love after 4 decades of marriage)

00:17:21:09 - 00:17:34:09

Narrator

The last six months of Henry and Robyn's love story was written in the first six months of Robyn's sobriety. A gift they shared together.

(The scene cuts to a plane flying off through the sky into a rising dawn.)

(Retro Typography appears on the screen reading "ROBYN STEWART INTERVIEW TAKE 5")

Caleb Stewart

Robyn Stewart Interview take 5

(a clapper is heard)

(A light upbeat jazz tune plays softly)

Caleb Stewart

Do people ever ask you when you are going to retire?

Robyn Stewart

(laughs and smiles) All the time!

My answer is, as long as I feel like I can do my job, which I have to go back every year and, pass training to prove that I can and still able to evacuate an airplane, which I can do just fine. I'm very active. I'm staying very active so I can fly until until I don't want to anymore

00:18:00:22 - 00:18:19:00

Robyn Stewart

The oldest flight attendant I believe right now is, a lady called Bette Nash.

(footage of Bette Nash in an airplane cabin)

And she is 87 years old. I would love to fly until I'm 87. Maybe seven if. If I still feel the way I do now.

00:19:27:03 - 00:20:31:09

(various images of Caleb and Henry together from Caleb's childhood through adulthood appear over a softly played uplifting music theme.)

00:21:25:18 - 00:21:28:17

Caleb Stewart (VO)

Hi, dad.

00:21:28:20 - 00:21:30:06

I've always wanted to write you.

00:21:30:06 - 00:21:31:15

I never got around to it.

00:21:31:15 - 00:21:34:03

Now feels like the right time.

00:21:34:03 - 00:21:40:03

Sometimes mom looks at me and tells me how much I look like you.

00:21:40:14 - 00:21:44:24

In those moments, there's a softness in her eyes when she has you back.

00:21:45:03 - 00:21:46:25

If just for an instant.

00;21;46;25 - 00;21;49;12

It's a happy moment.
But it's bittersweet.

00;21;49;12 - 00;21;50;15

My mom's doing well.

00;21;50;15 - 00;21;52;08

Sober for ten years.

00;21;52;08 - 00;21;55;08

Still flying
and taking care of all of us.

00;21;55;13 - 00;21;56;14

You'd be proud.

00;21;56;14 - 00;21;59;14

You've two more grandkids,
Leah and Henry.

00;21;59;17 - 00;22;02;04

who was named after you.
Life has moved on.

00;22;02;04 - 00;22;05;04

Maybe you left when you did
because you knew we'd be okay

00;22;05;21 - 00;22;08;09

even after you passed.

00;22;08;09 - 00;22;12;20

I struggled feeling that
you never accepted me for being gay.

00;22;13;11 - 00;22;14;24

That silence.

00;22;14;24 - 00;22;17;02

It was felt .

00;22;17;02 - 00;22;19;25

Over time
I realized you didn't need to say it.

00;22;19;25 - 00;22;22;21

You showed me with your love,
and it was unconditional.

00;22;22;21 - 00;22;24;06

And so is mom.

00;22;24;06 - 00;22;28;26

What I really miss is you telling me
everything is going to be okay.

00;22;29;00 - 00;22;33;07

Maybe in some way you're still here
saying it and you were always right.

00;22;33;20 - 00;22;36;06

Everything is going to be okay.

00;22;36;06 - 00;22;38;02

Your son. With love. Caleb