



AWE 2008 Conference attendance scholarship winner

Kajuju Laiboni

Before I attended the 4th Aviation and Women in Europe conference, I had sleepless nights. I was apprehensive about my future: where would I end up? Would I make it? What would happen? The media's extensive coverage on dismissed pilots and sky-rocketing fuel prices did not calm my restless mind. Neither did stories of friends, who were still unemployed a year after completing their studies. To add on to this list of worries were the expenses that I would have to incur for type-rating and Multi Crew Cooperation courses. More often than not, these worries would erode the motivation I had to pursue my dream.

Someone once said that worrying is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do but it does not get you anywhere. I had to stop allowing what was going on in the world to interfere with my dream and ability to act on my dream. I started looking at my life like a movie in which I was the director. I had control over this movie; I could make the movie take whatever direction I wanted it to. One evening after work, I wrote down what I wanted to include in my movie, including what I wanted to do with my life and the ways and means of achieving these goals. The next day, I was directing a new chapter of my life.

I already knew about the 2008 AWE Conference but I was not aware that the conference gave scholarships to participants. On visiting the AWE website again, I learnt about the scholarship and applied for it immediately. Weeks later, I received an email from Michelle Bassanesi informing me that I had won the scholarship, and on the morning of September 12th, I arrived in a lovely little town in South East Norway where I met and interacted with some of the most remarkable and inspiring women that I have ever met.

Meeting the women at the conference and listening to their stories made me realize that everybody's journey to their goal is different. It became clear that in as much as we might be heading for the same destination, we will not necessarily use the same means or, strategy. Neither will everyone make it to their intended destination due to one reason or another. Nevertheless, the women at the conference had a couple of things in common that enabled them to reach their dreams: focus, creativity, hard work, and perseverance. I was surprised to learn how long it had taken some of them to get to attain their goals, and how, despite the seemingly disheartening wait, they did not give up.

A well-known Zulu expression states that a person is a person through other persons. My life experience so far gives this saying a veritable stamp of validity. Many people have come to my aid at different points in my life, equipping me with the necessary tools to overcome the hurdles that I have encountered along the way, or to expedite my journey towards a personal or professional goal.



Attending the AWE Conference was an opportunity for me to acquire tools that will, in the long run, expedite my journey to my dream of becoming an airline pilot. The tools that I acquired included a wealth of information and advice from seasoned practitioners in the aviation industry, as well as valuable contacts. I learnt about specializations within the aviation industry that I had no prior knowledge of. Interacting with airline pilots gave me a deeper understanding of my future career as an airline pilot. Additionally, being an aviation student on a slim budget, the information availed to me about institutions offering financial aid and scholarships for type-rating and other licenses was a light in my confusion.

When Elizabeth Clark asked me why I was very quiet at dinner on the last night of the conference, I answered her that I was digesting the knowledge that I had gained during the conference. Without a doubt, the conference had opened for me many doors of opportunity. It was now up to me to decide what I would do with all the knowledge and insight I had gained, and the endless possibilities that lay ahead of me.

One of the ladies at the conference said something that has stayed with me: 'it is not the destination that counts but the journey'. Her statement got me thinking about how we often rush through life in an attempt to reach our goals and in the process, forget to enjoy the journey. I decided to move slowly and focus on my destination while at the same time taking pleasure in my journey. As I left the conference, it occurred to me that my uncertainties had no basis at all. My doubts, confusion and fears were brought about due to lack of information, advice, and guidelines.

My advice to all students out there feeling lost, uncertain or confused, is to join organizations like Women in Aviation. Find a mentor or a student who shares the same enthusiasm on your career goals and has similar ambitions as you do. And do not be afraid to ask for help. Remember too, that you are in charge of your movie, and despite similar goals with your mentor or acquaintances, your journeys will not necessarily be the same. Do not compare your life with others. Do not let anyone or anything dishearten you from going for your dreams. Dare dream HUGE. Accept your journey as it is and enjoy its uniqueness, because that journey, YOUR journey, is what makes you the person you are. Listen and learn from others, and write your own script.

I would like to thank my family for their unconditional support through my training and to my mentor, Susanna Hallsund, First Officer Norwegian Airlines, for all the information she has given me and the guidance she continues to offer.

My gratitude goes to all the women for generously sharing their stories and giving me a wealth of information that will serve me well. Thanks to Michelle Bassanesi, and her team, for choosing me as the winner of the scholarship. Finally, I would like to extend a warm thank you to my sponsors Elizabeth Clark, FedEx, and Patricia Beckman, the Boeing Co., for giving me an opportunity to attend the conference and transform the script of my "movie".

