



## THE YOUNGEST PILOT

1 *This narrative is based on a real-life story. Jessica Dubroff was only seven years old in 1996 when she attempted to be the youngest pilot to fly cross-country in America.*

2 "I want to learn how to fly," Jessica says. She says it again and again. My husband Ron thinks I should agree.

"Yes," I say at last. I still think I am wrong to agree. She is only seven years old.

So Jessica has lessons. Every week she flies. She sits in the cockpit with the pilot. She learns how to take off.

3 The plane flies over our house. I stand in the garden and wave. I cannot see her.

But I know she is in the cockpit.

"I want to fly across America," says Jessica.

"It's too far," I say. "You've only been learning for five months."

"But I can do it, Mum," Jessica says. "I've done more than fifty landings. And take-offs. And I've flown for forty hours."

"I'll fly with her," says her dad. "And there will be a co-pilot."

The two of them nag me. Nag me again and again. I sigh and eventually say yes. It is so hard when your child wants something that terrifies you.

4 A week later, Jessica brings me a map. "It's my flight plan," she says, "It shows where I will fly the plane. Please Mum, can I go? Can I fly the plane across America?"

At last I give in. How can I not let her have her dream? She wants it so badly.

5 Today's the day. We are in North California. At Half Moon Bay Airport. Jessica is jumping up and down. She's so excited.

Jess and I hug and kiss. I ask her if she wants to change her mind.

"It's not too late," I say. "Oh, Mum!" she tells me. "You never give up!"

Ron hugs and kisses me too. "Our girl will be fine," he says. "I'll look after her."

6 TV cameras film my baby in the cockpit. She waves and smiles. Newspaper cameras flash. She throws me a kiss. I hope she doesn't see that I am crying.

Down the runway the plane rolls. The engine roars louder. Up, up it flies. And then it straightens and is away. Towards the horizon it flies. Further away from me.

7 It is the next day and the phone rings constantly. Reporters ask me about Jessica. They want to know all about her. They say what she is doing is making history.

The phone rings again. It is another reporter, calling from Wyoming. That's where Jessica is flying through today.

"I've just heard," he says. "Do you have any comment about the crash?"

"What crash?" I ask.

8 Then he tells me.

A bad storm was in Wyoming. Jessica went down in her plane. With her Dad and her flight teacher.

I don't know what happens next. It is a long time before I can remember. Before my numb brain can think clearly.

All I know is that my baby has gone. Her plane was her passion. It lies somewhere in Wyoming.



## Questions

- 1 Why didn't Jessica's mum want her to fly?  
a Jessica didn't know how to fly.  
b Jessica was only seven years old.  
c Jessica didn't own an airplane.
- 2 How many landings had Jessica done?  
a forty  
b fifty  
c more than fifty
- 3 Jessica and her mum last saw each other at  
a North California Airport.  
b Half Moon Bay Airport.  
c Wyoming Airport.
- 4 Who kept ringing to ask about Jessica?  
a reporters  
b Jessica's mum  
c Ron
- 5 What was bad about Wyoming?  
a It was far away from North California.  
b It didn't have an airport.  
c There was a bad storm there.
- 6 What is the effect of this recount being told by Jessica's mother?  
a We get a feeling for what Jessica experienced.  
b We get a feeling for the emotions of Jessica's mother.  
c We feel like we are speaking directly to Jessica's mother.

## Vocabulary

Match the words in the text to the clues below. The brackets show the text sections ( ).

horizon nag attempted numb constantly

- 7 Tried to do something (1)
- 8 Ask again and again (3)
- 9 Where the earth and sky appear to meet (6)
- 10 All the time (7)
- 11 Have no feeling (8)

## Grammar

Find a **verb** (an action word) in these sentences.

- 12 The plane flies over our house.
- 13 Jessica brings me a map.
- 14 Jessica jumped up and down.
- 15 The phone rings again.

## Back To The Text...

- 16 This story is set in  
a 1995.      b 1996.
- 17 What would be a good sub-heading for section 6?  
a Take Off      b Bad News
- 18 Who do you think this text is most likely written for?  
a general readers      b trainee pilots

## Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happens first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a Mum says she can learn to fly.  
b Jessica asks to fly across America.
- 20 a Jessica throws a kiss from the cockpit.  
b Dad says, "Our girl will be fine."
- 21 a Many reporters ask Mum questions.  
b The newspaper cameras flash.

## Think About This

- 22 The symbols at each side of the main title are  
a hands.  
b wings.  
c just patterns.
- 23 What is the most important thing we learn in section 7?  
a Reporters can be very annoying.  
b It is an historic flight.  
c There has been a crash.

## Challenge Option

Writing: Write a different ending to the story – The Youngest Pilot.

