

HOLIDAY
WISH LIST *p. 26*

PRESCHOOL
DROP-OFF *p. 59*

ELECTION
PREDICTIONS *p. 82*

WACOAN

WACO'S

NOVEMBER 2007

Flying high
with the
Women Airforce
Service Pilots *p. 48*

We Can Do It!



**PAGE 48 ON A WING
AND A PRAYER**
A mother and daughter
work to preserve the
history of Women Airforce
Service Pilots

*By Lynn Bulmahn.
Photography provided
by Nancy Parrish.*

- 36 HEDONIA CLUB OF
WACO** Lauren Ann Stanton
and Mary Helen Trippet will be
introduced to society at Hedonia
Club's 71st annual Presentation
Ball. *By Dayna Avery. Photography
by Delk Photography.*

38 SAVORING THE VIEW

Suzi and Tom Pagel transformed
their home into a warmly lit,
cleanly textured living space
with a hint of old-world charm.
*By Mary Landon Darden.
Photography by Ashley Westbrook.*

59 PRESCHOOL DROP- OFF

Experience a slice of life
from the morning drop off at
Kids' Kastle's carpool line.
*Written and photographed by
Christine Sracic.*

62 WACO'S WINERY

Inga-Lill and Ulf Westblom have
a history of winemaking in their
Swedish roots and opened
Tehuacana Creek Vineyards in
1997. *By Taylor Coley.
Photography by Ryan Young.*

71 49 PEOPLE WHO DESERVE THANKS

This Thanksgiving, Megan
Willome counts her blessings
and hopes to inspire our readers
to do the same.
By Megan Willome.

{DEPARTMENTS}

- 10 From the Editor
- 15 The Lists
- 24 Jack Smith
- 28 Cover to Cover
- 30 Texas Day Trip
- 34 Rabbi Rotem
- 75 Cuisine
- 82 Q&A: Political
Roundtable

(ABOUT THE COVER)

Pictured: Heather Hensley
Photography: Joe Griffin
Design: Zachary Hinkle





Wing on a & a prayer

By Lynn Bulmahn | Photographs provided by Nancy Parrish

All Women Airforce Service Pilots earned their wings in Texas. In the 1940s, a total of 1,074 women completed a seven-month training period held first in Houston and later in Sweetwater. WASP were stationed at both of Waco's air fields during World War II. Left: Ruth Dailey Helm is the only WASP to have graduated from Baylor University.

Her footsteps echoing on the polished hardwood floors of the small South Waco bungalow that serves as the Wings Across America project's office, Deanne Bishop Parrish points to wall art quoting General Hap Arnold, chief of the Army Air Forces in World War II.

On December 7, 1944, the general told a group of patriotic young ladies who were the last graduating class of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP): "You and more than 900 of your sisters have shown you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. ... We of the Army Air Force are proud of you. We will never forget our debt to you."

Parrish taps her knuckles on the written words and frowns.

"Thirteen days later they sent us all home, and promptly forgot about us," the former WASP flyer said with a tinge of bitterness in her voice. "They forgot about us!"

But no more.

Thanks to support from Baylor University, Deanne and her daughter Nancy Parrish have formed Wings Across America, an all-volunteer, nonprofit project devoted to resurrecting the history of the Women Air Force Service Pilots. They are determined to tell the story, so that the contribution of these brave patriots will get the honor and respect the women long ago earned.

Wings Across America most recently has opened a museum exhibition, "Fly Girls of World War II," now on display at Baylor's Sue and Frank Mayborn Museum. "Fly

Girls" has proven to be so popular, the exhibit has been extended past its original closing date of November 28, according to Mayborn Marketing Director Sarah Levine.

Although few Americans realize it, WASP were stationed at 120 Army Air Force bases all over the United States during World War II. The group was started in response to a severe shortage of male combat pilots.

The women officially relieved some state-side male pilots, who were then sent overseas for combat duty. The women were able to assume the pilots' non-combat flying duties because they were given the same flight training as the men. Their duties included flying planes deemed too dangerous to fly by male pilots — in order to prove to the men the planes were safe enough. WASP also test-flew aircraft and flew targets for trainees to shoot at — risky business, indeed.

Collectively, the WASP flew more than 60 million miles in every type aircraft and on every type assignment — except actual combat — as the Army Air Force's male pilots. Arnold's request to militarize the women pilots was defeated in Congress, and the WASP were not given veteran status until 1977.

The Parrishes say it is only fitting that the WASP story be told from Texas.

"Every WASP, every one of them, earned her wings in Texas," Deanne said. The first group graduated in Houston; three months later, the training was moved to Avenger Field in Sweetwater. A total of 1,074 women completed a seven-month training period and became part of the WASP.

Deanne was adamant that every single surviving WASP should be interviewed and have her story told, Nancy said. So the duo set out to do just that.

Traveling to 19 states so far, the mother and daughter team have interviewed hundreds of former members, women now in their 80s and 90s, and put the information on the internet.

More of the WASP stories, their photos, original clothing and artifacts, can now be seen in person at the Mayborn Museum. "Fly Girls of World War II" will be on display through January 15, although the museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Hours are from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday; however, on Thursday, the museum remains open until 8 p.m. Sunday hours are from 1 until 4 p.m.

Admission is \$4 for children ages 18 months to 12 years, \$6 for adults and \$5 for senior citizens age 65 and older. Baylor stu-

dents and museum members are admitted free, and there are special discounts for groups when they make advance reservations. For more information, call the museum at 254/710-1110.

An entire room of the museum is devoted to the exhibit, showing how WASP forever changed the role of women in aviation. This is not a stuffy historical display, but a lively look at the incredible achievements of the daring women who signed up for the service.

In the exhibition, life-sized photos of lithe young female pilots, attractive as any 1940s Hollywood movie stars, model the WASP attire. Besides the dress uniforms, there were "zoot suits" — the women's name for baggy one-piece jumpsuits worn while flying, which they joked came in three sizes: "big, bigger and too big." The pantsuit uniforms they wore while training were much more tailored. Their brown leather flight jackets were adorned with "Fifi," or "Fifinella," a Walt Disney cartoon character with wings, appearing much like Tinkerbell the fairy. Fifi was the WASP mascot.

Some of the original uniforms have been preserved and are displayed on mannequins. Near the ceiling runs a display of photos of each WASP, showing her name and training class.

Quotes from those who admired and were influenced by the WASP — everyone from former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt to astronaut Eileen Collins — are also posted.

The exhibition is a triumph for the Parrishes, who receive no salary for their work, and their organization.

"We're doing all this on a wing and a prayer," Deanne laughed.

"Yeah, she's the wing and I'm the prayer," her daughter chimed in. On the Wings Across America website, Nancy is listed as the executive director and website creator.

As for the Mayborn exhibition, "Fly Girls" recently received rave reviews from some real experts — WASP alumnae who traveled to Waco from a women military pilots' convention in Dallas.

Betty Jo Reed of North Richland Hills, Texas, said she was glad such a fine display was so close to her home.

"They've done a real nice job," said Reed, who was interviewed for the Ken Burns documentary about World War II. "I'm glad some people are finally learning about us. Every time I speak, there are people who just can't believe we actually did that."

But she is proud to say most men who served in the military tell her, "You girls certainly deserve recognition."

Amarillo native Pearl Judd, now living in California, said the display was "beautiful."

"I was so happy to get to see this," she added.

Lucille Wise, now living in Denver, said the Mayborn exhibition "has told everything real accurately," and she hopes it can travel the country.

"We have to keep reminding people of the WASP, especially as a new generation comes along," she said.

Mayborn Exhibition Coordinator Frankie Pack said the institution is proud of the "Fly Girls" display.

"It has been an honor to work on this engaging exhibition and to be able to provide an opportunity for our visitors to learn about the amazing and virtually untold story of the WASP.

"These women are truly inspirational," she continued. "I hope the awareness raised by this exhibition will help enable the Wings Across America organization to preserve the history of these amazing heroines of World War II."

During a lunch at Rudy's, the visiting WASP talked about the struggle they've had to be recognized. One WASP's granddaughter told her history teacher she wanted to write her World War II report on the Women Airforce Service Pilots, only to be scolded in class. The teacher told the child that no women ever flew planes in World War II — a mistaken notion the grandmother quickly corrected.

"Many people have said 'I had no idea they even existed' [when seeing the exhibition for the first time]," Levine said. "It's been an education for everyone. Obviously, there was not a lot of attention given them."

In fact, according to the website, information about WASP activities were classified for many years by the military.

"I think it's really opened a lot of people's eyes," Levine added. "We feel very excited to work with Nancy and Deanne and the other WASP and to let them tell their stories."

She said museum visitors are intrigued by the "amazing story" depicted in the exhibit — a story most visitors say they've never before heard. Similarly, WASP speakers at military bases have found cadets and recruits — who have to learn the history of the Air Force — similarly uninformed about the WASP.

The WASP members credit the Parrishes with doing much to spread their history among internet users and others.

The story of how this mother-daughter

team embarked upon their mission is as colorful as the WASP legacy itself.

A former USO entertainer and PBS producer for Waco's former KNCT public broadcasting TV station, Nancy has a variety of experiences in the film and entertainment world.

"I worked in Florida as an actor. I worked in industrial films, commercials and played a lawyer for 13 episodes of 'Divorce Court,'" Nancy said, adding that she also worked behind the camera as a casting director for Disney and held various freelance jobs in the film industry and at MGM Studios in Orlando.

"My undergrad and master's degrees are in theater," Nancy said. "I love to entertain people in such a way that lifts them up. The WASP story lifts everyone up. Hearing it puts everybody in a better place. It's an important, inspirational story to tell."

A self-described "Air Force brat," Nancy said she was prompted to tell the WASP story after her father, an Air Force veteran, passed away in 1993.

Then, she realized many of his stories died with him.

Knowing her mother also had a distinguished history flying for the United States, Nancy decided that she would not let Deanne's story be forgotten.

"They didn't just fly airplanes; they served their country," Nancy said. "They sure didn't do it for any safety or comfort."

Many WASP, like Deanne, hung up their wings after the WASP were sent home, never to fly again. Instead, they married, raised families and resumed more traditional roles. One became a nun. Others, however, continued to take to the air — only not in any military capacity.

Nancy started doing research — and found little was written of the WASP.

"When she decided she wanted to do something, she started searching for historical information," Deanne said. "She went to the public library, to the Baylor library, looked in school textbooks, and it seemed no one had even heard of WASP."

That distressed her mother.

"She told me 'I found a total of two footnotes,'" Deanne said. "I told her, 'We didn't do it for the glory; we didn't do it for the recognition. Besides, it's all over. Nobody cares!'"

But her daughter cared — very much.

Nancy said it upset her that there was "not one word, not even a mention of the WASP" in the historical textbooks she consulted. According to the Women in Service for

America Memorial Foundation's website, almost 400,000 women served in and with the armed forces during World War II — a number that exceeded total U.S. male troop strength in 1939.

Most books Nancy read had a little information about contributions of the Women's Army Corps (WACS), the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS), Marine Corps Women's Reserve, Army and Navy Nurses' Corps and "Rosie the Riveter" women who worked in factories, but not so much as a single sentence about the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

While not considered officially in the military, WASP members were the first women to ever fly U.S. military aircraft, Nancy said. They proved that females could be as good as men when it came to flying airplanes, serving their country — and in many other areas.

Before World War II, most women were restricted to certain roles — wife, mother, housewife and a scant handful of occupations deemed suitable for females. Because of the WASP and other women supporting the war effort, American women began to break out of their traditional — and very limited — prescribed roles in life. That makes these groups of women historically very significant.

"I think the world is ready for this to come out," Nancy said. "People are hungry for women role models!"

At first, Nancy thought of making a single documentary on the WASP, but she reconsidered.

"I didn't think one documentary would make a difference," she explained.

So she took her mother's old scrapbook from World War II and created a website, www.wingsacrossamerica.org.

The site now contains information designed to appeal to people of all ages, from World War II buffs on down to those who are just now finding out about the WASP. Little girls can use the paper doll page as their own WASP Zwinky, dressing the pilot for active duty. There's a crossword puzzle and pages of interviews. The Parrishes have interviewed surviving WASP members, each in the woman's own home, and recorded these conversations on digital video.

Nancy said her mother is a good interviewer. Not only does Deanne share much in common with WASP alumnae, but she also knows what is true, and what stories may have gotten a bit exaggerated over time. Nancy said the other women know they can't bluff Deanne — and therefore are very truth-

ful in their reminiscing.

"WASP on the Web" now has more than 2,000 pages of videos, pictures, songs, articles and other records. Wings Across America says it is the largest digital collection of WASP memorabilia in the world. Students can e-mail questions to WASP members, via the website, who volunteer to answer them.

The website existed quietly for some time. Then, the site won the Yahoo Pick of the Week award. Since then, web surfers have visited by the droves. Several other national educational sites, including PBS, Britannica and NASA, have all linked to the site.

From the website, the Wings Across America project grew to collecting and compiling interviews from surviving WASP members. Time is the enemy; all the former pilots are now in their 80s and 90s and many have passed away.

When the Parrishes began their quest to locate former WASP, they sent questionnaires to 600 alumnae. Now, the population has dramatically dropped. They estimate less than 400 are still alive.

Waco has its own connection to the WASP history. Both the present-day Madison Cooper Airport and the airport on Texas State Technical College's campus started life as Army Air Fields during the Second World War.

"There were WASP stationed at both local air fields," Deanne said. "Yet, people in Waco don't know about it."

One, in fact, paid the ultimate sacrifice.

California native Bettie Mae Scott was killed — just 18 days before her 23rd birthday — while flight testing a BT-13 on July 8, 1944. Stationed at Waco Army Air Field, Scott had entered flight training to become a WASP the previous October at Avenger Field in Sweetwater and graduated on April 15, 1944.

Deanne said Scott was assigned to test-fly planes which had been damaged and then repaired, to see if they were once again air-worthy. This particular plane had not been repaired the right way, she said. Although WASP were equipped with parachutes, the plane lacked sufficient altitude for the pilot to make her escape.

Scott was one of the 38 WASP members who died in service to their country during the war. The WASP members were not considered full-fledged members of the military until 1977. Therefore, when a WASP member was killed, her colleagues often had to take up a collection so her body could be sent

back home — in an inexpensive "pine box" coffin. Either her family or colleagues had to pay to transport her body; the government wouldn't.

A male pilot, by contrast, would be escorted home by military members, at no cost to his family; his coffin and funeral also were provided by the United States. An American flag would drape the coffin. His family also received \$10,000 in life insurance and were allowed to hang a gold star in the window signifying their loss.

Survivors of WASP killed during the war were not allowed to cover the coffin in the flag or put a gold star in the window. They received no insurance benefits.

"We have a 48-star interment flag hung in the exhibit," Nancy said of the American flag from the World War II era. "It's in memory of the women who didn't get a flag."

Deanne said she is proud that, thanks to a later act by Congress, her family will be able to drape her coffin with the American flag. "I served my country proudly, and I deserve no less," she said.

The inequalities were not just in death. WASP had to buy their own uniforms, at a cost of \$100 — no small expense. According to the internet's Inflation Calculator, \$100 in 1943 would be equivalent to about \$1,200 in today's money.

To enter the WASP, women had to have some flying experience; male pilot trainees had no such requirement and no doubt some had never before been in a plane.

WASP often had to provide their own housing, if there were no nearby barracks for unmarried female nurses. If they washed out of training, they bought their own ticket home.

At the time, the WASP accepted their lesser roles.

"We didn't feel like heroes," Lucille Wise said. "We were just trying to do something to help the war effort."

Three decades after the war, when Congress decided to recognize the WASP, they were not present for any ceremony. Instead, they were sent medals in the mail.

However, Deanne said she has a letter from former senator and presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. In it, he writes of his admiration for the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

Another former military man who admired the WASP was the late Baylor president and chancellor, Herbert Reynolds.

"Dr. Herbert Reynolds, who was chancellor at the time we began all this, really embraced us," Nancy remembered. "He said

he'd known a WASP when he was growing up. Dr. Reynolds was also an Air Force officer, and the fact these women had been under-appreciated and under-reported was upsetting to him."

Other Baylor officials and organizations have also helped, she said.

In 1999, the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority on Baylor's campus adopted the project. The members helped by learning and recording the marching songs, and their voices may be heard on the website.

Deanne explained that everywhere a group of WASP went, they marched — and sang. This helped keep morale up, and the songs were recorded to bring some audible authenticity to the website.

Website visitors can also listen to the sounds of an airplane engine.

"We've also had Baylor students help us as crew [for the various programs Wings Across America has put on]," Nancy said. "Marketing students designed an ad campaign for us."

KWBU, the PBS station on campus, has also helped in various ways, and Nancy calls it their "mother station."

"[Baylor graduate] Ruth Helm and Sister Teresa were our first two WASP interviews," Deanne said. "Their faith is extraordinary and their values are extraordinary."

Sister Teresa, whose name was Anita Paul before taking her vows, lives in a convent in the French Antilles. She was brought to Waco and interviewed at the KWBU studio. She told not only of her WASP experiences but how her faith had sustained her throughout the war and later in life.

Nancy believes the WASP have much to teach us.

"They don't just talk about serving your country — they did it," she said. "They really did it, often with great sacrifice. The WASP really stand for such values as honor, courage, valor, patriotism and faith."

Wings Across America depends upon donations in order to continue.

"Raising the funds for an online vision is tough," Nancy admitted. "Our digital video archive now holds over 300 hours of priceless footage. This information will not be completely usable until we raise the funding to complete the back end — transcribing the interviews, creating the individual pages of information, metadata coding and publish-

ing."

Nancy's immediate plans include fundraising so the "Wings Across America's Fly Girls of WWII" exhibit can travel to other museums across Texas and beyond. She said such institutions as the Air Force Museum, Smithsonian Air & Space and the Air Force Academy Library have all expressed interest in a "Wings Across America WASP Kiosk" — a smaller version of the exhibition now showing in the Mayborn.

"Ultimately, completing the design for The Wings Across America Virtual Museum and making the digital archive public is my goal," Nancy said.

"They don't just talk about serving your country — they did it," she said. "They really did it, often with great sacrifice. The WASP really stand for such values as honor, courage, valor, patriotism and faith."

Funds will also allow the Parrishes to continue traveling and interviewing WASP who are still waiting to tell their stories. Neither mother nor daughter receive a salary for their efforts, Deanne said, joking that she's spending her children's inheritance on it.

"An oral history project is such an expense in both time and money," Levine said. "But it's so important to do it. The opportunity to do this is going to be gone very soon because these people are dying, and some are getting to where they don't remember very much anymore."

The oral histories, museum exhibits and website are only part of the overall dream.

Nancy wants to not only share this patriotic history with younger generations, but she also dreams of someday having a space camp-type of facility. She hopes it would interest children — girls as well as boys — in becoming aviators and/or astronauts themselves and help spread the "can-do" spirit of the WASP. She feels Waco would be the ideal location, since it is in the "crossroads of Texas."

"It has been an enriching experience [to document the WASP story]," Nancy said. "Their history is larger than life — it's an inspiring history." W

CARE TO COMMENT?

Log on to WACOAN.COM and click **FEEDBACK**

