

TRACY PILURS COLLECTION

MS-008

International Women's Air and Space Museum
Burke Lakefront Airport, Room 165
1501 North Marginal Road
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

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INTRODUCTION

The Tracy Pilurs Collection was accessioned into IWASM in November and December 1999. The material was donated by Tracy and delivered by three of her children, Tom and Jim Pilurs and Alexis Boilini-Levy. The papers in the collection date from 1942 (Tracy's first pilot log book) to 1998 (IWASM newsletter article about restoration of the Smith Miniplane donated by Tracy to IWASM in 1996). The material is organized into the following nine series and fills one archival carton (Series 1-8) and one Hollinger box (Series 9):

- Series 1 Private Pilot - competition and records
- Series 2 Ground School - instructor materials
- Series 3 Author - magazines articles, fiction, technical
- Series 4 Media Coverage - publicity articles and ads
- Series 5 Correspondence - letters and cards received
- Series 6 Photographs & Slides - taken by and of Tracy Pilurs
- Series 7 Smith Miniplane - airplane logs and certificates
- Series 8 Books & Pamphlets - pilot logs and related booklets
- Series 9 Magazines - magazines saved by Tracy Pilurs

There are no restrictions on the use of these materials.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tracy Stevens was born on December 19, 1920 in New York City and died on October 24, 1999 in San Antonio, TX. As a child, she "flew" a cardboard airplane in the basement of her parents' house. For her 16th birthday, she was given an airplane ride. In 1942, she secretly started flying lessons and logged 3 hours 20 minutes before her mother found out and made her quit. The following year she became Mrs. Alex G. Pilurs.

It wasn't until May 1957 that Tracy began serious flight training at Palwaukee Airport, Wheeling, Illinois. She passed her private pilot check ride on March 17, 1958 and five months later was introduced to aerobatics by Duane Cole. By 1960 Tracy had added commercial and ground instructor ratings to her credentials. She qualified as a flight instructor in 1962 (to support her flying), and attained her instrument rating in 1964.

In 1962 Tracy participated in her first Powder Puff Derby, a coast to coast race for women pilots. She flew a Beechcraft Bonanza owned by her sponsor, McDonalds Corporation. Departure was from Oakland, California, and terminus was Wilmington, Delaware, a total of 2,547 miles. Although finishing 17th, she and co-pilot Leah Higgins logged an outstanding time of 12 hours, 40 minutes. Her Derby participation was more remarkable because, by that time, she was divorced and raising six children (Jon, Dan, Kathy, Laurie, Tom and Jim) alone. They were enthusiastic supporters of their mother's endeavors and monitored her Derby progress on ham radios.

Becoming the 1963 Women's National Aerobatic Champion was Tracy's next accomplishment. She flew a Clipped Wing Cub borrowed from Hal Krier in the Antique Airplane Association championships in Ottumwa, Iowa. She won her second Women's National Aerobatic Championship in 1965, also in Ottumwa, Iowa, this time flying her own plane. It was a Smith Miniplane with trim colors of lavender and purple and named Pretty Purple Puddy Tat.

Tracy had built the Smith Miniplane in her garage. With advice from aircraft mechanics, help from her children, and knowledge gained in high school welding classes, she completed the airplane in four years. Final assembly was done at Chicagoland Airport where it passed its required FAA checks. Tracy flew it the required 50 hours for final approval, and met the deadline to qualify for the 1964 EAA fly-in at Rockford, Illinois. From then until 1976, she showed her Miniplane at air shows and earned an aircraft/powerplant mechanic rating as well as ratings in multi-engine airplanes, commercial helicopters, and hot air balloons.

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Injuries from an automobile accident on her way home from an airport put a stop to her flying. However, with the inborn versatility typical of her previous pursuits, she threw herself into other interests. She wrote extensively for aviation magazines and was proud of being a contributing editor of articles and a monthly column for Private Pilot magazine. Later she opened a photography studio and did pencil drawings. Two are in the permanent collection of the National Naval Air Museum in Pensacola, Florida.

When Tracy could no longer fly, Pretty Purple Puddy Tat was moved from place to place. In 1996 Tracy donated it to IWASM on the condition that it not be flown again. Restoration to a condition of "careworn antiquity" was completed in 1999 and since then the Smith Miniplane has been on permanent display at IWASM. Sadly, Tracy was too ill to attend the Museum's ribbon cutting ceremony and succumbed to cancer two months later. Pretty Purple Puddy Tat is a fitting memorial to this unique aviator.

Note: The Biographical Sketch in this finding aid is based on biographical material compiled in 1999 by Gretchen Reed, Director of Education, IWASM.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers in this collection are arranged into nine series. The file folders and the papers within each folder are generally ordered by date. The organization of the files is an approximation of the material delivered to IWASM.

Series 1 Private Pilot documents Tracy's accomplishments as a pilot. Among the earliest are the temporary certificate she received after passing the Private Pilot flight test on March 17, 1958 and the receipt for renting the airplane that she used to take the test. Other temporary and permanent certificates show her ratings as Ground Instructor, Commercial Pilot, Free Balloon Pilot, Flight Instructor and Airframe Mechanic. Completion of a short course for flight instructors at Ohio State University on January 12, 1966 is documented by a certificate in Folder PP-01 and a photograph in Folder PS-02.

The aerobatic competition material includes diagrams of maneuvers and official rule books for 1967-1969 in Folders PP-02 and PP-03. The Powder Puff Derby folder (Folder PP-06) contains an official program, a map of the route from Oakland, CA, to Wilmington, DE, a press release and copy of a good luck telegram from McDonald's, Tracy's sponsor and owner of the Beechcraft Bonanza that she flew. [Four photographs of Tracy in the Powder Puff Derby are located in Folder PS-02 Black & White Photographs].

Series 2 Ground School contains material found in a teal colored flight bag probably carried by Tracy to the classes she taught. There are teaching notes for weather, navigation and radio plus some related booklets. Publications from Acme School of Aeronautics, June 1966, were used for student exams. An instructor's manual and other flight instruction books are included. One black and white photograph shows Tracy at a blackboard.

Series 3 Author shows Tracy's accomplishments as a writer. This series contains photocopies of many of the articles that she wrote for magazines and several reprints of her wing-walking article. [All but one of the magazines is included in Series 9.] Also, there is a draft of a short story which may not have been published. About the draft of a technical discussion of aerobatic maneuvers as submitted for inclusion as Annex J of the Aerobatic Club of America Official Contest Rules, 1969 (see Folder PP-02), Tracy commented that the published version had been edited to sound like a [sic] army manual!"

Series 4 Media Coverage includes some publicity surrounding the 1962 Powder Puff Derby but most is about Tracy and her Smith Miniplane DSA-1. Tracy named the plane Pretty Purple Puddy Tat, painted a cartoon cat on the fuselage, and added a lavender racing stripe with a bow. It attracted attention at all the air shows she attended. The last folder in this series includes some of Tracy's ads for her Portraits in Pencil business.

Series 5 Correspondence is mostly letters of congratulation received after the Smith Miniplane first flew on September 8, 1964. Seven "special" letters are in a separate folder, as are samples of Tracy's personal note paper and business cards. There are no copies of correspondence from Tracy.

Series 6 Photographs & Slides contains four folders. The first shows the reconstruction of the Smith Miniplane in black and white (from pieces to re-assembly) and color (to show painted pieces). The second holds black and white photographs from 1962 to 1976 of Tracy in the Powder Puff Derby, with the Smith Miniplane, as instructor, and in helicopter. Color photographs and slides of Tracy and Pretty Purple Puddy Tat between 1965 and 1986 are in the third folder along with one showing the airplane at IWASM in 1999. The fourth folder contains material about the Whirly-Girls presentation of two portraits the National Naval Aviation Museum on June 19, 1993. The portraits were done by Tracy (also a Whirly-Girl), but she could not attend.

Series 7 Smith Miniplane was removed from a notebook. Included are the aircraft and engine log books, the aircraft registration dated September 23, 1963, and letters pertaining to airworthiness, propellers and cowling installation. On the weight and balance sheets Tracy wrote the formula for the lavender trim paint in purple ink.

Series 8 Book & Pamphlets consists of Tracy's log books, flight test guides and membership lists.

First log book (not numbered) has six entries: four flights from Dawn Patrol airport base, New York, in April 1942 and three flights from Palwaukee field, Mt. Prospect, Illinois in September 1942. Student time in Cubs and a Porterfield of 3 hours 20 minutes is not transferred to the next log book.

Log Book #1 starts on May 7, 1957 at Palwaukee. Tracy describes herself as 5' 5", blue eyes, gray hair and gives her birth date as 12-19-28. [Author's note: She's proud of her hair color but knocked eight years off of her age, here and in other log books!] This book documents Tracy's first solo (after 15 hours of instruction), first cross-country (at 42.5 hours), passage of her private pilot check ride (at 79.5 hours), first passenger, and "aerobatic time at Kewanee with Duane Cole" in a Boeing Steerman (a plane she thought a little heavy for her).

Log Book #2 documents Tracy's preparation for and participation in the 1962 Powder Puff Derby. Her first flight in the McDonalds' Bonanza N93644N on April 4, 1962 is both a check ride and a long cross-country; her post-flight comment is "never again!!!" The McDonalds pilots use the company-owned Aero Commander to introduce Tracy to mountain flying on a flight to Denver. Tracy and co-pilot Leah Higgins leave Palwaukee on June 28, 1962 and arrive in Oakland on June 30th. The racers depart on July 7th for Salt Lake City (Tracy: "The Race - Not so good on this leg"); stopped in Des Moines on July 8th (Tracy: "Did Better"); and land in Wilmington, Delaware, on July 9th (Tracy: "We made it - Placed 17th in Race").

Log Book #3 includes several highlights. Tracy wins the 1963 Woman's National Aerobatics Championship, held August 30-31, flying Harold Krier's Clipped Wing Piper Cub. On September 8, 1964, Tracy takes N1199 - the Smith Miniplane that she built in her garage - on its first flight. Tracy passes her instrument flight test in November 1964. On March 16, 1965, the FAA approves N1199 for flight ("Flight test for FAA - OK"). An entry for 9-2-65 notes that N1199 crosses the Mississippi River for the first time headed for Ottumwa but is followed by Tracy's comment that "Time at Ottumwa and trip back missing. Is this when won Woman's Nat'l Aerobatics - US in miniplane? - How come I didn't write it all down?"

Log Book #4 for 1966 to 1978 includes Tracy's last logged flight in N1199 (7-7-74); passing of Commercial Helicopter flight test (9/22/76), and last solo flight logged (11/16/76). Tracy notes gaps in logged time: "6 months not logged" (10/2/68 - 4/11/69), "2 years not logged. Sorry about that" (7/3/69 - 9/11/71), and "Another big gap - Darn it" (7/14/74 - 3/13/76).

The two other log books, one for helicopters and one for sailplanes, have limited numbers of entries. Both probably date from 1976 based on references in Log Book #4.

Series 9 Magazines is Tracy's collection of magazines. Most of them contain an article or a column that she wrote for *Private Pilot*. Some contain articles written by others about her and Pretty Purple Puddy Tat. Others contain articles written by authors she admired, including Richard Bach. Photocopies of most of the articles and columns by Tracy are located in Folder AU-02. Some of the articles about Tracy are also in Folder MC-01.

BOX, FILE, AND FOLDER LISTING

Series 1 Private Pilot (PP) - competition and records

- Folder PP-01 Learning & Licenses; 1956-1981. Includes certificates, licenses, letters, business cards.
- Folder PP-02 Aerobatics Maneuvers; 1963-1979. Includes diagrams, judge's badge, news articles.
- Folder PP-03 Aerobatics Competition; 1967-1969. Includes official rules books for those three years.
- Folder PP-04 Honorary Awards; 1963-1978. Includes C.A.F. certificate; A.A.A. membership, 99s Award.
- Folder PP-05 Helicopters; 1972-1976. Includes FAA handbook, Brantley flight manual.
- Folder PP-06 Powder Puff Derby; 1962. Includes press release, program, map of route, telegram.

Series 2 Ground School (GS) - instructor materials

- Folder GS-01 Teaching Notes & Exams; 1962.
- Folder GS-02 Weather 1 Notes; ND. Includes sequence reports.
- Folder GS-03 Weather 2 Notes; ND. Includes clouds, weather systems, etc.
- Folder GS-04 Navigation 1 Notes; ND.
- Folder GS-05 Radio Navigation Notes; ND.
- Folder GS-06 Navigation Booklets; ca 1960. Includes CAA Regs (no cover), VOR, "Motorola".
- Folder GS-07 Acme Private Pilot Student Exam Papers; June 1966.
- Folder GS-08 Acme School Exam Booklets; June 1966. Includes "Private Pilot FAA Exams Made Easy" by Acme School of Aeronautics and "Private Pilot Explanations of Answers".
- Folder GS-09 Photograph of Tracy Pilurs at Blackboard by Mrs. Blelock (8" x 10" black & white).
- Folder GS-10 Sectional Charts: Nashville (11/21/66) & Albuquerque (3/63).
- Folder GS-11 Notebook of lesson notes and exam problems; ND.
- Folder GS-12 Technical Manuals; 1957. Principles of Fixed Wing Flight.
- Folder GS-13 Training handbooks; 1956, 1965. FAA and Zweng publications.

Series 3 Author (AU) - magazine articles, fiction, technical.

- Folder AU-01 Biographical Notes & Samples of Writing; 1966-1990.
- Folder AU-02 Magazine Articles by TP (copies of Series 9 Magazines marked [*1]); 1968-1981.
- Folder AU-03 Fiction "The Cat's Burglar" (typed & edited draft); ND .
- Folder AU-04 "Annex J - Basics of Aresti" (pages 147-171 typed draft); 1969. See also Folder PP-02.

Series 4 Media Coverage (MC) - publicity articles and ads

- Folder MC-01 Media Articles About TP (copies); 1964-1995.
- Folder MC-02 Media Articles on Pretty Purple Puddy Tat; 1966-1998.
- Folder MC-03 Original Newspaper Articles; 1962-1981.
- Folder MC-04 Advertising Photo/Art Business; 1994-1995.

Series 5 Correspondence (CO) - letters and cards received

- Folder CO-01 Personal Correspondence; 1963-1964.
- Folder CO-02 Special Letters; 1964-1966.
- Folder CO-03 Personal Notepaper (6 sheets) and Business Cards.

Series 6 Photographs & Slides (PS) - taken by and of Tracy Pilurs

- Folder PS-01 Smith Miniplane Construction; ca 1960-1964.
- Folder PS-02 Black & White Photographs; 1962-1976.
- Folder PS-03 Color Photographs & Slides; 1965-1999.
- Folder PS-04 Whirly-Girl Presentation Photographs; 1993. Includes invitation and article.

Series 7 Smith Miniplane (SM) - airplane logs and certificates

- Folder SM-01 Smith DSA-1 N1199
Aircraft Log Book; 1963-1975

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Engine Log Book
Aircraft Registration Certificate; 1963
Aircraft/Engine/Propeller Specification; 1975
Weight and Balance Sheet
Application for Airworthiness Certificate; 1966
Fiberglass Cowling Installation by Galt Flying Service

Series 8 Books & Pamphlets (BB) - pilot logs and related booklets

Group BB-01 Flight Record Books

Pilot Log - unnumbered 04/17/42 to 09/18/42
Pilot Flight Log - Book #1 05/07/57 to 12/04/60
Pilot Flight Log - Book #2 12/04/60 to 08/01/62
Pilot Flight Record - Book #3 08/07/62 to 10/11/65
Flight Record - Book #4 10/24/65 to 11/16/76
Aviators Flight Log Book - Helicopter #1 July 1976
Sailplane Pilot's Log Book - unnumbered, ND

Group BB-02 Aviation Booklets

Aerobatic Club of America Membership List, 1966
Aerobatic Club of America Membership List, 1969
PAMA Maintenance Association booklet, 1979
Flight Test Guide Private Pilot Single Engine, 1966
Flight Test Guide Private Pilot Single Engine, 1968

Series 9 Magazines (MA) - magazines saved by Tracy Pilurs

ACA News - 2 issues
Air Progress - 2 issues
Antique Airplane Association News - 1 issue
Career World - 4 issues
Chicago SportScene - 2 issues
Flying - 1 issue
Private Pilot - 29 issues
Sportsman Pilot - 1 issue
Woman Pilot - 1 issue

[See next page for complete list of issues and article titles.]

List of Magazines and Article Titles Included in Series 9:

- ACA News for May 1973, page 15 column by TP [*1]
ACA News for Nov/Dec 1973, contains membership roster
Air Progress for January 1965, page 21 picture of TP with Pretty Purple Puddy Tat
Air Progress for February 1968, page 32 article by TP: "Don't Let the FAA Scare You!" [*1] (2 copies)
Antique Airplane Association News for May/June 1967, page 11 article by TP: "Pretty Purple Puddy Tat and Tracy" [*1]
Career World for October 1979, page 26 article by TP: "A First Step" [*1]
Career World for December 1979, page 23 article by TP: "Air Traffic Controllers Listen/Think/Speak" [*1]
Career World for January 1980, page 20 article by TP: "Air Traffic Controllers Listen/Think/Speak" [*1]
Career World for February 1980, page 18 article by TP: "Instant Pen Pals" [*1]
Chicago SportScene for Nov 1980, page 40 article by TP: "Too Bad the U.S.S.R. Couldn't Make It" [*1]
Chicago SportScene for Nov/Dec 1981, page 31 article by TP: "Ballooning, More Than HOT AIR" [*1]
Flying for January 1966, page 38 picture of TP with Pretty Purple Puddy Tat (2 copies)
Private Pilot for Dec/Jan 1966, page 29 picture of TP with Pretty Purple Puddy Tat
Private Pilot for April 1967, page 35 article of TP by R. Bach: "Message to a Distant Planet"
Private Pilot for October 1968, page 38 article by TP: "Mary had a Little Airplane" [*1]
Private Pilot for June 1970, articles by R. Bradbury, H. Downs, etc.
Private Pilot for July 1970, articles by E. Gann, Drury, R. Bach, etc.
Private Pilot for August 1970, page 40 article by TP: "A Moment of Greatness" [*1]
Private Pilot for October 1970, page 80 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for November 1970, page 75 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for December 1970, page 39 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for January 1971, page 23 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1] (2 copies)
Private Pilot for April 1971, page 6 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for May 1971, page 22 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for June 1971, page 62 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for July 1971, page 22 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for August 1971, page 4 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for September 1971, page 6 column by TP: Tracy Pilurs [*1]
Private Pilot for November 1971, page 14 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for December 1971, page 48 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for January 1972, page 54 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for February 1972, page 44 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for April 1972, page 8 column by TP: Focus [*1] (2 copies)
Private Pilot for May 1972, page 43 column by TP: Focus [*1] [*2]
Private Pilot for July 1972, page 38 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for August 1972, page 38 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for Sep/Oct 1972, page 22 column by TP: Focus [*1] (2 copies)
Private Pilot for November 1972, page 10 column by TP: Focus [*1]
Private Pilot for September 1973, page 38 article by TP: "Mean Ol' Boy?" [*1]
Private Pilot for July 1974, page 32 article by TP: "Flight to Perfection" [*1]
Private Pilot for April 1975, page 48 article by TP: "Grandma Rides the Wing" [*1]
Sportsman Pilot for Fall 1988, page 18 Smith Miniplane owned by Alan Preston
Woman Pilot for Jan/Feb 1995, page 11 letter about TP

[*1] Copy of Tracy Pilurs article is located in Folder AU-02

[*2] The magazine is not part of the collection, only a copy of the article in Folder AU-02