



## PLAY GUIDE

Written by Kira Obolensky

Directed by Noël Raymond

February 9 – March 3, 2019

### THE PLAY

**1958.** Mary Pat Laffey begins work as a stewardess for Northwest Orient Airlines. While thousands of young women applied for the position, only a handful are chosen.

Weighed, measured, trained and smiling, Mary Pat embarks upon a job that she quickly realizes is unfair. While her male counterparts can work past the age of 32, Mary Pat and her female cohorts put up with endless weight checks, are prohibited from marrying, wearing glasses and must retire when they turn 32.

Set against the backdrop of the birth of feminism, this play tells the story of one woman's fight over the span of 20 years to transform the lives of the women she works with by joining a union, taking legal actions and changing the consciousness of the men in the workplace.

A stylish, entertaining and relevant piece, *Stewardess!* tells the story of how one woman stood up to a corporate giant and made a difference. Go, Mary Pat!

history theatre

## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT—KIRA OBOLENSKY



Kira Obolensky is a Mellon Foundation Playwright and writer who lives in Minneapolis. Her plays have been performed around the country and abroad. She has received many awards and fellowships including a Guggenheim fellowship, the Kesselring Prize and Le Comte de Nuys playwriting fellowship, as well as grants from the Bush, McKnight, and Jerome Foundations, NEA, Irvine Foundation, and a Pew Theatre Initiative Grant. Her play *Lobster Alice* was a Kesselring Prize winner; *The Adventures of Herculina* received Honorable Mention/Kesselring Prize. Kira has written three books about architecture and design, including co-authoring the national best seller, *The Not So Big House*. Her novella, *The Anarchists Float to St. Louis*, won Quarterly West's novella prize.

Kira has worked collaboratively with choreographers and visual artists and is co-founder of The Gymnasium, a consortium of nationally known artists and scientists and innovators involved in the incubation of new work and ideas. *Force/Matter*, created by The Gymnasium, was recently produced by Shawn McConneloug and her Orchestra at Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. She's collaborated with University of Minnesota students and theatre professionals Shawn McConneloug, Luverne Seifert, Michael Sommers and Eric Jensen on a site-specific University of Minnesota presentation and adaptation of *The Master and Margarita*.

Her short puppet and film piece, *poor little poor girl*, premiered at Flat Works, produced by Open Eye Figure Theatre in fall of 2004. And her play *Quick Silver*, which premiered as a play for puppets and actors in Minneapolis, was produced by 3 Legged Race and The Playwrights' Center. Named by Twin Cities Critics as the "most outstanding experimental theatre event of 2003," it was presented in Prague, June 2006, where it was lauded for its script and visual landscape, and was subsequently produced by Gas and Electric Arts in Philadelphia.

Kira is a graduate of Williams College and the Juilliard School's Playwriting Fellowship Program and received her MFA in Fiction Writing from Warren Wilson's MFA Program for Writers. She teaches at Goddard's MFA Interdisciplinary Arts Program and at the University of Minnesota.

## MARY PAT LAFFEY



At the age of 20, Ms. Laffey was interested in the glamour and opportunity offered to Stewardesses of major airlines. She wrote to several and received a letter from Northwest Airlines, along with an airline ticket to Minneapolis. She attended their 6 week Stewardess training--Charm School--where she learned to apply makeup, apply a manicure, balance a book on her head, wear a girdle, and also how to evacuate a burning aircraft. In 1958, she became a Stewardess, based out of Seattle.

In 1965, Ms. Laffey became the Base Representative for stewardesses in Seattle. She took this unpaid position because she was idealistic and hoped to positively affect her industry. She hated to see her colleagues fired for marrying or turning 32, as they often were at this time. This policy did not apply to the male flight attendants, who were also allowed to apply for the higher-paying purser positions, while the women were not.

Along with other Stewardesses, Ms. Laffey appeared in front of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission protesting airlines' failure to comply with the recently passed 1964 Civil Rights and Equal Pay Acts. While the EEOC found the airlines in violation of the policies, they had no power to enforce the laws. During contract negotiations in 1967, Ms. Laffey was able to negotiate a non-discriminatory contract, and the marriage and age rules were terminated, female flight attendants were allowed to apply for the purser positions, and they were allowed to wear eye glasses while at work.

After passing a battery of tests--not required for male applicants--Ms. Laffey became the first female purser. In 1970, Ms. Laffey filed class action suits under both Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act. 70% of Stewardesses from Northwest joined the Equal Pay section of the suit. They initially went to trial in 1972 for 5 weeks, and the women testified that their jobs required equal skill and training as the positions held by men. In 1973, it was found that Northwest Airlines had violated every aspect addressed by the lawsuit. The court ordered the following:

1. The company must raise the salary of each stewardess to the purser level.
2. The company must pay every stewardess (not just those who had joined the lawsuit) back pay for the difference between stewardess and purser salaries for the entire period beginning 2 years back from the filing of the suit and continuing until their salaries were raised to the purser level.
3. The company had to pay every stewardess for the difference in value between single and double rooms for this same period. (Male flight attendants were given single rooms during travel, while the women had to share rooms.)
4. The company was forbidden to weigh stewardesses, or to have a weight chart, or to ground any stewardess on account of weight unless she was so overweight as to be physically incapable of performing her duties.
5. Northwest was forbidden to establish any chain of command which made a stewardess subordinate to any male flight attendant with less system seniority.

Northwest managed to drag the case out for the next 12 years. Under the Equal Pay Act, the trial court found the women were owed double damages because Northwest had acted deliberately; it also ruled that Northwest must go back 3 years rather than 2. The trial court handed down a further opinion in 1982. The judgment awarded \$52.5 million to 3,362 present and former female attendants.

In July 1984 the U.S. Court of Appeals handed down a ruling for the second time. The 63-page decision reaffirmed its prior holding that Northwest violated Title VII and the Equal Pay Act in each of the respects alleged in the lawsuit. The opinion was written by Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and was concurred by Ken Starr, and the conservative justice Robert Bork.

Northwest again appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court but on Jan 14, 1985 the U.S. Supreme Court again refused to hear it, letting stand the lower court ruling in favor of the plaintiffs which now required Northwest to pay \$59 million dollars in damages plus the women's attorneys fees. At the time this award was the largest judgment in an Equal Pay Act or Title VII case. Northwest had until the end of May to issue the women their settlement checks.

The exact pay-out to each flight attendant was based on her longevity, and whether or not she joined the suit as an Equal Pay Plaintiff. The largest single award was in the neighborhood of about \$56,000. Some received as little as \$1,000 but the average award was between \$30 -35,000.

Not only Flight Attendants but American women in many vocations have relied on this case to establish parity in employment and pay with men.

## STEWARDESS TO FLIGHT ATTENDANT

As early as the 1950s, the term Stewardess began to have a negative connotation for women in the aviation industry. Stewardesses were seen as having no real purpose on a flight, except to appeal to male passengers, and attracting more business for the airline.

During the 1960s and 70s, with equal pay becoming an important issue for Stewardesses, the name began to fall out of fashion in favor of the gender neutral term Flight Attendant. This term reflects the importance of their role on the flight.

What airline made courtesy a career?



It's **United Air Lines** where stewardess service began!

A girl named Patricia, age 11, wrote us recently: "I've wanted to be a United Air Lines stewardess since I was 6 years old."

From 11 back to 6 is a long time, but Patricia might like to know that the career she has in mind goes back beyond that. For this year marks the 25th Anniversary of stewardess service, originated by United Air Lines in May, 1930.

It was then that Ellen Church, the nation's first stewardess, and 7 other girls pioneered a great new career for young women. United Air Lines' idea was simply this: to make Mainliners more than airplanes—to make them "homes aloft."

Today the trim uniform of Mainliner blue has become a symbol of the finest in courtesy and hospitality. Fees change for more than 4000 girls have carried this great tradition forward. But the spirit of service remains the same—and there's no other service quite like it.

And so, Patricia, we hope you will become a Mainliner stewardess some day! You'll be joining the "first team" in air travel.

For reservations call or write United Air Lines or an Authorized Travel Agent.




There's a difference when you travel in the Mainliner Manner.



## ORIGINS OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

While most flight attendants today are female, the first flight attendant was a German man named Heinrich Kubis. He served aboard the Schwaben Zeppelin in 1912, and later in his life served on the famous Hindenburg. In 1937, when the Hindenburg burst into flames, he survived by jumping out of a window when it neared the ground.

The term “Steward,” used in the context of transportation, derives from the concept of a chief steward used in maritime transport and dating back to the 14th century. The first airline in the United States to employ male stewards was Stout Airways in 1926. They were soon followed by Western Airlines and Pan American World Airways in 1928 and 1929, respectively.



The first female Stewardess was hired in 1930 by United Airlines. Ellen Church was 25 years old, and a registered nurse. As other airlines began to hire female nurses as flight attendants, they were known as stewardesses or air hostesses. In the 1930s, this job was one of few that permitted women which led to a large number of applicants with limited positions. In December 1935, two thousand women applied for just 43 available positions at Transcontinental and Western Airlines. In 1936, women had nearly overtaken the Stewardess the New York Times published the following requirements for Flight Attendants:

“The girls who qualify for hostesses must be petite; weight 100 to 118 pounds; height 5 feet to 5 feet 4 inches; age 20 to 26 years. Add to that the rigid physical examination each must undergo four times every year, and you are assured of the bloom that goes with perfect health.”

Ruth Carol Taylor graduated from the Bellevue School of Nursing in New York City as a registered nurse in 1955. After working for several years as a nurse, Taylor decided to break the color barrier that existed in the career of airline stewardesses. Wishing to be the first African American stewardess, Taylor applied to Trans World Airline (TWA) but was rejected and subsequently filed a complaint against the company with the New York State Commission on Discrimination. About the same time, the regional carrier Mohawk Airlines expressed interest in hiring minority flight attendants, and Taylor applied for a position. She was selected from 800 black applicants and was hired in December 1957. On February 11, 1958, she became the first African American flight attendant on a flight from Ithaca to New York City. Six months after making aviation history, Taylor married Rex Legall and was forced to resign from Mohawk due to restrictions that flight attendants remain single.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's first plaintiffs were of age discrimination, weight requirements, and bans on marriage. Female flight attendants were fired if they reached age 32 or 35 depending on the airline, were fired if they exceeded weight regulations, and were required to be single upon hiring and fired if they got married. The no-marriage rule was eliminated throughout the US airline industry by the 1980s.

## WHAT IS A PURSER?

On modern airliners, the Purser is the Chief Flight Attendant, responsible for ensuring that all safety procedures are followed.

## FLIGHT ATTENDANTS WHO SAVED LIVES

The main role of a flight attendant is to ensure passenger safety. During emergencies, they are responsible for executing safety procedures. On many occasions, flight attendants have played a crucial role in the outcome of many disastrous situations. Here are a few examples:



Nellie Granger

**1936**—flight attendant Nellie Granger aided survivors after the crash of TWA Flight 1, then walked 4 mi (6.4 km) through a snowstorm to find help, before returning to the crash scene.

**1982** - Air Florida Flight 90 in which Kelly Duncan, the lone surviving flight attendant, passed the only life vest she could find to another passenger. She is recognized in the NTSB report for this "unselfish act."

**1986**— Senior Purser Neerja Bhanot saved the lives of passengers and crew when Pan Am Flight 73 was hijacked. She was killed while protecting children from the terrorists. After her death she received the Special Courage Award from the United States Department of Justice and India's highest civilian honor for bravery, the Ashoka Chakra (military decoration).

**1988**— Aloha Airlines Flight 243 suffered a decompression which tore an 18-foot (5.5 m) section of fuselage away from the plane. The only fatality was flight attendant Clarabelle Lansing who was blown out of the airplane. Flight attendant Michelle Honda was thrown violently to the floor during the decompression but despite her injuries she crawled up and down the aisle reassuring passengers.



Clarabelle Lansing

**1990**—British Airways Flight 5390, in which a flight attendant was able to prevent a pilot from being lost through a cockpit window that had failed.



**1992**—TWA Flight 843, when a TWA Lockheed L-1011 aircraft crashed after an aborted takeoff in 1992. The aircraft was destroyed by fire. Nine flight attendants, along with five off-duty flight attendants, evacuated all 292 persons on board without loss of life. The NTSB in their after accident report noted, "The performance of the flight attendants during the emergency was exceptional and probably contributed to the success of the emergency evacuation."

TWA FLIGHT 843

**September 11, 2001**— Flight Attendants on United Airlines Flight 93, United Airlines Flight 175, and American Airlines Flight 77 worked to protect passengers from assault and keeping in contact with air traffic control on the ground.

**2009**— Flight Attendants on US Airways Flight 1549 successfully evacuated all passengers from the aircraft within 90 seconds despite the fact that the rear was rapidly filling with water. This came to be known as the Miracle on the Hudson.

## STEWARDESS TIMELINE

**December 1903** - The Wright brothers successfully fly the very first heavier than air powered aircraft. The Wright Flyer 1 flew for 120 yards in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

**January 1, 1914** – The world’s first scheduled airline using winged aircraft, St Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line, was born.

**June 1926** -The Ford Trimotor plane had space for 12 passengers and was the first plane to make air travel potentially profitable.

**May 1930** - The first female flight attendant was a 25-year old registered nurse named Ellen Church – who originally wanted to be a pilot. The first flight attendants all needed to be nurses.

**March 1936** - The first kitchens preparing meals in-flight were established by United Airlines.

**Mid 1930’s** – United Airlines instituted the first formal policy of refusing to employ married women for cabin service. Single-women-only hiring and termination upon marriage became industry-wide policies.

**1937** - Women’s Home Companion describes a stewardess as an amalgam of “nurse, ticket-puncher, baggage-master, guide, waitress and little mother of the world”. Job duties included cleaning the cabin, winding the clock, restraining passengers from exiting out the emergency door and throwing garbage out the windows.

**1940’s** – Training takes place at facilities fittingly called “charm farms”, which churned out stewardesses with identical collar-length haircuts and teeth ground into even smiles.

**August 22, 1945** - Flight attendants from United Airlines founded the present-day Association of Flight Attendants union, originally known as the Airline Stewardess Association, or ALSA.

**November 1953** - American Airlines instituted the first age restriction on stewardesses’ continuing employment. The policy called for stewardesses to retire from passenger service upon reaching their 32nd birthday. TWA is the first airline to stop the no marriage rule in 1957.

**Late 1950’s** - Aloha's flight attendants debuted the concept of in-flight entertainment with singing, hula dancing, and ukulele playing.

**1956**—More than 300 women compete to be Miss Skyway, marking the 25th Anniversary of the Stewardess. The winner, Muffett Webb from Memphis, says that her job is a good training to be a wife.





Ruth Carol Taylor

**December 1957** - Ruth Carol Taylor was the first African-American flight attendant in the United States. She was let go within six months because of Mohawk's then-common marriage ban.

**April 17, 1963** - Eight stewardesses held a press conference to indict American Airlines' policy of retiring them at age 32.

**July 2, 1964** - President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII of the Act barred private employers of twenty-five or more workers from discriminating against job applicants and employees on the basis of sex,

race, national origin, or religion.

**July 2, 1965** - The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) began its work of interpreting and implementing Title VII. Stewardesses were among the very first working women to file charges of sex discrimination with the Commission.

**September 1965** - The EEOC issued general guidelines on sex discrimination, including the finding that firing female employees for marriage when the policy was not applied to male co-workers was discriminatory.



**March 23, 1966** - The NYSCHR issued a blanket finding against airline age rules, denying that age represented a "bona fide occupation qualification" for the flight attendant occupation.

**November 9, 1966** - The EEOC issued the general ruling requested by Northwest and the ATA, declaring categorically that sex is not a bona fide occupational qualification for the flight attendant occupation.

**February 24, 1968** - The EEOC released a new blanket ruling denying sex as a bona fide occupational qualification for the flight attendant occupation. The ruling went unchallenged by the airline industry.

**June 20, 1968** - The EEOC declared age and marital restrictions on stewardesses' employment to be illegal sex discrimination under Title VII.

**August 1968** - American Airlines all-female flight attendants finally won the right to marry without forfeiting their jobs.

**November 1968** - United and the Steward & Stewardess Division of the Air Line Pilots Association signed a new contract that granted stewardesses the right to marry and remain employed.

**1971** - The restriction of hiring only women was lifted at all airlines in 1971 due to the decisive court case of Diaz vs. Pan Am.



**Late 1970's** – The term stewardess was replaced by the gender-neutral alternative flight attendant. More recently the term cabin crew or cabin staff has begun to replace flight attendants in some parts of the world, because of the term's recognition of their role as members of the crew.

**1980's** - The no-marriage rule was eliminated throughout the US airline industry. The last such broad categorical discrimination, the weight restrictions, were relaxed in the 1990's through litigation and negotiations.

**1986** – United Airlines pay nearly \$33 million in back pay and reinstate 475 flight attendants who were forced to quit in the mid-1960s because of a no-marriage rule.

**July 13, 1990** - Recognizing the contributions that flight attendants have made to the airline industry over the years, President George H.W. Bush designated July 19 as Flight Attendant Safety Professionals' Day.

As of **January 2018** - AFA represents 50,000 flight attendants at 20 airlines.



**July 2018** — Virgin Airlines Flight Attendants win a summary judgement that states the airline failed to pay for many hours worked and decreased the amount of overtime pay that the employees were entitled to.

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## Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, you are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early
- Visit the restroom before the show starts
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone and any other electronic devices . If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately
  - Do not use your phone for texts, calls or games
  - You cannot make recordings in the theater
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so
- Avoid getting up during the show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly



30 East Tenth Street  
Saint Paul, MN 55101  
651-292-4323 Box Office  
651-292-4320 Group Sales  
[historytheatre.com](http://historytheatre.com)

Written by Kate Sandvik