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"If you were born without wings, do nothing to prevent them from growing."

—Coco Chanel



# Fly Girls

A history as career jet-setters helps Regents Point's former flight attendants' friendship take off.

By Erin Brereton

ON HER FIRST NIGHT at Regents Point, a be.group community in Irvine, California, former United Airlines flight attendant Colleen Whyte met a helpful neighbor—assisting with a stubborn lock—whose wife turned out to be a fellow former flight attendant, from Northwest Airlines.

Whyte soon found out another flight attendant lived across the hall, and she's since met several others. A number live in the community, she says—many worked in the industry when commercial travel was becoming more popular.

In the process, airlines moved away from the more leisurely trips that Jo King, also a Regents Point resident, who flew with Pan Am in the late 1950s, remembers. That shift, she believes, has changed the nature of the job.

"People think it's a really exciting, glamorous job; we were in the heyday of that," King says. "Now, on an hour flight, attendants are supposed to serve something—it's a different life."

## Wanderlust

King became a stewardess—Pan Am's preferred title, she says—following her move from California to New York after college to experience big city life.

"After a year, I said, 'I need to see Europe,'" King says. So she did. Her work took her to London, Paris, Rome and Frankfurt, as well as Tokyo, Scandinavia, Africa, Istanbul and Beirut. Utilizing the airline's employee discount, King also brought her mother, who had emigrated to the U.S. from Italy, back to her village in Sicily.

"I went everywhere," King says. "That was the whole idea." When she got married and left the airline, King and her husband used Pan Am's parting gift—an international ticket—on an extended honeymoon in South America.



Colleen Whyte



Jo King

Although the couple and their three children journeyed over the years to a number of destinations, King now travels primarily to see family in Florida, Texas and Palo Alto, California. She credits her job with introducing her to countless interesting places and people.

## Up In the Air

Whyte, who previously worked in the San

Francisco area as a nurse, wasn't interested when one of her patients suggested she interview for a flight attendant position.

"But then, just for the heck of it, on my next day off I went and interviewed," she says. "And the following day, I was hired." United, according to Whyte, liked to have nurses on longer trips over water, so she frequently flew from Los Angeles to Hawaii.

After four years, Whyte's in-air career ended in 1962, when she got engaged to a Pasadena lawyer she'd met on a blind date two of her co-workers set up.

Whyte—who went back to school at age 40 to pursue a master's degree in marriage and family therapy, and eventually earned a doctorate—embarked on a new adventure.

"Flying gave us a real education—not only of knowing the scope of the world and its cultures, but the confidence in knowing you could carry on a conversation and handle most situations," she says. ●

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