

SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR MAYA



INSPIRATION:
The Tuskegee Airmen, left, were a huge factor in Maya Appiagyei-Yousuf's chosen career path; below, in a plane cockpit; bottom, British Airways' Airbus 380 simulator



BY JOEL CAMPBELL

AS WE celebrate Black History Month, the Ghanaian proverb Sankofa – which means 'to know your past is to know your future' – seems very fitting.

These words are there to inspire and encourage us all, especially the next generation, and for one young lady, 16-year-old Maya Appiagyei-Yousuf, right, these words of wisdom are definitely helping her to reach high for her dreams and aspirations.

From a very young age Maya, brought up in Croydon, south London, had a real passion for planes and flying.

Talking to *Life & Style*, she recalled that being just 12 years old and watching a film about the brave Tuskegee

How Tuskegee airmen inspired next generation of high flyers

ee Airmen – the first African American airforce pilots to fight in the Second World War – was a huge factor in her developing an ambition to fly.

The courageous efforts of the Tuskegee Airmen helped secure victory for Britain and its American allies during the conflict.

Maya was fascinated by their story and decided that she would love to learn how to fly, and set about researching how.

A year after she had watched the film Maya heard about the Air Cadets, a national youth programme run by the Royal Air Force, who have branches all over the country which enables youngsters aged between 12-18 to participate in a huge range of exciting activities two evenings a week.

Armed with some leaflets she asked her mother to attend an recruitment evening with her.

Maya's mother, Catherine, said: "After attending the parents evening with Maya I was extremely impressed by what was available at our local 97th Squadron

in Croydon, not only would the children have the opportunity to learn a range of sports, military drills, adventure weekends away and, of course, flying lessons,

“I will never forget my first lesson – that is when I knew I wanted to be a pilot”

which was Maya's main motivation for wanting to join.

But more importantly, Maya would also be exposed to a new experience where she would have the opportunity to develop team building and leadership skills, which would be invaluable to her in adult life.

"What finally made me sign her up was the discipline, immaculate appearance and self-respect I saw displayed in the young air cadets that gave the presentation that evening and all for just £10 per month subscription fee."

With her mother's support, Maya joined the Air Cadets and it was not long before she became a First Class Cadet. Within a year, she was promoted to Corporal.

During her time at Cadets, Maya was given the opportunity to have flying lessons in a Grob Tutor two-seater aircraft.

"I could not believe the sheer

speed and how quickly we were airborne the sense of total freedom and peace I felt in the air was absolutely incredible," Maya said.

into what it takes to be a pilot for one of the world's leading airlines. The two most memorable moments of my week were the Airbus 380 simulator training and the day we went gliding, which was fantastic.

"I was also so encouraged because British Airways has the UK's most female pilots in an industry which is mainly dominated by men.

"I would really encourage other young people especially girls who have a passion for flying to consider work experience at

"I will never forget my first lesson. I knew at that moment that I definitely wanted to because a pilot."

At 15, Maya, who is a pupil at Croydon High School for girls whose motto is 'May her character inspire others', was asked to find work experience so encouraged by her mother her apply to British Airways (BA) highly competitive Flight Operations Work Experience Programme.

She recalled: "The selection process was like a real interview, a group interview and a one-on-one interview, I was so proud when I heard I had been selected."

In July this year Maya spent one week at British Airways being immersed into the world of a trainee commercial pilot.

Talking about the experience she explained: "My experience at British Airways was truly life-changing.

"I gained a realistic insight

British Airways as it truly opens your eyes to a world of possibilities."

Maya is currently studying hard for her A-levels – but it is her ambition to get her Private Pilots Licence by the time she is 18.

She says: "After my experience at BA I am determined to get my private pilots licence, I have been working hard all summer and have saved enough for my first 10 hours of flying lessons but need a total of 55-60 hours to pass the test costing £150 an hour it is a high mountain but I will do it."

