

Filled with Wonder

Dionna Cameron and the Joy of Taking Flight

The instructor climbed out of the airplane and closed the door behind him.

For weeks, he had occupied the seat beside nineteen-year-old Dionna Cameron, guiding her through takeoffs and landings at Jenks Airport. Together they had practiced the same maneuvers until they felt familiar, almost routine. On this particular Sunday morning, however, he smiled and said the words she had been working toward for months.

“You’re ready.”

The tower had already been notified she would be flying solo. Dionna looked down the runway from the cockpit of a small Cessna 152. Without an instructor beside her, the airplane suddenly felt different. Every decision belonged to her now.

She eased the throttle forward, felt the airplane gather speed, and lifted into the bright Oklahoma sky. The tower operators, knowing it was her first solo flight, encouraged her over the radio as she completed a series of takeoffs

and landings on her own. Years later, she still remembers the exhilaration of that morning and the realization that she could trust herself to do what she had spent months learning.

As a young girl, Dionna had been captivated by anything that soared. After watching the movie *Space Camp*, she dreamed of becoming an astronaut. Although that dream evolved, her fascination with flight never disappeared. She earned her pilot’s license while studying Aviation Sciences at Oklahoma State University and discovered that flying offered more than adventure. It demanded preparation, discipline, and confidence.

“There’s an incredible feeling when the flight check is complete, the tower clears you for takeoff, and the airplane begins to move,” she says. “You add power, pick up speed, and then the airplane does what it was designed to do.”

That same spirit carried into the rest of her life. Roller coasters never intimidated her, and when her father finally decided it was time to go skydiving, she didn’t hesitate.



Dionna Cameron

After years of talking about making the jump, he called with a simple question.

“What are you doing tomorrow?”

By the end of the conversation, father and daughter had made plans to leap from an airplane together.

Looking back, Dionna realizes those adventures weren’t really about airplanes or parachutes. They were possible because she had been raised by people who encouraged curiosity, celebrated effort, and believed she was capable of more than she imagined. Her parents and grandparents gave her both strong roots and the freedom to

explore.

That encouragement became one of the defining gifts of her life.

Although her career eventually moved beyond aviation into leadership and community service, one thread remained constant. Whether mentoring colleagues across multiple states or serving as Executive Director of Young Scholars of Bartlesville, Dionna found her greatest satisfaction in helping people discover possibilities they hadn't yet seen in themselves. Former coworkers still contact her years later to recall conversations she barely remembers. A simple word of encouragement from her, offered almost in passing, gave them the confidence to keep going. What seemed like an ordinary moment to Andrea became a turning point for someone else.



“God used me to be an encouragement to others,” she says.

Today, Dionna finds herself living a chapter she never expected. Health concerns

reshaped the timing of her retirement and changed plans she once imagined. Yet gratitude has become stronger than disappointment. She speaks often about the gift of slowing down, spending time with family, enjoying unhurried conversations, and recognizing blessings that busy years often overlooked. Through every season, her faith in Jesus has remained the steady foundation beneath her life.

“I can’t imagine doing life without my faith in Jesus.”

That same desire to encourage and preserve what matters inspired one of her most personal projects. In 2025, she published *Fishin’ & Lemonade*, a book honoring the memories of her beloved PaPa. Written originally for younger cousins and future generations, the book captures the stories, laughter, wisdom, and simple moments that made him unforgettable. More than a family keepsake, it reflects Dionna’s belief that some stories are simply too valuable to lose.

When asked what she hopes people remember about her, Dionna doesn’t mention flying, leadership positions, or accomplishments. She hopes they remember encouragement. If she could

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leave one piece of advice for women hesitant to try something new, her answer comes quickly.

“Don’t think about something not working. What if it does work?”

Throughout her life, Dionna received encouragement from parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, colleagues, and even a control tower guiding a nineteen-year-old pilot through her first solo flight.

Today, she understands something that nineteen-year-old Dionna could not have known as she sat alone in that cockpit.

The encouragement we give away has a way of finding its way back.

And that may be one of life’s greatest adventures.

“The encouragement we give away has a way of finding its way back.”

About Dionna Cameron

Dionna Cameron is a retired nonprofit and business leader, pilot, author, and lifelong encourager whose life has been shaped by service, faith, and a willingness to embrace new adventures. She is the author of *Fishin' & Lemonade*, an illustrated children's book honoring her beloved PaPa and preserving his legacy for future generations. Whether mentoring others, taking to the skies, or writing for children, Dionna believes life's greatest opportunities often begin with a simple "yes." She and her husband, David, enjoy spending time with family, traveling, and discovering wherever the next adventure leads.

Learn more about *Fishin' & Lemonade*: <https://www.amazon.com/Fishin-Lemonade-Dionna-Cameron/dp/B0G6XPVVR5>.

About the Writer and Permissions

Angie Thompson is a fundraising strategist, consultant, and storyteller who helps nonprofits, organizations, and purpose-driven individuals shape messages that inspire action. Her work blends message development, strategic communications, and community-rooted storytelling, informed by award-winning experience in film, television, and philanthropy.

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