

[Ann Blumensaadt](#)

By [Anne W. Semmes](#)

If you've been watching the new ABC-TV series "Pan Am," you probably get the feeling that the life of a stewardess back in the '60s was full of adventure, luxury, and glamour.

Truth is -- it was, according to Greenwich resident [Ann Blumensaadt](#), who was a stewardess with Pan Am for more than 20 years, from early 1969 to 1991.

Blumensaadt, who recently returned from a gathering of World [Wings International](#), a philanthropic organization made up of former Pan Am stewardesses, says the show was a hot topic among the 400 former frequent flyers in attendance.

Greenwich Citizen spoke to Blumensaadt about the show and the highlights of her own high-flying career.

So, what was the reaction to the "Pan Am" show by your Pan Am colleagues?

The show is a plus, was the consensus. This TV show has been a shot in the arm. [Nancy Hult Ganis](#), the producer, was there. She was in my graduating class.

It has increased our membership in [World Wings International](#), Inc. People are calling and say they want to join. It's a great plus to getting the Pan Am story out.

I think the show is done very well. It presents things in a positive light. Its time period is 1963, which was a few years before I joined. When I started flying, I flew mostly Boeing 707s. Each aircraft had a name such as Pan Am Clipper "Star Of The Sea." In 1970 they introduced the 747s, though they were always called Clippers.

What's not true to life in the show?

In the TV show, the girls have long hair. But we had to have our hair cut short -- ear length. But, look ladies, it's not a documentary -- it's a TV show, and all the writers for the show are young -- they like the visuals.

Also, the flight attendants are wearing hats in first class. We only wore our hats in the airport and to the airplane, but we took them off when serving. Our training was like being in the military. We had to wear a girdle in order to fit into our uniforms.

And the show has the captains as very young. We never had a captain that young.

Was there a lot of romancing in the air in your Pan Am days?

I didn't date a pilot but I did have friends who married pilots, and a few flight attendants married passengers.

Where did you fly?

I was first based in Miami, as I spoke Spanish. My goal was to see Central and South America, Caracas, Buenos Aires, Mexico, Costa Rica, San Juan. In seven years I did that.

I was then transferred to New York City -- it was always the best place to be. A jumping off place for Europe, the Middle East, Tehran, Beirut, India, Tokyo and Africa.

Can you share one of your memorable experiences?

For two months, at the end of 1975 and beginning of 1976, I had a temporary assignment in Tehran. Pan Am had an agreement with the Shah's government to fill their 747s with Iranian pilgrims going to Mecca. While we were living at the Hilton, [Iran Air](#) gave us free tickets to visit Iranian cities. A friend and I traveled to Persepolis, Shiraz and Isfahan. We also went to Kabul, which was fascinating. It was not destroyed then. We were staying in the InterContinental that was part of a hotel chain Pan Am owned then.

Did you have any scary experiences aloft?

One time, we were getting ready to land in Madrid when the landing gear didn't come down. But it finally did come down. Overall, I was very fortunate.

How about famous people encounters on your flights?

In the 1980s, when Pan Am started flying 747s from L.A. to New York, serving caviar and champagne in first class, [Elizabeth Taylor](#) was aboard. She was beautiful. All the men were impressed. I never wanted to go up and ask for an autograph.

When [Charles Lindbergh](#) was aboard, he always sat in the back even though he was on the Pan Am Board of Directors. He didn't want to draw attention to himself. But he would always introduce himself to the crews.

What are the major differences you see in flying today?

Before 747s, before it became mass transportation, the big difference is the passengers dressed up to fly, and now they don't as much.

In my day it was a much younger work force. You had to be 21, a college graduate, unmarried and speak another language. Pan Am needed a lot of languages as they were flying all over the world.

And, you had to retire at 32 -- but they changed that in the early 1970s. Now there is no age restriction. Now there's a more diverse work force. They did not hire male flight attendants until 1972.

And in my day, we were expected to cook and I had no clue about timing or anything, as I had never cooked before. The first time I cooked eggs to order -- I had to scramble, soft boil or fry -- I had egg yolks in my hair, egg shells everywhere. We later just heated up omelets. We were cooking roast beef to order, and steaks. I was like the Mad Hatter in the galley. You had two or

three ovens going, roast beef in one and fish in another. You had to watch or the fish would be cremated! I learned on the job.

Is the attraction to be a stewardess as strong today as it was back in the 1970s?

It's still a popular choice. The economy has had some effect, of course, and right now we're being flooded with applicants. It has an appeal for those people coming out of other jobs who want to travel.