

THE STORY OF BESSIE COLEMAN

BY

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This is the story about Bessie Coleman, who was the first black woman who became a pilot.

Bessie Coleman was born on January 26th between 1892 and 1896 in Atlanta, Texas. At the time Bessie was born there were no airplanes.

Bessie spent much of her childhood working in the cotton fields. When there was little work in the fields, Bessie's mother sent her and her brothers and sisters to school.



Bessie was very good at maths, so she could make some money by doing the bookkeeping at the plantation. She also took in laundry to earn enough money to go to college. But after a year Bessie had to leave college because she ran out of money.

She became a manicurist in Chicago. This was around 1919 and she heard about the new flying machines then. From this time on she wanted to become a pilot.

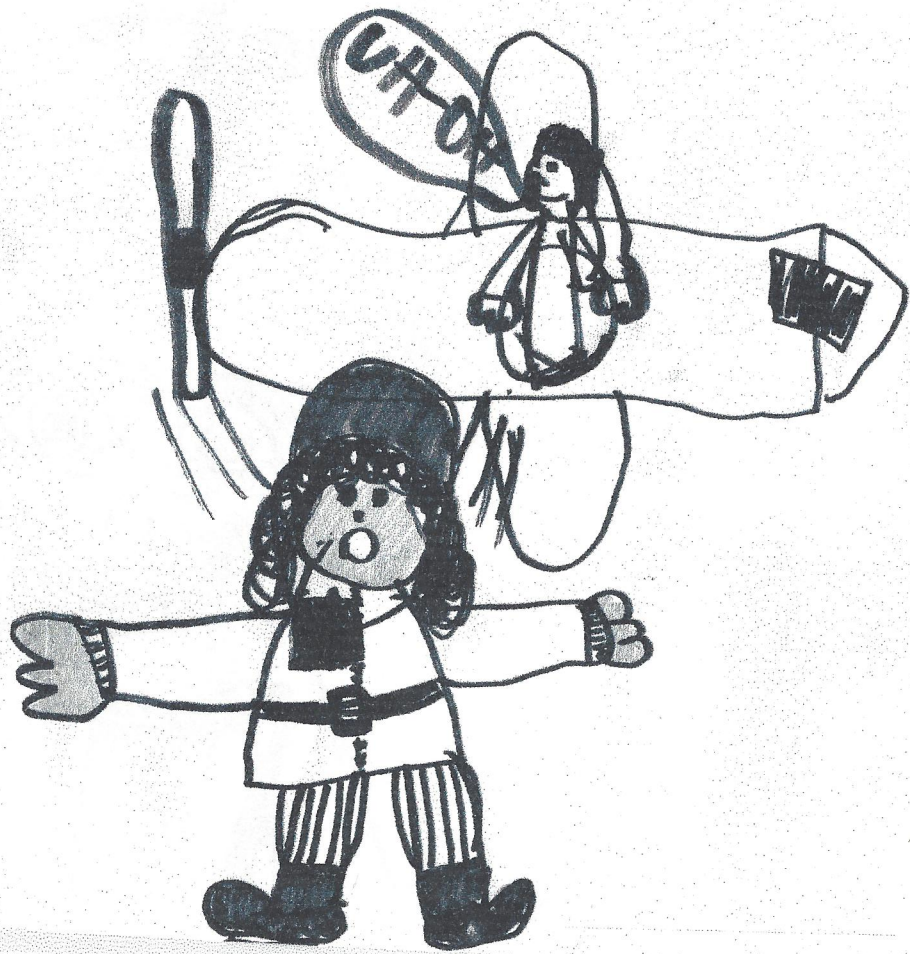


But no American Flying school would admit her because they were only for whites. But then somebody paid for Bessie to go to a flying school in France. There she not only learned to fly but also to jump by parachute and to do stunts by an airplane.

When she finally received her international pilot's license in 1922 she didn't get a job as a pilot in a passenger airplane because she was a woman. So she made her living by doing stunts. Everybody wanted to see her, and she became known as "Brave Bessie".



Bessie always wanted to help other African Americans. Once she found out that African Americans were not allowed to watch airshows. So Bessie said she would not fly in the show until they were allowed to watch. She dropped information sheets from her plane to let them know that they were admitted to the show.



Bessie also wanted to start a flying school for African Americans. In 1926 when her mechanic was piloting the plane, it suddenly spun out of control. Bessie was not wearing a seatbelt, and she was thrown from the plane at 2000ft.

Through Bessie's example many other African Americans decided that they would become pilots.