



## Bernice "B" Steadman

March 18, 1926 - March 18, 2015

Bernice "B" Trimble Steadman, age 89, passed away at her home in Traverse City, on Wednesday, March 18, 2015. Following is a biography chronicling the life of this incredible lady. No services are planned at this time. Arrangements were made by Wolfe-O'Neill Funeral Home, our family serving yours. Bernice "B" Trimble Steadman Bernice, known simply as "B" to her friends, was born July 9th, 1925 in Rudyard, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She was the youngest child of Robert Harry Trimble and Laura Trimble with four sisters, Margaret, Marjorie, Marian and Dorothy Jean, and a brother, Robert H. Trimble, Jr. When just 1 1/2 years old, her life was shaped by tragedy when the family home burned and her father gave his life trying unsuccessfully to save her sisters and brother. She has dedicated her life to them, striving to be the best she could be and disdaining mediocrity. After the terrible fire, she and her mother (Laura) moved to Pontiac where Laura met and married Ray Whipple. They moved to Flint where her brother Ray Whipple was born and she attended Flint Central with a dream of flying. As she said in her memoir, she could not remember a time she did not want to fly. Although she had no one in the family who had ever aspired to fly, she remembered fondly her cousin, Leonard Jacobson, who lived in the Upper Peninsula and created magnificent model airplanes. "B" began flying after graduation when finally able to earn enough for the lessons from her job on the inspection line at AC Sparkplug. She earned her pilot's license before she had obtained a driver's license and began flying professionally the same day she was licensed as a

commercial pilot in 1946. She had begun classes at Flint's Junior College but flying was her dream and her activities as a commercial pilot and instructor consumed her time, leaving no time for further studies. After she obtained the necessary flight ratings to teach, for several years she instructed and flew charter for a fixed base operation at Bishop Airport in Flint. She supervised the maintenance shop as well and became known as Miss "B", a nickname that remained with her for her entire life. When the opportunity came, she started and operated her own flight school, charter service and fixed base operation at Flint under her family name of "Trimble" Aviation. She was active in all phases of general aviation including training of pilots and sale of aircraft from single engine through twins. When able to get away from her business, B flew in numerous air races all over the country. She won each of the major races at least once including the All Woman Transcontinental Air Race (Powder Puff Derby), the International Air Race and the Michigan Small race. (A race she founded) She was acknowledged to be one of the finest professional pilots in the country and finished in the top five or ten places in every race she entered, racing without specially prepared aircraft, using planes off her flight line or loaned by friends for the competition. She was one of the first women to obtain an Airline Transport Rating (ATR), the highest rating available for any pilot and was the only woman to instruct reserve air force officers after the war. She was proud that she taught more than two hundred men to fly who went on to become airline or corporate jet pilots although the Airlines would not hire women pilots in those days. She received numerous awards including recognition as Michigan's Outstanding Pilot by the Michigan Aeronautics Commission. In 1956 she flew the Zontians from Flint who helped establish the Zonta Club of Traverse City. After moving to Traverse City in 1971 she was active in Zonta and was elected club president many years later. In December of 2001 she was selected by her Traverse City Zonta Club as its Woman of the Year in recognition of her service to the community. In 1959 she married Robert Steadman and they lived in Montrose and Ann Arbor before moving to Traverse City. They have one surviving son,

Michael, having lost their son Darryl in 2001, and two grandchildren, Melissa and Joshua. In 1961 she was selected as one of the original 25 women pilots to be tested for possible participation in the space program and was one of only 13 women who passed the Mercury Program's exceptionally difficult medical examination, meeting or exceeding the standards of performance on the same tests taken by the Mercury astronauts. Unfortunately, just after jet training for the 13 was approved, NASA decided not to allow women to become astronauts. Sadly, it took many years for NASA to accept women as mission specialists, much less as pilots in the Space Program. NASA chose to overlook the overwhelming evidence of their competence in handling military aircraft, as demonstrated by the incredible contribution of the WASPS and the jet records set by Jaqueline Cochrane and Jacqueline Auriol (France.) In 1964, President Johnson appointed B as one of the charter members of the President's Women's Advisory Committee on Aviation and she was instrumental in the initiation of several programs since adopted for general aviation, including the "Gold Seal" program for flight instructors. In 1968 she was appointed chairperson of the Airport Commission for Ann Arbor, Michigan and actively participated in developmental planning for expansion of the Ann Arbor Airport. In the same year, she was elected President of the International Ninety Nines (99s), the largest organization of women pilots in the world. She was especially proud that she and Page Shamburger co-founded the International Women's Air & Space Museum during her tenure as Vice President and President of the 99s. Since then, the Museum has been on its own and she has been the Museum President or Executive Vice President for most of its lifetime. The Museum is now located at Cleveland's Burke Lakefront Airport and "B" served as Honorary Chairman of the Board until spring of 2002. In 1973, under the name "B Steadman and Company," she started a successful women's clothing store on Front Street in Traverse City, specializing in classic styles. When brain surgery forced her out of business in 1975, severely impairing her cognitive abilities, she fought back with the help

of family and her Zonta friends, relearned her ability to drive and looked for new challenges. She accepted a position with the State, speaking around northern Michigan on the subject of energy conservation. She struggled for a time learning directions and map reading but gradually fought her way back to a strong level of competence. When the International Women's Air & Space Museum she had founded needed help, she assumed her leadership role again and was instrumental in the relocation of the Museum from Centerville, Ohio to Cleveland. In 1996, working with Darryl, she started her own Taxi company in Traverse City and was actively involved in the daily operation of that company, including driving cab on a regular basis. With co-author Jody Clark she wrote her memoirs and published the book in September of 2001 under the title, *Tethered Mercury: A Pilot's Memoir: The Right Stuff, The Wrong Sex*. The book has received exceptional reviews. B is a warm and compassionate woman whose friends become friends for life. Her very special friend, Berniece Vaillancourt, attended Flint Central with B more than seventy years ago and learned to fly with B. They have been as sisters all these years and have shared their lives and families. She has been a tremendous motivational speaker for women's rights, in demand across the country with her message as a woman of humble beginnings who aspired to and reached the highest levels of what had been a primarily male profession. Her remarkable life and numerous contributions to the advancement of women were recognized when she was inducted into the Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame in October of 2002 and the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 2003. She is one of a small handful of women honored by both Halls. The Halls of Fame citations are attached. In 2007 she was further honored by presentation of a Doctor of Science Degree by the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Bernice "B" Steadman*

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January 30, 2023 at 04:02 AM



“ *Bernice "B" Steadman*

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January 30, 2023 at 01:03 AM