Joy and enthusiasm — there’s not a whole lot of that going around in this Covid-19 restricted world. But talking to Beth White and Julie Torres reminds us that such emotions are possible — and they live them every day.

There are many paths to becoming a pilot. For high school senior Julie Torres, the path began with an internship at Julie’s local airport to learn aviation mechanics. Julie saw herself as an average student with no clear direction when her high school counselor referred her to Beth White, an Eastern New England Chapter Ninety-Nine and Education Design Coach at Big Picture Learning. The program encourages and supports schools to design individual education programs that are deeply meaningful to each student.

Julie’s long-range goal is to become an airline pilot and mechanic. To feel safe flying, Julie wants to know all the nuts and bolts and parts of an airplane. Beth helped Julie apply for and receive a Harbor Freight Fellowship, a program that supports young people who want to learn a trade, such as airplane mechanics. Julie is now interning with airframe and powerplant mechanic George Coy at Franklin County Airport in Swanton, Vermont.

She loves every minute of her apprenticeship and devotes as many hours as she can to hands-on learning with George. She fills in her own logbook to keep track of her hours and what she is learning. Beth also logs hours towards her AMT (Aviation Maintenance Technician), learning alongside George.

“I’ve always kind of been an average student when I’m in a school environment, but since I’ve participated in Harbor Freight, my vision of how my education should look has changed significantly,” Julie said. “I love being in the hangar. Like the saying, if you love what you do, you never work a day in your life.”

“There is just something incredible to be the member of a group founded by the most brave, bold, badass women who came before me. I try to capture these incredible women in my paintings because they inspire me to continue their legacy.”

Beth White: Living Your Dreams

By Jann Clark, Eastern New England Chapter
When Covid-19 shut down Julie's high school indefinitely and the hangar at the airport temporarily, Beth reached out to King Schools and arranged for Julie to study their online course for Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics. It kept her moving in the right direction until the hangar reopened, and Julie spends Thursdays through Sundays learning from her mentor. Julie and Beth have calls several times a week.

Currently, Beth is mentoring 10 young people who are learning to become pilots. Beth solicited and received assistance from Sporty’s Pilot Shop for her young aviators, including access to Sporty’s ground school and discounted materials for the students to plan their cross-country flights online together.

Beth’s experiences led her to mentor young aspiring pilots. “Breaking barriers and finding paths to achieve my ambitions is not new to me. As someone who was once told by my high school guidance counselor I would never get into college because I came from a farming family, I learned how to overcome adversity.”

She not only went to college, she eventually earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She spent time teaching in conventional schools and volunteering in her community. From these experiences, she realized the value of having advocates and pathways to opportunities for young people. Conventional classroom education does not work for many students, while alternative ways to recognize and foster their interests can turn any student into a passionate learner.

Sometime after Beth earned her Ph.D., she read Beryl Markham’s autobiography and realized she too could learn to fly. She joined her local EAA chapter early into her journey to become a private pilot.

Although she has been a private pilot for just over a year, Beth plans to become a CFI and instruct young student pilots who would not otherwise have access to such an opportunity. She has no interest in moving on to the airlines — teaching and inspiring young people is her passion.

After about 100 hours of flying, Beth was asked by a friend to deliver a plane he had just sold in Vermont to the buyer in Oklahoma. Flying solo for 20 hours over three days, Beth racked up challenging experiences along the way, such as thunderstorms and tying down the plane between two picnic tables. Sharing stories like this helps her inspire young people who need constant encouragement to work towards and fulfill their dreams.

Along with the work she does at Big Picture Learning, Beth is the scholarship chairwoman of EAA Chapter 613 and supports youth in applying for aviation scholarships. She herself has received scholarships from the Eastern New England Ninety-Nines and the Aero Club of New England to continue her training.

She is also an accomplished artist, and her aviation-themed paintings have been featured at her EAA Chapter’s annual Wings and Wheels Fly-In and at the Burlington, Vermont, International Airport.

A member of The 99s since January 2019, Beth finds her association with other women pilots to be a source of inspiration. “Many speak of the importance of seeing yourself reflected in the types of jobs or work you want to do in the world, which resonates especially deep for me,” said Beth. In her travels across the country, whenever she sees a pilot who is a woman, she can’t help but approach her and ask if she’s a 99.