This audio documentary aims to depict the journey of Captain Nerin Salem, who went from a child who wasn’t taken seriously to being one of the most successful female pilots in Egypt. Hear her story through her own words, including the challenges she faced and how she overcame them.

COLD: Airport Announcement Chime (00:04)

That grabs the attention of any passenger waiting at the airport.

COLD: Airport Announcement Chime (00:04)
FADE IN: AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENT PLAYS FOR THEN FADE OUT (00:06)

Being a pilot isn’t easy. With the hectic hours and long flights, it’s pretty stressful.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Endless Love - Dirty Mac (0-38 seconds from the start of the song)

The first female pilot in Egypt, Latifa Elnadi, got her license in 1933. She was also the first African and Arab female pilot in the world. Eight-five years later, there are more female pilots than people would imagine, but still, that number is insignificant to that of male pilots. For example, in America, female pilots make up only seven percent of all pilots. The case is even worse in Egypt, where the percentage of female pilots isn’t even mentionable. The mere existence of female pilots raise Egyptian eyebrows.

FADE OUT: Endless Love - Dirty Mac

Nerin Salem (NS): “I get all the eyebrows up when I say among any people that I’m a pilot.” (00:10)

That was my mom, Nerin Salem. She’s been flying for twenty years, and she’s one of the first female pilots in the country.

FADE IN: SOUND OF WORKSHOP MACHINES (00:10)
It’s a chilly evening, and we’re standing on the sidewalk in front of her workshop—she also
makes home accessories and furniture as a hobby—and she’s telling me her story.

*FADE OUT: SOUND OF WORKSHOP MACHINES*

*NS: “Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to fly. Maybe at the age of six or seven. My
parents didn’t react except by laughing.” (00:10)*

Let’s rewind. Growing up in Zamalek, an area in Cairo, Egypt where the elite used to live,

*FADE IN: SOUND OF STREETS (00:17)*

Mom attended Port Said British School, including elementary, middle and high school. Once
she finished High School, she was hopeful that she would be able to join the aviation academy
and follow her dreams.

*FADE OUT: SOUND OF STREETS*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: The Whole Other - Breakfast Alone (0-57 seconds from the start of
the song)*

But her parents claimed that females were not allowed to fly. That lie changed the direction of
her life.

*NS: “I went to Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management and after I graduated I found
out that there are female pilots in Egypt.” (00:11)*

Fast forward ten years.

*NS: “At that time it was too late, because I already got married and I didn’t have any
money.” (00:06)*

She worked other jobs for about eight years and pulled together the money. But it was a lot of
money. The entire trip costed around twenty-five thousand US dollars, equivalent to
seventy-five thousand dollars today.

*NS: “I already had my daughter, who’s you, so I thought at that time it was now or
never.” (00:07)*
While my mom was learning to fly in America, she left me with my aunt and grandparents.

*Rasha Salem (RS): “I never felt a responsibility, I felt more it’s a…it’s fun, it’s adventure that we’re taking.”* (00:09)

That’s my aunt, Rasha Salem.

*RS: “We had a really great bond from the day you were born so it wasn’t anything new that we had to work on or acquire.”* (00:07)

A memorable thing that happened during that time is the creation of my aunt’s famous nickname. And until today, everyone calls her by it and I take all the credit for it.

*RS: “At this time, you would say the ‘R’ ‘V’, so my name is Rasha, so you would say Vasha. But I think that was too long for you so my name was Va. And that was my favorite name, until now. I just love people calling me this name. This name is the closest to my heart.”* (00:23)

My aunt and I are very proud of everything that mom has accomplished. But getting her license after finishing at the aviation academy was just the beginning.

*NS: “After you receive your basic flying license, you have to study a type of an aircraft. So basically, you join an airline and you start studying for this kind of aircraft, from ground school to simulator and then to line training and then you get your license to fly as a co-pilot on this aircraft. The process takes from one year to one and a half years.”* (00:31)

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: The 126ers - Missing My Girl*

The first time getting on a plane is a memorable experience.

*FADE IN: PLANE TAKING OFF (00:17)*

The rush of blood as the plane takes off, the world getting smaller and smaller below. For mom, the first time she flew for an airline was unforgettable. She’s smiling big as she recalls the flight that meant so much to her.
NS: “I can’t explain my feeling because I was more than happy, excited, thrilled. The first time I flew an Airbus 320, after I landed and disembarked the aircraft, I stood there looking at the aircraft and I thought, ‘well, did I fly this big bird in the sky and then got it back on the ground?’ I couldn’t believe myself.” (00:30)

Hearing people’s reactions is always my favorite part of my mom’s stories.

NS: “Well, the good ones I usually get from other women. They say ‘you make us very proud’. ” (00:07)

Sometimes they can’t wrap their heads around it.

NS: “‘You drive an airplane? And I go, ‘yes, I fly an airplane.’” (00:04)

But that wasn’t the case for the male pilots she worked with. One of the most striking stories my mom told me is about an older, male pilot she flew with, and after they landed the plane,

NS: “Some of them made fun of me, and some of them just mocked me.” (00:04)

he looked over to her and said, “didn’t you already prove yourself and proved that you can fly just like a man? It’s time for you to go back home, back to the kitchen where you belong.”

It definitely wasn’t an easy road, but my mom inspires me more and more as each day passes by. To passengers on their way to becoming female pilots,
FADE OUT: The 126ers - Summer Love

FADE IN: AIRLINE SEATBELT ANNOUNCEMENT (00:09)

buckle up and have a safe flight!

FADE OUT: AIRLINE SEATBELT ANNOUNCEMENT

This audio documentary was produced by Kenzie Ali AboHamad for the Audio Production course at the American University in Cairo, taught by Professor Kim Fox in the Spring semester of 2018. Special thanks to Nerin Salem and Rasha Salem. Music Pieces used are, Dirty Mac by Endless Love, Breakfast Alone by The Whole Other, Plastic or Paper by Wes Hutchinson, Dark Walk by Kevin MacLeod, and Summer Love by The 126ers.

(Dark Walk by Kevin MacLeod is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
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