



## **DR. BARBARA BELL, CAPTAIN U.S. NAVY (RET)**

Dr. Barbara Bell is an inspiring speaker, author, and leader who empowers women, men, and teens, encouraging and teaching them to fly high in their personal and professional lives.

Growing up in small-town Michigan, Barbara had her head in the clouds. “As a kid, lying on the grass, seeing planes go by, I wasn’t thinking about being a pilot, because there was no context for that for women in the 1960s,” she remembers. “When I dreamed of flying, I was always the airplane.”

An accomplished student and athlete, she received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy at a time when only six percent of the student body was female. After becoming one of Annapolis’ first women graduates, she continued on to a distinguished career as an aviator and Naval Flight Test Officer, during which she flew more than 1,600 hours in 35 different types of U.S. and Allied aircraft. In 1992, she and fellow aviators went to Capitol Hill to successfully repeal the combat exclusions laws, opening combat aircraft and ships to women in the services. **She is happy to report that women now fly unrestricted in the services.**

Today, Barbara draws upon the skills she developed throughout her trailblazing years of service to help young women find the courage to test new and innovative ways of thinking and doing. Recently named one of the **American Society of Naval Engineers 30 Inspirational Women in Naval Engineering, STEM and Beyond**, she’s known for her empathy, as well as her ability to ignite the spark young women need to envision their dreams and chart a path forward.

A passionate and experienced advocate for the next generation of women thought leaders and girls in STEM, Barbara is the former director of the Center for STEM Education for Girls in Nashville and is now an adjunct Professor of Leadership at Vanderbilt University. Her book, *Flight Lessons: Navigating Through Life’s Turbulence and Learning to Fly High*, released in 2022, encourages young women - especially those in STEM - to learn to fly high in their lives.

“Grit and persistence are built one day at a time, one step at a time,” she says. “You have to continue to work.” She believes in tackling challenges from a higher perspective. She sees the world differently as a result of flying, “I understand that sense of adventure: building up speed, and then the moment of lift. That sense of being *up*. It’s like a whole new world. I’ve lived and flown in all three dimensions.”

Dr. Bell holds a B.S. in systems engineering from the United States Naval Academy, an M.S. in astronautical engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School, an M.A. in theology from Marylhurst University, and a doctorate in education from Vanderbilt University. She is also a graduate of U.S. Navy Test Pilot School.