

**OLGA E. CUSTODIO**  
**LT COL USAFR (RET)**  
**CAPTAIN (RET) AMERICAN AIRLINES**  
**SHORT BIO**

The first Latina to complete U.S. Air Force Undergraduate Pilot Training and graduate in the top 5% of her class with a fighter qualification to fly the T-38 as an instructor pilot, **Olga E. Custodio** points to three principles that have helped her become successful in a profession dominated by men: overcoming self-doubt, staying open to possibilities, and seeing herself as an equal.

The path to her dream, however, has not been a walk in the park. While studying at the University of Puerto Rico, she tried to participate in the university's Reserve Officer Training Corps program but denied the opportunity, as women were not allowed at that time.

But Olga never gave up hope, and she went on to fulfill her dream of becoming a commissioned military officer—and then some. A female military aviation pioneer, she served for 24 years in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. As a pilot instructor pilot, she received an Aviation Safety Award for superior airmanship for her handling of an engine failure in-flight emergency. After transitioning to the U.S. Air Force Reserves, Olga became the first Latina commercial airline pilot and later upgraded to Captain, flying for American Airlines. Besides the T-38, Olga flew the T-41, B-727, F-100, B-757, and B-767.

Today, Olga is retired with over 11,000 flight hours to her name. Now a community leader, she works with several nonprofit organizations that advocate for inspiring and empowering students, especially those from underserved communities, to pursue careers in aviation and aerospace. As a STEM advocate, she has also volunteered her time as a speaker and role model at local schools, universities, corporations, and military base groups, encouraging young women and men to reach for their dreams. Olga is a mentor with the Women in Aviation International, Aviation Explorers, and the School of Aeronautics of the Inter American University in Puerto Rico.

By pioneering many firsts during her career, Olga has shattered stereotypes and served as a powerful role model for aspiring to become a pilot. From breaking barriers and overcoming challenges as a woman in a male-dominated profession throughout her career, Olga has gained essential life insights and perspectives that she shares with everyone, especially women working to achieve their dreams.

Olga lives in San Antonio, Texas, with her husband of 46 years, Edwin—who is also her best friend, supporter, and advocate for everything she sponsors. They have two children, Marcia and Edwin II, and one grandson, Jedi.