

Black History Month: Realizing a dream

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In the February issue of onboard magazine American Way, Tracy Hardin, an Aviation Maintenance Technician at American's Base Maintenance facility in Tulsa, Oklahoma, shared how his brother and a school speaker — an American Airlines team member — changed the course of his life, and how he hopes his experiences overcoming adversity will positively influence the next generation.

Tracy Hardin

"When I think about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream for America, it often calls to mind my own dream of one day working for American Airlines. It wasn't an aspiration I had right away, but one I knew was within reach once I discovered it.

I grew up near Dallas with six brothers and sisters. We didn't have much — sometimes, not even running water. On top of that, my parents both died when I was 7. I moved in with my older brother in a rough neighborhood in the city and was presented with a choice: I could take a path that wouldn't end well, or I could choose the straight and narrow with the goal of making something better happen in my life.

With my brother's help, I chose the latter by enrolling at Skyline High School, which offered an aviation program. My first year, during a career day event, an African-American Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) from American was the featured speaker. I remember him clearly because, for the first time, I was seeing someone with a successful career who looked just like me. My dream was born.

I graduated high school with my airframe license and joined the Air Force, where I spent five years working as a line mechanic on the Boeing E-3 Sentry and obtained my powerplant license. My dream came full circle 33 years ago

when I left the military and joined American's Tulsa Maintenance Base, where I still work as an AMT today.

In addition to keeping our aircraft safe and airworthy, I'm grateful to be in a position that allows me to give back. As an executive board member for the Transport Workers Union Local 514, I support the community causes and veterans initiatives that matter most to the 4,200 members of our chapter. One that's particularly personal to me is breast cancer awareness because I lost my first wife to the disease in 1998.

If overcoming the turbulent times in my life resonates in some way, I hope it's this: Regardless of the color of their skin or the obstacles in their path, I want children to know their dreams are always within reach. And, as we celebrate Black History Month, I hope they'll look to American as a company that connects people and brings their dreams to life, because it did just that for me."