

IDA'S FAVORITE CELEBRITIES FLY AWAY

Who is your favorite celebrity?
Is it a movie actor? Musician? Singer?



What if you had special access to meet your idol in person, get their autograph, and actually talk with them a while?

For most of her life, Brookdale resident Ida Settle has had a celebrity crush that is different than most. Her favorite group performs more loudly than any band. They have been around for 65 years. They travel more miles to more cities, and can draw crowds of more than a million people at a time.

Yet, they don't sing.

A few months ago, Ida got to meet these unique celebrities -

The
Blue Angels.



A Girl's Favorite Sunday Show

After her mother died when Ida was four, she was raised by her father. He was a jack-of-all-trades who was fascinated by airplanes. He once had his photo taken with his favorite celebrity, the first trans-Atlantic pilot Charles Lindbergh.

Ida's father shared his vicarious love of flight with his daughter each Sunday when they drove to the local airfield in Springfield, Illinois, parked in the perfect spot and ate lunch while watching the planes take off. This was a Sunday ritual for Ida from when she was seven years old until age 17. While other fathers were absorbed in football games and other teenage girls were discovering American Bandstand, this father-daughter pair was thrilled by the roar of engines that overpowered gravity to climb the sky.

Rosie the Riveter's Sister

Ida's sister, Isabelle was 16 years older – a young adult who had already moved to Chicago to work for Douglas Aircraft. There, Isabelle was among the women who filled the shortage of male mechanics by working as riveters on a production line of C-54 Skymaster transport planes. Ida's sister was among the ladies represented by the WWII icon "Rosie the Riveter," popularized by posters and a 1942 hit song.

A Flying Role Model

In high school, Ida's math teacher was a pilot who owned her own plane. This Amelia Earhart style heroine let her students build model airplanes in class as a math project. She took them on field trips to the local flight school, Parks Air College. When Settle applied there for flight instruction in her last year of high school, she was turned down because that flight academy would not accept female students.



An Attraction to Machines

Denied her dream of flight, Settle eventually chose the career path of nursing. While in training at St. John's Hospital in Springfield, she was required to serve rotations through all departments, and felt particularly drawn to the Radiology department. Big machines still appealed to her.

After training and certification in that specialty, Ida Settle began her career as a Radiology Technician, working at several prestigious hospitals in the Chicago area. While at Northwestern Memorial, Settle worked alongside a doctor who would later become a unique flight celebrity – a space shuttle astronaut.

Ida and Isabelle: Air Show Groupies

In the 1980s, Ida and her sister began a tradition of attending the Chicago Air Show, an annual event that can draw between one and two million spectators to the beachfront of Lake Michigan. The Blue Angels precision flying performance was the favorite part of the show for the Settle sisters.

Ida was no mere casual fan. With the same zeal that many men apply to sports statistics, Ida knew the Blue Angels pilots' names, their ranking number, and their function in each formation. She thought it would be such a thrill if she and her sister could just get a chance to see their favorite celebrities up close.



Ida with her sister Isabelle and three Blue Angel pilots behind her.



The Blue Angels Meet Their Biggest Fans

Brookdale and the Wish of a Lifetime organization made Ida's dream celebrity meeting come true. Resident Programs Coordinator Mary Grimes-Kelly worked out all the details.

On a warm August morning, while crowds gathered on the beach of Lake Michigan, Ida and Isabelle were driven to the Gary International Airport where the Blue Angels were prepping for their flight. There were no large crowds at the hangar. Ida and Isabelle were among the lucky few who would get to see the planes take off in a thunderous roar.

Ida assumed she would only have a chance to wave from a distance as the pilots walked out to their jets. But instead, they came over to visit with the Settle sisters for a while. The pilots were impressed that Ida knew their names and flight numbers. And they were honored to meet a real-life example of WWII icon "Rosie the Riveter."

Ida could not believe that she was actually having a conversation with her celebrity heroes. In spite of their status as best of the best, Ida was surprised that "They talked with us just like they were normal, real people," she said. The pilots presented Ida and Isabelle with an autographed photo of their flight team. In turn, Ida gave the flight leader a gift – a fine handcrafted wooden pen she had obtained from a friend for this occasion. He thanked Ida sincerely and placed her pen in the sleeve pocket of his flight suit. (That pen may have gone on the flight.)

Aerial Acrobatics

Back at Lake Michigan, Ida and Isabelle watched the Blue Angels they just met fly their F-18 Hornets in formations as close as 18 inches apart. The pilots performed rolls, loops, breaks, and a trick called "The Knife Edge" in which two planes fly straight at one another full throttle, then tilt their wings vertically at the last second to narrowly avoid a collision in a close pass.

Not Yet Back on Earth at Brookdale Lake View

When she saw Ida upon her return, Brookdale's Mary Grimes-Kelly remarked, "She was floating on air, without a plane."

In her apartment, Ida keeps model replicas of the airplanes she watched on Sundays with her father all those decades ago. And whenever she hears the sound of a jet airliner passing over her Brookdale community, Ida remembers the day she met her celebrity heroes in blue.



Ida and her sister Isabelle are flanked by three Blue Angel pilots.

