
Autobiography of BRUCE G. NELSON

Modeler since 1952 Birth Date: December 27, 1941 AMA Number: 6005

Submitted by BGN (3/03)

Transcribed & Edited by SS (3/03)

Career:

- His club hosted the first U.S. Scalemasters in the Pacific Northwest in 1981 and he was the contest director; for the next two years he was the contest manager and then the contest director again; his wife, Marcy, did all of the organization work – without her help, it could not have happened
- Proxy flew at the 1982 U.S. Scalemasters and placed second after having only flown the plane three times
- Helped find a location for the AMA Nationals when they came to the Pacific Northwest and worked in the public relations office for that Nationals
- Has been club president for the Barons Model Club several times
- Manager and charter member of the Barons Flying Circus air show team; it was the first air show team west of the Mississippi River
- Has been a member of the air show team advisory committee for more than 20 years and chaired the committee four or five times
- Served as an associate vice president for the AMA's District XI for 21 years and has been vice president since 2000
- Helped local clubs become AMA-sanctioned clubs
- Has helped teach model group leaders
- Worked in law enforcement from 1965 to 1999

Honors:

- 1999 – AMA Distinguished Service Award

The following autobiography is taken from an audio recording Bruce G. Nelson submitted to the AMA History Program. The recording and original transcript of it are in his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives. Please see the AMA librarian for assistance.

The Beginning

I've been modeling for approximately 53 years. I started when I was about 10-years-old. I got interested in modeling when we had a pastor at a nearby church who started a youth program. When the young people at the church didn't seem to be too interested in it, he opened it up to nonmembers of the church – youngsters in the neighborhood – and I stayed involved with that for about three years. We had organized contests amongst other churches in our town that were involved with this as well as the summer camp. We met with other youngsters who were doing the same thing and had any number of events or contests at that summer camp. The name of the organization was the Sky Pilots. I believe I joined that in 1951 approximately and it was held in the attic of the First Brethren Church in Spokane. Members of the church had made some tables for us to use and each member had an area approximately three-feet by four-feet allocated with little divider walls in place where you could leave your equipment and it was locked up so that you could leave your plane from night to night. We met usually on Tuesday nights; sometimes we would meet again on Thursdays.

The first model I made was a Gruman Hellcat. I don't remember the name of the company that made it, but it was a solid balsa airplane. It was a very bad kit – the instructions were not good and the wood was very hard. My father helped me with it. We did the best we could then he helped me as I got involved later on with building Free Flight rubber. I stayed with that until I discovered cars at about 16 years of age. And I dabbled a bit around 1965 with Control Line. Control Line, quite frankly, wasn't my cup of tea and I got involved in car racing and competitive shooting in the form of pistol shooting and stayed away from model aviation until about 1970 or 1971. During that period of time the state of Washington sent the top 10 pistol shooters to the national championships. For three years in a row I was the bridesmaid finishing 11th place.

About 1971 and got interested in Radio Control (RC). At the time I had two young boys at home who were interested and we were involved then as a family activity. I joined the Barons Model Club in about 1970. At that time the club was only about 3-years-old.

Competition

In 1981 our club hosted the first U.S. Scalemasters in the Pacific Northwest and my wife, Marcy, Dick Carson and myself put together the event with Marcy doing most of the work. I was the contest director and Dick Carson was the contest manager of that year and we had very successful event – only losing several hundred dollars in the process. The following year, Dick Carson and I traded positions and he was the contest director and I was the contest manager. And, again, Marcy was the one that made this thing work. We had a very large turn-out for our second event due to the fact that the word had spread of how well the qualifier went and we had flyers from as far away as southern California and northeastern Canada. At the last minute I was pressed into service by a friend who was unable to fly. So, he entered his airplane in team scale and I flew it for him. I won a second place having only flown the airplane three times and that was the three flights at the contest. The following year we hosted the event and I was the contest director as I did the first year and Dick Carson managed. Again our third year was also highly successful. We continued to run Scalemasters for several years until such time as we lost our lease on the field that we had and we [the Barons Model Club] co-sponsored the Scalemasters with the Faragut Flyers and the Coeur D'Alene Aeromodelers. After a couple of years the Barons decided that they no longer wanted to continue with the program although we continued to attend.

I've always had a very strong interest in scale, particularly giant scale. I was contacted by staff members from AMA when it was decided to have a Pacific Northwest Nationals (Nats) and I helped in reviewing some possible sites for the Nats around eastern Washington and northern Idaho. When it was decided to hold the Nats in the tri-cities, which is approximately 120 miles south of Spokane, I volunteered to work in the public relations office working with Jeff Styles who I had also worked with on the site review.

I was in an ideal position to see most of the Nats. In the morning I ran the mail to almost every one of the sites and, as needed, helped take the frequency analyzer to sites that might be having a

problem. We had some very positive comments from civic leaders a few years after the Nats. I was involved with the meeting with the police chiefs of several of the cities and the mayor of Richland who complimented the modelers on their conduct while in the area. They stated they had never had any kind of organized activity in their town that did not require extra police, fire, paramedics, that sort of thing usually brings a certain amount of problems that go with large activities. They were very pleased and hopeful that the Nats might return to their area someday.

Design and Experiments

I have built a few of my own design CL and several RC sport airplanes. Just for the fun of experimenting, it is not uncommon to this day for me to modify kits when I see shortcomings in the design.

Leadership

I have been the president of the Barons Model Club several times, manager of the Barons Flying Circus air show team (air show team number 116) for 12 years. I'm a charter member of that team, which is the first air show team west of the Mississippi. I've been a member of the air show team advisory committee for more than 20 years and chaired that committee four or five times. I was an associate vice president for AMA's District XI for 21 years. I was appointed by Vice President Homer Smith approximately two or three years before Ed McCullough became the vice president. Ed kind of inherited me. I've been the vice president for the last three years.

There was a club in our area that was not an AMA club. This was during the years of Sport Flyers Association (SFA) and they had a few SFA members and it was a private-owned field and they were self-insured. They decided that they wanted to become an AMA club and I assisted them with answering our questions and helping with the application process. I have done the same with several other clubs around eastern Washington who are just getting into the model club business.

Publications

I wrote an article called "Notes and Floats" that was apparently picked up by the AMA national newsletter. I wrote it for the local newsletter. It was picked up and republished and I've had quite a few requests for copies of that which I have sent to individuals all around the country. It was about the things I wish I would have known about float flying before I started.

Education

My involvement has strictly been that of helping teach group leaders. I work with group leaders, such as YMCA groups. I work with different school groups and YMCA groups. Through our show team activities we've done several open houses. Our air show team has also been involved with educational programs and demonstrations for school classes, including classroom

presentations, static displays and even small flying shows using helicopters, electrics and gliders at the schoolyards.

Getting Personal

I had first decided to go into architecture and while studying of that was advised by the American Institute of Architects that the field was overloaded. They suggested that anybody who was able to change his major do so.

Then I got involved with law enforcement and joined the Spokane police department in 1965. I worked as a uniformed officer for five years then was appointed to detective and assigned to the special investigations unit, which handles all undercover operations including narcotics investigations. I was assigned there for 12 years and then continued the rest of my career in homicide investigations. Additionally, I was the senior technician for the bomb squad for that department.

While in law enforcement, I also taught criminal investigation and several other related classes for the Washington State Criminal Justice Regional Training Academy. I retired from law enforcement in 1999 and went into security consulting and pre-trial investigations in the private sector. I was self-employed. And I recently retired from that this past January.

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