



# The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of LARRY SRIBNICK

Born in 1944    Began modeling in 1950  
AMA #3000



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Written & Submitted by LS (09/2001); Transcribed by NR (09/2001); Edited & Formatted by SS (02/2003), Reformatted by (02/2010)

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## Career:

- Has taught about 50 people to fly Radio Control
- Started SR Batteries in 1978
- Started experimenting with and promoting electric flight in the 1980s
- Has conducted many educational seminars
- One of the 12 founding members of the Silent Electric Fliers of Long Island
- Was the electric flight columnist for *Flying Models* magazine from 1994 to 1997
- Started the National Electric Aircraft Council in 1994
- Event coordinator for the 1995 Electric Nationals
- Served on AMA's electric contest board
- Has written 54 articles in a series called "Radio Control Techniques and Electric Flight Techniques"
- Started designing and producing kits through his company, SR Batteries in 1999; first really successful kit was the fully aerobatic electric X250

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Norm Rosenstock has been after me for some time to write an autobiography for the AMA's archives. I guess I've been dragging my feet because I felt a little funny writing about myself this way. However, I recently had an experience that caused me to change my mind. I was asked to write an autobiography about my working career for some graduate students. (I guess we all have a personal life, a modeling life, and a working career.) I was surprised by their comments and it seems my bio was helpful to them in making career decisions. In that light, maybe a bio of my modeling life will be helpful to others, too.

I've been nuts about aviation for as long as I can remember. My earliest modeling recollection is from about 1950 when I was 6-years-old. We were living in Coney Island, Brooklyn, (in New York) and I remember visiting one of my cousins and his showing me and then giving me a small stick and tissue biplane. That biplane instantly became my most prized possession.

By the next year, when I was seven, I had started building my own stick and tissue models. I couldn't read, yet, so my mother read me the instructions, and by my looking at the drawings I was able to build my first model airplanes.

About that same time, I saw my first U-Control models. There was a school near my home and there was a group of modelers who flew their models on a ball field surrounded by a chain link fence. I'd spend hours watching them through the fence and I can still remember what the engine exhaust smelled like as none of today's fuels smell anything like it. It was more of a shoe polish smell.

By about 1955 I got my first U-Control model. It was a Cox TD-1 with a plastic fuselage, sheet aluminum wing and Cox Thermal Hopper .049 engine. I spent more time waving that ship

around in my hand dreaming of it flying than I did actually trying to fly it. However, eventually I got the hang of it.

The following year, I finally moved up into the big time! I received a Ringmaster kit and a Fox .35 for my birthday. At last – a “real” model airplane. This was only the first of a long list of U-Control models I built including the Super Ringmaster, several different sizes of Flight-Streaks, a Thunderbird, a Manx Cat, Nobler and a profile B-25 twin.

By this time we had moved to Queens, New York, and I split my flying time between Kissena Park and Willet’s Point in Flushing. To this day I still complain about them building Shea Stadium in the middle of my flying field, Willet’s Point. A typical summer day for me was to ride my bike, with a Ringmaster and a gallon of fuel strapped to the back, to Kissena Park at about 7 a.m. to watch single-channel Radio Control models fly. When the wind came up a little, the Radio Control flying would stop so I’d move over to the lake in Kissena Park to watch the tether boats and Radio Control boats run. By late morning I’d leave Kissena Park and head for Willet’s Point to fly my U-Control model. By late afternoon I was on my way back to Kissena Park to watch the Radio Control guys again in the late afternoon/early evening as by then the winds had died down and they could fly again. My mother would always ask, “Why do you bother to come home? You should just move your bed down to the flying field!” Of course I was coming home so I could build my next ship!

My hobby shop was Al’s Hobby Shop on Northern Boulevard in Flushing, Queens. Al’s was an old time hobby shop, much like the one reproduced in the AMA museum. Al didn’t just sell modeling supplies. He was always there to answer your questions and help you. There seemed to always be a bunch of modelers hanging around in the back room swapping stories and information. I would find myself a corner and try to soak in all of the information being passed around.

By 1958, it was time to give Radio Control a try. I bought a single-channel Citizenship system. The receiver had a big glass tube sticking up in the middle and you suspended it from rubber bands in each of the four corners within the fuselage to shock mount it from the engine’s vibration. Before each attempted flight – notice I said “attempted” – you had to carefully tune the receiver to the transmitter by watching the reading on a milliamp meter.

Well, as you can guess from the above, I didn’t have much luck with the Citizenship radio system. It was only when I bought a Kraft Tone receiver and a Kraft Tone transmitter kit from Ace that I finally became successful in Radio Control. Most of the engines were .09 to .15 in size, both glow and diesel. My mother is a saint letting me mix diesel fuel in glass bottles in an apartment in Queens. Some of the planes I built and flew were the Mambo, Livewire Kitten, Aero-Nine, Esquire, Miss America, Charger and Smog Hog.

Up to this point I was going through junior high school and high school. On different occasions I won three different science fairs. Two were with wind tunnels that I designed and built and the third was with a hovercraft that I designed and built. I never strayed much from aviation.

I had decided to become an aeronautical engineer and took a lot of drafting courses. In one, we had to draw a set of detailed plans for an object of our choice. Naturally, I picked a Fox .35 to draw. I even got a 100% on my drafting regents (a big standardized test given to all students in New York State). I wish I could say the same for the rest of my studies! I was never a “reader”

and never wanted to sit down and read a book for pleasure. However, I would devour every bit of technical writing I could get my hands on. To this day I still have all of my original issues of *Model Airplane News*, *Flying Models*, *American Modeler* and *Air Trails* magazines.

Well, it was time to go to college and at the last minute I changed my mind and decided to become a shop teacher, teaching drafting. I went to Oswego in upstate New York, and during my years there I only built two models, a Splinter and a Voodoo. Both were combat U-Control ships. The great thing about Oswego was that the school library had bound copies of *Model Airplane News* dating back to the early 1940s. I spent a lot of time in the library reading *Model Airplane News*! I went on to graduate school studying educational communications at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

Eileen and I were married in 1968 while I was still in graduate school. Her later comments about my modeling should sound very familiar to any of your wives out there. Eileen tells people that when she got married, she felt like she moved into a boy's room!

In 1969 I graduated and we moved back to Long Island. My job was working for an arm of the State Education Department teaching teachers in Nassau County. I joined the Suffolk Wings, but within a year I changed clubs because I wanted to get very serious about flying pattern. The top pattern club on Long Island was the Long Island Aero Radio Society, better known as the LIARS, to which I've been a member on and off ever since. One of my primary functions in the club has been teaching others to fly and I guess I've taught at least 50 people to fly Radio Control over the years. Besides pattern, I also got very interested in flying sailplanes and my LSF (League of Silent Flight) number is 461. I got into helicopters, too, and flew Crickets, Competitors and Cobras. You can see why Eileen said she felt like she moved into a boy's room.

In the early 1970s, I left the field of education and went into industry. First, I worked for Beseler setting up a national school of color photography that 12,000 people attended each year and later I took over all professional, technical and educational services for Nikon. Each year over 42,000 people attended the programs I planned and implemented for Nikon. While working for Nikon, and helping NASA with photographic aspects of the space program, I discovered that not all nickel cadmium cells were the same.

This was the realization from which SR Batteries grew. It was a little scary because my daughter Erin had just been born in 1978, but it was at this point that I decided that I really wanted to start my own company and work for myself. So, I left Nikon and became the color editor for *Popular Photography* magazine. In 1980, while still working for *POP*, I founded SR Batteries. As they say, I didn't want to quit my day job, yet, so I did both jobs for about five years while SR grew.

While most of the work done at SR is for the military/aerospace industry, our work for the Radio Control field has always been special to me because first and foremost, I'm a modeler. I'm always on the look out for military/aerospace projects and products that can be of use in the Radio Control field.

In 1980, I also started to experiment with electric-powered flight. If you think it was hard finding someone interested in sailplanes in the early days, try finding someone interested in electric flight! I wanted to share my interests in photography, aviation, modeling and electric flight with others so in the mid 1980s I published articles on aerial photography using an electric-powered model sailplane in both *Popular Photography* and *RC Modeler*. I got a great response to both.

It was also in the 1980s that I started being asked to do educational programs within the Radio Control field, specifically on the subject of the care and feeding of NiCad battery packs. The program I taught at the AMA Chicopee Nationals was particularly gratifying as we had modelers pouring out of the meeting room and down the halls listening to the program. Each year I'm asked by Radio Control clubs all over the Northeast to do these kinds of educational programs and I try to do as many as I can.

At about this same time I started conducting educational seminars at the KRC Electric Fun Fly in Pennsylvania. For about 12 years I conducted these programs right at the flying field on topics ranging from battery packs to care and maintenance of motors to flying techniques. For the following four years I changed this program into a day long Electric Flight Symposium and invited some of the best known people in electric flight to join me in making presentations to about 175 modelers each year.

In 1989 I was one of the 12 founding members of the Silent Electric Fliers of Long Island, SEFLI, one of the very first all electric clubs in the United States. SEFLI was founded as a source of educational information for new electric fliers.

In 1994, I became the electric flight columnist for *Flying Models*, a post I held for three years. Rather than the usual product-oriented column, I tried to write a how to column that would help people get started in electric flight. Also in 1994, I started a new national electric flight organization called the National Electric Aircraft Council or NEAC. My concept was a council of member clubs, which had members interested in electric flight. The idea being the easy and fast dissemination of information through the Internet.

In 1995 I became aware that the AMA was thinking of canceling the 1995 Electric National Championships (Nats) because of a lack of individuals to plan and conduct the event. I petitioned the AMA to allow the NEAC to become the official Special Interest Group, SIG, representing electric flyers in the United States and allowing the NEAC to run the 1995 Electric Nats. The AMA agreed and I became the CD (contest director) or event coordinator for the 1995 Electric Nats. I also wrote an article for *RC Modeler* reporting on the preparations and activities at the Nats.

In 1996 I became a member of the AMA's electric contest board representing District II. I held this post until recently. I finally resigned my post because I felt other modelers should be given a chance to participate in the process. I really don't think it's best for modeling to have the same people making the decisions year after year. I think there has to be room for new people and new ideas.

By 1997 I had stopped writing my monthly column in *Flying Models* because I just didn't have enough time to do a monthly column. I still had a lot of information that I knew modelers wanted about electric flight and modeling in general so I started writing a series of articles I called Radio Control Techniques and Electric Flight Techniques. At this point there are 54 different articles in this series and I continue to send them all over the world as a product of SR Batteries.

Somehow along the way, in 1994 I started working on my private pilot's license and in 1996 I got my instrument rating. I fly a Piper Dakota. If you're not familiar with the Dakota, it's a Cherokee on steroids.

In 1999, I started a new division of SR Batteries. I bought a laser cutter and started designing and kitting my own line of model airplane kits. I did this because I had modelers all over the world telling me that the traditional kit companies weren't making what they wanted. I felt strongly enough about the designs I had in mind that I was willing to make the substantial investment it would take to get started.

The first kit was a little hand toss electric Free Flight sailplane called the X70 that I did as a test to get the kinks out of the kit making process. The first serious kit was the X250, which is a low wing, fully aerobatic electric aircraft able to do just about anything in the aerobatic book. We've shipped X250s all over the world and from the numbers we've sold, it's probably bound to be one of the classics. At the risk of being totally immodest, the seven product reviews the X250 has received in all of the major modeling magazines and on the internet say that the X250 is one of, if not the finest, kit ever produced in the hobby.

Recently, I introduced my second design, the Cutie. The Cutie is a sport/trainer meant to put the fun back in modeling. It's an electric-powered parasol wing aircraft. It's just plain fun to fly.

Now for the present and future... I'm working on several new designs. I want to do a twin and a giant scale ship and then later on I'd like to work on some sailplane ideas I have. All are electric-powered.

I try to spend as much time as possible visiting a Web site called [www.ezonemag.com](http://www.ezonemag.com), better known as the Ezone. Modelers post questions and requests for help on the Ezone and I try to help out and answer their questions as much as I can. I guess once an educator, always an educator. It really is what I love doing best.

*(Signed) Larry Sribnick  
September 2001*

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