



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of SIDNEY (SID) MILLER

Born June 25, 1926 Started modeling in 1936
AMA #148020



Written and submitted by SM (01/1998); Transcribed and Edited by SS (06/2002), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

Career

- Started a model airplane club at his high school while he was there from 1940 to 1943
 - Began entering competitions in 1949 and was successful
 - From 1949 to 1954, started and ran a model aviation club called the Flying Aces in the Williamsburg Housing Project in New York City
 - Continued teaching model aviation after move to Chicago in 1954; joined the Chicago Aeronuts in 1959
 - Helped the Chicago Aeronuts acquire an indoor flying site in the early 1970s
 - Had various articles and photos published in Model Airplane News magazine and one article published in Model Builder magazine
 - Won the .020 Replica Old-Timer contest in 1969, 1971, 1972 and 1988
 - Associate vice president for District VI under Vice President Glenn Lee
 - Served as contest director for the Chicago Aeronuts
 - Was treasurer of the Chicagoland Radio Control Modelers
 - Served as chairman of the indoor committee of the Chicago Aeronuts
 - Chairman of the Chicago Aeronuts' public relations committee
 - Has been a member of the following organizations: the AMA, the Society of Antique Modelers, the National Free Flight Society, the Chicago Aeronuts and the Chicagoland Radio Control Modelers
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I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and started building models at about age 10. A mile from my house was a secondhand magazine and bookstore owned by a cantankerous man with only one arm. I would go there to trade Doc Savage Amazing Stories and Flying Aces magazines. In one corner, he had a small model airplane supply section. There were some models and a few kits on display. I bought a small Comet rubber model for 10 cents, took it home, and managed to successfully build and fly it. Later I graduated to larger models, including some kitted by Megow. Finally, I had enough experience to start building from plans.

In 1939, the New York City Board of Education started an after-school model airplane class at my junior high school. It was held in the bookbinding shop where the tables were ideal for workbenches. In 1940, a cousin gave me a Synchro B-30 model motor, which I could never get to run. Later I was to acquire a .09 Atom and .09 and .19 Arden. These were much better motors and I had my first successful ignition engines. The Atom was flown in a Lou Garami design called the Molecule. One of my fond memories is of a visit to Sal Taibi's store in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn where I purchased a Bay Ridge Mike kit, which later was constructed and flown successfully.

From 1940 to 1943, I attended Eastern District High School where I started a model airplane club, convincing a teacher who had no model airplane experience to act as faculty adviser. I taught him how to build and actually played the role of instructor to my fellow students. A picture of the group, the adviser, and me was included in my high school yearbook of June 1943. The last model I constructed and left hanging in the living room at home was a Sinbad towline glider.

I entered the U.S. Navy in 1943 and served with the Navy Air corps until June of 1946. I remember building a F4-U Corsair from a Cleveland kit while in Guam. It was given to me as a Christmas present by the base Chaplain. The last I knew it was still hanging in the base library at NAS Orote, Guam.

After being discharged from the Navy, I went to Brooklyn College and graduated in 1949. During that period, I managed to squeeze model building in between my mid-term and final exams. By 1949, I felt ready to enter competition. I competed in local club contests, the New York Daily Mirror Meet, and a Nationals (Nats) contest. I won ½-A Free Flight at the Mirror meet with an original high thrust model. This model, unfortunately, was stolen while practicing at Pennsylvania Avenue and never recovered. About that time, I joined the New York Aeronuts and was able to hone my skills by learning from modeling greats like Sid November and Carl Goldberg.

From 1949 to 1954, I embarked on what was to become a lifelong project. I started a model airplane club called the Flying Aces in the basement of the Williamsburg Housing Project. This club built model airplanes five days a week with support from the New York City Board of Education. We also received kits from Berkeley Models and kits and glue from Frank Ehling and the Zaics at Junior Aeronautical Supply Co. (Jasco). I remember getting model airplane cement in gallons and pouring it into small bottles. Some of the models built were the Thermic 18, Thermic 20, Trooper and Thermic 50. Some of the club members advanced far enough to build small gas models like the Veco Dakota. This group was so successful that it was written up in Model Airplane News magazine and Louis Brown (the first AMA president) came out from Washington to interview me. He said that my club was one of the few successful clubs of this type in the nation. He wanted to know what I was doing to make it so.

To fly our models the youngsters and I used to have to carry them on the subway for about an hour in order to reach Van Courtland Park in the Bronx. We were not alone as many of the famous old timers like Carl Goldberg, Sal Taibi and Paul Mueller also flew at Van Courtland Park. There was always a little extra excitement like dodging cricket balls and being chased by the police. My favorite story is when my friend Paul Mueller had a fly away with a rubber job and later received a letter from the warden at the prison on Rykers Island telling him that his model had landed in the prison recreation yard. He was invited to come get it, which he was brave enough to do.

In 1954, I moved to Chicago where I ran a model airplane class at Jewish Community Centers of Chicago until 1961. In 1961, I took a job teaching in Evanston, Illinois, and there also conducted model classes until 1969 when I transferred to the Elk Grove Village, Illinois, schools. I joined the Chicago Aeronuts in 1959 where I met or renewed friendships with modeling greats like

Cark Goldberg, Pete and Charley Sotich, Art Christensen, Ed and Joe Konefes, Tony Italiano and Dave Lindstrum.

The period from 1968 to 1995 was probably the most rewarding and productive stage of my modeling career. I ran, promoted and conducted model airplane classes in summer school as an after-school special activity. I helped produce mall shows including a major one at the Woodfield Shopping Mall, an educational fair at Harper Junior College and wrote numerous newspaper articles. In March 1973, Model Airplane News published my article called "Chicago Aeronuts' Indoor Model Flying" (reprinted later in this biography). Due to the Vietnam War, the armories were not available for indoor flying. I was able to obtain a local high school gymnasium every Sunday from December 1 to April 1. At the same time, I became the Chicago Aeronuts Indoor Flying Committee chair. By providing a clean, warm, spacious facility on a regular basis and offering a variety of new contests, a gradual renewal of interest in indoor flying occurred. It was at this time that the now very popular Penny Plane originated. I must give credit to Erwin Rodemsky for coming up with the original Penny Plane rules.

The following are some of my publishing and photo credits:

- In July 1972, Model Airplane News magazine published my article "Now the Schools," which featured photos of my after-school model club in action. As part of this article, I outlined a curriculum for using model airplane building as a tool to teach science, math, industrial arts and English. The lead photo for this article showed three of the model club members holding their Delta Darts and Nats trophies. As part of the summer school model airplane club, they were taken on field trips to the Glenview Nats where the trophies were won. (The article is re-printed later in this biography.)
- The May 1977 issue of Model Airplane News magazine had as its cover my photo of Aeronut Marv Jaster launching his ½-A Starduster at Bong.
- The July 1978 Model Airplane News magazine cover shows my son, Eric, lighting a fuse for his brother Gregg's .020 So Long.

I have also been fortunate to have two of my Free Flight scale model designs published as construction articles and they are as follows:

- The October 1973 issue of Model Airplane News magazine featured my Pietenpol Aircamper.
- The March 1982 Model Builder magazine published by 1912 Blackburn monoplane as a construction article.

During this period, I married and raised three boys who all built, flew and competed in model aviation. They won their share of local, regional, U.S. and Canadian Nats trophies. They are all college graduates and credit their model airplane building with helping them be successful in school. I remember son Eric won Class A and Class B power Free Flight at the 1975 Canadian Nats, while son Gregg won ½-A Free Flight and Mouse Race at the 1977 Canadian Nats.

The Mouse Racer was designed by me and later went on to place second at the American Nats flown by Tim Stone and Stu Willoughby. Based on this success the Mighty Mouse was kitted by Midwest Products.

In the 1970s, I became interested in Free Flight Scale (indoor and outdoor) and helped promote and direct contests for these events. My Pietenpol won the prestigious Chicago Scalemasters contest twice. As time marched on and Old-Timer contests were introduced, I promoted .020 Replica to the Aeronuts and finally the spring and fall Old-Timer contests became a regular event. I won .020 Replica with a Baby Bombshell and Class B Glow with an Eastern States Gas Champ in 1969, 1971, 1972 and 1988. In recent years with the disappearance of suitable Free Flight sites, I have switched to Radio Controlled (RC) flying sailplanes, scale models and my favorite Old-Timers. I have designed and successfully flown two-meter and standard class sailplanes. This past year I constructed and flew an 80-inch RC version of my Pietenpol. A construction article for Model Airplane News magazine is now in progress.

To sum it up, I feel that my greatest contribution to the field of model aviation is the 45 years I have given to the teaching of elementary, junior high school and high school students the joy of building and flying model airplanes. My success is measured by the personal satisfaction of seeing these young people grow up to become fine citizens and parents who are teaching their children to build and fly model airplanes. Some of these former students are graduates of Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, and West Point. Others are pilots for commercial airlines, engineers and teachers. This has been a two-way street with my receiving tenfold for all that I gave.

The story goes on. After all the articles on the dangers of CA and epoxy, I have introduced a safe, non-toxic, excellent model airplane glue called Weldbond. It is now distributed and sold throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, South America and Hong Kong. It is currently being sold in the AMA Museum Store. Finally, my flying buddy Art Christensen and I are about to embark on a program to reintroduce model airplane building into the Chicago Park District crafts program. This is where Carl Goldberg and Frank Nekinken started the Chicago Aeronuts in 1935.

Some of the positions I have held include the following:

- Associate vice president for District VI under Vice President Glenn Lee
- Contest director, Chicago Aeronuts
- Treasurer, Chicagoland Radio Control Modelers
- Chairman, indoor committee, Chicago Aeronuts
- Chairman, public relations committee, Chicago Aeronuts

Some of the memberships I have held include the following:

- AMA
- Society of Antique Modelers (SAM)
- National Free Flight Society (NFFS)
- Chicago Aeronuts
- Chicagoland Radio Control Modelers

(signed) Sid Miller
January 30, 1998

The following is an article that was published in Model Airplane News in July 1972.

... Now – the Schools

By Sid Miller

As a teacher of many years (too many to count), it has always been my concern that students had little or no voice in their school's curriculum. Summer school enrollment in our district had been steadily declining, and it seemed an ideal time to propose a new idea to the summer school director.

After close scrutiny, he gave me the go-ahead and I conducted a survey at my school, Grove Elk Junior High School, Elk Grove Township District #59 (a suburb of Chicago).

Model aviation and rocketry ran a close second to physical education among the 700 boys enrolled in our school, and when 70 boys enrolled, it was included in the summer school curriculum. My other idea was that model building is an ideal way to teach many of the facts and principles of both mathematics and science. The teachers in both departments were extremely positive and helpful in setting up the areas of learning that they wanted to correlate to their fields.

The students attended in two classes of 35 each, for an hour and a half, five times per week. The course lasted for six weeks.

There were five distinct phases to the program:

1. Lecture and demonstration
 - a. Math used in model building
 - b. Scientific principles used in model building and flying
 - c. Model construction and materials
 - d. Model flying
2. Helping students choose proper models to fit their abilities and experience.
3. Actual model construction
4. Flying sessions
 - a. Indoor models in the gym
 - b. Outdoor models at the 3-1/2 acre park across from the school
5. A field trip to the Nats at the Glenview Naval Air Station

Rather than attempt to go into a detailed breakdown of how model building ties in with math and science, I will rather give you a working outline from which anyone interested can adapt these ideas to his/her particular situation.

Mathematics

1. Wood sizes – teaching of fractions

2. Use of plans – teaches the reading of blueprints, geometric drawings, ruler, compass, square and protractor
3. Wire, tubing, wheels – how to measure diameters, circles, use of decimals
4. Propellers, splice points, dihedral, engine thrust, stab offset – teaching of angles and their measurements
5. Engines – capacities in cubic inches and centimeters; comparison with and teaching of metric system
6. Weighing of wood and parts – use of scales, understanding of weights and measures. Metric system as well as ounces and pounds
7. Rocket flight – measuring of altitude and plotting of trajectories

Science

Free Flight Models

1. Thermals – air as a gas and its properties
2. Aerodynamics – why an airplane flies, airfoils, flying surfaces, model adjustment
3. Engines – ignition, flow, diesel principles of combustion: two and four cycles, jets, fuels, etc.

U-Control Models

1. Centrifugal force
2. Friction, drag, etc.

Engine and Rocket Firing

1. Volts and amperes
2. Plus and minus poles
3. Series and parallel hookups
4. Dry and wet cells
5. Electrical energy flow – wire diameters, resistance
6. Switches, pilot lights, soldering and splicing

Industrial Arts

1. Proper use of tools
2. Blueprint reading
3. Finishing and painting
4. Use of proper glues for specific jobs

I am sure you can see that the list could go on indefinitely. The key point is – *the kids learn by doing and because they are interested.* This is what the education textbooks call “motivation.”

This program is not a one-shot deal. Since it was offered in the summer of 1971, the following has happened:

1. I have been invited to come and lecture to regular science classes.
2. Model building has become a part of the school’s ongoing extra-curricular activities.
3. The course will be offered as part of the summer school this year (June-July 1972).

Another interesting point is that the director of summer school is encouraging other teachers with special talents or hobbies to submit proposals for new courses to be offered this summer.

Very positive public relations for the school district was achieved by involving some of the fathers who were model builders to come in and assist. Also the local newspapers did articles on the course and on the three boys who won trophies in the Nats Delta Dart program.

A final suggestion: it is vital that the instructor have the following qualifications:

1. Be an experienced model builder and flyer
2. Have a liking for and understanding of children
3. Knowledge of basic math and aerodynamics.

The following article ran in the March 1973 issue of Model Airplane News magazine.

Chicago Aeronuts

By Sid Miller

The Chicago Aeronuts, well known in modeling circles for over 35 years, have seen a decline in Indoor flying in the past five years. This has been primarily due to the lack of a flying site *available on a consistent basis*, and also because of the growing complexity of the types of models flown.

With the aid of indoor contest committee members Al Sortwell, Erwin Rodemsky and Jim Richmond, I set out to remedy this situation. Target: a suitable, convenient, regularly available flying site. After visiting a dozen high school field houses and gymnasiums, the selection narrowed to three sites and the choice was made – Forest View High School girls' gymnasium, in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

The club approved the committee's recommendation at its next regular meeting. Features that make this site ideal include proximity to most club members; proximity to major highways; clear 90 foot by 129 foot floor with a ceiling of 30 feet (28 feet clear); availability every Sunday from Nov. 1 to April 30, except for three dates (given at time of permit); warm, well-lighted and clean; plenty of parking almost at the door; and, last but not least, *no rental charge*.

The club has been careful on its part to keep the site clean, not to permit smoking and, in general, to provide suitable supervision. We have thus cemented a positive relationship with the school authorities, which has assured us of the same site for the next year.

To encourage Junior flyers and also modelers who have avoided Indoor flying in the past, the Indoor Contest Committee has conducted experimental contests with good success. Contests included Hand-Launched Glider, Class A Hand-Launched Glider (maximum projected wing area = 30 square inches), modified Easy B event (no wood size less than 1/16 square inches, tissue covering, no built up prop) and the Penny Plane event.

Three contests were held in January, February and April. A total of 61 contestants produced 90 event-entries. Juniors represented about 40% of the entries and their times were very good, coming close to the top Open times. Age groups are Junior (15 years of age and younger) and Open (16 years of age and older). To further encourage participation, instead of the usual

trophies, merchandise certificates valid at a major hobby store (Stanton's in Chicago) were offered as prizes (first place, \$5; second place, \$3; and third place, \$2).

It is very important to give credit to Charlie Sotich, club president at the time, for an outstanding job of organizing and planning (attendance at meetings averaged between 35 and 40 and the membership stands officially at 50). Club secretary, Pete Sotich, is also a key factor. He keeps detailed records of all club business, acts as a contest director, purchases the awards and maintains communications with the AMA and other clubs, mails detailed results of each contest, meeting notices and contest announcements to each member or contestant.

I feel that the club owes its renewed vigor (increased membership and more active Indoor and Outdoor flyers) to two things: a dedicated, hard-working core of officers and members, and the fact that every attempt is made, through committees and democratic process, to involve as many club members as possible in the decision-making.

The principles are the same ones Carl Goldberg had in mind when he founded the club after an Indoor meet at the Madison Street Armory way back in 1935.

As Sid continues his work with young modelers, he frequently receives thanks from them. Below is a note that was sent to him by a middle student he worked with in 1998. The student placed seventh out of 30 in the state finals that year.

Dear Mr. Miller,

Thank you very much for all of the help you gave me with my Science Olympiad airplane. I had lots of fun building it and was very proud when it flew. Thank you for teaching my father and me about the hobby, which I think is quite enjoyable.

Thank you for letting me use your supplies and plans. I especially appreciate you letting me fly your plane. (Sorry about getting it stuck!) Also, thank you very much for giving me the propeller; it was very generous of you.

I hope that you will consider working with me next year. By then, I hope to know more about the hobby and to be flying some planes of my own. Thank you again. I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

Murray Galster



Charlie Sotich around 1972 or 1973. To stimulate new indoor flying interest, Sidney came up with ideas for simple contests. This one allowed no dimension over 18-inches, no wood size under 1/16-inches and tissue covering. Sidney's son, Eric, age 13, is in the background. He held the national baby ROG record at one time.



Jim Richmond's attempt sometime around 1972 or 1973 to beat the rules. Note that there are no ribs in the wing, no leading edge on the stabilizer or rudder. The model had a sheet propeller as no built-ups were allowed. This was probably the only time he placed low at 10th.



Circa 1972 or 1973: An overall view of the facility which had a clear floor and a 30-foot ceiling. The events held there included Class A Glider, Easy B, Indoor Scale, penny planes and special events.



Also circa 1972 or 1973: Jim Noonan and Sidney at the Forest View High School gym with Jim's original Easy B. Sidney was the indoor committee chair and acquired the site. The first penny plane was flown there.



1950: Augie Schmidt and Sidney collaborating on an AG Cat u-Control stunt model with an Arden .19. It was all-original and was physical therapy for Augie's right hand which was hurt in a broken window accident.



BOTH ABOVE: June 1997: Sidney's quarter-scale version of his original Pietenpol Free Flight scale model. This model is 84-inches with rudder, elevator, aileron and throttle controls. It has a .91cc four-stroke engine. Sidney added more details after these photos were taken.



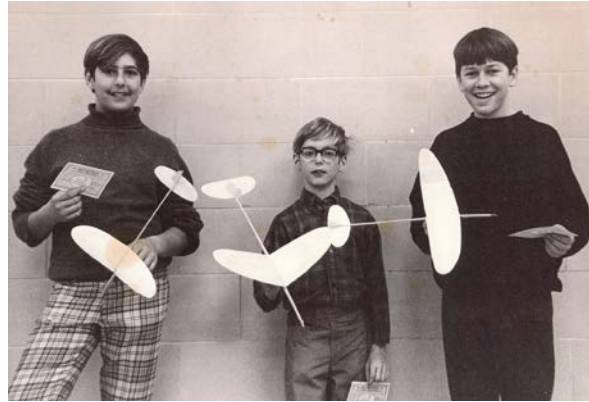
BOTH ABOVE: From 1949 to 1954, Sidney worked with boys in the Williamsburg Houses at the community center teaching modeling at their club called the Flying Aces Model Club. An article about this club appeared in Model Airplane News magazine and Willis Brown, then president of the AMA, visited the club to find out why it was so successful.



BOTH ABOVE: Sidney continuing his work with the Flying Aces Model Club. On the left, he is helping a student start a .049 OK Cub in a Vic model.



1952: Flying Aces club members watch as Sidney flips an Arden .09 on an original flying boat at Van Courtland Park in Bronx, New York.



1972: Forest View High School gym in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The Chicago Aeronauts indoor hand-launched glider contest. From left: Eric Miller, Brett Miller and Dave Rodemsky



1975: Some of the Grove Aviation Society club members at a park across from the school. This was an outdoor glider contest.



1951: Sidney at age 25, holding his original Flying Boat with an Arden .09 on glow. It was a very stable flyer with yellow silkspan and maroon paint. There were Ohlsson and Rice decals on the wing and a ballast box in the nose. This picture was taken in Van Cortland Park in Bronx, New York.



Sidney's original mouse racer that won second in the American Nationals in 1996, first in the Canadian Nationals in 1997 and first in a local contest. The model was kitted by Midwest as the Mighty Mouse.



Sidney and his six-foot Kloud King flown at the AMA's Celebration of Eagles. Doc Mathews and John Grigg took turns while designer Mike DeAngelis paid compliments. This photo was taken at a Chicago RC Modelers club meeting when it was the model of the month.



2003: Sidney with a U-Control model that he also flies. This is his current stunt model – a Veco Chief with a Fox 35. The model flies beautifully.

Sidney with his seven-foot Quaker and a six-foot Brooklyn Dodger. Both are flown on three-channel Radio Control (R, E, T) and are strictly for pleasure. All the club's "hot dogs" want to take turns on the plane and say, "That looks like fun!"



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