



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ALTON (BLAKE) WALSTON



Written by AW (c. 2007); Transcribed by JS (12/2007), Reformatted by JS (02/2010)

Alton Walston wrote the following autobiography in 2007.

The Biography of Alton (Blake) Walston

I was born on Friday, November 13, 1942 aboard a DC-4 airplane about to land in Baltimore, Maryland. Mom was rushed to St Joseph's Hospital and that is my birthplace of record.

My start in modeling began at my elementary school in Cresaptown, Maryland in 1948, my second year of school. I was 6 years old. One day I had to stay after school and as I was leaving, I had to cross the playground. There were several grown men on the playground with several large model airplanes. They were the most fascinating things I had ever seen. Then they started flying around in a circle; my love for airplanes was born that day.

A bit bashful then, I said nothing to the men flying the airplanes, but I heard one of them say they would be back again and I made sure that I was there. That day, I ask one of the men where you could buy one of those airplanes and he said that you could not buy them, you had to build them. He also said there were some kits I could buy and I asked him where I could do that. He told me they had them at Blou's store on my way home. He gave me a quarter and told me that it would buy a 10-cent *Comet* kit, some *Comet* model cement, and a small bottle of dope. That day, I bought my first airplane. I do not remember exactly what model it was, but it was a box of printed sheets of parts that had to be cut out and a sheet of 1/16 sticks and some paper to cover it. As this was my first airplane, I botched the cut out job and ruined it.

I did not give up. I went back to the men and told them that I could not cut out the parts. He told me the next time I bought an airplane to bring it out with me and he would show me how to cut them. My allowance allowed me to buy another airplane. This time it was a *Comet Sparky*, designed by Ed Lidgard.

I took it to the playground, and on the tailgate of a truck, I learned how to cut out the parts. My mentor (I only knew him as Bob) even gave me my first cutting knife. I had been trying to use a razorblade. The one he gave me was homemade and you used a razorblade in it. My airplane was built many months later and I took it to the playground. Bob, who taught me how to build, now taught me to fly. All my instruction was given at the playground. Sometimes we would stay until almost dark and Bob's patience never seemed to run out. I remember the first flight when the *Sparky* took to the air. No money in the world could buy that moment from my memory; it was to say the least one of the most exciting moments of my life. It stayed in the air only about 2

minutes, a wonderful flight. *Sparky* lasted almost two years, but was damaged beyond repair in a family move to Florida.

Between 1950 and 1960, I built almost every model that Comet had to offer and most of Guillow's models, too. Those were the days of rubber power and too little money to do anything else. I did manage to fly many Control Line models. My first fuel-powered model was a Jim Walker *Firebaby* powered by an OK Cub .049 and a rubber bladder fuel tank. From that Control Line, I went on to build and fly the entire fleet of *Ringmaster* models and oh so many scratch-built airplanes that I lost count.

There was a brief period between 1962 and 1968 (when I got married to the most wonderful, magical woman in the world, who is still with me after 45 years) that I did not build or fly. We moved around the country and overseas, working on full-scale airplanes for the Navy, Army, and Air Force.

In 1968, I came home from Vietnam and needed some quiet time to escape reality, so I went back to building and flying again. This time, it was with an added vigor, for I had learned to fly full-scale airplanes. My favorite was the ever-wonderful Piper *Cub*. For only a very short time, I let my modeling set on the bench, but in 1970, with my son at my side, I started building again. Together we started Radio Control. I had limited success with the old Ace single-channel and galloping ghost systems, the rubber powered escapements, and tube-type radios in the mid-1950s.

We were in Japan in 1968, 1969, and early 1970, when DigiAce, Kraft, Orbit, and Royal Radios were just coming alive. We came home with many engines of the Enya and OS MAX variety. Therefore, in 1970, we homebuilt a Heathkit 8-channel radio and installed it in a Sig *Kadet*. Both of us learned to really fly Radio Control with that model.

In March of 1974, I had a motorcycle accident that took my left leg off just above the knee. While in the hospital on the operating table, according to all the doctors, I lost my life. However, in the process of transporting me to the morgue, I moved my arms in such a way that the nurse called for a doctor, they put the "shocker" on me, and the rest is part of my history. I am still here.

The two things I can tell you about the time I was out was that (1) when I woke up, I had no fear of death and (2) I knew that the rest of my life, that time which I did not have to spend earning a living would be dedicated to helping other folks. The only thing I knew really well was building model airplanes, so I decided that was the way I would help others.

Since that time, I have taught many kids to build and fly, held classes for the Boy Scouts, Brownies/Girl Scouts, Young Astronauts, and several church groups, teaching them the basics of flight with the *Delta Dart* (now the AMA *Cub*.) It has been my pleasure to help many young men, and old men too, build and fly model airplanes.

My deal with the kids in our neighborhood was and has been for the last 25 years, this: earn enough money to buy your radio and engine and I will furnish everything else to build and fly your first airplane. It has been a very successful and rewarding adventure. Most of the boys I taught are working in the aircraft or aerospace field today. Most of them are really good at their work, and most important of all, they stay in contact with “Mr. Blake.”

I have never been a competitor and have only competed in local club contest. My favorite of which is the spot-landing event. I build big ole slow airplanes that land on a dime and that makes competition easy.

My experiments in modeling have been many, success being about 50/50. I have designed a couple of airplanes, but never marketed them. Together with the kids, we have made many “homemade” tools that they could not afford to buy. Hinge alignment tools, 2-56 rod insertion tool, Clevis tools, and many others. Most of them are now on the market, but alas, none bearing our name.

In April of 1992, with six people in attendance in the Walston family living room, we formed the Perry Radio Control Flyers. It grew over the course of eight years to 45 members and only went down after we lost our flying field. I was the first president and my wife was the first secretary.

One of my goals I have not achieved yet is to buy a flying field and present it to the remaining members of the club. My goal at retirement is to continue teaching model building and maybe flying. My lifetime dream is to build a complex called COA, an acronym for Center of Attention. It will be a resort dedicated to model aircraft, encompassing a flying field, lake for float flying, a hobby shop, flight line, pit area, concession stand, real honest to goodness bathrooms and a rental building for storage, equipped with electric and tools so that even the most confined wannabe builders will have some place to build and store their models. It would also include a two-story clubhouse with large windows and air conditioning so that the wives and girlfriends of flyers could have some place comfortable to watch.

Included also would be swimming pools and tennis courts for the wives and kids and a fully equipped RV park for traveling modelers and grandstands for watching events. If successful, I would build one of these in every region of the country and sponsor competition events in preparation for the Nationals in Muncie, Indiana.

Looking back over the years, it does not look like I have contributed much to aircraft modeling; however, it has been my greatest passion for over 50 years. I will continue to teach and build until the day when I will fly in a different world. To the readers: May you always look for the silver lining in all your endeavors, and build and fly to the very best of your ability. Always offer a helping hand to kids who seem curious, always give all you can to the hobby, build with integrity, fly with confidence and thank your God, whoever he may be, that modeling is a part of the world.

Submitted:
Alton (Blake) Walston

Modeler at heart, aircraft mechanic by profession, and teacher by choice
Retired as of January 1, 2008

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