



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of JIM WALTERS



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Jim Walters wrote the following autobiography, date unknown.

Autobiography of Jim Walters

By Jim Walters

This will be an attempt to recount the events in my life that lead up to my present-day position as a “Really Great SAM 8” member, otherwise known as an “Old Time Free Flighter.” (Really old, it seems.) To begin with, I was born October 14, 1931 in San Francisco.

I first remember at a very early age, when I was 2 or 3 years old, my parents buying me one of those Japanese ready-to-fly models. You know - the ones with wire framework, silk covering, and powered by a rubber band. I can still vividly see it flying across the room and banging into the wall. I was too young to handle it, so it was put on the top shelf of the closet out of my reach.

I remember seeing the great dirigibles, flying low over the skyscrapers in San Francisco in the early thirties. They just covered the sky. Wow, what a sight! My heart was in the sky.

In 1935, I remember getting a five-cent stick-and-tissue model kit but was just too young to build it or even open the box to look at it so again, it was put on the top shelf of the closet. I do not really remember what happened to it. When I was old enough to see what was on the top shelf, it was gone.

I remember standing on the dock in Winslow with my mom, waving goodbye to my dad, who was in the open cockpit of a two-wing single-engine floatplane (ponton) on his way to Port Gamble to meet his departing steamship. He was a seaman and there was a ferryboat strike preventing him from joining his shipmates. As the plane taxied away from the dock, he clutched his hat as the pilot gunned the engine and it took off across the bay into the drizzling gray Puget Sound sky.

I remember standing on the same dock a few months later as part of my second grade grammar class, gawking at the monster four-engine Boeing 314 Flying Boat as it underwent a weight and balance test. Our teacher herded us little angels during our lunchtime recess to witness this giant of the skies. These are vivid recollections, giving me a love of the flying machine.



Boeing B-1

I remember, at age nine or ten, putting together those solid models. You know, the Strombecker solid pine models that we glued together with that terrible powdered casein glue; B-17s,

Stratocruisers, flying boats, etc, with turned engine nacelles and tiny metal three-bladed propellers.

I remember graduating to solid balsa models, consolidated “solids” which had rough carved fuselages and wings, plastic canopies, turned wooden wheels, etc. My favorite was a FW 190 with a camouflage paint scheme. My bedroom ceiling was covered with solid models hanging from threads. About this time, my parents built an addition to the garage. My own workshop! Lucky me!

I remember putting together those black cardboard silhouette spotter planes that were used to identify enemy aircraft. It was 1940-1941, and we just entered World War II.

I remember the desire to get something to fly and built those Comet and Megow kits of the World War II fighter planes, stick and tissue with lots of wrinkles that did not fly very well. They were probably underpowered and, needless to say, I knew nothing of trimming them.

I remember the small Scientific rubber-powered Sport models. They started to show signs of flying. I was in Junior High School at the time.

Raised on remote Bainbridge Island where there were hardly any other modelers and no hobby shops, my mom took me to music lessons in downtown Seattle once a week for several years. I found my way to the hobby shop in the Bon Marché basement. Mr. Weeks was the shop manager. I spent much time there just listening to the model chatter across the counter and I loved to look through the model kits on the big table, especially those big gassie models.

I remember getting a huge Brooklyn Dodger kit and a Vivell 35 for Christmas. I built about three-fourths of the kit before bogging down. The basswood parts were just too hard to cut and sand. Balsa was only used sparingly. World War II was still affecting the balsa availability.

I remember the Comet Speedomatic and Joe Ott kits. The Kress five-and-dime store had dozens of Korda rubber kits, I think with cardboard ribs.

I remember seeing my Thermic 18 hand-launched glider (HLG) gliding upward briefly. I did not know thermals existed. It was just magic.

I remember flying large HLG-like models powered by CO2 “Sparklett” cartridges. I saw my Baby Playboy climbing high on the OK CO2 engine. Wow, what a climb!

In my high school years, I built Jasco HLG TLG (Thermic 50), Sinbad 50, Jasco small rubber kits, (Jasco Kid), and a Monogram Prowler. All flew pretty well. My flying field was our small pasture encircled by trees. I became good at climbing trees and patching holes in tissue.

I was a college freshman at Washington State University in 1949. My new roommate was an experienced modeler, having won the Junior Stunt award at the 1948 Nationals. He had actually seen Free Flight models with skyrocket climbs and dethermalizers to bring them down, just what

the doctor ordered. He filled the gap and had answers to my modeling questions. (Without his help, I might be flying Radio Control today.)

I was then into the contest Free Flight models - gas and gliders. I had a great flying Thermic 70 and built all of the Ehling-designed gas models, Phoenix series, and couple of big Sandy Hogans, ZEEKs, and Kiwis. I also had a strong interest in the International events, mainly Nordic and FAI Gas. During the years 1954 through 1956, I pursued these events with great enthusiasm. In 1954, Dave Kerzie and I traveled along with some guys from Tacoma, Gil Coughlin, Jerry Thomas, and Maury Hinkley, along with eight models and our entire luggage, to California in Jerry's Jaguar sedan. In 1955, I came within a few seconds of making the FAI Power Team. In 1956, Joe Masters and I flew FAI Power in California.

Out of college and into family and career endeavors, I took several years off and started up again in the mid-sixties, flying AMA events including Indoor Scale, HLG, EZB, FAI Gas, and Nordic. I built Taibi Spacers and Stardusters. I also designed my own FAI Power jobs and Nordics.

In 1974, with the advent of "circle tow" and with a great flying partner/helper, Joe Deady, I finally made the US Nordic Glider Team. In 1975, I represented the US in the World Championships in Bulgaria. I repeated that again in 1977 in Denmark, and again in 1979 in the USA where I shared winning the world team title in Nordic.



2003: Jim launching his Orbiteer on Labor Day at Fort Lewis Training Area 15.

In 1982, I took a sabbatical from modeling until 1998, when I joined the Really Great SAM 8 and now you know the rest of the story.

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