



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of BILL YOUNG

**Founder, Modeler, Electronics Designer,
Magazine Contributor, Amateur Historian, Engineer,
Hobby Shop Owner**



June 17, 1934 - November 30, 2011 Started modeling in 1941
AMA #W6MJH

Text by B.Y. (12/2008); Also written by AMA staff (12/2011) Transcribed and Edited by J.C.Y. (01/2009); Reformatted by J.S. (02/2009)/ (02/2010); Updated by J.S. (01/2012, 08/2013)

Career:

- Late 1960s: President of Westcoast Association of Model Boaters
- 1969-1970: Spearheaded the founding of the North American Model Boat Association (NAMBA)
- Author of over two dozen scale model aircraft designs and plans
- Author of detailed manuals on model autogiros, autogiro kites, and the *N9M* flying wing
- Author of over several articles published in *Model Builder* and other publications
- 1988-1996: Wrote monthly column “Electric Scale” for *Scale R/C Modeler*
- Volunteer historian for the Northrop *N9M-B* Restoration Project at the Planes of Fame Museum, Chino, California
- 1994: Co-author, with Gerald Balzer, a *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* article on the *N9M* flying wing
- Designed electronic free flight timers
- Designed micro servo for Cannon R/C Systems
- Designed the first fully integrated electronic U-control handle
- 1996-2007: Vice-President of Flagstaff Flyers R/C Club
- 2007-2009: President of Flagstaff Flyers R/C Club
- With the Flagstaff Flyers, organized and ran several *Delta Dart* building programs for children
- Volunteered in three Flagstaff, Arizona elementary schools to assist kids and teachers involved in the Science Olympiad
- State highway engineer in California for 22 years
- Practicing psychotherapist in Los Angeles, California for 20 years
- 1996-2007: Owner of Bill Young Designs & Hobbies in Flagstaff, Arizona
- Currently designing electronic devices for use in magic tricks

Honors:

- 2004: Recognized as KNAZ-TV’s “Someone 2 Know” for his volunteer assistance with the Science Olympiad in local elementary schools
- 2011: AMA Hall of Fame inductee

Jeremy Young submitted the following excerpt from an oral history taken of his father, Bill Young, in December 2008. The full transcript is available on the web at <http://billyoungdesigns.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/bill-young-oral-history-2008-12-27-transcript.pdf>.

I remember [when I was a boy] in Pasadena, [California,] Dad taking [my brother] Bob and I to a high school somewhere near where we lived, and there were people – there was a club that went there, and they flew U-control model airplanes. We went there quite a bit, actually. And that started an interest in model aircraft, and I can remember building stuff – never managed to get much of it to fly very well, up until I was eight, nine, somewhere along in there. And then began to be able to be successful. And along about that time, and probably before, what was showing up in the model magazines was the very early radio control equipment for model aircraft. And it was very primitive, very unreliable, difficult to build and keep operating, and la-de-dah-de-dah-de-dah. But that sparked my interest in electronics. And at that point in time, in order to operate a radio control aircraft, you had to have a ham license, because the frequencies that were available were amateur radio frequencies. So that's what put me on the track of getting my amateur radio thing [at the age of twelve or thirteen]. And needing to learn Morse code, not having a radio that picked up the amateur radio signals – also at that time, magazines like *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* published regular articles on electronics. And amongst them were articles on how to convert common, everyday kitchen radios or what-have-you to cover the amateur radio frequencies. And so I was into taking those old radios apart and redoing them so I could use them and listen to the ham radio. And that's how I learned code, while I was listening to code on the air. ... Voice communication was [also] there with the amateur radio stuff. Amateur radio stuff was far more sophisticated than the radio control stuff. But that all changed as time went on.

So I was – that sparked my interest in electronics, and then – they were kind of mixed. And by the time I got my amateur license, I had become interested in wanting to communicate on the air, and I managed to put up a big antenna, and I cobbled together a transmitter that would work. Managed to get it to work, too. And I spent a lot of time listening for people to talk to on the air using Morse code. And mixed in amongst that, I was still building and flying model airplanes and trying to figure out how to do the radio control bit. And it wasn't until after we had moved to Porterville, [California] – seems to me it was around 1960, maybe a little earlier than that – right at the point of time that transistors came on the market and were available to anybody. And transistors made it possible to build radio control receivers that worked pretty well. And at that point, I managed to build a system that worked, and started playing around with controlling the models. So it was all mixed together. And then, as the years went by, I had less and less interest in the amateur radio side of it, more and more interest in the radio control side. ...

[Growing up, I generally worked on modeling] just by myself. Was nobody else around that was interested that I knew of. They thought I was weird – that was geeksville time in those days. ...

[I met NAMBA co-founder Ross Kominitzky sometime after my family and I moved to Bakersfield, California in the late 1950s.] And we had been there a year or two, maybe more. But Russ and a friend of his, another high school teacher, had decided to open a slot car track and a

store to sell parts and so on. ... And they had operated that business for four or five years, something like that. And they had some supplies for – hobby supplies. And the way I met him was going in for supplies, and it was either he or the other teacher that were there. So that's where I met him.

Somewhere along the line in that same timeframe is when the model airplane group in Bakersfield was approached by model boat clubs in Los Angeles and San Francisco about a lake that they could have races on that was central to their two locations. And I don't remember why I was involved in the process, but somehow or other I was involved in the process. And we decided to see if we could arrange that for them. And that created an interest in model boats. And we were able – we found a lake and made all the arrangements for the lake for them, and I think it was about a year later – maybe it was two – those two model boating clubs had a meet at Bakersfield, in the lake that we had found in Bakersfield. And because of that, we had created a model boating club in Bakersfield. ...

There was an organization on the west coast called the Western Council of Model Aircraft – [actually, the] Western Association of Modelers, WAM. It existed primarily for U-control model aircraft activities, and it was a big enough thing that they had managed to get good liability insurance for the various clubs that belonged to them, so that they could fly their aircraft on various and sundry public pieces of property, and so on. And when this thing with the model boat thing got started, the model boating clubs just a year or two before that had gone to the Western Association of Modelers and said, "Can you manage to have your insurance cover us, and we can be another part of the organization – Western Association of Modelers, U-control and model boats?" And Mom Coad, who was the one who ran the thing, said, "Yes, definitely," and that was all put in place. So when the two clubs came together, one of the things that came out of that very quickly was, "Let's have an organization that covers our activities so we can compete together and have records, and all that kind of stuff." And that's what started the model boat association, [the North American Model Boat Association (NAMBA)]. ...

And at that juncture – there still is an organization in the United States called the International Model Boat Association, IMPBA – Power Boat Association. And at that point, they were by far the largest operating organization. And they had corporate liability insurance that covered the member clubs and so on. And I ended up being president of the Western Association of Model Boaters, and I pushed for the group to join IMPBA. It just made sense at that point, because we were small compared to them, and pulling it all together into one situation would have benefitted model boating as a whole, a lot. However, people didn't want that. And the worst part of it was, I think, that they would have voted for it, except that the IMPBA rejected the proposal. They finally came back, and in a letter to our organization said, "No, we don't want anything to do with it." And at that point, [in 1969-1970,] we just said, "Okay," and just went ahead with our own organization, and created our own set of racing rules, and lah-de-dah-de-dah. And ten years later, we were a bigger organization than IMPBA, and we still are, by a whole lot. But the downside of it is that the model boating association is split in the United States – the two organizations. ...

By the time we had got to that point [of founding NAMBA], there were member clubs in

Washington and Oregon and Arizona – I don't remember whether there was any – there was one of them in Nevada, and a member club in Hawaii, and a member club in Alaska. ... [I was also creating model boating designs at that point] – in fact there's at least three model boating designs that are published in various magazines. Yep. Most of the ones that I designed never got published. [One was published in,] I think it was *Model Airplane News*. ... Boating organizations were struggling to get one of the magazines to cover our activities. And we didn't have much luck; in fact, one of the largest magazines, Radio Control Modeler, flatly stated that model boating was just this little interest off to the side, and didn't have any meaning, model airplanes were the only thing – it was ugly. Ten years later, he was contacting model boaters and asking them to write articles for his magazine. In fact, one time I asked him, I said, "What happened to your original statements?" He says, "What are you talking about?" I said, "You wrote a letter to our organization that was pretty nasty." He says, "Ah, well, I changed my mind." ... And we never did get model boating coverage in the national magazines to any degree at all, even today.

...

[In the late 1970s,] it's like my interest in the boating world just went to nothing in an instant. ... It was very obvious after a short period of time that model boating wasn't going anywhere for me, because I just – I had no interest in doing it. Zero. Boats were packed up and they stayed packed up. They're still packed up. But that didn't mean I wasn't interested in modeling. And the other part of the modeling world, the airplanes, was wide open. And living in Los Angeles, [where I moved around this time,] it was convenient, because there were four, five model airplane clubs all within a very small radius. And I had known Tony Naccarato, who owned the hobby shop T & A Hobby, for many, many years. And they were involved with the Blacksheep Squadron [model airplane club]. So that's how that connection started. And just – the lead into the airplane world just continued to evolve.

[I had met Tony] a long time before I moved to Los Angeles. Because there were several times during those early years when I would drive to Los Angeles with a specific need and want to go to surplus places and hobby shops and stock up on things I couldn't get in Bakersfield. And Tony's place was one that I frequented, for the same reason that I did for many years: he had an interest in the lines of things that I was interested in. ...

Model airplane-wise, there's six or seven things that I have published. ... I had always been interested in the engineering side of whatever I was doing. And in the airplane world, full-size as well as models, there's always been a side interest in pure airplanes, i.e., the flying wings. And by now, even in full-size aircraft, there have been so many flying wings successful that anybody who says that flying wings are unsuccessful, doesn't, is not – is asleep, because there's millions of them out there. But at that time, it wasn't quite so strong. So I was looking for ways – in the model airplane world, they just didn't exist, and they still pretty much don't. So three of the designs I got published were flying wings. And along the way, the interest in history was being evolved, so those three are also scale of the full-sized airplanes. ...

[I also became involved with the *N9M* restoration project at Planes of Fame in Chino, California –] sort of. The guy who actually owned that process, quote – and theoretically couldn't own any of it because it was a non-profit organization. But you couldn't tell that if you tried to do

anything with him, because if he didn't like you, you weren't going to work with the stuff, period, end of report. And I had known ahead of time, writing to museums all over the world to get information about this, that, and the other thing, or clubs and organizations, and never had anybody refuse. Lots of times they didn't have anything, but that's beside the point. But he – I had been told ahead of time that he will trade with you like anybody – all the rest of them will trade; however, you won't get anything, he'll get it all. Sure enough – sure enough happened. And in the process, he decided he didn't like me, so being involved with the *N9M* project had to be done in a way that he didn't know I was doing it. And in fact, at some point in the process of the *N9M* project, the guy who was running it contacted me because of stuff I had written and said and what have you, and he says, "You have a lot of information about this airplane, and would you share that with me?" And I just – I told him, I said, "You know, me and your so-called employer, we're not on good terms, and so if I try to do anything with you and you share that with him, the likelihood is that it isn't going to work very well." And he says, "I know all about that kind of stuff;" he said, "Whatever you can do to help, we'll be very glad of it, and we'll be helpful with your project of writing it up." He said, "Don't worry about it." And that went through the whole project; it was – I was able to get information that they had found, and I shared information I had found. It worked very well for them, and me too.

[The end result was that] they rebuilt [a working *N9M* at Planes of Fame,] and it's flying to this day. And I finished the article that is probably – not probably; it is the article on the *N9M* [published in the *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* in 1994]. ... [Researching this article,] first thing I did was go to obvious places like libraries, magazines in the field. After I had done some of that, then it was into going to museums, seeing what I could glean from the museums. At that time, there was a number of small museums in the Los Angeles areas, and they were a gold mine of information that a lot of people didn't know existed. And in fact, like I said, no matter where I went around the world in museums, I always was – got very pleasant responses, and got stuff back. And at this point, there's two other museums that haven't responded, but I kind of understand both of them. One of them is the Musée d'Air, and the understanding that I have there, based on a French person that I know well, was that, if you're not French, you're not likely to get any information from the organization. And I knew that that might have been true before I went to there. And the other is the Russian museums, and that has to do with the fact that they're trying to make that a – those archives a moneymaking process for themselves, and as a result it's really hard to get information out of Russia. ... I [also] managed to interview every living person who ever flew the *N9M*. I think at that time there was only three that had passed away. [And also] Some of them that had worked on it, and some of the engineers that did design work – yeah, lots, lots and lots of that stuff. ...

[I began in the early 1990s to create electronic inventions for model aircraft.] Actually, I'd played around the edges of that for quite a long time before, and by that, I mean I had built things for myself, and never went any further than that. But in ... ninety-three, ninety-two, I was approached by members of the Blacksheep Squadron who flew U-control model airplanes about electronics in their controls. And what they were using at that time is modified radio control systems which were kind of clumsy in their operation, and their question was, "Can we put this all together in a handle and make it nice and neat and compact and make it work?" And I said, "Yeah," and I designed a simple handle at that time for them to use, and the two guys that I was

talking to loved it, and several other people saw them and said they wanted them. And so I refined the design and started selling radio – not radio control, but electronic u-control handles, and to this day – in fact, I have an order for one right now.

... Just during the couple of years prior to that I had built some electronic free flight timers, also for the members of the Blacksheep Squadron who knew of my electronics and wanted to know if there was some way I could come up with electronic timers for their U-control stuff. ... [Also, I briefly marketed a speed control with Cannon R/C Systems.] Because of the other electronics that I was doing, and because I had a longtime friendship with Bill Cannon, when he got ready to get involved in electric model aircraft – oh, I was writing [a monthly electric scale column in *Scale R/C Modeler*] at that time too. ... And he contacted me, and wanted to know if I could design a speed control for him for his microsystems, and I said, “Sure.” So I did, and sold quite a few of them, actually. ... At the time it was [the smallest speed control on the market, though] the market was moving so fast that it didn’t last long. ...

One of the first things I did when I [moved to Flagstaff, Arizona in 1995] was to get connected up with the model airplane club, [the Flagstaff Flyers,] because at that point I was very active at flying model airplanes, and wanted to fly when I was here. So that was a natural connection. And there was a hobby shop here at the time. I had always wanted to do a hobby shop, and I was looking at the possibility of starting a therapy practice. One thing led to another, and made the decision to do the hobby shop [Bill Young Designs & Hobbies], and did that [for eleven years]. ... Initially, [my involvement in the club] was getting to know people and how things functioned. And then at some point they were having trouble with officers, and so I said, “I’ll volunteer for Vice President, but I can’t be an officer beyond that, just simply because of my involvement with the hobby shop.” And one thing led to another and a couple of years later I said to them, “Why don’t you just make me permanent Vice President, and forget it?” – which they did. And so out of the eleven years that I was a member, probably eight or nine of them I was Vice President. ...

The Blacksheep Squadron was [sponsoring *Delta Dart*-building programs with young kids] all the time. And whenever a teacher would come into the shop and talk about getting supplies and things, I would make a suggestion to them that that was something that I could offer, and/or the club could offer. And so yeah, over the years, there were quite a number of those that we [the Flagstaff Flyers] did. And then also the Science Olympiad stuff, also. ... It’s a national program, and they have different segments that people can do, and the one that we helped with was airplanes. And supposedly, these are kids who don’t have any experience coming in, they’re given this plan to build, and as a helper, you’re not supposed to tell them anything. And then they offer county competitions, and statewide competitions, and national competitions. Well, any kid that’s going to be interested in going into the competitions has got to have some pretty good tutoring at the beginning, or they’re never going to be able to get there; they’re just never going to be able to get their aircraft complex enough, it just – it’s got to happen. And the Science Olympiad fight that – fought it and fought it and fought it something awful. And the end result was, is we dropped out of the program. And then the other one that runs in the schools ... Odyssey of the Mind is even worse. Several times people have asked me why I don’t get involved. I don’t like the way they operate. [On the initiative of one of the teachers, I was named by the local television station as their “Someone 2 Know” for the week for my involvement with

the Science Olympiad.] ...

[Since closing the shop because of ill health in 2007, I've been President of the Flagstaff Flyers.] All the people who were President and willing to be President left town or changed their willingness, and there I was Vice President, so therefore I was President. It's only just this last round [in 2008] that I got elected.

[I've also become involved in doing some electronic work for magic tricks.] I always have this interest in electronics; it's always been there. And I've kept my hand in. And so, even here when people would come into the shop with something that would be electronic, if it was something that I thought I could solve, I had an electronics project to do. And I did several of them. And several of them were for model railroaders, and several others were for other things. And then, one day this guy [magic designer and retired magician Nick Ruggiero] was in the shop asking me about servos – he had been in the shop several times, and he'd bought servos and so on. And he looked at my card, which said electronics – he says, “What does that mean?” And I said, “It means that I do electronic design work.” And his answer to that was, “Aha.” And so he sat down, told me that he was a retired magician and magician designer of magic tricks, and been looking for somebody adept at electronics and electrical stuff. And he was in Sedona; he used to own a company who made magic – who still makes magic tricks in New Jersey, and he was retired, and he was their magic trick designer. And beyond that, whenever something came up and he developed a magic trick, if it didn't sell very many, he made them by hand; if it started selling well, then the company took over and manufactured them. And so ever since, I've been working with him on one thing and another, and at this point, it's been about six or seven different magic tricks that I've worked with him on.

The following was printed in the January 2012 issue of Model Aviation by AMA staff. Bill was inducted into the AMA Hall of Fame in 2011.

Bill Young

Bill Young began his model-building career with boats, but built his first model airplane in 1941 at the age of seven. In 1969, as president of the regional West Coast Council of Model Builders, he advocated for a new, national governing body for the hobby. He formed the seven-member committee that created the North American Model Boat Association (NAMBA).

In the late 1970s, Bill became an active member of the Black Sheep Squadron in Los Angeles. After moving to Flagstaff, Arizona, he joined the Flagstaff Flyers. From 1996 to 2011, he held the offices of vice president and president.

Bill has published nearly two dozen Scale drawings, focusing on electric power, autogiros, electric-powered ducted fans, flying wings, Schneider Cup racers, and the Northrop *N9M*. Some of these designs were self-published, while others appeared in *Scale R/C Modeler*, *Model Builder*, *Flying Models*, and *RC Modeler*.

In the early 1990s, he began designing electronics for FF aircraft. He invented a popular FF timer, a mixer, and the Cannon/Young micro-speed control marketed with Cannon RC Systems. He also created his most popular invention: the first fully integrated electronic U-Control handle.

Bill's work led him to contribute to aircraft scholarships and history. He wrote a monthly column for *Scale RC Modeler* entitled "Electric Scale," from 1988 to 1996, and self-published historical technical manuals on model autogiros, autogiros kites, manuals on model autogiros, autogiro kites, and the Northrop *N9M*. This project led to a two-part *N9M* article (coauthored with Gerald H. Balzer), published in the *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* in 1993-1994. The article has become the definitive reference to the *N9M*.

In 1996, Bill opened Bill Young Designs & Hobby Shop. In the 11 years it was open, Bill took interest in youngsters new to the hobby and spent countless hours helping them build, fix, and fly their aircraft.

Bill's involvement with youth led him to his most-enduring contributions to the model aircraft world. In the late 1990s, he began offering Delta Dart building programs for elementary school children. For several years, he organized and coordinated volunteers for the weekly Science Olympiad programs at three Flagstaff elementary schools. He often closed his shop early to volunteer at the schools, teaching children the basics of model aeronautics, helping them build airplanes, and preparing them for statewide Science Olympiad competitions. In 2004, he received the Someone 2 Know award in recognition of his service to Flagstaff schoolchildren.

Bill's nomination was sponsored by his son, Jeremy. He wrote the following in his submission:

"Bill Young has spent his life demonstrating excellence and commitment to nearly every aspect of the model aircraft world. His activities have strengthened the hobby at local and national levels and in the realms of organization, scholarship, outreach, and design. His efforts have introduced numerous people, young and old, to the joys of model aviation and have measurably improved the modeling experience for everyone, from U-control racers in Japan to young modelers in Arizona. This story of leadership is a rare thing and it deserves the highest honor the modeling world can bestow."

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

