

## Bringing Home the Baby Ace

I do not remember life before the blue and yellow Baby Ace; the first memory of my childhood is seeing rib jigs in the upstairs room of our small farmhouse. One day my Dad's friends (Allen Rudolph, Arden Hjelle, and Jim Dins) came over and helped take the windows out of that 2nd story room and lower the wings down to



the ground. The next thing I knew those wings were in our living room and all the furniture was moved! It still makes me wonder how the wings actually got into that living room, and even more so how they got out. The fuselage had been in the garage, and things seemed to go together rather quickly after that.

The year was 1964, and in October of that year the plane flew for the first time.

My younger brother Warren was born in January 1965, and that summer we all



went to Rockford with Dad's new Baby Ace. We traveled to numerous air shows and watched Dad fly and display that beautiful plane for the next few years.

Around 1971, shortly after my youngest brother, Bill, was born, Dad sold the Ace.

He said he was going to build something else.

Warren and I missed that pretty

Ace, and we wanted it back. Years later, Dad

offered to buy it back, but the owners had no intent of selling at that time. My brother Warren made up his mind; he was going to get the Baby Ace back, and he never stopped trying.

Years went by, and finally Warren convinced Bob Zilinski to sell the plane. It was agreed that it would be sometime later in 2014, and Warren decided that he would buy the plane and surprise Dad. A definitive date hadn't been discussed yet, but the Ace would be coming home in the fall. The thought alone had us overjoyed, almost in disbelief that this was finally going to happen. Warren told his son Joe, our brother Bill, and me, and it went no further than us until the day Zilinski's called and gave us our sense of resolution: "tomorrow around 11:00 am".

The date was Friday, October 3, 2014. We had no idea how we were going to get Dad to Warren's house the next morning to watch the plane fly in. Warren had been trying to call our mother all day, but, as fate would have it, her cell phone had gone dead that morning and it would be evening before anyone would be able to get a hold of her.

Our big news was left to me to deliver, since Warren had to leave for work before he could reach Mom. Time was falling short when I finally reached my mother later that night-- mere hours before the Baby Ace would be coming home! Warren's son, Joe, had been able to get a hold of Mom and tell her before I could, and I confirmed the news for her. All we had to do was come up with a plan to get Dad to Warrens, without him asking a bunch of questions or suspecting this big surprise. This was not an easy task. The autumn weather was unseasonably warm and sunny; a string of beautiful days had already gone by, and Dad was going to have plenty of ideas on what he wanted to be doing!

My mother called a few family members and close friends, and we finally got Dad to Warren's on the premise of having a picnic to enjoy the unseasonable weather before it was gone for the year. The Zilinski's called and the arrival time had to be changed to 2:00pm. Slight panic ensued at this change in plans, only because we knew Dad wanted to get back home while there was still daylight to work on any of his many projects that he was currently in the middle of. We had to keep calm and quiet and carry on as if nothing was happening behind the scenes. Somehow we all were able to pull ourselves through the silent apprehension and lingering excitement, and as 2 planes appeared in the distance, everyone was ready.



Dad looked to the horizon and first exclaimed that there was an Ace! No one said a word; it was so quiet that the only sound in existence was the high-pitched drone of the Ace's engine in the distant sky. Dad's gaze was set on the planes as they flew toward us. As they came nearer and nearer, the look of curiosity grew

to wonderment and then disbelief as he uttered some inaudible words toward the sky. It did not take him long to figure out which Baby Ace was flying over us!

He turned to Warren and asked, “How did you get them to fly up here?” We then realized that he thought the planes came just for a visit during our “picnic”. Then Warren told our Dad that the Ace is coming home for good. “Its staying,” Warren said, as Dad was internalizing what was happening. By then we were all crying, and the glister in Dad’s eyes told us that he was happy to have his plane back.

Bob Zilinski taxied up and gave a laughing, joking shout from the cockpit that he had changed his mind and was going to keep the Baby Ace! It was a joyful, emotional day for our family. We spent the afternoon taking pictures and reminiscing, carrying ourselves back to the days in Rockford and all the airshows between then and now.



The Baby Ace is original; virtually untouched since the day in 1965 when it won the “Mechanix Illustrated Award for Worksmanship”. That blue and yellow Baby Ace that my parents worked so hard on was the icon of my childhood. It was the plane my younger brother always dreamed of flying, and it is the plane my youngest brother never knew. And it is now back home after 5 decades.

The next weekend, as I was outside preparing my yard for the inevitable winter that would soon arrive, I heard an unmistakable sound in the distance. I lifted my head to see that above my house flew the now 50 year old Baby Ace, flown by my now 81 year old father. I was not 6 years old anymore. But, for a split second, as I listened to that familiar purr of the 65 Continental engine, I could have been.

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