

# RC Soaring Diaries

How it all started, and how it all came back around full circle.

[Michael Berends](#)



My mentor's Legion Air (photo: Mike Berends)

Thank you for tuning in for another month and hope the flying season has been treating you well!

My intentions with *RC Soaring Diaries* has always been to be exactly that. A diary and compilation of all my RC soaring adventures and experiences both past and present. This wonderful hobby, and pastime, always starts somewhere in our lives and I thought that it would be fun to share my

beginnings, as it has come around 'full circle' in a very interesting way.

I have loved flying models ever since a very young age. They are a big part of my first memories in life and something that has been a component of my very existence since.

It all began in a typical way of the era — I was around four years old when my dad bought a control-line Cox .049 *PT-19*. I remember him firing it up in a parking lot and I ran to the car crying into my mom's arms because the noise terrified me! I do however remember looking through my diminishing tears and the windows of my noise barricade mesmerised by this miniature yellow and blue airplane flying in circles. It was already apparent even at a very young age that engine noise was not something that agreed with me. It was the only time that my dad flew it and it sat on a shelf after that for years.

A couple of years later another memorable experience took place. The weekend newspaper was sitting on the table and there was an article on RC planes that caught my young, curious eyes. I was looking at the pictures of the planes and of course I had some questions that were directed towards my mother. She explained the man on the ground talked to the little pilot in the plane on the radio and told him what to do. Well, that just sent my imagination through the roof! The thought of having a small airplane and telling the pilot to do loops and rolls fueled my dreams for weeks!

All of this gave me a fascination with anything miniature that flew and I spent my youth building many balsa free-flight planes, control-line planes and model rockets. It was gliders however that always took precedence and were the one thing I focused on the most. I spent hours throwing hand launch gliders and launching towline gliders learning more and more every flight about trimming and aerodynamics.



Always fascinated by anything that took to the air. Here I am proudly displaying the Saturn V that my cousin and I built together. (photo: Mike Berends)

Fast forward to 1983 and my 15th birthday. My family took a road trip through the western United States from Canada. My parents asked me what I wanted for my gift and I had

been eyeing a four channel radio advertisement from Circus Hobbies in Las Vegas for a few weeks already, and with some hesitation asked for a radio. I was so happy when they agreed!

It was a painful few days of driving through a number of states sightseeing and doing the tourist thing. All I wanted to do was to get to Las Vegas and pick up my gift. Once we arrived it was straight to Circus Hobbies and eagerly purchased my shiny new radio. Then my dad gave in and agreed to stop at another hobby shop where I bought a *Gentle Lady* kit and some rolls of covering with money that I saved up! What a great day and all from Las Vegas, a place that ironically became a big part of my life years later and my home away from home.

After we returned from our trip a week later I jumped right into building my first RC glider, which didn't take long. I worked on it every waking hour for a number of days and it was ready to fly. I didn't have anyone to guide me or help me so the first flights all ended up in repairs of some sort. I kept repeating the pattern of flying, crashing and fixing over and over again, learning something more each cycle. The plane was getting heavier and heavier from the repairs but I was determined and was getting better with each flight.

A few weeks into this new challenge, I was sitting in the back seat of my parents car driving to a family member's birthday

party. As I looked into the distance I couldn't believe my eyes. I saw what looked like a glider launching at the top of a winch. Examining the sky up ahead carefully, I could see more gliders in the air! We passed the field with my nose pressed to the glass desperately asking my dad to stop the car, but he declined and continued on.

As we drove the last few minutes to my aunt's house, I remembered all the turns we made and how to get to that field. We finally arrived at our destination and I ran all the way through the winding streets in hopes that I could make my way back to all the gliders!

Out of breath but filled with excitement, I finally made it back to the field and walked straight to all the cars and the launch area. I couldn't believe what I was seeing — all these beautiful sailplanes that I read about in the various RC magazines: *Sagittas*, *Olympic 650s*, and a *Windrifter* to name a few. It felt like I was dreaming.

As I scanned the skies I saw another glider that I recognized. It was a *Legion Air*, lazily circling in what I knew had to be a thermal. The man flying it was fairly close to where I was standing. His legs shoulder width apart, head tilted back looking skyward at this dark blue glider that was getting higher and higher. With some trepidation I walked up to him and said hello and that I liked his *Legion Air*. His gruff response was "oh, you know what this is?" I responded

telling him that I started flying a *Gentle Lady* and I was getting better.

He was a man of few words so the conversation was short and we silently stood side-by-side looking up at his plane. Until a few minutes later, the alarm on his watch went off. He said "well, that's 20 minutes" then handed me the radio and walked away! I was in shock, looked back and he commenced to scold me for taking my eyes off the plane while he was grabbing a thermos to pour himself a cup of coffee!

I didn't dare touch the elevator but used the rudder to slowly nudge this beautiful flying machine around the sky with a stern and grouchy voice barking out things behind me like "turn right...your other right!", "you just flew through lift, I thought you knew how to fly!" Finally I could hear him utter, "well, I guess I'm going to have to get out of my chair!". Then he appeared at my side with his coffee in hand. Giving me stern commands guiding me through the sky. I didn't dare make a mistake as he was very abrupt and harsh in pointing out what I was doing wrong.

In the process I realized that the glider was getting higher and higher. I was focusing on his rough commands and listening to every word as he explained how the lift was affecting the plane and how to find the center of the lift and stay in it.



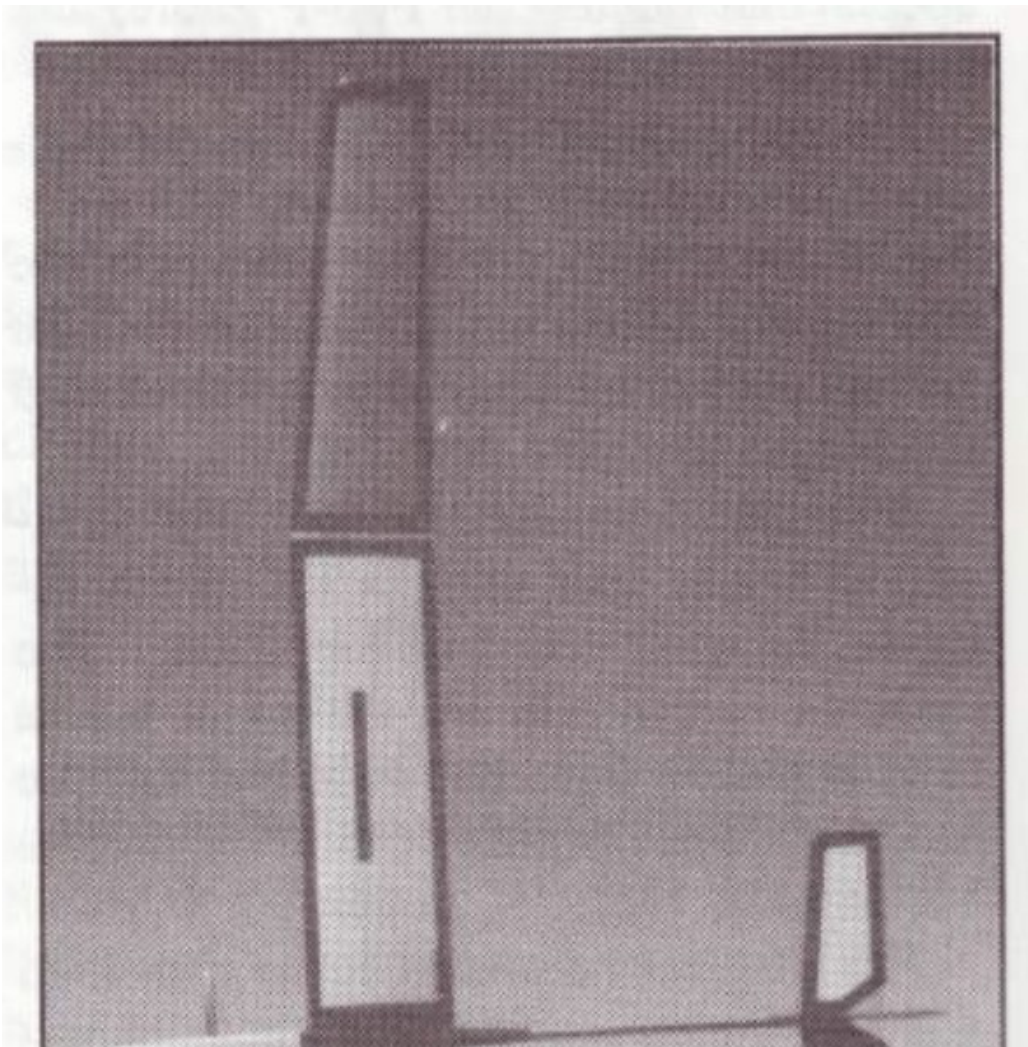
Painting of Steve, done by my good friend Chris Gregg. (photo: Chris Gregg)

Ten minutes later I was still in the air much higher than we started, and he didn't touch the sticks once! At this point he said that he wanted to sit down and finish his now cold coffee and I could land whenever I wanted.

Without his words and commands I slowly guided the *Legion Air* in very flat wide turns until it settled nice and level in the field a few hundred feet away! It was a success and I was on top of the world. Not even his brash remarks about how I landed so far away and already forgot all the things he taught me, could wipe the ear to ear smile off of my face and that sense of accomplishment.

After I retrieved the plane, admiring it the whole walk back, he told me that his name was Steve and with a subtle wink said that I should come back with my glider. I don't even remember the walk back to the family party. I was on cloud nine and had just accomplished that one thing that I dreamed about and desired so badly.

I did return with my *Gentle Lady* and Steve taught me more and more over the years of flying sessions. I realized that under the stern and sometimes grouchy demeanor, there was a man that was extremely passionate about RC gliders and really did have a big heart, always helping everyone around him.





Steve Yurchevich just after receiving the first Diamond Achievement award of the Canadian Soaring Society. (photo: MAAC)

His dedication to the hobby allowed him to achieve the first Diamond Achievement Award of the Canadian Soaring Society along with a multitude of other contest wins and awards. It was quite an honour to have him as a mentor. He was a gigantic influence to me and taught me how to always set my goals high and not stop till I achieved them!

The story does not end there though:

Five years ago, a very good friend of mine named Chris Gregg stopped by for a visit. We were chatting about old

times and Steve came up. I told him the story of how I met Steve and that memorable flight with the *Legion Air*. He looked at me, grinned, and said the most unbelievable thing, "I **have** Steve's old *Legion Air*!"

WHAT? I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I was in disbelief as he told me that he ended up with a number of Steve's planes after his passing. He then invited me out to his property to fly the *Legion Air* that weekend! I just couldn't believe this was real. How could this be true?

That Saturday I drove out to his acreage and there she was, the beautiful dark blue glider that I flew my first thermals in, leaning against the wall of the shop. As I touched the wings of this plane so many memories came flooding back. It was like I just went through a time machine!

We did some checks, set up the winch and it was time to relive that monumental day! With sweaty hands and nerves on the sticks, Chris sent the *Legion Air* up the winch line as I made sure she tracked straight. Once off the line I could feel the tears start to fill my eyes and Steve's voice barking out commands. Thirty-three years later I was reliving this epic day. It was a beautiful flight filled with emotion and happiness on a beautiful sunny day!



33 years later, ready to fly this beauty again (photo: Mike Berends)

Just after I landed, I looked at Chris and told him how deeply thankful I was. He just looked at me with a smile and said

"she's yours". I couldn't believe it! Not only did I get a chance to fly the plane that I flew my first thermals in but now it was mine? Do things like this really happen? It was all extremely surreal!

I still fly the *Legion Air* a couple of times a year. It's so great to let Steve's essence soar in the place that he was so passionate about. On those flights if someone with little experience stands beside me, I always quietly put the radio in their hands and walk away, just like Steve did with me all those years ago. There have now been a few more people that have circled in their first thermals with this veteran glider but this time with me barking commands and orders *at them*.



Just after a 20 minute flight at a recent contest day. (photo: Mike Berends)

Having a mentor was so important to my success in RC soaring. His guidance not only taught me how to fly but also gave me important life skills and taught me how to strive for my goals and achieve them. I hope that along the way I can give back all that he gave me.

This hobby is much more than the planes and the flying. It is

also about the experiences, friendships, adventures, achievements and making memories. That's my story and how it all came back around full circle. I would love to hear all of your stories of how it all began for you down in the *Responses* area below!

That's it for another instalment of *RC Soaring Diaries*. Until next time, happy flying!

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