



September 2019

# Balsa Dust

An Official Publication Of Genesee Valley Aero Modelers, Ltd.

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## We will miss a Friend

It's been a strange Summer for me with a new job consuming much of what would normally be flying time at the field. Four months of work culminating today in the first physical inventory of my new Parts Department. It's Saturday evening now and I think I'm actually starting to relax a bit for the first time since the job started just after Memorial Day. With that relaxation comes time to think through so many thoughts I've had since Tuesday when I got word that a fellow club member, Eric Higham, was no longer with us. I find myself suddenly grateful for work consuming me so completely 'cause it helped keep my mind off of something I honestly didn't want to think about at all but now it's time to try to accept those thoughts and sort them out as best I can.

I didn't know Eric nearly as well as many of the other club members did. I met him at the first Thursday evening club night I went to back in 2008. He was at the field often and more times than not I would find myself in a conversation with him about model airplanes or machine work or steam engines or any of a multitude of other things he seemed to have endless experience with. I saw him offer help and advice to modelers, including me, whenever he could. He was quick with compliments and even quicker with support when something went wrong and someone was a little down. For more than a decade that was the extent of my thoughts about him.

In the past few days I realized something else. I considered Eric a friend. Even though I didn't know him as well as most, or as well as maybe I should have, he was a friend. When I read the message Dave sent around about what had happened I didn't have anything I would call "thoughts" of any kind I just hurt more than I was prepared for. Again, thank God for a busy workplace 'cause I didn't want to think about it. I needed some time to process what had happened.

The facts I know about Eric are few. He was originally from England and had a fantastic accent. He was a talented machinist who enjoyed building all kinds of "things" from small parts for friends in need to complex machines that few could duplicate. I know he was married but I'm not even sure if I ever met his wife. I'm pretty sure he didn't have any other family in the area at all. He was interested in virtually anything mechanical but said that anything he truly enjoyed began and ended with the people involved.

I sit here tonight spending far more time staring at a computer screen choking back tears than typing words that just aren't coming very easily but that's ok. This time around this newsletter is far more than something fun I look forward to putting together each month. It's serving as some healthy therapy that's helping me sort out some thoughts and work through some pain and remember a person who I was glad to share a few moments of my meager existence with and am now honored to say was a friend.

Earlier today I had my mind made up that I would stay home tomorrow and rest and recover from a very rough week and grieve for a friend I will never see again. However, the more I think about him and the light that he was in a sometimes-dark life, my attitude is changing and I think tomorrow should be more than just crawling into a hole and hiding. I don't think that's what I want right now and I'm fairly sure it's not what Eric would want either. I'm gonna do what I do, what we did, and fill my truck with model planes and head to the field early in the morning. I'm gonna marvel at the miracle of flight and watch my planes defy gravity once again. I will think often of the ways my life is better for knowing him and dedicate however many flights I manage to his memory.

So, yes... We will miss a friend. Maybe I'll see some of you at the field tomorrow and we'll talk and reminisce about who he was. Maybe I'll learn more about a person I now regret not knowing better. Maybe there will be no conversation at all and we'll remember him in silence. Regardless, there is no question that he will be missed...

Goodbye, Eric...





Eric and Max at the NEAT Fair in 2008



More NEAT Fair 2008



Lookin' like a proud papa in 2008



Eric, Max and Jim with a Trimotor at Oshkosh in 2008



With a free flight model at GVAM Field in 2014



At the Pageant of Steam in 2013