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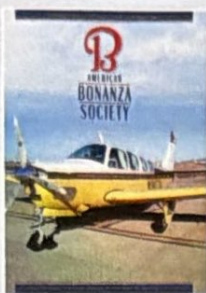
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The American Bonanza Society serves Beechcraft enthusiasts by sharing valuable safety, technical, and educational resources, and by promoting interaction among and advocacy on behalf of its members.

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On the Cover: Beechcraft of the Month

Son of a Tuskegee Airman

1969 Model 36 N3477A

By Lincoln Ragsdale Jr. Phoenix, Arizona



I can't remember not being around airplanes. I vividly remember, at an early age, flying with my father often. My father, Lincoln Ragsdale Sr., PhD, was a Tuskegee Airman. In 1945, after graduating from the aviation program in Tuskegee, Alabama, and commissioning as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Forces, he was transferred to Luke Army Air Force Base near Phoenix for advanced gunnery training in the P-51 Mustang.

When he arrived at Luke he was assigned to room with another officer of Caucasian descent as an early test of the Air Force's integration experiment. I remember him telling me it was challenging for him and his roommate, as this type of pairing was so unusual at the time. However, because my father

proved himself to be a very skilled pilot, they were able to overcome their differences and work together as a team in flight competition against other Tuskegee graduates and pilots also taking part in this experiment. Under the Department of Defense after the war, the newly formed



U.S. Air Force was one of the first military organizations to desegregate under President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981 in 1948.

After my father served his military commitment, he realized he was drawn to Arizona's mild weather and mostly clear skies. Having been raised

in Ardmore, Oklahoma, my parents could feel the contrast of very cold winters and humid summers to the warm, dry climate of the Southwest. Although out of military service, flying was still in my father's blood. I recall my mother saying that after they got married in 1949, even before they had all the furniture she needed for the house my father purchased a Cessna 140. Later he bought a Cessna 180 and then upgraded to a tricycle-gear Cessna 172. As the family grew in number and size he wanted to upgrade again. He looked at a Mooney but needed six seats. He was considering a Cessna 210 when a friend who owned a V-tail Bonanza suggested my father look at the Model 36 Bonanza. He said the Bonanza family was the Mercedes-Benz of airplanes, and he was right! My father bought a 1969 Bonanza 36 in 1974. That airplane, N3477A, is the same Bonanza I fly today.

My father's military training made him a very conscientious pilot who always checked the weather before every flight. In the 1960s he would take me with him to the Flight Service Station to check the weather. I remember the noise of the teletype machines typing out the weather information at the top of the hour. Back in those days, the federal weathermen could really interpret all those pieces of paper and had great weather knowledge even though the systems lack the sophistication we rely upon today. Many times, the Flight Service specialists kept us safe. In contrast, it is so much easier now getting weather information online, and near real-time updates in the cockpit. What a world of difference!

As a child I flew with my father as copilot, and I learned to help with navigation using aviation charts. Sometimes he would give me the yoke to fly the airplane, even though I had difficulty seeing over the instrument

panel. As I reflect, we have always had at least one airplane in the family. In my early teens I didn't always desire to fly. However, I didn't want to have an airplane in the family and not know how to fly it. I have learned to appreciate achieving my flying skills as I have become older.

After graduating from high school I overheard my mother telling my father I was too young to learn to fly. My father said, "Eleanor, I was learning to fly at that age. I was flying a P-51 at age twenty." He explained that pilots start with slow airplanes and "it's as easy a driving a car." He left off any discussion of taking off, landing, crosswinds, and

avoiding getting lost. It all worked out and I'm thankful for his belief in my abilities.

I attended the aviation program at Cochise College in Douglas, Arizona. It took me about 11 months to earn my Private and Commercial certificates. After that I attended and graduated from Arizona State University. That first year at ASU studying business sure was boring after flying an airplane almost daily for a year.

Our main family business was in the funeral home industry. Being raised in the family business helped keep me in the reality that some mistakes can cost you your life. Sometimes my



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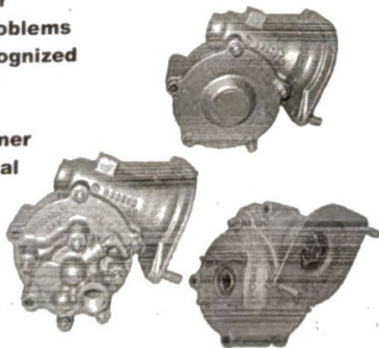
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father would ask me to fly human remains to Compton, California, or pick up a traffic victim in Page, Arizona, or similar flights in the Bonanza. We'd remove the rear four seats to accommodate the remains. I was by then a licensed funeral director and had no problem doing so; it gave me a break from the office and a chance to fly the airplane. I remember flying over Blythe, California, one day, thinking *if I crashed the airplane my father would be very upset with me*, yet more troubling would be sitting in the desert justifying to the authorities that my passenger was already dead and didn't die in the crash.

Being a pilot can make a person think about life in its many aspects. For example, when you take off you know where you plan to land, but if the weather gets bad you have to adjust your flight to go somewhere else. It's just as life forces you to adjust to any circumstances.

My father passed away in 1995 and I inherited one of his airplanes, the Bonanza 36. I found a good mechanic who worked for the Airlines Training School of Arizona in Goodyear, a school that used the F33A Bonanza as a high performance trainer. One year he told me he would not sign off the annual inspection because the engine was well past TBO. That started my search for a new engine. After researching my options I upgraded to a remanufactured IO-550B with a D'Shannon baffle kit. I used Cutter Aviation, an authorized Beechcraft Service Center in Phoenix, to install the engine and perform the next annual inspection. They informed me it was time to inspect the wing bolts. After hearing what the inspection cost, I had them install new bolts to avoid issues in the future. The whole process cost me a pretty penny!

I had an employment opportunity in Sacramento, California, and was flying the Bonanza 36 between Phoenix and Sacramento regularly. I could really feel the difference in power from the original IO-520 to the IO-550. The plane was flying like a dream and I was in love with the Bonanza.





My new shop, Ivan Air in Sacramento, gave me some bad news: he found a small crack in the carry-through spar web. He stop-drilled the crack and informed me he would not be able to sign off the next annual inspection without a spar web repair. Here we go again! Since my new engine was providing me a faster airspeed, and with the airplane getting older, I knew it was important to have the spar web reinforced. Also, flying in the turbulence of the desert Southwest, I didn't want to risk not having the web repaired.

I attended my first ABS Convention in 2005. At that time the spar web AD was a hot topic. I was able to receive critical information about repairing a crack in the spar web at that convention. With help from the ABS support team I was guided to a vendor to purchase the repair kit and was recommended a few shops to install it. I settled on using Cruiseair in Ramona, California. I had them perform an annual at the same time they installed the spar web kit. I'm so glad they did. They informed me my landing gear transmission had a few worn teeth and recommended overhaul of the landing gear box. Cruiseair inspected the aircraft and made all the necessary adjustments to keep me safe, at a reasonable cost. They did a great job.

I've removed seats 5 and 6 and can carry 80 gallons of fuel. I don't have an air conditioner, which helps provide a high payload. Air conditioning would be nice in Arizona, but I get by. I have learned to do a hot start, a little differently than the manual but very effective, because I don't want to be sitting on the ramp in a hot cabin with no air moving. This is a wonderful aircraft and has a fantastic payload with full fuel. I know I have a great and well-maintained aircraft because my mechanic, who is also a pilot, told me to please call him first when I am ready to sell.

Our 1969 36 (E-183), which my father purchased in 1974, still has the original paint except for the wing leading edge, which we repainted once. We have kept the Bonanza



hangared 95 percent of its life. The plane could use a paint job; however, I have put a lot of money into the engine and mechanics of the airplane. I'll keep having it waxed at least twice a year until I'm ready for the expense of repainting. Reading accident reports published by ABS and AOPA, airplanes don't crash because of paint jobs.

I now have over 1900 hours logged, 1750 in Bonanza N3477A. I have flown to beautiful Sedona, Arizona, for breakfast, and over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to Half Moon Bay for lunch. I have flown from Seattle, Washington, to West Palm Beach, Florida, and visited many towns in between. I enjoy reading *ABS Magazine* because the articles help me with concepts such as situational awareness, staying within my abilities and many other issues that help be become a better, safer pilot. Attending BPPP was very helpful, too.

I think one of my father's proudest moments was when he owned two Beechcrafts in the late 1980s: a B55 Baron and N3477A, my Model 36. Hopefully my sons will be able to enjoy the wonderful and gratifying experience of flying as much as I have over the years. — 

