

My Tsunami story

My name is Walter "Wally" Johnson and this is my connection to Tsunami and the story of how I came to be involved with The Tsunami Project.

It was in the spring of 1988 and I was 22 yrs. old when I first learned of Tsunami from a friend who had read an article about it. I had always had a cursory interest in airplanes like any other kid growing up and this piqued my interest so we decided to go to check it out.

Somewhere we had learned of the hanger's location at the Chrystal, MN airport. We were a bit nervous as we were showing up uninvited. We cautiously knocked on the hanger service door. I don't recall who answered the door but he was polite and perhaps a little annoyed at having unexpected guests. We asked if we could come in and see this, as we saw it, incredible aircraft. With the promise to keep our visit short we were let in.

As we started looking Tsunami over a man approached us and introducing himself as Jack and asked if we had questions. I think he may have regretted asking that as I proceeded to talk this man's ear off *with questions.*

It wasn't until we were about to leave, after a "short" visit of 2 hours, that I put 2 and 2 together and realized he was Mr. Sandberg. I felt a bit embarrassed as I processed this realization and I asked if I could come back and help while thinking what the hell do I know about planes. He introduced me to the gentleman who had answered the door earlier and he told me to stop back the next week and he'd find something for me to do.

So for 2 or 3 evenings over the next couple months I stopped in and did little to actually help, but in that time, and the brief encounter with Mr. Sandberg, I was left with an impression, one that inspired me to switch from electronics school to A&P School.

After That I had tried to follow Tsunami's career but kind of lost track. It was a few years later while working as a volunteer at Planes of Fame East I had opportunity to meet Steve Hinton a couple times not realizing that he was Tsunami's pilot. It was while there I heard of the crash. I was saddened to hear of it and the loss of John. I assumed Tsunami was gone forever probably scraped never to be seen again.

It's funny how life's paths come back around surprise you. Fast forward nearly 3 decades. I had been out of aviation for at least 2 of those decades but one day while recovering from a motorcycle accident and poking around on the Internet I come across The Tsunami Project.

I was stunned to find out not only did she still exist but she was just a few miles away and being rebuilt. I immediately sent off an email to Sharron Sandberg of Flight Expo and she in turn put me in contact with

John Bjornstad. So one Saturday in January of 2018 I met with John at their shop.

Upon seeing Tsunami I actually got a bit emotional. I placed a hand on the fuselage closed my eyes and "had a moment". Some will understand, many will not, but for me it is so much more than just an airframe. It is about history and legacy and the people that brought her to life. Now it is about the next generation and a new legacy of rebuilding her and putting their mark on aviation history while teaching them about aviation and the mechanics trade.

After the visit with John and seeing Tsunami my aviation fire was re-lit. I decided right then I was going to do everything I can to help make her fly again and see John Sandberg's legacy continued.

At the time of writing this it has been about 7 months of 2 or so days a week working on Tsunami and I am loving every minute of it. John and I continue to work as my connection to Tsunami and the Sandberg's grows as well as my determination to see this project through. Progress is slow but steady. She nearly has all new tail feathers an excitement mounts as we get ready to show the progress at Reno this year.

With the support from the aviation community and a lot of hard work and patience I believe that this phoenix will rise again. I am proud and honored to be a part of this next chapter in Tsunami's history.

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