

COUNTY Life

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Section **B**

WILLIAMSON COUNTY ALBUM



Photos by Joyce May

Buz Landry stands next to his plane out at the Georgetown Airport, where he practically grew up. Buz has written a history book on the facility, *History of the Georgetown Municipal Airport*.

They call him Mr. Georgetown

Can you remember what you were doing when you were eight years old? Buz Landry can.

On November 9, 1945, an airplane apparently ran out of fuel and made a forced landing at Highway 183, near Hwy. 138, just west of Florence, Texas. Buz's Dad, Neal Landry, was contracted to haul it to the Georgetown Airport. In lieu of payment, Bill Shipp, operator of the airport, offered to give everyone in the family a plane ride on November 11, the date of the grand opening of the airport.

That became a life-altering experience for Buz. From that first flight, the root of an unshakeable idea was embedded in that young man's mind. He knew, without question, that some day he would become a pilot.

Howard, "Buz," Landry was born in his grandparent's home ten miles west of Georgetown on the San Gabriel River in 1937. He had a great childhood, growing up in a small town; his life was filled with adventures and fun. However, he knew from his earliest recollections that he wanted to fly airplanes.

It all started with that first plane ride. In 1951, Bill Shipp hired him as a hangar boy. He paid Buz fifty cents an hour and gave him thirty minutes of flying time each week. After that day, there was no turning back; his future was set.

Buz soloed on his 16th birthday. The following day, he received his driver's license.

As his knowledge base and skill progressed, he received his private pilot license at seventeen and his commercial license at nineteen years of age while still in high school. He recalls, "My fine parents laid the financial groundwork for me so I could get started in aviation as a career."

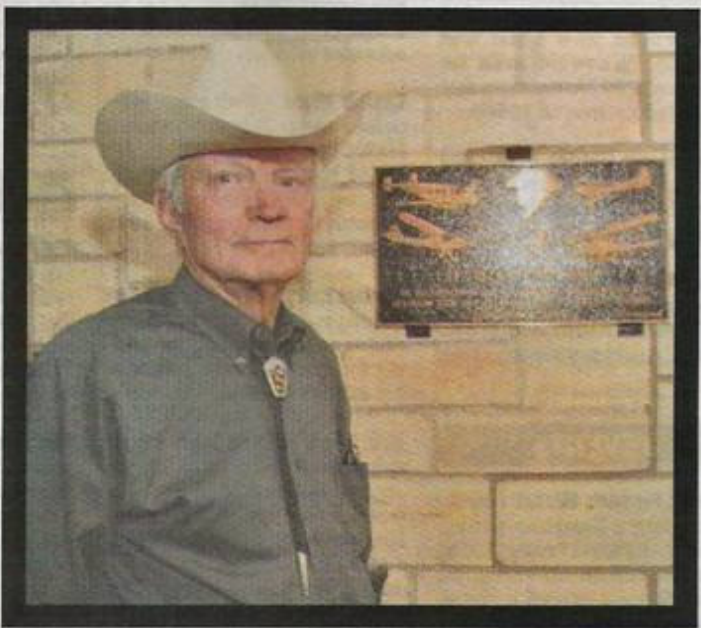
Buz had many mentors during his flight training and credits them all as having an influential part in his life. They were W. H. "Bill" Shipp, Jim Sybert, Herman Feind, A. O. Williams, Billy Hoffman, Fritz Miller and Floyd Jones of Jones Auto Supply.

While a senior in high school, Buz used two wrecked Luscombes to create his first airplane, a Luscombe 8A. When the airplane was almost finished and ready to paint, he went to the Jones Auto Supply to gather up the materials he would need. He stacked them all on the counter, but when he saw the bill, he began to turn his pockets inside out to find the cash



Courtesy of Buzz Landry

Buz Landry in 1952. Buz received his private pilot license at 17 and his commercial license at 19.



Buz stands next to a plaque that was recently installed at Georgetown Municipal Airport at a surprise ceremony held in his honor.

to pay it. Then the realization hit him: he didn't have that much money.

As he began to put some of the items back on the shelf, Mr. Jones walked up behind him and said, "Buz, you need a charge account here at the store. If you'll promise me you will pay your bill by the tenth of every month, I will open a charge account for you." The agreement was quickly made. Buz made sure the bill was always paid when it was due. The generous support by Mr. Jones was another important contribution to the ongoing of Buz's aviation future.

In 1956, Buz graduated from Georgetown High School, and al-

most immediately applied to join various branches of the military. However, the fact that he had two fingers missing on his left hand prevented him from being accepted.

The Georgetown Airport was a magical place for a young pilot starting out on his search for a career in aviation. He loved the time he spent at the airport, just hanging around the pilots, the planes, and doing odd jobs to help him pay for his hours in the air.

In 1957, Buz went to Houston to apply for a pilot position with Trans-Texas Airlines, a small Texas-based carrier. However, his application was rejected because

he was only 19 at the time. He was advised by the personnel director to come back when he was 21 years of age.

When he became 21, Buz began to apply to several major airlines, but the pilot market was flooded with returning military pilots from Korea. These military-trained pilots were more acceptable because of their intense and thorough pilot training. He knew he must wait for the pilot market to change.

Meanwhile, Buz learned that out on the West Texas plains, agriculture was a vital industry. An entire cotton crop can be decimated by destructive insects.

Crop dusting from the air has been around since the early 20s, when lead arsenate was dumped from a primitive hopper attached to the fuselage of a JN-6H (Jenny) onto a field being destroyed by insects. Thus a new and practical use for the airplane was born.

When Buz learned of the need for crop duster pilots out in Pecos he was interested. He saw this as a way of building up his flying time while being paid well for his work. Consequently, he went to work for the Western Flying Service, flying J-3 Piper Cubs as well as Super Cub Dusters and Sprayers. These modified Cubs (with more powerful engines) could carry from 650 to 1,000 pounds of payloads.

Piloting skills for this type of flying were passed along in informal sessions, usually from the older pilots to the new guys. They were taught how to fly low, their wheels touching the crops. Crop dusters occasionally clipped standpipes, fence posts, and too often pulled up without seeing electric or telephone wires in their path. These unseen hazards often meant serious injury to the pilot. Needless to say, the mortality rate for this work was concerning.

Buz jokingly says his mother was responsible for his "ag" flying. When going to the airport to fly as a boy, she always told him not to fly too high.

The danger notwithstanding, Buz says he learned more about life, people and about flying from crop dusting than he did from any other source. He well remembers roaring fast and low across a field, mere inches above the ground.

After a few years of this heart-stopping, nerve-jangling kind of flying, Buz accepted a safer job: flying corporate airplanes. His

Buz

Friends surprise 'Mr. Georgetown' with ceremony

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employer, Tele-Com, based initially in Georgetown, offered a more diverse choice of aircraft. During his tenure with Tele-Com he flew Beechcraft D-18s, Super 18 Beechcraft and the Beechcraft QueenAir. At Tele-Com, his normal duties were varied and often colorful.

One of these assignments was to repossess airplanes from all over the country; he was often asked to fly aircraft he had never flown before. For instance, once he was sent to pick up a DC-3 in California and ferry it to Georgetown. Having never flown a DC-3, Buz received a cockpit check out, and took off about dark. He landed about midnight in El Paso, fueled up and headed to Georgetown, arriving before daylight. He mailed a page from his logbook to the ground check-out pilot in California, who as agreed, signed his logbook page verifying the trip as a dual cross-country in the DC-3.

When Tele-Com moved its corporate headquarters away from Georgetown to Houston, Buz made a decision to remain in Georgetown and become a business owner. He founded and operated Mid-Tex Industries, a pre-cast concrete company. He also bought and sold real estate in the local area.

After his retirement, once again the adventurous and dangerous industry of aerial spraying beckoned. Buz went to work for some operators of an aerial application service operating out of Palacios, Portland, Victoria and Hondo.

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Even with all the excitement

continued on next page

and adventure that ag flying offers, Buz finally decided it was time to retire from this part of aviation. He was now convinced maybe he had courted disaster a little too long. He had never crashed an airplane, nor hurt himself in an accident, so it appeared to be the right time to quit. Many local pilots value the anecdotes Buz tells of his humorous experiences and daring adventures flying the crop duster airplanes in the wide, blue skies of Texas.

Aerobatic flying, which Buz regards as an exciting adventure, was never a major part of his aviation career. However, when he retired he bought a Christen Eagle, (an aerobatic plane) as a personal plane. Through the years, he has owned and operated many different types of aircraft including a Cessna 185.

Although Buz is in no way preachy, he strongly affirms he knows there is a God who watches over children and fools. "And I'm no child," he says. He further states he never met a pilot who is an atheist.

Buz says some of the finest people he has ever met are in the aviation community.

For the past decade, Buz has spent many hours in compiling the history of the airport where he took his first flight. His motivation for this stems from the desire to preserve the history of the airport, and make certain the original airport pioneers are not forgotten. The museum there is for the benefit of the airport's guests.

After thorough research in archives of the Southwestern University Library and interviews with those who were instrumental in the airport's history, Buz has written a book, *History of the Georgetown Municipal Airport*. In this interesting and comprehensive book, he records the erratic and unsteady growth of the airport. Many of the original operators and pilots who trained there are listed. These early pioneers of aviation were instrumental in the foundation and growth of what is considered today an ex-

cellent regional airport. It now boasts of a control tower completed in 2007, which unquestionably adds to the safety and well-being of pilots, passengers and nearby residents as well.

The considerable growth and development of the Georgetown airport is attributed to the closing of Austin's Robert Mueller Municipal and the Austin Executive Airport, both of which were home to many private airplanes. Many of these relocated to the Georgetown Airport.

To pay tribute to Buz, a host of friends and family surprised him recently with an award ceremony. A beautiful plaque depicting his experiences at the Georgetown Airport was presented to him and placed in a prominent position in the terminal. It was a surprise event, but as often happens the honoree almost blew the surprise apart. He planned to go to the airport that morning, but to preserve the surprise his family circumvented that. Consequently, when he finally arrived at the Airport Terminal, he was totally amazed at the number of people there. Confused, he looked around. Then he recognized many long-time friends. It finally dawned on him this must be about him. As usual, he felt undeserving of the honors they showered on him; and of course, he gave all the credit to others.

The Master of Ceremonies, Jim Schwertner, had this to say: "I've known Buz for a long time now; in fact, our fathers knew each other. He's one of the most unique pilots there is. He can make an airplane talk to him. In addition, he has the biggest heart in Georgetown. He will take any young pilot under his wing, mentor him and take care of him through the years."

Jim added, "One day Buz flew into the Georgetown Airport in one of his crop spray planes, with one of his flagmen riding on the wing. When my father saw this, he said, 'I can't get my employees to even work a little overtime, but look at Buz, he can persuade them to ride on his wings.'"

"Buz is a treasure of William-

son County. He doesn't recognize that, but he is."

Another close friend, Steve Powell, who initiated the idea of the celebration, said, "We wanted to honor Buz because of his diligent efforts in preserving the history of the Georgetown Airport. The focus was on three main goals: to present him with a worthy plaque, to have a good time, and surprise him. This was accomplished due to the careful planning by his children, Todd and Timberly and his good friend, Judy Owen." Steve continued, "I also want to thank the many people who shared and helped with this event."

Among Buz's proudest accomplishments are his children. Todd, the oldest, is a professional pilot. Timberly, his daughter, is married, lives in Georgetown with her husband, Bubba Seals and their children, Shiloh and Sutton.

It has been said one of the best ways to gauge a man's worth is to listen to what his children say about him. Todd, Buz's son says, "My Dad is my best friend."

Bill Farmer, another of Buz's many friends, said this, "When I moved to Georgetown four years ago, Buz befriended me. He was helpful, friendly and fair. He's absolutely the most honest person I've ever met. What you see is what you get with Buz. He respects everyone unless they show disrespect. That's just the way he is."

Bill laughed as he recounts how the celebration came about. "Steve and I approached many people to help us come up with a way to pay tribute to him. We tried to name the pilot's lounge in the terminal for him, we even joked about renaming the county and that's when we negotiated down to the plaque."

If you go out to the airport today, you might see a man wearing a white cowboy hat, looking up at the clouds, preparing for a flight. Chances are he is remembering an excited 8 year-old-boy as he climbs aboard an airplane for the ride of a lifetime.

That could be Buz Landry.