

Reach for the Skies



John Fornasero,
Aviator

by Janet Fornasero Burton
with Barbara Fornasero Grimes

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of our parents,
John Bernard Fornasero and Elouise Denbo Fornasero
who dared to reach for the sky.

"They build too low who build beneath the skies."
--Edward Young

FOREWORD

This is their story — as best we can tell it without sitting down with them one more time to ask the important, unasked questions, and hear the significant, lost details. If they are watching, they are probably amazed at how we have colored between the lines. But it is an honest attempt on our part — my sister Barbara's and mine, with help from our husbands and children — to recall it as it happened. Our best qualification is: we were there and lived it with them. Our sources (beyond our memories) have been our father's personal resume, Mother's carefully-kept scrapbooks of Daddy's adventures, the reliable history books, slightly less reliable newspaper and magazine clippings, and Internet research. Our fallibility is, that we were their children, and children never seem to really know who their parents are, though they think they do. And try to.

It is an exciting story — the story of two people with dreams and goals, who worked at them hard and steadily, and achieved a good measure of success. A story of two people to whom we owe much, and of whom we are rightfully proud.

JFB

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The Decision of a Lifetime

“Would you rather be a farmer’s wife or a pilot’s wife?” Johnny cut a sideways glance at the girl he hoped would share his dream. She was thinking.

Elouise hadn’t ever been a farm girl, but she had been taken to visit the Fornasero home place south of town where Johnny’s older brother, Frank, and his bride now lived. There she listened to Rosie talk about getting up at 5:00 AM to cook mash for the baby chicks, not to mention helping with the milking at the dairy, and putting in a garden behind the old farm house. That didn’t sound like a fun life to Elouise. After all, she was still in high school, working weekends as an usher at the Tulare Theater, and going to dances when she could.

But on the other hand, she hadn’t ever been a pilot’s wife either. Not many women had, because flying was still just a “fledgling” adventure — a teenage industry still “trying its wings.” And it had elements of danger. Beside that, they would have to leave home to do it.

Johnny, by contrast, knew farming well. He was born to it, grew up in it, and had been pushed into running the farm with Frank when their father died while they were still just high school students. Now twenty-three, he could get in a hay crop, break a horse to harness, plow with a team, raise a barn, fix a gasoline engine, and run a dairy. Flying sounded like an exciting, daring, and fun alternative to him.

Elouise was still pondering the two alternatives. “I guess a pilot’s wife,” she said tentatively.

Johnny only stopped smiling long enough to give her a proper kiss. And very soon after that he was off to flying school in San Diego.

A Long Line of Adventurers

Johnny's decision should not have been a surprise. Almost forty years before, about 1887, his father, John B. Fornasero, Sr., had sailed out of Italy as a teenager of "sixteen or seventeen," bound for a better life in the golden state of California. Driven by famine from the farming area near the Piedmont Mountains in Northern Italy, many Italians left for America about that time. Family lore says he traveled with an uncle who left the boat in South America. By whatever route, he began life in America in the San Francisco Bay area about 1887. At some point — thought to be about 1900 — he migrated farther south, into California's San Joaquin Valley, and settled in Tulare.

About the time Johnny's father immigrated to America as a teenager, his mother's family also came to California from the north of Italy. Bernardino Cometto and his bride, Teresa Delmasso, came with their infant daughter, Marguerite. Family records indicate that both the Fornasero and Cometto families had been living near the town of Cuneo, Italy, in the Piedmont area (west of Milan, and south of Switzerland). Teresa Delmasso Cometto much later recalled that John Fornasero, Sr. had come to Cuneo as a youth with his widowed father and some siblings. The Fornasero and Cometto families had some acquaintance in Cuneo, but were not closely associated there. But it was from these early adventuresome immigrants that Johnny Fornasero's heritage came.

About 1900 many Italians were settling in the rich farm lands of the San Joaquin Valley. It was a starting place. John Fornasero, Sr. hired on as a hand at the Swall Ranch north of Tulare, and worked there several years. Tulare, in earlier days, was quite a thriving town. In 1872 the railroad had come in, and made Tulare the rail center, with yards and round houses for the valley. The city grew rapidly after that, because the railroad brought investors, farmers, ranchers, and merchants. Wheat, cotton, orchards, grapes, and dairy quickly became part of the economy. The land was rich — more so because of the irrigation system which was purchased and built by the town. Although three fires in the 1870's and 1880's had devastated the town, it always built back. Hotels, banks, a creamery, restaurants, livery stable, water works, mercantiles — all these were built in multiples. But before Grandfather Fornasero moved there at the turn of the century, Tulare had lost the county seat to Visalia, and had lost the round houses (with a half-million-dollar payroll) to Bakersfield. Now only with agriculture, the town continued to grow and survive.



Illustration 1: John Fornasero, c. 1906

Bernardino and Teresa Cometto had only the one child — Johnny's mother, Marguerite, born in Italy in 1885. When they arrived in California, about 1887, they settled in the town of Buttonwillow, south of Tulare, and Marguerite was raised there. They may have moved into Tulare later, because Bernardino died and was buried in Tulare in 1899. (Teresa Cometto married a second time to Joe Giordano, and eventually outlived that husband also. Teresa is buried between her two husbands in the Tulare City Cemetery in the Fornasero plot.)

On October 21, 1901, John Fornasero, Sr. married Marguerite Cometto (she would have been sixteen then, and he thirty-one). They must have been thrifty, because about seven years later, in 1908, John and Marguerite loaded their first two sons, Frank five, and Johnny four, along with all their possessions, into a buggy and took them to the 360-acre ranch he had bought south of town. Frank (Francis) had been born in 1903, and Johnny (John Bernard, Jr.) on March 5, 1904.

The next year, Frank and Johnny, who (at their father's insistence) could not yet speak English, but only the Piemontese language of northern Italy, began school at the one-room school house just north of their place. Family members told how the teacher favored Johnny, who was small and very cute, and often sat him on her lap as she taught. Two younger siblings joined the family: Jim in 1909, and Ann in 1910. All the children attended that Hanby District School through eighth grade, and then went into town to attend Tulare Joint Union High School, which served all the farming communities around.



Illustration 2: The Fornaseros, c. 1908. John Sr., Marguerite, Frank (r), John (4 yrs)

Of Oaks and Omens

I treasure a story told to me by my grandmother, Marguerite Cometto Fornasero, late in her life. It must have been about 1970, and she was 85 years old, living in a care facility in Tulare. While on a trip to California, I took her out to the ranch for lunch with Aunt Rosie. We sat in Rosie's living room, looking out on the yard and the pasture, reminiscing. "Your daddy planted that tree" she said, pointing to a tall, spreading oak out in the pasture. "When Johnny and Frank were little — about four and five — their father gave them each an acorn, and took them to the pasture to plant it. One of the acorns came up and made that tree." In a very real sense, that ranch embodied our family's heritage and roots.

Do you believe in omens or premonitions? My father once told us a funny story about a day when he and his brother (was it Frank or Jim?) decided to try to fly. They gathered feathers from the chicken yard, and stuck them into their sweaters. Then climbed onto the barn roof and made all the right motions to try to fly down onto a haystack. Johnny bit his tongue half off in the mishap, but apparently did not damage his daydreams much.

Johnny did not often speak of his childhood and youth on the farm, but on occasions he told how they would rise early to milk the cows or get in a hay crop. After a couple of hours work, the boys, their father, and hired hands would come in for breakfast. Generally the menu included fried steak, green salad with the traditional Italian dressing, and "biscuits the size of coffee cups." Milk from the Fornasero dairy farm was taken into the creamery in Tulare. The boys accompanied their father on that run, also taking milk to the Europa Hotel run by Mrs. Orisio, our Aunt Rosie's mother. That was when Frank and Rosie met — as children playing together while their parents had coffee with the many Italians who lodged in, or gathered at, the hotel. Later the boys drove the milk into town. John laughingly told of driving the milk truck, taking a corner too fast, and sloshing milk all over the courthouse steps.

John Fornasero, Sr. lived on the farm with his little family until his untimely death from a cerebral hemorrhage at age 50. It was 1920 — post World War I era. Marguerite, now left with Frank and John still in high school, Jim only eleven, and Ann ten, depended on her older boys to take over the ranch. Their many Italian neighbors — it was a close-knit community — pitched in to help the teenagers get in the crops and raise the barn. Fortunately, before his death, their progressive father had purchased one of the first gasoline tractors, and one of the first Ford cars in the community; and that eased their load somewhat. Johnny laid out a year of school while Frank graduated, and then Frank ran the farm so Johnny could graduate in 1922.

Recall that World War I was fought between 1914 and 1918, when John was ten-to-fourteen years of age, and too young to serve in the military. That was the first war in which America was drawn into the aerial warfare arena. In our family's keepsakes, along with Johnny's high school graduation diploma, we also have two certificates titled, "State of California High School Cadets," awarded to our father in 1919 and 1920. These would probably have been his



Illustration 3: Around Tulare: (clockwise from top left) John with his Dodge Roadster (purchased 1926); John and Elouise, fall of 1928 as he was leaving for Ryan's; John on the farm with early gasoline tractor c. 1925; John on 'dozer, laying electric cable for California Edison Co. c. 1926; H.S. graduation, 1922; farm pyramid with three Fornasero brothers at right: Jim (top), John (middle), Frank (bottom); John and Elouise began dating, Oct. 23, 1926

freshman and sophomore years in Tulare Joint Union High School. There is no record of his ever taking part in athletics — likely he was far too busy helping in the dairy and on the farm for such trivial pursuits. His small stature (he was barely five foot seven) may also have been a factor.

The next year after graduation, 1922-1923, he spent a year in Los Angeles, at the National Automotive Electronics School (his mother's gift to further his education). My sister, Barbara, recalls his saying that he sold a field of barley from the home place to pay that tuition. John also tried his hand at several jobs in and around Tulare. Loving the new gasoline motor era, he worked as a mechanic at the Dodge Garage for a time. Electricity was being strung into the interior mountain areas of California, and he hired on with California Edison Company around Big Creek in the Sierra Nevada's above Fresno. Photos in his album show him driving heavy, bull-dozer-type equipment on mountains where there were not yet roads, as the crew worked through rugged terrain to lay cables. All of these skills with motors and electricity were put to good use in his early years as a pilot and mechanic at Ryan Aircraft Company in San Diego.

In 1926, Frank married Rosie, and they moved to the Fornasero home place. Marguerite moved into Tulare with the other children, to her little house at 140 North "D" Street where we used to visit her. It was late in 1928 that Johnny Fornasero, now twenty-four years of age, left Tulare to attend the T. C. Ryan Flying School in San Diego. He had begun to date his future bride, Elouise Cleveland Denbo in 1926 (she was just sixteen, and they met at a dance), so their courtship took on a long distance flavor until they married in 1929.

Catching the Ryan Dream

T. Claude Ryan had dreamed of flying since he was a young teenager. (His story is beautifully told in William Wagner's, *Ryan, the Aviator*, published in 1971). After several frustrating attempts to locate an instructor, he tried becoming a Navy pilot, but was too young and had no college education. He applied to the Army Signal Corps, but was still under age and without college. Eventually, with some college under his belt, he learned to fly a Jenny bi-plane as an Army Cadet at March Field near Riverside, California. In September, 1922, at the age of twenty-four, he leased a dilapidated air field on the waterfront of San Diego, purchased a surplus WWI Jenny, and opened the Ryan Flying Company. His first office and tool shed was an old piano box. His business, according to the *San Diego Union*, was a "combined aerial taxi service, flight training school, and daily excursion service."

In 1923, Ryan moved to a better location at Dutch Flats near the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. There he leased hanger and office space, and began to build his employee base. Dan Burnett, an old friend of our family, joined him early, as did Douglas Corrigan. The main income of the company came from sight-seeing flights, but he also bought old Jennies, fixed them up and sold them at a profit.

The next year Ryan latched onto several Standard J-1 biplanes — a WWI trainer which was larger than a Jenny and could carry two passengers in front of the cockpit. Ryan converted the planes to hold four passengers, and put three of the planes into operation. With the added flights, and tourism booming, the company was soon making a nice profit. With a partner, B. F. Mahoney, he co-owned and opened the "Los Angeles – San Diego Air Line," which touted a 90 minute trip between the two cities for a fare of \$14.50 one way. In time they added a Douglas *Cloudster*, an even larger plane, and business was good. Other ventures of the Ryan Company included hauling beer through Mexico up to the border during prohibition years, and carrying the United States mail. It was for the purpose of making a better mail plane that Claude Ryan designed the M-1 monoplane, which took its first flight in 1926.

But what put Ryan Flying Company on the world map, as we all know, was the opportunity to build "*The Spirit of St. Louis*," the famed plane which was flown non-stop from New York to Paris by Charles A. Lindbergh in the spring of 1927. Ryan had just 60 days to design, build, and deliver that craft to the Robertson Aircraft Corporation in St. Louis. In his book, *Ryan the Aviator*, William Wagner tells of the February morning the telegram arrived at Ryan's.

CAN YOU CONSTRUCT WHIRLWIND ENGINE PLANE CAPABLE FLYING
NONSTOP BETWEEN NEW YORK AND PARIS STOP IF SO PLEASE STATE
COST AND DELIVERY DATE

Ryan wired back a bid of "ABOUT SIX THOUSAND WITHOUT MOTOR AND INSTRUMENTS," and offered delivery in three months. After some back-and-forth, it was agreed that the plane would be ready in two months. The plane was built like the Ryan M-1 but with larger wings, a gas capacity of 380 gallons, and a cruising speed of 100 miles per hour. Lindbergh had chosen a Wright "Whirlwind" air-cooled engine. Lindbergh visited the Ryan Company, the details were agreed on, and the plane went into construction. It was said that, "Every man and woman connected with Ryan Airlines devoted every waking moment to the job of finishing the plane on time."

The deadline was met, the plane delivered in April, 1927, and Lindbergh flew his historic flight on May 20, with no parachute, and a lunch of five sandwiches and a few candy bars. It was in October of the following year that Johnnie Fornasero left Tulare, dreams in hand, and became a student at Ryan Flying School.

Trying His Wings

It is worth noting that Claude Ryan was not the head of Ryan Company when Charles Lindbergh made his famous, non-stop flight from New York to Paris. Wagner, in his book, *Ryan, the Aviator*, explains that Ryan had sold out to his partner in February of that year, but worked as general manager for Mahoney for a time, and the company retained the Ryan name. Ryan was present when the Lindbergh telegram came and the deal was made. He was with the company during construction of "*The Spirit of St. Louis*." But at the time of the famous flight, Ryan was on a business trip to New York, making plans to manufacture and distribute airplane engines. Although he did not have the position of honor at the time of Lindbergh's flight — others got the credit for that — he had been the founder and developer of the company that did the job.

Ryan re-established in business for himself the following year, opening the Ryan Flying School on May 1, 1928. John Fornasero enrolled as a student in November, 1928. Because of hard lessons learned earlier, Ryan established very rigid and businesslike methods. Instruction included more hours than other schools required, and involved instrument, night, and cross-country flight training. Also about that time, the Department of Commerce adopted regulatory measures and began granting certificates to qualified flying schools. Ryan was recognized both for pilot and ground school training (the latter was done in partnership with Pacific Technical University). Early in 1929 Mr. Ryan hired John Fornasero as a mechanic on his ground crew. Soon after, he was put in charge of plane maintenance for the company.

But he went there to fly. His earliest "Pilot Log Book" records that his first flight on November 20, 1928 lasted fifteen minutes. We can only imagine what a thrill that was for him, and how it whetted his appetite for more. It was probably his first time to soar over the city of San Diego and the Pacific Ocean — scenes he would love and come back to in his retirement



Illustration 4: John with Great Lakes biplane c.1930

days. The first page of his log records that plane as "T.A.30LB" (later entries call it a 3 POLB, which would probably have been a Crosley Moonbeam bi-wing, first manufactured that year), his license number as 6740, and his home address as 3777 Louisiana, San Diego. Finally he was on his way to being a pilot. He flew again for fifteen minutes on the 21st; and on the 22nd the flights began to increase to thirty minutes and longer. After the fifteenth flight, he switched to flying a Waco 10 biplane, and doing "Solo Practice." By winter vacation break he had flown twenty flights — something to talk about around the Christmas tree.

January 4, 1929 he was back in San Diego flying a couple of times a week. The log lists other planes which he flew during these months of instruction as a: Fairchild, Monocoupe, Ryan B1 (presumably the B-1 Brougham, an enclosed cabin plane), T.Air, Great Lakes (the famous biplane for which Ryan was a distributor), Ryan M2 (Ryan's improved monoplane), D.H. Moth, Fleet, Eaglerock, and Davis. Claude Ryan took pride in the diversity of planes available for his students' training. John Fornasero completed the Commercial Pilot's course of study in seven months, and was graduated on June 21, 1929. By then he had about thirty-four hours in the air. T. Claude Ryan signed his diploma. Instruction continued with a break from October 15 to November 1st in 1929 — which would have been time out to get married and have a honeymoon.

Besides his Pilot Log Book, we have scant family records of his student days, probably because he was not yet married. Elouise became the family historian after their marriage on October 23, 1929. We have her to thank for the "Ryan Scrapbook" with newspaper clippings and photos of their San Diego years. But there are a couple of interesting (perhaps incriminating?) snapshots in the book labeled, "Johnnie's 'Crack Up' 1929." They document the day when his plane (it appears to be a Ryan M-1 or M-2 single wing) skidded off the end of the runway and nosed down into the dirt, causing considerable damage. He walked away. I remember as a child prying Mother with impertinent questions about the pictures and being hushed with, "Daddy didn't want me to put them in the book." That was his only accident in 30 years of flying.

While facts about his Ryan life are somewhat sketchy, we do know that some very significant things happened in his personal life. As mentioned, John Bernard Fornasero and Elouise Cleveland Denbo were married by a Justice of the Peace in Tulare on the morning of October 23, 1929. John was 25, and Elouise still 19 at the time. John's brother, James B. Fornasero, and Frank's wife, Rosie Fornasero, stood with them as witnesses. The Justice who presided was H. A. Charters. In the Tulare *Daily Register* the wedding is described.

Miss Denbo was lovely in an ensemble of soft brown and tan shades with matching accessories. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. L. Denbo of Tulare and attended the local schools graduating from the Tulare high school in '28. For the past year she has been employed at the Woolworth store.

Fornasero is the son of Mrs. M. Fornasero of Tulare. He was employed for several years at the Dodge garage, but is now living in San Diego where he is employed at an aviation school.

After a honeymoon trip which will include a tour of the coast from San Francisco to San Diego the couple will make their home in San Diego.

In the months prior, Elouise was feted at a bridal shower, and listed among the guests was her sister, Velma Denbo Huett. Pictures of their courtship days show them making trips to Giant Forest in the mountains on his motorcycle, or in his Dodge roadster convertible. On the day of their wedding Elouise's mother, Edith Madge Denbo, honored the couple with a late morning brunch reception in the Denbo home on South C Street in Tulare, (the house her father, Robert Denbo had built with his own hands). Elouise remembered that her mother served sandwiches, punch, and a cake to relatives from both families and to friends. Then they headed for San Diego, by way of a coastal trip down from San Francisco. John was four months past receiving his commercial pilot's license, and established in his job at Ryan's as an airplane mechanic, an instructor, and a pilot.

What they could not know was that the Great Depression was just around the corner. It was that very fall of 1929 that the stock market crashed, and plunged the country into "an economic depression of staggering proportions." Many were out of work, and in soup lines. Johnny and Elouise were fortunate that he had a job; and though the Ryan Company struggled, he was able to take on extra work and hours instructing, mapping, and as a mechanic. For that reason their income remained fairly stable.

By June, 1930, T. C. Ryan Flying School certified in his Pilot Log that he had 123 hours flying time. On June 12th Aeronautical Inspector George W. Vawler signed off on a corrected total of 205 hours. By then he had flown several cross country and overnight trips around California, and carried passengers. His first recorded flight with a student (presumably when he began instructing) was on July 15, 1930. On his personal resume' (written in 1960) he lists "mid 1930" as the time when he earned and received his Department of Commerce Transport Pilot's License, and was employed by the Ryan School of Aeronautics as Director of Maintenance and as a pilot.

Ten months after their marriage their first daughter, Barbara Joyce, was born at Mercy Hospital in San Diego on August 19, 1930. She was a beautiful baby, and John's pride and joy; and he nicknamed her "Bobbie." Our family's Ryan scrapbook picks up on his career in 1931, when he was promoted to chief pilot at the Ryan Flying School. The news release in the June, 1931 *Western Flying* magazine reads.

John Fornasero, former assistant flight instructor at the T. C. Ryan Flying School in San Diego, Calif., has been advanced by T. Claude Ryan to the position of chief pilot. Fornasero will fill the vacancy left by Jerry Jones who is now with the Alaskan Airways.

Another news article from the San Diego *Union* in May, 1931, adds these complimentary facts.

Fornasero is well known in local flying circles having served as assistant flight instructor at the Ryan school for the last year. He was formerly chief of maintenance for all Ryan equipment and, in addition to being a highly skilled pilot and instructor, is considered one of the most expert airplane mechanics [*sic*] on the coast.

The Glory Years

In the years following his appointment to the position of "chief pilot of all Ryan flying activities" life was filled with excitement and new experiences for John and Elouise. There was the serious work of instructing and training new pilots, but there also were historic events happening in the new field of aviation, and John was part of several of these. One of the first documented by Elouise was the aerial mapping of Death Valley, California. In July of 1931, John Fornasero piloted the Whirlwind Fairchild cabin plane used in that venture.

Much of Death Valley, an area about 50 by 8 miles (400 square miles), the lowest area in the continental United States, had never been mapped or surveyed. Ranging from 274 feet below sea level up to 6,000 feet above, this area of desert and canyons was still mysterious in 1931. Ryan bid on, and was awarded, the contract by the United States Geological Survey of the Interior Department to map the entire area. The contract required that the photographing be done from an altitude of 15,000 feet, and stated that the pilot could not vary his altitude more than two percent above or below, regardless of air turbulence. Although daytime temperatures at ground level would be about 140 degrees, at that altitude the air would be quite cold. Weather would be



Illustration 5: Early Ryan Days: (clockwise from top left) John about 1930; Commercial pilot's license signed by T. Claude Ryan; John bringing Santa to the airport party; "Johnny's Wreck," 1928; brothers John (r) and Jim at Dutch Flats, 1931; old Ryan Field, 1926; officers of the Ryan Aircraft Co, 1934 brochure; five Great Lakes biplanes in formation (center photo)

a factor, as no clouds or shadows could be present in the photographs. The task would require the pilot to cruise steadily at 80 to 90 miles per hour, and make six full-length passes over the valley. The photographer would be working through a hole in the bottom of the plane's belly, taking overlapping pictures continuously and to specification, through each run. And they had just thirty days to complete the project.

Special equipment was needed. The photographer, P. A. McDonough, had been the chief photographer for the Alaska aerial survey in 1926, so was quite experienced. He used a specially made, German Hugerhoff camera, valued at \$4,900. (In 1931!) A special altimeter was also required — one able to record as little as a three-foot change in elevation. That \$360 instrument was put into the Fairchild plane, and used by John as he piloted. They based out of the Barstow airport for the first attempt, and completed about two-thirds of the mapping before thunderstorms set in. About a week later the project was completed out of the San Bernardino airport. From all reports the whole project was a great success, and much credit was given to the pilot. One newspaper article illustrates.

According to Ryan, the terse 'Death Valley job well done' reflects exceptional credit on John Fornasero, Ryan's chief pilot who was at the controls of the Fairchild cabin plane, and P. A. McDonough, local commercial photographer, who was responsible for all camera shots and final development of negatives.

It must have been exciting for all involved, because Elouise included no less than nine different newspaper articles in her scrapbook, some from San Diego papers, one from *Aero Digest*, one from *Aviation* magazine, and one from the Tulare *Daily Register*. The hometown boy had made them proud.

One of the fun and joyful things in the family's Ryan Scrapbook — the story that was always our favorite when we leafed through the book as children — was that of our father flying Santa Claus into the San Diego airport each December. It was always front-page news in the *San Diego Union*, and one year Barbara Fornasero and Wayne Wilcox (a family friend) made the photo collage. The routine went something like this. Pilot John Fornasero took off in a Great Lakes bi-plane for the North Pole (actually Los Angeles) carrying a U. S. Mail sack full of children's letters to Santa. Clad in a "fur-lined flying suit" he had orders to have Santa there four days later by 3:00 PM. Crowds of excited kids and families gathered to watch for Santa's plane to arrive. The plane returned, Santa parachuted to the ground, carols played, treats of candy, apples, and oranges were handed out. The Marines came to help manage the crowd of 10,000, and a grand time was had by all. John actually flew Santa in for six straight Christmases, and each year the party grew larger, the show more grand, the gifts and prizes more spectacular.

Following Lindbergh's success in 1927, the city of San Diego had passed bond issues for a new airport, to be called Lindbergh Field. It took four years to fill in the marshy area of waterfront where the airport was to be located. Claude Ryan was wise enough to realize that he would need to relocate to the new field. He also saw that the airlines would need ticket offices, and government agencies would require offices. Since the city could not afford to build the terminal, Ryan offered to build it and rent space to the others. It was a bold move for depression

years, but it proved successful. Ground was broken in 1932, and a lovely, Spanish architecture building was built, landscaped with palms, and dedicated in July of that year with 350 military planes flying overhead — quite an addition to the city of San Diego. Ryan Company also built their own new facilities at the airport, including an air terminal and school buildings. Construction costs were modest due to the strained economy and availability of labor at reasonable rates. Lindbergh Field continued to be San Diego's official airport into the 1960's.

There were air shows, and air races in those years, all delighting the crowds below. One "air circus" in September, 1931 drew 10,000 spectators when John Fornasero took a famed woman parachutist, Mary Wiggins, up for a spectacular jump. But the news article reveals that John himself was quite a showman. "Before Miss Wiggins jumped, Fornasero, flying a Great Lakes plane, presented a one-man circus of aerial acrobatics. He swept away from the field and after gaining sufficient altitude went through some of the most difficult maneuvers known to aviation." (Who would have known?)

Early in 1932, he was promoted to the position of Director of Training for the Ryan School. In that capacity he supervised and conducted ground and flight training, local and long distance passenger transportation, aerial mapping, and engineering flight testing of new aircraft. Elouise saved the "Souvenir Flight Program" of another spectacular event: the "Student Field Day" on March 19, 1933. In the program listings, John Fornasero's name appears three times:

- 1:30 P.M. – Event No. 1 - Five Great Lakes plane formation
- 1:45 P.M. – Event No. 2 – Bomb Dropping Contest (fake flour bombs)
- 3:30 P.M. – Event No. 6 – Acrobatic demonstration in Great Lakes plane by John Fornasero chief instructor Ryan School of Aeronautics.

The programs explains that, during his acrobatic demonstration, these maneuvers would be performed "in the order listed. WINGOVERS, LOOPS, JENNY IMMELMAN, TRUE IMMELMAN, INVERTED IMMELMAN, SNAP ROLLS, SLOW ROLLS, INVERTED TURNS, FALLING LEAF." It was the students' show, but their instructor was the star performer. The next day's morning newspaper reported, "The onlookers perhaps got their biggest thrill when John Fornasero, Ryan's chief instructor, flew a tiny plane through a long series of difficult and intricate stunts."

The next month, April of 1933, another exciting event was recorded in *The San Diego Sun* and the *San Diego Union* papers. Five thousand spectators came out to see a night searchlight demonstration in which Ryan and the National Guard's 251st coast artillery played a war game. The crowd listened to a loud speaker as John Fornasero, (taking the part of the enemy) took off in a tiny Great Lakes plane. Climbing to an altitude of over 4,000 feet, he flew from Tijuana to the Marine base, attempting to escape the searchlights. On the ground, as the sound of the plane was detected, "three searchlights set in a triangular fashion," began their search. In less than a minute the giant, 800-million candlepower light had found the plane, and the anti-aircraft guns pretended to fire on it. In several passes at different altitudes and in different patterns, Fornasero flew over, but was found by the lights every time.

On a far more serious note, John piloted the staff of the *San Diego Union* up and over earthquake-stricken Long Beach following the devastating quake of March, 1933. The plane, carrying a staff photographer and writer, arrived just before 7:00 AM on March 11th. Heavy fog hindered a landing. "But Fornasero daringly took the plane under the fog blanket — and beneath stretched as bleak a picture as one could ever imagine... Fornasero swept to a landing at the Long Beach municipal airport." A waiting car took the reporters into the city to view the damage first hand. And so the story was told.

A couple of promotional booklets from Ryan School of Aeronautics, which Elouise saved in the family keepsakes, give a good picture of what flight training was like in the mid 1930's. The one published in 1934 features a picture of Ryan students in a formation of five Great Lakes planes over the city. The 1936 edition features a cover shot of three flyers in formation in the open-cockpit Ryan S.T. Trainer. That is the 1935 photograph our family has and treasures, because the three pilots were (left to right) John Fornasero, Paul Wilcox, and James Fornasero. Our uncle, Jim Fornasero, had come to Ryan's in 1931 and learned to fly there. The Ryan Scrapbook shows a snapshot of brothers John and Jim, both in flight suits with parachutes and helmets on, shaking hands in front of a Ryan Flying School training plane. Elouise captioned it, "Dutch Flats about 1931." A surviving copy of *The Tailskid Digs the Dirt*, the unofficial, humorous newspaper of Ryan students, indicates that Jim was both an eligible bachelor and a respected pilot, enjoying life as a student.

Both the 1934 and 1936 brochures have a large photograph captioned, "John Fornasero, Chief Instructor." In that capacity he taught and monitored students through instrument or "blind" flying, radio beam flying, cross-country flying, radiotelephone and radiotelegraph training, high altitude and aerobatics flying, night flying, and landings and take-offs in adverse weather, all in a wide variety of aircraft. Offered were an Amateur License, Private or Limited Commercial License, and Transport License. Daily classroom lectures were basic to the course, and in the 1936 brochure Elouise noted that John taught "8 or 9 subjects" and was licensed for each of them. Some of the subjects listed were: licensing regulations, air traffic rules, marketing aircraft, engine principles and structure, the history of aviation, spins and prevention, airplane maintenance, and much more. Hands-on training was given in welding, use of power machinery, metal work, and aircraft building. Hearing this list, it is no wonder that John was able to "do just about anything and fix just about anything" throughout his life.

Many years later, John Fornasero was talking "pilot talk" with his son-in-law, Joe Grimes, who was a missionary pilot. He related a couple of tales that he had neglected to tell the family, about moments of terror in those early days. One incident occurred when he was testing the plane in a flat spin (a spin where the nose is slightly lower than the tail). There was a technique for bringing the plane out of the spin by gunning the engine at a certain point in the rotation, which he tried, but it did not work. The plane continued to lose altitude, and just as he was about to bail out, it finally recovered. On another occasion, when he was flying open cockpit, a wire came loose on the wing, and he had to step out with a foot on the wing to reattach it in flight, and then step back into the cockpit. No doubt these personal experiences made his classroom lectures more colorful — and convincing!

Several recognizable names are among the students he taught in his years as an instructor at the Ryan Flying School. Best-known is Jacqueline Cochran, who went on to become a record-setting aviatrix. Cochran had learned to fly earlier in New York, but was instructed by Johnny when she came to Ryan for additional flight training. Another was Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan, who had been a mechanic for Ryan several years before taking flight training. (We will tell his tale a little later.) Peter Dana, heir of the famous Dana and Longfellow families, was another — a student with the means to purchase his own Ryan S-T plane. Orva Johnson was another woman who took flight training. Students also came from China and Mexico to learn to fly. The Sunday morning San Diego paper on January 14, 1934, rehearsed this interchange. Johnny Fornasero was overheard explaining how a parachute works to a student flier.

"I understand that when the thing opens it will let me down safely," said the student, "but what happens if it doesn't open." Johnny passed up that old story about coming back for another 'chute, and gently said that the student probably would get back to earth a little bit faster.

Coming of Age

Aviation in America was thirty years old when Claude Ryan designed and built his classic Ryan S-T (sport trainer). Johnny Fornasero flew the maiden flight on June 8, 1934. His "Pilot's Personal Log Book" for that historic day reads:

"X12243 Ryan ST 1hr. 15 min. Test Flights on New Plane."

This all metal fuselage, open double cockpit plane was "far ahead of its day." Its military version, the PT-16, was purchased and used for years by the Army Air Corps, the Navy, and several "friendly foreign governments." Ryan built 1,500 of the planes, and it thrust Claude Ryan from the role of pioneer aviator into that of an industrial leader in aviation.

Ryan had hired two full-time engineers the year before, Millard Boyd and Will Vandermeer, for salaries of one-hundred dollars a month. (According to Wagner in the book cited earlier, he paid for them, in part, from a side business he had developed, renting pinball machines to local restaurants.) Working together, Ryan and the engineers came up with a newer, sleek, low-wing design for the fuselage, and a nose cowl to cover the engine. The plane, with double cockpit and dual controls, was ideal for training new pilots. Dedicated company mechanics and students actually built that first plane, which had an overall length of twenty-one feet, a wingspan of thirty feet, and a cruising speed of 125 miles per hour. Nine months later, when the plane rolled out, Ryan stood aside and let his chief pilot make the initial flight, which lasted ten minutes. The plane was somewhat sluggish at first, but after a new propeller was installed at a slightly different angle, the plane "performed brilliantly." The *Ryan Guidebook* calls the plane, "one of the most sought after classic airplanes of all time." It sold for \$3,985.



Illustration 6: Ryan S-Ts in formation, Pilots John and Jim Fornasero and Paul Wilcox

Modifications we made in the next four years, until the ST-A built in 1937 could reach a cruising speed of 150 miles per hour.

The months following the maiden flight of the S-T in June, 1934, were full. Claude Ryan and John Fornasero flew the plane up to Mines Field in Los Angeles for three days of testing by the Department of Commerce. Engineers of the Department of Commerce's aeronautical branch not only tested the ship, but were excited about its new, aerodynamic features. The news reporters in Los Angeles spent two hours taking pictures. Even Ryan himself was surprised by the interest created. It was the Ryan company's second time to command the nation's newspapers and newsreels: first in 1927 when Lindbergh flew his NYP cabin monoplane; and again with the introduction of the Ryan S-T.

There are two especially well-known, classic pictures of the much-photographed S-T. One is the formation flight of three S-T planes (mentioned above), taken in November, 1935.

“Billowing cumulus clouds over San Diego make a perfect background for the slim bodies of three Ryan S-T planes piloted by John Fornasero, Paul Wilcox, and James Fornasero, Ryan flight instructors.” The second is an evening shot of the plane silhouetted over the Pacific shoreline against the setting California sun. That one shows the pilot flying solo in the rear open cockpit, and came to us on a Christmas card from a family friend and company employee, Adelaide Smith, who later married Earl Prudden, Vice President of the Ryan Company.

Of lesser importance on the world scene was the birth of a second daughter to Johnny and Elouise about that time. Janet Ann (middle name after Johnny’s sister) was born in San Diego at a birthing hospital on January 15, 1935.

Two years later, John Fornasero left the Ryan Company to take a post as inspector with the Bureau of Air Commerce, Washington D. C. John’s resignation as chief pilot opened up a place for his best friend, Paul Wilcox, to follow him in that job. Paul had come to Ryan’s in 1934 from Continental Motors. He was an instructor for three years prior to taking the chief pilot job upon John’s resignation. In those years of early marriage, Johnny and Elouise had become fast friends with Paul and Alma Wilcox. The Wilcoxes had a son named Wayne who was about the same age as Barbara, and a daughter Marilyn who was born just before Janet. The two couples enjoyed many good times from 1934 to 1937. Johnny and Paul flew together, and owned a fishing boat together. Elouise and Alma supported each other as young mothers. The two couples spent days at the beach, and remained fast friends until their retirement years.

Upon his resignation from Ryan School of Aeronautics in September, 1937, John was honored in the San Diego newspapers. An article in the *San Diego Sun* quoted him as saying:

“I would rather be the oldest, not the ‘bravest’ or most spectacular, pilot. That’s why I don’t race around pylons or perform daredevil stunts in an airplane only a few feet from the ground. I’d be setting a bad example for my students...”

It went on to explain:

Johnny Fornasero is representative of that large group of pilots whose attitude toward aviation is the same as that of doctors or lawyers to their professions. To him it is not merely an opportunity to get a thrill or ‘show off’ in the clouds. It is a day-to-day job that requires the greatest attention in order that its infinite details may be mastered...

Even when stunting is necessary, he does not abandon caution. Occasionally, while spinning a Ryan S-T plane on its test flights, the motor has failed. That didn’t worry Johnny Fornasero because he usually was above a proper landing field into which he might glide with safety.

On September 7th John left San Diego for Washington, D. C. by plane, to accept his new position. The newspaper revealed that he went by way of Detroit to visit his brother James, who had been employed as a pilot with Continental Motor Company for a year. Elouise and the girls were driven to Tulare by John’s mother, Marguerite Fornasero, and stayed eleven weeks there, visiting with relatives before following John to his new post in New York.

Personal memories take over here. We lived with our grandmother, Marguerite Fornasero until December, when we boarded a train for the East. Grandmother's "D Street" house was delightful to us. Her yard was full of flowers and fruit trees, and a trellis of sweet peas always climbed up the sunny south wall of the house. Between the garage and the fence were one each: an orange, a lemon, and a grapefruit tree. In the back was a small fishpond filled with goldfish and tadpoles. On the back, frame porch stood two large kegs of olives from her trees, curing in brine. Close around lived many relatives to visit, and one cousin to play with. Uncle Frank and Aunt Rosie were still on the farm, of course, and had Frankie, who was then almost four. In town were others: Aunt Ida, Mother's oldest sister, and her husband, Uncle Slim Wilkins. All of them, and other friends, made the nearly three months spent there enjoyable.

The train trip to New York in December took several days. For Barbara and me it was a great adventure. We discovered sleeping cars with upper berths, porters who carried our bags, and friendly passengers who helped Mother care for two active, restless children. Being not quite three, my memories are limited, but very vivid. Barbara, now seven, got the upper berth. Mother and I shared the larger — but cramped — lower one beneath her. At mealtimes we had to make the long and scary trip from our passenger car back to the diner — a trek which required us to go through four or five cars. I can still hear the train wheels and feel the rush of winter air each time we opened a door to the passageway between cars and walked over the connecting, moving panels. Ground rushed under us, and Mother held tightly to me — a terrified toddler — until we were safely into the next car. Several times a day we made that round trip. However did she do it?

We changed trains in the night somewhere in the middle United States (maybe St. Louis?). Imagine that California girl, who had never been out of the state before, waking two sleeping children, balancing all our carry-ons and paraphernalia, and stepping out onto lines of tracks in the dimly lighted rail yard. I can still remember stumbling over the tracks with her holding my hand, and Barbara walking close by. Somehow we made the transfer and arrived in New York. Our father had rented an old, two-story, frame house in Minneola, on Long Island — the Blanton house. We Southern Californians found ourselves smack into our first New York winter: a world of snow shovels, sledding, snowmen and snow angels, mittens and galoshes, subways, taxis, and electric trains. Quite a change! Quite a change!

A Stint with the Government

It is well to remind ourselves that aviation was still a very young industry in 1937 when John Fornasero went to the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce in the position of Flight Engineering Inspector. The Government had only been in the air regulating business for less than twenty years then. To regress and catch a little history as described in the official *Federal Aviation Administration Flight Inspection History*, speaking of the time before 1920:

In the early days...there was no actual route [airway] specified, nor were there any means of aerial navigation provided. There were no aeronautical charts, no terrain or obstruction information, and no radio capability for weather, communication, or navigation, much less anything resembling air traffic control. There was no civil aviation authority at either the state or federal level. There were neither flight rules nor, at that point, a real need for them. Airplanes and pilots were unlicensed and anyone with a self-perceived skill could build his own version of a flying machine and sell it to anyone who wanted an airplane.

All that began to change in the early 1920's with the coming of the "infant air mail service," and the establishment of airlines in the 1930's and 40's. Early federal inspectors flew surplus WWI planes, bouncing around in open cockpit biplanes "with the airmail pilots." Airway and airport beacons were their only means of navigational guidance. "The advent of radio navigation brought an increased importance to the flight inspector." The development of technologies such as the Instrument Landing System (ILS), and Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range (VOR), allowed more accuracy for air navigation; and also required more supervision.

When John Fornasero joined the federal Bureau of Air Commerce in 1937, he reported for work to Roosevelt Field on Long Island, not far from our new house in Minneola. Roosevelt Field, originally named the Hempstead Plains Aerodrome, had been renamed in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt's son, Quentin, who was killed in air combat during World War I. It was famous already for many historic flights, including Charles Lindbergh's 1927 solo transatlantic flight which originated there. Amelia Earhart and Wiley Post had also used it. During that first war, the field was used as a center for training military pilots. After the war, the U. S. Air Service maintained control, but allowed private companies to operate there.

On his later resume' (1960) John listed as his duties in his new job for the Bureau:

1. Engineering flight testing and certification of newly designed and modified commercial aircraft and aircraft components.
2. Inspection and supervision of component, equipment and aircraft manufacturing facilities.
3. Examination of airmen for certification.
4. Accident investigation.

Much of what he had done in private aviation at Ryan's he was now doing for the Bureau of Air Commerce, only now he was on "the other side." He was the one watching over private aviators and aviation firms to see to safety in the increasingly crowded and complex airways. Although he had always been seriously cautious as a pilot, now he was an enforcer of safety. It was a different mindset, but he brought great experience to it from his nine years at Ryan's. His resume' states that he was "selected by the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce" for that position, so his reputation was known in the industry.

During his first two and a half years with the Bureau (1937-1940), the name was officially changed from the "Bureau of Air Commerce," to the "Civil Aeronautics Authority" or CAA. He worked out of Roosevelt Field from 1937 until 1940. Those were significant years for Barbara (ages seven to ten) and Janet (two to five), but memories are somewhat sketchy. The Blanton House itself was a story. It seemed somewhat "haunted" to Mother and to me, because the former owners had both died there. At the time of our residence, it was managed by a relative who lived down in Florida, so was always on the verge of neglected. It had two stories, as mentioned, but also a full basement, and a full attic, making it a four-level house; and it was fully furnished with the old Blanton furniture and personal items. Remnants of their lives and personal effects were still stored in the basement.

For me (Janet) the most vivid memories center on four things: snowy winters, a terrible bout with Red Measles, a driving trip back to California, and beginning kindergarten. Beginning with the fun part, we had snow — lots of it. Our parents bought us sleds — a full-size one for Barbara, and a smaller one for me — which we steered (sort of) by a thin rope tied to a guide board on top of the runners. The greatest adventure came when a neighbor's dad hooked a line of a dozen sleds together like a "choo choo" train, tied them to the back bumper of his car, and slowly pulled us around several blocks on the snow-packed streets. Our cautious father quickly put an end to it, realizing the danger of kids on sleds with no brakes running up under the bumper, or being hit by an unaware driver skidding around the corner. But it was great fun while it lasted. As snow piled up, and fathers shoveled new snow upon old, the mounds on the curbs and lawns grew to several feet. These we packed, and then tunneled into, or made into snow thrones.

Our mother, of course, felt quite differently about it all. For her it was an endless task of toggng up kids with double socks, shoes and galoshes, mittens fastened to the snowsuits so they could not be lost in a snow bank, sweaters layered under snow coats, knit hats tied under chins. All to be undone in fifteen minutes when we had to come in and go to the bathroom. Newspapers lined the front entry between the living and dining rooms, set to catch all the snow that came in with our galoshes. Besides all that, Mother did not drive a car, nor did we have a second one for her; so she had to walk to the nearest grocery store and carry all needed items back home, while trying not to slide on the icy walks. And remember — women did not wear slacks in those days, so it was house dresses and cold, bare legs. Barbara adds that we did have regular milk and bread delivery to the door, which was a great help.

As to the Red Measles, generally Barbara would be exposed to contagious diseases at school and bring them home. Then I (Janet) would contract them, and have a much worse case. Such it was with the measles in the first year of our New York life. Our father was away much of that year on a mission to write a manual for the CAA in Washington, D. C. The salvation of it all was a Doctor Smith, M.D. who lived two doors down, and made house calls. The month-long bout I had cost me the hearing in one ear, and damaged my vision. (We had no miracle drugs back then.) I recall Daddy being home during part of the time, when fever sent me into delirium and my ears had to be lanced — the stuff of nightmares. After a month in bed, I had to learn to walk again.

Our mother loved to get away for a day to shop once a week, and it was a great thrill for her to ride the train and subway into New York City to shop at Macy's and other name stores. With Barbara in school, she either had to tote me in with her or hire a sitter. My memories are of getting away from her in some big department store, and hiding among and under the clothes racks, leaving her frantic. I'm sure a sitter was the best way to go.

The Douglas Corrigan Incident

In a strange sort of way, our father was reluctantly involved in the Douglas Corrigan, "Wrong Way" fiasco of July, 1938. John Fornasero had been an associate of Doug Corrigan in his Ryan years, and was one of his instructors. Corrigan had been a mechanic at Ryan's, and a builder of the famed, "*Spirit of St. Louis*" airplane flown by Charles Lindbergh in 1927. In the years following, Corrigan learned to fly, using his lunch hours at Ryan's to get air time. A stunter by nature, he got into his head that he wanted to duplicate Lindbergh's flight and fame, but was denied permission by the Government to make the flight because his craft was not air worthy. After rebuilding his plane, he filed a flight plan for a transcontinental flight out of Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Field, but instead took off for Ireland. Close friends knew of his planned deception, but he blamed his "wrong way" flight on a navigational error due to clouds covering familiar landmarks at take off. According to his bio in *Wikipedia*, it's almost miraculous that he made the flight successfully, because his engine was leaking gasoline over the ocean, and he had to poke a hole in the fuselage of the plane to drain it as he flew.

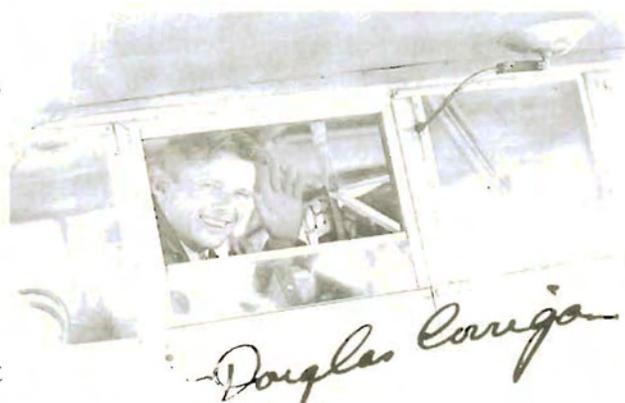


Illustration 7: Douglas Corrigan, autographed picture, 1938

As will happen, the media loved the stunt, and he was acclaimed a hero on both sides of the Atlantic. Although the aviation authorities (perhaps our father?) used a 600-word telegram to

describe all of the laws he had broken, Corrigan was actually given just a fourteen-day suspension penalty. He and his plane returned to the United States aboard the steamship *Manhattan* in August, and he was given a ticker-tape parade and celebration in New York City.

John was very embarrassed at having been one of Corrigan's instructors — given his pretended poor navigational skills — and would have “laid low” about the incident. But — no — Corrigan looked him up at our Long Island home, and invited himself over to dinner. The media got wind of it, along with many of the neighbors, and our front yard was packed with the paparazzi and other inquisitives. All evening long there were knocks on the front door, ringing of the doorbell, and pieces of paper being shoved through the mail slot for autographs. Embarrassed is actually not a strong enough word to describe John Fornasero on that evening. That was not an incident he wanted associated with his sterling reputation. Later that year Doug Corrigan sent John an autographed, first-edition copy of his book, *That's My Story*, which we still have in our family library. (John is not mentioned in the book.)

We lived in Minneola during the big New York World's Fair of 1939. For that occasion the city built a huge Trilon (obelisk) and Perisphere (round, globe-like structure), which were trademarks of the fair. As we drove to and from Long Island, through the Holland Tunnel, we would pass near to the fairgrounds and see the Trilon and Perisphere. Our parents took us to the fair one day, to see the exhibit halls. My only true memory is of a huge typewriter, several feet high, with keys large enough to sit on. Typewriters were the technology of the day, along with telephone and telegraph, of course. We have a set of “Worlds Fair teaspoons” in the family — each with one of the large exhibition buildings engraved in the bowl. As kids, charged with setting the evening dinner table, we argued endlessly over who got the “aviation spoon,” until Mother mandated that it would *always* be set at our father's place.

In the summer of 1939, we embarked on a month-long vacation — a driving trip back to California to visit Grandmother Fornasero and the relatives and friends we had left behind. The route took us south where we visited Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, then on to San Diego and a reunion with the Wilcoxes and other friends. Car sickness was the plague of the females in our family, so there were continual bouts with that, interspersed with nights in tourist courts along the way. Our father was a dawn-to-dark, get-on-with-the-trip driver, and Mother didn't drive at all. Barbara and I shared the back seat and “wrangled” all the way. From San Diego it was north to Tulare to stay with Grandmother and visit relatives. We took a further trip up to Salinas, so Mother could visit her sister, Velma. Before returning to New York, we picked up Grandmother Fornasero and took her East with us. On this leg of the trip we took a northern route, staying at Yellowstone National Park, and spending several days at a lake in Minnesota, so Daddy could fish — one of his passions.

Now to the beginning of school. Barbara had started school in San Diego, and continued to attend during the eleven weeks we spent at Grandmother Fornasero's in Tulare. She transferred into Emery Road grade school in Minneola. Just before my fifth birthday I entered kindergarten at mid-term, and did not complete the year before we were transferred to Kansas City. The big family news at Kansas City was that we rented an *unfurnished* two story house, so

bought out Montgomery Ward for our very own appliances, living room furniture, and bedroom sets. Barbara and I had twin, maple beds. There we attended Hale Cook grade school, which was just a couple of blocks from our new house, and very close to the Kansas border.

Memories of Kansas City are two for me: playing "Tarzan" with the neighbor kids; and attending my first Sunday School. Oh yes, and the day we ran away. Neighbors across the street and down two doors noticed that we were not a church-going family, and asked permission to take us with them on Sunday mornings. There ensued a great buying of "Sunday clothes," including taffeta dresses and black patent Mary Jane shoes. We have pictures to prove it. The neighbors were wonderful to do that, and will receive their reward in heaven. And it was the baby doll era. Barbara's big doll was named Peggy, and mine was Kathy. (I had mine into adulthood when I gave it to Johnny to "practice on" when his baby brother was in the making. He re-named it "Baby David." It could have been the first known sex-change on record, I suppose.)

As to the running away part — it was Barbara's idea. Something Mother did was deemed unforgivable, so I was instructed secretly to pack my duds because we were running away. I remember we packed our bathrobes, our teddy bears, and some snacks. In the process, Mother became aware and amused at it all, so helped us pack the snacks to take and told us good-bye. Somehow that took the edge off of it all. Barbara leading the way, we traipsed down to Hale Cook school yard (deserted on a weekend), and camped out. We played on the swings and bars, ate our snacks, and pretended to be far, far from home. But then someone had to go to the bathroom, and it got boring, so we re-traced our steps back home. Our parents pretended not to notice.

Somewhere in all of this, our father was an inspector for the CAA, but we had little idea of what he was doing and where he was going. Early in 1941 John Fornasero was promoted to the position of Director of the Branch with offices in New York City. That gave him "responsibility for the supervision of all Flight Engineering and Factory Inspection activities throughout the Eastern Seaboard." At that time we were transferred back to New York. This time he worked out of the new LaGuardia Airport, which had been constructed during the WPA era. For the second time our family lived on Long Island, but this time in the town of Douglaston.

The War Years

World War II would be the biggest part of our memories of the Douglaston and LaGuardia years, 1940-43. The war greatly affected the work of the CAA. Further developments in the technology of air navigation had come about in the late 1930's. For the technology savvy, we include this update from the *Federal Inspection History* article on "The History of U. S. Flight Inspection:"



Illustration 8: Growing Up Fornasero: (clockwise from top left) Janet and Barbara in 1938; with Grandmother Marguerite and cousin Frankie in Tulare, 1937; John and Elouise portraits, c. 1934; in Douglaston on Easter (with borrowed Scottie) 1940; Minneola house and car; Togged out for snow in Minneola, 1938; Barbara and Janet in San Diego, 1935

The Visual-Aural Range (VAR) was the first navigation range developed to utilize the higher frequency bands, but even though the VAR system introduced both the VHF frequency band, and direct course read-outs to the airway navigational system, it was still limited by the number of navigable courses. The VAR system was installed on the New York-Chicago airway for demonstration purposes in 1941. However, the shortage of VHF equipment caused by the war effort impeded the aircraft installations and minimized the effect of VHF navigation through the war years.

I remember the Sunday when news first came of Pearl Harbor. Barbara and I had gone to Sunday School, dressed in our fancy suits and hats and Sunday shoes. When we came home we were met by Mother, warning us to be very quiet and not to bother our father because war had been declared. For me, not yet eight years of age, it was the first time to hear about enemies, and invasions, and bombings.

In addition to concerns over aviation safety and development of better navigational systems, John Fornasero had great concerns about the war. Both John and Elouise had younger brothers who were called into the service. Elouise's youngest brother, Clifford Denbo, remained Stateside throughout the war. John's younger brother, Jim, was called into the Army Air Corps as a pilot. Jim spent his tenure in the Orient, flying cargo planes over "The Hump" from Burma to China, ferrying troops and supplies to allied forces. China became the base for long-range bombers to take the war to Japan.

The air routes followed the old "silk roads" which had been used for many generations by traders, leading from southwestern China down into Burma on one side, and India on the other. For many reasons, (political, religious, terrain, disease, and enemy occupation) it was deemed necessary to develop the air route; but since the Chinese army was not able to manage such an endeavor, it was evident that the Americans would have to maintain the supply route. The Hump Airlift began in February of 1942, with three squadrons of 350 men each, flying twenty-five V-47 aircraft. The planes were commandeered from the United States airlines. Our Uncle Jim had been an airline pilot, flying for Pennsylvania-Central Airlines, and so was included in those enlisted to fly the dangerous missions.

Each evening John Fornasero would come in from work, spread the evening newspaper on the ottoman in front of his arm chair, turn on the floor-model radio, light up his favorite pipe, and listen for news of the war. Although our parents tried to protect and reassure us, life changed greatly when the war began. At school (we attended P. S. 98 in Douglaston) we had air raid drills, when we were marched to the hallway and taught to sit with our backs against the wall, and place our hands over our heads. Other days when the bell rang a three-alarm signal, we crawled under our desks and waited quietly until the "all clear" sounded. Everyone saved tinfoil from gum wrappers — nothing metal could be wasted, because it was needed in the war effort. Each Friday we brought dimes and quarters to buy Savings Stamps, fill a book, and purchase a United States Savings Bond. At home we had rationing of sugar, car tires, gasoline, shoes, and other commodities. After dark there were air raid sirens, requiring that every light — even cigarettes — be extinguished, so that the enemy could not find us, were he to fly over. Fear reigned. Patriotism soared.

A little known aspect of John Fornasero's military life is documented in his personal files. Five years before the war began, he had enlisted in the United States Army Reserves on October 26, 1936. This event took place at Lindbergh Field, San Diego. On his commission he is listed as an airplane pilot, married, and of excellent character. The following month, on November 12, 1936, he received his appointment as a Second Lieutenant in the Adjutant General's Department of the Army. He was honorably discharged as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps on June 20, 1939, after moving to New York, but was subject to recall for a period of five years. That, of course, took him into the World War II era, but he was never recalled because of his work with the United States Government, and because he was thirty-seven, and beyond draft age at the beginning of the war in December, 1941.

In our Douglaston years we lived in apartments, first in a white brick fourplex where we had a downstairs unit, and later in a red brick duplex in the same neighborhood. Apartment life was somewhat cramped after having lived in two-story houses for several years. An unfortunate event colored our stay in the fourplex. We arrived home from P.S. 98 one afternoon to find our neighbor, Leona Harwood, on the sidewalk outside our apartment house, waiting to intercept us and take us to her duplex a few units away. There had been a suicide in another apartment of our building, and the police detectives were there. The smell of gas haunted the building for several hours.

But there were pleasant moments also. Barbara was in the Girl Scouts, and Janet in the Brownie Troop, and we went to camp in the mountains in the summer of 1942. Barbara was growing up — she was going on thirteen when we left New York — and remembers taking ballroom dancing lessons and having her first dates while we were in Douglaston. Janet, much more the "tomboy," was busy roller skating break-neck down the crooked sidewalks. It landed her in the doctor's office one Sunday afternoon with two broken wrists.

Wherever they lived, Johnny and Elouise were a popular couple with many friends. The best of the Douglaston era were our neighbors, Dome and Leona Harwood. Dome also worked in aviation, so he and Johnny had much in common, not the least of which was a huge distaste for the incumbent mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia. Whereas Johnny kept a respectful distance, Dome engaged the mayor with animation over the phone frequently.

In his own words on the 1960 resume', John resigned from the CAA in March, 1943 "to accept a position with the Fairchild Airplane and Engine Company, Hagerstown, MD." Probably we cannot ever have a clear picture of all John Fornasero did during his years with the CAA from 1937 to 1943, but valuable insights can be snatched from letters written to him by well-wishers when they learned that he was leaving the CAA for Fairchild. Upon his resignation, John contacted many of the companies he had been inspecting, notifying them that Mr. George Haldeman would be replacing him as Chief of the Flight Engineering and Inspection Branch. He heard back from more than a dozen, all expressing their appreciation and best wishes. Their names and locations betray how much travel had been part of his job. A partial list is:

Sensenich Brothers Aircraft Propellers, Lititz, Pennsylvania
Luscombe Airplane Corporation, Trenton, New Jersey
Andover Kent Aviation Corporation, New Brunswick, New Jersey
Hamilton Standard Propellers, East Hartford, Connecticut
General Aircraft Corporation, Astoria, New York
Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, East Hartford, Connecticut
Edward G. Budd Manufacturing Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Lycoming Division — the Aviation Corporation, Williamsport, Pennsylvania
Bellanca Aircraft Corporation, New Castle, Delaware
American Export Airlines, Inc. New York, New York
Curtis-Wright Corporation, Propeller Division, Caldwell, New Jersey
Franklin Aircooled Motors Corporation, Syracuse, New York
Piper Aircraft Corporation, Lock Haven, Pennsylvania

Other personal notes also came in. Excerpts from one written by Robert W. Ayer of Moorestown, New Jersey was representative of the sentiments expressed.

It was nice of you to write such a letter and the least I can do is confirm what I told you over the telephone, that the pleasure has been all ours.

From what I have heard from manufacturers that have dealt with you, and from what I know myself, you were an inspiration to the manufacturing business. I am tickled to death, naturally, to see you finally get into a good organization in a job where you can continue to do the business a lot of good.

Of course, I don't know how Dick Boutelle got smart enough to grab you off [while] half a dozen others such as ourselves slept at the switch. Must be Dick is really 'in the groove' from all I hear as evidenced by his hiring such people as you.

The war was not ended, but we were off to Burlington, North Carolina, not far from famed Kitty Hawk, to see if the Fairchild Corporation could produce something that would be useful in the war effort.

A Taste of the South

Burlington was a small, hosiery mill city, being rudely awakened by an influx of aviation personnel, when John Fornasero arrived in March, 1943. Fairchild Aircraft had developed a military training plane, the AT-21 Gunner, and had chosen Burlington as the site for production and testing. Originally designed at their Hagerstown, Maryland location, the plane was now to go into mass production at a manufacturing facility (actually a converted rayon mill) in Burlington, adjacent to the city airport. There were high hopes for this small, twin engine, plane, and John Fornasero was hired to be the test pilot at that location. The city residents were divided — some excited about the new jobs and industry, and others unhappy that their little town was changing.

Housing was scarce with the town booming and much of the labor force away at war. For the first weeks Johnny "batched" in Burlington, while Elouise and we girls remained in Douglaston. The city was frantically putting up small, two-bedroom houses in a new neighborhood, clearing the woods as they went. When one became available to rent, a moving van was secured, and all of our family moved down from New York and into the new home.

Aviation families were occupying homes all around us, so our neighbors became our friends. The streets were not curbed or paved, of course, and the red clay dirt was a mess when rains came. Copperhead snakes fought us for territorial rights. The house foundation was built into a gentle hillside in the woods, creating a space under the house that was unfinished and unsafe. Johnny built a small washroom and storage area down there with temporary flooring, and piped in water. Heating was by a kitchen wood and coal furnace. For us "city folks," accustomed to central heating and finished basements, it felt like we were truly living "in the sticks." All in all it was an adventure.

Barbara and I entered the Burlington schools, she in Junior High, and I in third grade. Undoubtedly the school system was as stressed as the housing industry, and teachers were not accustomed to "outsiders" and "Yankees" in their classrooms. Both of us experienced some prejudice and ridicule at the hands of these Southern ladies whose routines were being upset. (It must be said that the students and most of the town's people were very kind to us.) But we were there to accommodate our father's career, and that was all we had ever known. All of our family life and experience was determined and colored by following our father across the United States as his job opportunities changed. So Mother and we adapted and endured through the 1943-44 school year.

There was a bright spot for us. Barbara very much wanted a dog, and it had not been a good possibility while we lived in the Douglaston apartments. Now, somewhat as an appeasement to her for having to leave her friends in New York, our father relented and got us a



Illustration 9: John by AT21 Gunner, Burlington, NC, 1942

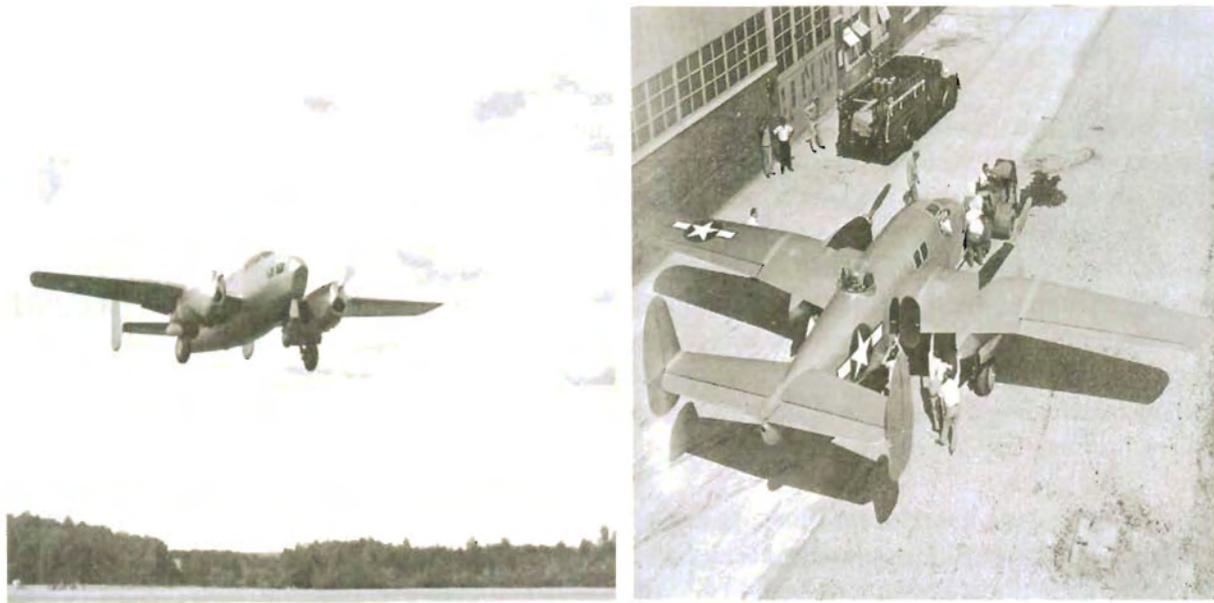


Illustration 10: Fairchild AT21 Gunner in flight. Being towed from the rayon plant.

darling, liver-colored cocker spaniel pup. Barbara named her Ginger, and she was the joy of our lives. But it was short-lived. She was just a few months old when she contracted canine meningitis. And — it being war years — the only available penicillin was restricted to military use. So we lost her almost as soon as we had gotten her, and we were two, heart-broken little girls.

Back to the story: the AT-21 Gunner and its development. The plane he had come to test was apparently still in production when he moved to Burlington, so John went up to the Hagerstown, Maryland plant to fly the original ship which had been built there. Two weeks later, September 1, 1943, the first plane manufactured in Burlington came out of the “rayon plant,” and was towed across the airport to the test area. The first test flight took just over an hour, and afterward the *Times-News* quoted Johnny as saying that the plane was “the easiest multi-motored ship to fly that I have ever piloted.” He took the plane over the town and then climbed to 15,000 feet altitude, put it into steep banks, and a dive over the runway. Our next-door neighbor, Don Campbell, who was a flight mechanic, accompanied him on that first test run. About that time the local *Times-News* ran an article describing the new man in town.

The new Chief of the Test Flight section, Burlington Aircraft Division, is the antithesis of flamboyance usually associated with the glamorous business of test flying. Few employees here recognize the slight, bronzed, mustachioed man who headquarters at Lee Worley’s office as their pilot. Nevertheless, he has flown every type of plane from an autogiro to the huge four-motored Voight-Sikorsky transatlantic clippers. Apparently he flies them about as quietly and efficiently as he moves around the office.

We can better understand the plane he had come to test from an Internet article on military aircraft in *High Gallery*:

The AT-21 Gunner was designed to fill the need for a way to train bomber aircrews, especially in regards to the operation of a bomber's machine gun defenses. In this way trainees could learn how to use a power turret or a gun on a flex mount, as well as learn to function as a member of a crew.

The plane had several unusual features. For one, the fuselage was built from plastic-bonded plywood which was stronger and lighter in weight than available metals. It was a stubby twin-engine plane, just over thirteen feet in overall length, with a wide double tail, glazed nose, and a top turret with twin machine guns installed. Over one hundred planes were eventually built at the Burlington plant, and John Fornasero was in charge of testing the planes, the engines and equipment, and the guns, before releasing the planes to the military.

These were intense war times, and newspaper articles give considerable column space to campaigns to get all the employees of the Fairchild Company, and their families, to purchase war bonds for the effort. Those who bought \$1,000 or more in bonds were given free rides in a company plane, piloted by John Fornasero, of course.

At some point shortly after his arrival, the paper reported that, "John Fornasero, head of Test Flight and Delivery, is also new airport manager." He was given his own office on the field, and was said to be "equipment-hunting."

As mentioned, testing the machine guns and other equipment was an important part of the test program. The planes had to be safe in all aspects for military possession. The ground testing of guns was done at the airport, but tests of the guns in flight had to be conducted in an area away from the city. Burlington residents became accustomed to the new sounds of machine gun clatter, and roaring planes taking off and circling the city area.

Mother told of an incident when a stranded plane had to land at the Burlington airport at night. There was no airport runway lighting. Apparently the plane had a prominent passenger on board, because the *Times-News* reported this under the byline, "Stormbirds."

Fairchild Field was a welcome port to two fliers Friday night during the terrific thundershower. A Captain Johnson, AAF, and Enos Slaughter, ex-first baseman for the Cards landed and spent the night. Charlie Bast and Johnny Fornasero heard the beleaguered plane soaring over the plant, drove their cars over and lighted the port with their headlights so the plane could land.

The family scrapbook which Mother kept of our Fairchild year, 1943-1944, has many photographs, but little description of their purpose. Many include military personnel, but the details of their involvement with Fairchild were not published in the local papers, probably for security reasons. Some insights are given in *Wikipedia* and other history articles written later. The plane was in production only a year (1943-1944) because it was deemed "unsuitable for use

as a trainer due to vibration and oscillation tendencies” inherent in the design of the plane. The military turned instead to using actual bombers for their training. The AT-21 was evaluated for use as a pilot trainer, but was not found to work out well for that either.

Probably for these and other reasons, John decided to leave Fairchild in April, 1944, after just a year with the company, and take an opening in the test flight division at Boeing Airplane Company in Seattle. He would say to close friends and family that he “did not see a future for Fairchild in aviation after the war.” The company did go on, of course, to develop the C-119 Flying Boxcar and other transport planes, and eventually became a large subcontractor to Boeing for the B-52. Graciously the Fairchild friends gave a nice farewell party for Johnny and Elouise at the Alamance Hotel in downtown Burlington, with about thirty people present. Their parting gift was a lovely set of silver, three-branch candelabra, which remain in our family today. Also, the “boys in Flight Test and Delivery” gave Johnny a shotgun. The *Times-News* article was titled, “Johnny Gets A Gun From Dep’t. 30.”

But we were soon packed and off to Seattle, by way of California. Gasoline and tire rationing during war years had made it impossible for us to make any trips “home” between 1939 and 1944, and this California trip could not have been made except that we were moving west and it was on the way. Johnny wanted to get back to Tulare to visit his mother, Marguerite, who was nearing sixty. “California, here [we] come, right back where [we] started from.”

Our visit was brief, probably because an exciting job was awaiting John, and Barbara and I had to get back into school. In Tulare we found lots of cousins to play with. Rosie and Frank Fornasero had Frankie and Eleanor; Ida and Slim Wilkins now had Jim and Bill. My main memory is of Frankie’s horse — I thought he was the luckiest boy in the world — and having my first experience at learning to ride (not very well). Barbara was now thirteen and a half, and quite grown up, but I remained a tomboy at eight, and the farm was a wonderland to me. Still the true wonderland — Seattle, Washington with its beaches and trees, hills and near-by mountains — lay ahead.

The Opportunity of a Lifetime

Boeing Airplane Company was a premier player among aircraft developers when John Fornasero was hired as a “Functional and Engineering Test Pilot” in April of 1944. The company had been developing, testing, and marketing both commercial planes and airliners since its beginnings about 1916. Now, with World War II in full swing, Boeing was manufacturing and upgrading its B-17 Flying Fortresses and putting them back into action as soon as they were combat ready. John’s first job at Boeing was testing the upgraded B-17G models.

The B-17 was not a new plane when America joined World War II. It had been developed in 1934 and 1935, and put into production in 1936 for the Army Air Corps. It was unique in that it was a four-engine bomber with a plexiglass nose, larger and faster than previous bombers, and with five gun positions. Its speed was due to the inclusion of the turbo-supercharger concept — an idea that had been kicking around aviation since the end of the First War. In succeeding years the plane was continually re-designed and upgraded, through models B-17B, C/D, E, and F. The upgrades were in armaments, cowls, tail design, overall length, nose cones, motor power, exterior paint, and more.

The B-17 F was the model which had gone into “wartime mass production” and it included 400 changes from the previous models. The biggest upgrades had been a frameless, one-piece nose cone, wider propeller blades, and the addition of fuel tanks to the outer wing panels. These improvements allowed the planes to go on longer missions and accomplish them faster. Another important feature was the development of the complicated Norden bombsight, which allowed the bombardiers to hit their targets accurately. The planes varied in cost, but on average were valued at \$357,655.00 each. The B-17F was the main bomber of the Army Air Corps from 1941 until early 1944.

The B-17G, which is what John Fornasero was hired to test, had flown for the first time in 1943. Designers improved the gun positions in this model, and also the gun mounts and windows. Some of the B-17G’s were upgraded model F’s, and others came off the production line at Boeing as new planes. It had been the unfortunate death of famed Chief Pilot Eddie Allen, whose B-29 plane caught fire and crashed in Seattle, that created the opening in the Testing Division so that John could be hired. At age forty he joined the line up of Boeing test pilots as the new guy at the bottom of the list. His Commercial Pilot’s License showed him to be qualified in “AIRPLANE SINGLE AND MULTI-ENGINE LAND AND SEA FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR – AIRPLANE INSTRUMENT [and] GLIDER.” He also kept his Airplane Mechanic’s License current, showing him qualified in “AIRFRAME [and] POWERPLANT.”

Arriving in Seattle from California, we, of course, had no house ready yet. Our first weeks were spent in a downtown hotel while our parents selected a part of the city in which to house hunt. That decision made, Barbara and I were started into West Seattle neighborhood schools: she in James Madison Jr. High, and I in Lafayette Elementary. The house chosen by



Illustration 11: Boeing B-17

John and Elouise, at 2716 – 45th Avenue SW, was their first to actually purchase and own. The two-story home with half basement and central coal heating, cost \$7,500. It would be our home for the next six years.

Downstairs were the adjoining living and dining rooms, a long kitchen with dinette area, a bathroom, and two bedrooms. Upstairs Barbara and I each had our own bedrooms, a bath, and a playroom. It being wartime, the upstairs had been converted by the previous owners into a rental apartment. Our “playroom” had been the dining area with kitchenette for the upstairs residents. A full stairway went down the outside back wall of the house into the back yard, providing the renters with private entry. It provided me with quick access to the nearest game of Hide and Seek after school each day. We had a separate garage behind with alley access. We all loved that house with its fireplace flanked by two bookshelves, and plenty of gabled nooks and crannies.

Each morning our father left in the maroon, 1941 Plymouth sedan to drive to work at Boeing Field. Mother never worked outside the home after marriage, so was always there for us



Illustration 12: Boeing B-29

when we came in for lunch, and after school. We were just two blocks from the bus line and a shopping junction with grocery and other stores, which was convenient for her, since she did not drive.

The B-29 Superfortress became Boeing's second major bomber, and was heavily in use during the last part of the War. John Fornasero flew it, although it was not his main project plane. The B-29 was created in answer to the Air Corps' need for a longer range capability. According to the Boeing history, *Boeing, Planemaker to the World*, (by Redding and Yenne, published in 1983,) it was conceived and discussed for many years before the "go ahead" was given in 1939, and initial plans were drawn up. Several airplane manufacturers competed for the final design, but Boeing eventually won the contract. The plane was not only larger and faster, but the compartments were pressurized, and the remote control gun-aiming system was based around a General Electric computer. There were also significant developments in the wing structure, and in the tricycle landing gear.

Testing on the B-29 was begun in 1942-1943, and it was in that series of flights (as noted earlier) that Chief Test Pilot Eddie Allen lost his life, creating the opening in Test Flight for which John Fornasero was hired. Eleven experienced Superfortress personnel were lost in that tragic accident, setting the project back for a time. But the plane was sorely needed, and in 1943 Boeing ramped up production at both their Renton, Washington, and Wichita, Kansas, plants.

Nearly sixty thousand employees worked on the planes, which were tested thoroughly over and over before being released to the Army Air Force in March of 1944.

Another of the Boeing test pilots, Marvin Michael, wrote accounts of his life as a test pilot in his autobiography, *A Passion for Flying: Exciting Stories of a Boeing Test Pilot*, which he published in 1999. In it he told of a day when he flew the B-29 with John Fornasero as his co-pilot. Since our father very seldom related any of these stories to us for fear of increasing Mother's already high anxiety about his work, this story should be of interest to our family. The incident began at Smoky Hill army Air Field in Salina, Kansas.

My assignment was to fly a sustained 3,200 miles without landing, in order to test the B-29's ability to perform long-range bombing missions. As I climbed the ladder to the entry hatch, I felt a thrill of anticipation for this challenging mission. I was joined in the cockpit by my copilot, John Fornasero, who was a few years my senior...He was short and dapper, with brown eyes and a thin black mustache. We both were aware that there could be no mistakes in testing this Boeing giant. The war was going poorly for our troops in the Pacific. Success in these tests would mean a tremendous advantage over our enemies, and could shorten the war. The Air Force was pressuring Boeing for immediate results.

Michael described the take off and their alarm when an engine observer yelled over the intercom that the number three engine was covered with oil and not functioning. With considerable caution they were able to radio for an emergency landing, and bring the plane back to the airfield safely. After two days of repairs, they tried the mission again, this time with better success, but new complications. The computerized bomb release system malfunctioned, and the plane's altitude had to be adjusted lower so that the manual release could take place. That accomplished, they began the return journey. Then another problem:

As we approached Marietta, Georgia, Fornasero fiddled with the autopilot. He turned to me with a scowl and said, "Marv, I can't get this darn thing to work." "Well," I said, "Good thing we know how to fly it manually."

Further into the return journey they encountered a violent thunderstorm. They tried to fly around it, but to no avail. Grateful that John had more instrument flying time than he did, Michael deferred to his advice. The storm was so large, and the air so turbulent, that they abandoned their attempt to get home to the Wichita airport, and landed instead in Fort Worth, Texas. The number one engine was sending out sparks, they were fatigued from the stress and long hours in the air, but finally landed at 9:17 PM safely.

A very tired and stiff flight crew staggered out of the airplane. We had been airborne for 13 hours and 40 minutes. We stretched our aching limbs as we walked up and down waiting for taxis. It took us two days to rest up in our hotel while the mechanics prepared the plane for our return trip."

Several significant things happened during our first two years in Seattle. A giant Boeing transport plane, the C-97, which was built similarly to the B-29, set a coast-to-coast, non-stop

flight record on January 9, 1945. Elliott Merrill was the pilot, and John Fornasero was copilot, on that historic flight. The C-97, and later version known as the Stratocruiser, became his main project in the next two years. Also in 1945, World War II came to a successful conclusion, much to the relief of a grateful country. The Boeing B-17 and B-29 planes had been major players in the success of the European and Asian campaigns, but when the war ended it meant, to our family, that Uncle Jim could come home!

Childhood memories are curious. I remember that, on V-J day when the war was officially over, Mother was in joyful tears. She dug into the kitchen cabinet, handed me the old "waterless cooker" soup pot and a big spoon, and told me to organize a parade of the neighborhood children, which I did. Can you see us marching around our block and down the alley, banging pots like drums and shouting, 'though we scarcely understood the significance of the day? Barbara remembers being at the church when the news came, and sharing the joy of one of the secretaries whose fiance could now return for their wedding.

The C-97/Stratocruiser Project

Following the war, the aircraft industry experienced a serious "lean period." Coming from those years when production was high, Boeing went from a payroll of over 78,000 at the peak of the war, to only 44,023 in the fall of 1945. William M. Allen, now president of the company, realized that the answer to reviving productivity was to develop a commercial airliner that could answer the needs of a growing airline industry. Competitor aircraft developers were putting such planes on the market. Douglas was offering the DC-6, with a pressurized cabin, a passenger capacity of 50, and a speed of 315 miles per hour. Lockheed was setting records with its Model 49 Constellation. Boeing developers observed the competition, and determined to produce something even better.

For this they turned to the C-97 Army cargo plane, which they had developed during the war. An evolution of the B-29, but with a double fuselage for larger carrying capacity, it provided the basis for a luxury airliner that could compete. There was no money available from the government for a commercial development, so the Boeing Company risked millions to develop the C-97 into Model 377, which would become the Stratocruiser. To please the traveling public it had to be safe, comfortable, and fast. Such a craft would be expensive, so it had to pass muster with the airline industry, or the risk would surely cause Boeing to go broke.

In November of 1945, Pan American Airways ordered 20 of the new Stratocruisers, for a total of \$24,500,000 — the largest contract ever given for commercial planes. They were willing to risk on the design because of the history of the C-97 on which it was modeled. As Redding and Yenne explain it in their *Boeing* history,

Officials knew that a C-97 transport had, on 9 January, 1945, flown from Seattle to Washington, DC in six hours and four minutes. The average speed was 383 mph, with

sputrs to 400. That speed and fast time cut down on overhead. The C-97 was mother to the Stratocruiser and what one could do, so could the other.

John Fornasero had been the copilot of that history-making flight, and he was selected to be the project pilot on the Stratocruiser project. It was an honor, because he had been with the Boeing Company only a year, and there were many pilots with more seniority. It was a proud moment for our family when he was chosen.

Actual time on that record-setting flight had been six hours, three minutes, and fifty seconds. As the Seattle newspaper recorded, "The fastest nonstop transcontinental flight previously made by any plane was 6 hours 39 minutes, from Los Angeles to New York, flown by a North American Mustang fighter with special gasoline tanks." On the flight were several Boeing people, and some Army Air Force officers. The flight was made at an altitude of 30,000 feet with a pressurized cabin. In our family's scrapbook of Boeing years, Mother included the certificate given each of those on board, along with a photo of the Boeing members of the flight crew having dinner at the Lotus Restaurant in Washington, DC after that exciting day. On arriving home, the newspaper reporters shot a photo of the crew being welcomed by then Chief of Flight Test N. D. Showalter. It was an historic event, and it paid well in terms of enthusiasm and sales with the airline companies later.

As the luxury Stratocruiser airliner was developed from the C-97 by Boeing, several unique features were incorporated. The wide cabin of the plane would allow for extra passenger space, so that passengers could walk around during long flights. The lower portion of the double fuselage would have a lounge which could seat 14 comfortably, and serve drinks at a nominal charge. Air conditioning and pressurization would increase passenger comfort. Soundproofing cut engine noise. And, for those accustomed to rail and boat travel, there would even be Pullman berths and dressing rooms for sleeping! Planes with berths could carry 75 passengers, and those fitted with only seats carried 115.

Pilot comfort was also incorporated into the design. The wider cockpit, with higher ceilings for stand-up comfort, the larger, better padded seats which were fully adjustable, well-placed equipment — all these not only made the longer flights easier on pilots, but lessened fatigue, thereby contributing to safety. Lighting, air-conditioning, and air circulation were improved. And the controls, while the most complicated ever designed to that time, were placed so as to be available to all three officers in the cockpit.

The plane was designed and ordered in 1945, but the first prototype did not fly until July of 1947. Pan American took possession of the first Stratocruisers in January, 1949. It was those years — from 1945 when the plane was being designed, through 1949 when finished planes were delivered — when John Fornasero was charged with testing the big planes through every possible difficulty and condition.

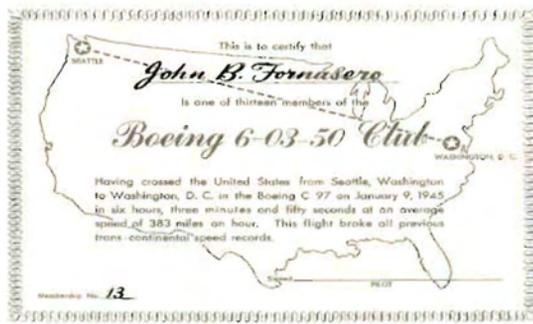
Barbara and I remember the Sunday afternoon when we got to be "celebrities" for Pan American. As the planes neared completion, Pan Am began to introduce and sell them to the public. For this they needed slick, magazine advertisements of the interior of the plane with



Illustration 13: Record setting C-97



Illustration 14: Crew of record-setting flight (John, right). Certificate given to crew and passengers.



“real people” enjoying the luxuries. So the families of the flight test division were invited to come down to Boeing Field, all dressed up in our suits and finery (we used to travel that way, you know!) and pose for photos inside the plane. It was our family’s first look at the Stratocruiser — the lady that had been vying with us for our father’s attentions for months. And we were thrilled with every minute of the experience.

Another amusing story grows out of the day famed aviatrix, Jacqueline Cochran, visited Boeing in 1946, and was being shown the big C-97 plane. As the Seattle paper related:

When the pilot who was to explain the working of the plane turned around, Miss Cochran recognized him.

“Hi, Johnny!” she recalled enthusiastically.

“Hi, Jackie!” answered John Fornasero, test pilot. “Imagine meeting you here.”

“It’s a little different from the trainer we used, isn’t it, Johnny?” Miss Cochran said, surveying the giant plane.

It was the first meeting of the flyers in 15 years.

Johnny, you recall, had been one of her early instructors at Ryan Company in San Diego where she had gone for further flight training after learning to fly in New York. By now she had made her mark in aviation, directed the WASPS during World War II, and was the head of her own cosmetic company. Her visit had been sponsored by Fredrick and Nelson Department Store to promote the cosmetic products. The tour of Boeing was part of the PR for that trip.

When the giant Stratocruiser took its first test flight in July, 1947, just six days after coming out of the Boeing plant, John Fornasero was at the controls. The paper hailed it as “the world’s largest, fastest and most luxurious postwar airliner.” The flight lasted an hour and



Illustration 15: John in the cockpit of the Stratocruiser

twenty-four minutes, and was conducted over Bremerton, Everett, and the Seattle metro area. The plane...

...landed and came to a full stop in 1,200 feet, or about one-sixth the length of the runway. Then, using the reversible-pitch propellers, which made the quick stop possible, Fornasero thrilled the ground crew and other spectators by backing the 67 ½ ton plane off the runway and onto the parking strip on the west side of the field.

The flight was "uneventful and highly successful," according to the pilot. In reporting the event, the *Fresno Bee* paper added these facts.

Boeing said its torpedo shaped Stratocruiser, a four engine double decked aircraft, would be able to fly from San Francisco to New York in 8 ½ hours; from New York to Stockholm in 12 ½ hours, from Tokio [*sic*] to Seattle in 16 ½ hours, and from Honolulu to San Francisco in 8 hours...Its cruising speed on scheduled flights will be about 240 miles per hour, officials said.

(Grandmother Marguerite made sure the Fresno and Tulare papers stayed abreast of all the developments and achievements of her second son.)

When the second Stratocruiser rolled out of the factory a few months later, John took over as pilot of that ship, and turned the first plane over to Robert Lamson. The first plane took over the experimental work, and the second was designated for CAA certification. But the tests were not without incident. In August the Seattle paper reported that "Flames [were] pouring out of the exhaust pipe of one of the 3,500 horse power engines" as John Fornasero "hurried the big ship in for a landing at Boeing Field." The fire was extinguished in the air when John discharged a carbon-dioxide bottle, and then radioed the tower for permission "to land immediately as a precautionary measure."

Considerable space was given in our family's Boeing scrapbook to articles related to the testing and certification processes conducted on the Stratocruiser by the CAA. The Seattle paper did a six-picture story on it in February, 1948. One of the aviation magazines published a ten-picture story about it. A thirteen-member CAA board, headed by George Haldeman, and old friend of John's from CAA days, conducted the certification process. During that time the experimental Stratocruiser 2 was flown by John Fornasero with a CAA flight engineer as co-pilot. The entire process took several weeks.

As testing on the Stratocruiser was completed, John Fornasero turned to flying the Boeing B-50, and the new B-47 jet which was also in testing stages. Our father was about to bring our family into the jet age, but the Stratocruiser would always be "our favorite airplane."

As a postscript, our son John Burton points out that only 56 Stratocruisers (Model 377s) were ever built and sold to the airlines, compared to 888 of the military versions of the C-97 which were deployed.

So, while it was a remarkable plane, it had major maintenance problems. That meant that the Constellations and DC6s were far more prevalent as airliners. The Stratocruiser used the 3500hp Pratt & Whitney Wasp Major (this engine was probably the high point of internal combustion aircraft engines — 28 cylinders of supercharged bedlam — incredible power in the air but a maintenance nightmare on the ground). By today's standards, it's hard to believe so complicated an engine was designed using only slide rules and drafting paper, and made with hand-controlled machining equipment. It would be a remarkable feat using modern computer drafting and design tools, and CNC milling machines.

Life in West Seattle

Our West Seattle years were, in some ways, the high point of our life as a family, and of our father's career in aviation; so it is good for us to refocus here and give space to the personal and family aspects of John Fornasero's life. His passion was flying, and he was consumed with his career in aviation; but at home he was a devoted husband and a thoughtful father to his two daughters.

When time permitted, he followed other passions as well. One was fishing, and Seattle was the perfect place for that. In the springtime, when the salmon were running, he would take his little 10-horse Johnson motor down to Elliot Bay, rent a small fishing boat, and spend the day in the mouth of the Duwamish River, sometimes actually catching a pretty nice fish. To keep the little outboard running between fishing expeditions, he would bring a large garbage can into the basement, fill it with the garden hose, clamp the motor to it, and run it to clean out the carburetor — or whatever. Of course, it filled the upstairs with noise and exhaust, and drove our mother nutty, but she seldom said anything — until she couldn't breathe any more! He always loved tinkering with gasoline motors. (And in those days, when car engines were simpler, he kept his set of mechanic's tools from the old Dodge Garage in Tulare, and did all of his own motor tune ups.)

It wasn't just fishing — he just loved being on the water. One can't think of Seattle without visualizing Puget Sound. One can't drive far in Seattle without encountering a breath-taking view of either the sound or the bay. Often we would just drive to a lookout point, like the one at the end of California Avenue overlooking Alki Point and the Bay, and just enjoy watching the sun go down over the city lights. About three years into our Seattle stay, our father bought a double cabin cruiser called "Sunshine." Actually, four families purchased it in a sort of club arrangement, and each family had possession one week out of each month. It was an old, wooden tub of a boat about thirty-three feet long, with a huge, Chrysler inboard engine. Two summers, and sometimes on weekends, we took the boat out for overnight trips. It slept four easily (more with making the table nook into berths) and had a double sun deck above. Our father loved to pilot it through the gently rolling waves of the sound; but the tub seldom made it home without his having to open the motor compartment, pump the bilge, and make repairs. I think he turned into the official mechanic for the boat.

One such vacation cruise took us up into the San Juan Islands, north of Seattle. Several Boeing families had boats — either cruisers or sailboats — and coordinated the trip with us. In the evenings we would meet at a designated cove, rob a friend's crab trap, and have a feast of fish and crab. (They always re-baited the crab trap so the owners would find fresh catch when they came to check their traps the next day.) It was on one such trip that we came into a passageway where two large ocean liners passed us, one on either side going in opposite directions. Daddy saw what was coming — opposing wakes that would meet right under our little 33-foot boat — and warned us to grab tightly to the guard rails inside the cabin. A Coast Guard ship was near, and also anticipated our danger. "Sunshine" had probably never been tossed so hard and so high, and the Coast Guardsmen watched us in cautious amusement until the danger had passed. It was a few moments of stark terror for us "land lubbers." It was on those trips that he insisted we learn to properly swab a deck and coil a line. (Always an instructor!)

Back to John Fornasero's other interests and passions — woodworking had always interested him since his days in high school shop class. He had picked up some furniture-making skills, but had not had the time or place to use them until now. The basement at our 2716 – 45th SW house was perfect. Into one corner he built an L-shaped workbench, and began collecting tools. I recall a band saw, a jig saw, joiner, planer, drill press, and many hand tools. He built storage cabinets for two basement walls, and would have done more, except that Boeing kept him busy with the development and testing of the B-47 about then.

Another interest of his life was his membership in QB: the Quiet Birdmen fraternal lodge. Their monthly gatherings were attended regularly, in Seattle and many other places. His loyalty remained throughout his lifetime.

Knowing how much we had hated losing our little cocker spaniel puppy, Ginger, our father bought us another cocker the first year we were in Seattle. She was blonde, and Mother named her Scamper. We had her for about twelve or thirteen years, and she was a great pet. Being about ten when she came to us, I was a perfect age for a puppy, and she became my best friend. Each June 16th I gave her a birthday party with ice cream, and on occasion took her to a professional photographer to have her photo made. On quiet afternoons, Scamper and I would find a cool place in the back yard under the long, outside staircase to the second floor. There we would contemplate life, and pick the bluebells that grew in the dampness. It was a good life for a child.

Early on in our Seattle time, our father decided that Barbara and I should get into a church and get some "moral training." His background as an Italian kid had been in Catholicism, but he had left the church about the time his father died. Mother's background was Methodist — her grandfather had been a Methodist preacher, in fact — but she also had left the church as a teenager. Daddy's advice to Mother was to, "Take the girls to some nearby respectable Protestant church." There was just such a church less than a block from our house: West Side Presbyterian. It was respectable, and it was also very evangelical; and within the first year of



Illustration 16: West Seattle and Wichita Days: (clockwise from top left) Fornasero family and Scamper at Christmas, 1947; West Seattle house; "Sunshine" on Union bay, c.1948; Wichita house on Old Manor Rd. 1951; Janet Ann Fornasero, 1953; Grandmother Marguerite Fornasero, c.1948; Barbara Joyce Fornasero, 1948

attending there, both Barbara and I had come to a personal faith in Christ as Savior. Those decisions were the most important of our lives, and shaped all of who we are and what we do even today. We had six good years at West Side to grow in our faith, and the people of the church were very nurturing and deeply into the Word of God. Our father thought we had “gone off the deep end” of religion, but we both stayed on the straight and narrow through our teenage years, and married well because of it.

Interestingly, early in those six years, the church had a revival meeting with an evangelist named Homer Grimes. We thought he was wonderful, with his varied gifts in preaching, piano playing, and composing. He enthralled our youth group with his ability to take any Scripture promise and turn it into a catchy Gospel chorus. Little did we know that, in due time, the Lord would bring Barbara together with his son, Joe Grimes, during their college years. In those six Seattle years, our lives — Barbara’s and mine — pretty much centered on the activities of the youth at West Side Presbyterian. Our pastor, Rev. Charles Hoffmeister, was one of the most influential people ever to come into our lives.

Mother, as noted earlier, was an at-home mom. Her friends were mostly the other Boeing wives, but she did volunteer at the Children’s Hospital one day a week part of the time we lived in Seattle. Having grown up in very sparse (and somewhat abusive) circumstances, she was always interested in learning better home-making and cooking skills; so sometimes took community courses in those things. It was during the West Seattle years that her health began to fail, and she tried several things to keep herself physically and mentally stable. Friends encouraged her to get into psychotherapy — a trendy fad of the rich and famous in those days — which she did. Anxiety and depression plagued her through the rest of her life.

In 1948 Barbara was a Senior, about to graduate from West Seattle High School. She had been a stellar student through all of Junior High and High School, and a class officer in her Senior year. Now the decision of what college to attend was upon her. Her leadings were toward preparing for a missionary career — not what our parents wanted to hear — but after some give and take, our father agreed to her attending Wheaton College, near Chicago. In the fall of 1948 Barbara, along with her best friend, Margaret Carleton, packed and headed east. It made a big change in our family life — all of us missed her, of course — but probably it was most difficult for Mother. It was that first fall, 1948, when Barbara met Joe Grimes in the dining room at Wheaton. Before Christmas they had their first date to a basketball game. He convinced her to become a Greek major, like he already was, and their lives began tracking together toward foreign missions at that point.

Back in Seattle, the rest of us were about to enter the jet age. There is an amusing “dinner table” story that needs telling here, because it was preliminary to our father’s becoming a jet-age test pilot. It seems all the Boeing pilots who would fly jets were required to go to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to be fitted for high-altitude flight suits designed to help withstand the pressures of jet-speed flight. John Fornasero was forty-four years old about then, and went with many younger pilots for that fitting.

The Air Force required that the pilots pass several stringent endurance tests, and John passed all of them with flying colors — some better than the younger pilots did. But the young doctor, who had to pass on their qualifications, denied him approval on the basis of his age — and his age alone. Irritated and unable to argue the younger officer to his point of view, John went over his head to a major he had met who was about his age. The major approved him, and he was able to continue with his career as a jet aircraft test pilot. John later admitted that, had he been a military person, he could not have gotten away with jumping over rank in that way. To his great advantage, he was civilian, and above reprimand. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way” I guess. (The cover photo of this book shows him sporting that flight suit.)

Chief of Boeing Flight Test – B-47 Years

On October 21, 1948, the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* carried the article, "Fornasero To Head Boeing Flight Tests." Similar articles followed in *Western Aero-Trades* magazine, and in the *Institute of Aeronautical Science News*. One article reads:

John B. Fornasero, veteran test pilot who has headed up the Stratocruiser certification test program, has been appointed Chief of Flight Test Section for Boeing. In his new position he will be in charge of all engineering flight-test operations for the company, reporting to the Assistant Chief Engineer, N. D. Showalter, who held the flight-test post previously.

The announcement came from the office of Edward Wells, Boeing vice-president of engineering.

It was a tremendous career move for John, but it had a terrible price. The administrative responsibilities began to mount, creating greater stress in an already stressful occupation. Serious accidents occurred during his watch. And it meant less actual flying time. He would never again be a project pilot on a developing aircraft — those assignments he would give to selected pilots. All of these consequences would eventually cause him to give up the position after about six years. But they were significant years — both for Boeing and for him.

The Boeing News published an article by John Fornasero, a few months after his promotion, in its June 9, 1949 issue, which sums up some of his philosophy about testing. The article is titled, "If It Holds Up for Flight Test You Can Bet It's a Good Plane." Excerpts read:

I think the function of the flight-test section can be summed up



Illustration 17: John and Elouise 1948, Seattle

best in the worlds of a little motto I inherited from N. D. Showalter and keep around the office. It says: **“One test is worth a thousand expert opinions.”** That’s the way it is with airplanes. Lots of experts may think a new design or a modification or a new type of equipment is good. But the only way to *prove* that it’s good is to fly it.

He went on to give examples from the Stratocruiser testing:

The modern airplane is so complicated a piece of machinery that the way all its components function together as a unit cannot be foreseen from the way the components function individually...Flight testing is a very scientific operation...Engine performance, wing and body and control-surface stresses and reactions are measured by sensitive instruments in our test flights. A permanent record of instrument readings is obtained for the guidance of engineers in their constant effort to improve airplanes that already are excellent.

He ended the article with this statement:

There is nothing particularly glamorous about this business of being a “test pilot,” in spite of the glamour that has been associated with the job...After a correction is made, we test the correction to see how good it is!

About a year after his being promoted to Chief, in the fall of 1949, the B-47 testing project, which had been based out of Moses Lake Air Force Base in Washington for almost two years, was transferred to the Boeing Wichita plant and Wichita Municipal Airport. The maiden flight of the B-47 had been made from Boeing Field on December 17, 1947 with Bob Robbins as pilot, and Scott Osler as co-pilot, both of whom were experienced engineers who had undergone extensive training and testing through Boeing and the Air Force for the job. The plane was called “the world’s fastest bomber,” averaging over 607 miles per hour, and had the most powerful jet engines manufactured at that time. It was dubbed the “Stratojet.”

The move to Kansas required about 40 Boeing employees to relocate from Seattle to Wichita. Chief of Flight Test John Fornasero was among those employees. It was an especially critical move for our family. Barbara was away in her second year of college at Wheaton, near Chicago. I had just begun my Sophomore year of high school at West Seattle High. My father called me into the living room and asked me to sit on the ottoman of his arm chair so we could talk. (The only time I ever recall his doing that, so I knew whatever he would tell me would be important news.) He explained that he had to move to Wichita, and that he would like for Mother and me to make the move with him. But he realized I was established in high school and with my friends, and that the move would be difficult for me. He asked if I thought I could make the change so our family could stay together. I agreed. He left for Wichita, and Mother set about selling the house and preparing for the move. When he could, he flew in on weekends. In April of the following year, 1950, we three flew by airline (my first airline flight) out of Seattle and set up in a downtown Wichita hotel until housing could be found.

Several papers ran very complimentary articles about John Fornasero during his days as Chief of Flight Test at Wichita. Among them were the Boeing paper and the Wichita paper. Of



Illustration 18: B-47 with rocket assisted (JATO) takeoff

course, the Tulare paper ran a big spread titled, "Native Tularean Flies High and Fast in Kansas Skies." It began:

Streaking through the blue skies over Wichita, Kan., these days at a 600 mile per hour clip is a Tulare-born man who is rated one of the top test pilots of the nation. He is John B. Fornasero, chief test pilot for the Boeing Co. plant at Wichita and specialist in the B-47 Stratojet bomber.

These were the days leading up to the Korean Conflict. Russia was perceived to be a major threat. Now with the development of long-range bombers, Seattle was vulnerable. Wichita was thought to be a safer location for the development and testing of the new B-47 Stratojet. There were further complicating factors. A strike at the Boeing Seattle plant had slowed down the work there.

The two experimental planes were flown, one after the other, from Moses Lake to Wichita by John Fornasero and "Tex" Johnson. Testing resumed a week later, with Johnson as project pilot on the Statojet 1, and Doug Heimberger as project pilot on the Stratojet 2. Just months after the project was transferred to Wichita, in June of 1950, the Korean Conflict broke out — both a ground war and an air war, similar to the strategies of World War II — and the work on the B-47 took on new urgency.

For us, who have become accustomed to jet flight and jet speeds, it is hard to fully understand all the innovations, dangers, thrills, and adjustments that came into play when pilots who had been flying propeller-driven planes began to switch over to jets. Walter J. Boyne, a writer for the *Smithsonian Air and Space* magazine, made helpful observations in his July, 2009 article, "The Dawn of Discipline." The greater speed of jet flight (two to three times that of earlier planes) made every small error a potentially fatal one. Take offs and landings were tricky due to speed and the weight of the planes. Loss of concentration for even a few seconds in a



Illustration 19: B-47 in flight (autographed by Scott Osler who was later killed). (L) John with Tex Johnston prepping for B-47 test flight.

plane going seven miles a minute could put the pilot out of control and result in a crash. Many planes and pilots were lost before this fact became fully respected.

Two terrible accidents during the testing phase marred the B-47 testing era for our family, and put extreme stress on our father. The first happened early on in Seattle (or Moses Lake), before the operations were transferred to Wichita. John was up in the B-47 for the first time, not as pilot, but being checked out to fly. Scott Osler was piloting, and another man was riding co-pilot. It was a two-place cockpit with tandem seating, and John was standing in the well below and beside the pilot during the flight, his head about shoulder height to the pilot, watching, learning, asking questions. For some unexplained reason, the plexiglass canopy lock came loose, and the canopy shot back, forced at great speed by the air pressure, killing the pilot instantly, crushing his skull. Our father's head was just inches below the impact.

As he later related the horrendous story, the plane was on autopilot at the time it happened, and he could not reach over the dead pilot it to release it so the co-pilot could take over the controls. With much gesturing and shouting John was finally able to make the co-pilot understand the problem over the air noise. He lifted the partially decapitated pilot from his seat, and laid him into the floor well of the plane, and then took the pilot's seat himself. The co-pilot brought the plane in. The trauma of that event haunted our father for months. It was undeniably the worst in-flight experience he ever had as a test pilot.

The second accident happened while we were living and working in Wichita. Our family was away with another Boeing family, the Plaths, enjoying a Labor Day holiday at Grand Lake in eastern Oklahoma in the fall of 1950. News came that two B-47 test planes had collided in mid-air, killing all four crew members aboard. We learned that one crew had taken a B-47 up for test hours, but was having trouble with the wheels or landing gear. They radioed back to base,



Illustration 20: B-47 Test pilots, Wichita. John at front center.

and a second crew made the unfortunate decision to take a second B-47 up to observe the problem. The observation plane got too close to the first plane, and the accident resulted.

It was a terrible loss of valuable life to the families, primarily; but also to the testing program. Four pilots out of a stable of only about eleven qualified to fly the plane put a huge strain on the program. Financially it was disastrous for Boeing. And although he had nothing to do with their decision, our father felt responsible for the loss, and for the grief of the families involved. Barbara recalls that she and our dad drove back to Wichita overnight. On arriving home the next morning Barbara went to bed, but he changed and went straight to the airport. It was a senseless tragedy and beyond description.

There is no mention of either of these accidents in the Boeing history book, and Mother did not save any clippings about them. Likely Boeing kept these tragedies as quiet as possible. Barbara and I have only our memories, and the talk around the dining room table, to go on for

relating these two accident stories. Our facts may not be totally accurate, but they are as close as we can make them. She was twenty and I was fifteen when the second accident occurred. In the months prior, I had frequently been a baby-sitter in the home of Doug Heimberger, one of the pilots killed. He left a wife and two small children to grieve and put their lives back together when he died.

Safety was, and always continued to be, a major theme of John's life and work. An April, 1953 article, written by him and published in the magazine, *Flying Safety*, (and speaking of the B-47 project) gives a pilot's view of what learning to fly the planes was like.

From the start, too, flying safety has been emphasized. From our early engineering studies to an unusually extensive pilot training program, safety has always been a major consideration. While the airplane was still on the drawing boards, designers were keeping in mind a prime requisite — it had to be fast but it had to be safe.

Because the early jets had the probability of having to make an emergency landing on airfields with moderate-length runways, he explained that, "the drag 'chute and anti-skid device have been developed as further landing-safety aids." Because of the extensive training, and the safety features developed in simulations, most pilots found the new plane easy to fly and to handle. "The main problem," he went on to say later in the article, "is navigation, since the radio stations go by so fast that you constantly are tuning the radio compass to keep track of them."

There is a very definite safety feature, too, in the manner in which the engines are slung in "pods" beneath the wings. During early design studies there was considerable concern over the vulnerability of jet engines to gunfire. It was felt that the fire hazard of the engines contained wholly in the body was not acceptable, and as a result the manufacturer started studies on external nacelles and various alternate external locations on the wing.

The result, as we know, was the familiar, swept wing styling with external engines that is used in aircraft to this day. Toward the end of the lengthy article he went on to explain that the most training required by jet pilots in the early days was in how to land the plane. "The very high level of flight speed requires a longer time for the airplane to slow down. The higher wing loadings possible in jet airplanes and the somewhat lower wing maximum life result in higher stalling speeds...All in all," he concluded, "with its simplicity, lack of vibration, smooth ride and comparatively low cockpit noise, the B-47 is a lot of airplane, and it appears that a lot of them are going to be flying in the future."

John Fornasero was kept busy writing and speaking about the B-47 in those days when he was Chief. You can easily see by the dates of the former article, and also the two articles mentioned below, that they were written later, after he had transferred back to Seattle and was deeply involved in directing the B-52 and 707 projects. Boeing was concerned that the airline pilots, and also the flying public, were very slow to take to the idea of jet travel. The new 707, which they were already developing to be a large, commercial jet airline, was very like the B-47 in design. For that reason, they urged upon their Chief to write and publish articles about the B-

47 that would allay the fears of the airline pilots, by assuring them that the plane would be easy to learn to fly. They also wanted him to convince future passengers about the advantages of faster jet travel.

(It seemed best to include these articles with this B-47 section, even though it somewhat disrupts the chronology of his story. It is interesting to note that, along with being an excellent pilot, administrator, and mechanic, he was also quite an accomplished writer! Picture him working over a manual typewriter, engrossed in his two-finger-style of "hunt and peck" typing as you read. Or possibly he dictated his thoughts to his secretary who was transcribing into shorthand.)

In June, 1953, the *Boeing Magazine* carried his article, "The *BIG* Difference," which compared flying the big jets to multi-engine, propeller planes. Subtitles in the four-page article show his progression of thought: "Conversion is Easy," "Controls Simple," "Best Combination [of reliable engines]," "Descent is Rapid," "Turbojet Advantages." The article follows a typical flight and landing and concludes,

What has it shown us?

It has shown us that the turbojet has definite advantages of speed and ability to climb and quiet comfort. It has shown us that the precise cruise control is necessary but easy. It has shown us that a turbojet airplane need not be a "hot" airplane — that even a high-performance B-47 bomber would not be difficult for the well-qualified airline pilot to handle well.

U. S. Air Services magazine the following month, August, 1953, carried another B-47 article by John titled, "Jet Transports Will Be Easy to Fly." While a more technical article for that kind of periodical, it made many of the same points as the *Boeing Magazine* piece had made. In December of that year he was awarded a plaque by the Flight Safety Foundation which reads:

FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE IN ACHIEVING
SAFER UTILIZATION OF AIRCRAFT.
PRESENTED TO
COMMITTEE S-7
COCKPIT STANDARIZATION
OF THE
SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERS
DECEMBER 14, 1953
J. B. FORNASERO

Over the next few years the B-47 would go on to set record after record. In 1951 it flew its first flight over the North Pole. In 1953 it set two transatlantic records, crossing the ocean in four hours and 45 minutes. In 1954 it flew 21,000 miles non-stop with mid-air refueling. Several upgrades were made in engines until the B-47E became the standard production model.

Variants of the aircraft were developed as trainers and reconnaissance planes. One was driven by experimental turboprop engines. These were essential developments for the Cold War years.

The August, 2007 *Air Force Magazine*, journal of the Air Force Association, ran an insightful postscript about the B-47 under their "Airpower Classics" section.

The B-47 Stratojet made Strategic Air Command the most powerful war instrument in history. The B-47 wartime mission was nuclear attack of the Soviet Union. It was fast, powerful, and numerous. There were two sets of B-47s, with two sets of crews. One comprised aircraft and crews optimized for delivering atomic weapons. The second was made up of reconnaissance, electronic jamming, and weather types. The later group would troll Soviet air defenses, SAMs, and airborne intercept radars, trying to provoke a response. Two were shot down.

In speaking of the new, swept-wing design, borrowed from German engineers after WW2, the article went on to say, "Flying the B-47 was a demanding task, and many were lost in landing or take-off accidents."

Our son, John Burton, had a revealing conversation with a retired B-47 pilot when he was working with Hughes in Tucson in the 1980's. He said of the plane,

We just flew them to death. They only lasted a few years because in those days we didn't have ICBMs, so the quick-response to a Soviet attack was to be from planes that were always in the air, running a race track pattern over northern Canada for hours at a time, refueling to stay airborne, and only coming down for crew changes and required maintenance.

The Boeing history book explains that, as Russian air defenses improved, the USAF pilots were required to make bomb runs at very low altitudes, with tight turns and maneuvers which "did not suit the B-47 airframe." Crashes resulted, and "in one 30 day period in 1958, six B-47s went down. The day of the Stratojet was coming to a close." We wonder how many of those young Air Force pilots knew the price that was paid by the test pilots at Boeing to make that plane such a reliable workhorse for their use in defending our nation during the Cold War years. The *Smithsonian Air and Space* article by Boyne, cited earlier, sums it up this way:

Boeing's initial \$14 million investment in the project paid off handsomely, leading to the production of 2,042 B-47s... All succeeding Boeing airliners, and indeed, most commercial jet airliners of all countries, followed the B-47 configuration. The latest Boeing airliner, the 787, and even its arch rival, the Airbus A380, feature swept wings, tail surfaces, and nacelle-suspended engines — all derived from the B-47.

The B-47 flew until 1969, but, to much of the world, the B-47s' importance was eclipsed by the B-52 which followed closely on it and outlived it. None-the-less, the B-47 was a major player in the development of jet aircraft — the one on which many pilots "cut their teeth."

Life in Kansas

In many ways, life anywhere is much like life everywhere. The day-to-day routines and patterns are about the same — just the scenery and faces change. But somehow the move to Kansas from Seattle felt very different — like we had gone to Oz. Mostly it was a perception. Anticipating the move, the “Boeing crowd” was negative, partly because they were a drinking crowd and Kansas, in those days, was a dry state. Much was made of the BYOB problem, and, “Where will we buy our booze?” It was as though we were moving to the middle of nowhere. The fact of forty families moving there together may have exacerbated the situation, because it allowed us to “hang together” and not integrate as well as we might have.

School felt different for me. Wichita High School East was about twice the size of West Seattle High, and far more diverse. And, while I had spent my life moving and adjusting to new schools, and knew how to make friends quickly and find my place, my being fifteen factored in. Kids in mid teens are more aware of relationships, more in need of acceptance. So it took a while to adjust.

A big factor was leaving my church family behind and trying to find another that came close to the intimacy and intensity of West Side Presbyterian. Barbara being away, and our parents not being church-goers, I was on my own for that. It took a lot of trial and error, riding the city bus to this church and that one, before a friend convinced me to try the Baptists. I found them compatible, and though my father thought they were “just one step above the holy rollers,” I plugged in there and found friends. In fact, I found more than friends — I found Jack! (Many years later Mother would avow that, “We had to have the Korean War so we could move to Wichita and Janet could meet Jack” — an interesting take on history!)

Our first house was a rental while our parents located one they wanted to buy. The rental was small, with an undeveloped yard. Scamper was about five, and a typical woolly cocker with long leg feathers; so every trip out into the rainy yard brought clods of muddy clay into the house. She was relegated to the basement much of the time, and I was assigned to bathe her often. But when we bought the house at 333 North Old Manor Road, everything improved. It was still smaller than the Seattle house, but in a comfortable neighborhood, with a lovely yard, and close to bus lines and shopping for Mother’s convenience.

It had a finished basement “rec room,” and a shop area for our father’s wood-working tools. In the absence of good fishing opportunities, he put more into the wood shop, and set about making work benches and a spectacular poker table. Mother hoped for some other pieces of furniture, but the poker table, with its eight coats of varnish, was a work of art which took months to complete. It was a good, consuming hobby for him as the pressures of his job mounted. Poker grew into a favorite pastime for him, and he developed a table of cronies who played with him at least two evenings a week as time allowed.

The Boeing crowd made their own life and entertainment in quick order. There were plenty of parties and picnics. Tex and Delores Johnson bought a house with a pool, and we often gathered there to pot luck and swim. The Boeing wives had some kind of group — maybe a canasta club — that met together regularly. Despite that, our mother's health continued to spiral downward. Turning sixteen, and being busy reconstructing my own life, I'm sure I did not understand or appreciate how the added pressures of my father's job, and his time spent away as he ran to and from Seattle, and Wright-Patterson, and Washington, D. C., affected her mental balance. His new status as Chief of Flight Test put some added obligations on her to entertain and play the role of the "boss's wife." Memories of her abusive childhood came back to haunt her; and eventually the doctors suggested that she try "chemical shock treatments" to try to alleviate her anxiety.

Mother eventually got right side up again, but two positive things came out of that for us. During the two weeks that she was hospitalized I "kept house" for Daddy. Just he and I were there, and he tried hard to pay more attention to our relationship. I took the bus to the hospital each afternoon after school to see Mother, and then rode another bus to the grocery store to pick up something I could cook for our supper, carried it home along with my school books, and cooked — after a fashion, I'm sure. We had a house cleaning lady, but I did the washing and tried to keep things straight. My dad was impressed, and at the end of those two weeks he announced that I had grown up and could "probably start to learn to drive." It was a good step in maturity for me, and gave us all a greater appreciation of Mother's role and our need for her. Even the bad times generally spawn some positives.

The big news had to do with Barbara's engagement to Joe Grimes, and their plans to marry early in 1952. After his graduation from Wheaton, Joe became involved with the Wycliffe Bible Translator's Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), and began teaching for them in their Norman, Oklahoma summer school. Translation work interested him greatly, and with his background in Greek and Hebrew, and his genius in languages, Bible translation was a fit. As God's Spirit worked in their lives, they became convinced that translation would be their calling in life. Joe became a member of SIL. and Barbara also took the course and became a member. Joe accepted assignment to begin work in Mexico; and Barbara, anxious to join him, hurried her graduation from Wheaton, finishing in three and a half years. Their wedding was planned for March 1, 1952, in Mexico City, where Joe was establishing residency.

Distance weddings are common today, but in 1952 it was quite a big deal for our mother and father to agree to, and plan for, a wedding in such a far away place. It became an exciting adventure: Barbara in Wheaton and Mother in Wichita, trying to coordinate the buying of dresses, planning of flowers, securing of a photographer. Barbara got home to Wichita in January, and carried much of the responsibility (remotely through Joe who was on location). As soon as she could, she joined him in Mexico City.

Friends, of course, could not go to the wedding because of the distance, and bridal showers could not be given with her away. Gift choices were limited because of customs restrictions, and also because their needs in the remote mission field where they would be living

did not allow for finery and luxury — just basics. Mother was determined that she would have silver as a gift (Barbara amended that to be silverplate, not sterling), but how to get it down to Mexico through customs without paying for it again presented a problem. Eventually our father wrapped it and hid it in his packed shoes! One by one the problems were solved, and the trip planned. Grandmother Marguerite Fornasero traveled to Laredo by Greyhound bus (always her personal preference for transportation), and we met her at the border. Then we four drove down to Mexico City, overnighing in Monterrey *en route*.



Illustration 21: Barbara and Joe Grimes' wedding, 1952

The weddings were lovely — both of them! Mexican law required that, before a church wedding could be held, a civil ceremony must take place. They had that on February 28th with Joe's parents, Homer and Ruby Grimes, our family, and Grandmother Fornasero witnessing. It being leap year, that allowed a day before the Christian ceremony on March 1st. The evangelical Union Church was lovely, with huge bouquets of gladiolas, and a garden reception. Rev. Homer Grimes officiated, along with Pastor McKean of the church. I was her maid of honor (I had the mumps that day!) and a missionary friend, Bill Nyman, was best man. Another missionary, Danny O'Brien, sang. Although none of her "Seattle family" from West Side, and none of her Wheaton friends were able to attend, the missionaries gathered around and were family to all of us. Our parents were impressed by their wonderful hospitality.

Following the wedding I flew home to Wichita (exposing everyone on the plane to the mumps!) to school — and to Jack. Our parents drove over to the coast for a lovely vacation at Acapulco, on the Mexican Riviera. When our parents got home a week or so later, Mother was coming down with the mumps also.

But more about the important thing: my meeting Jack. It was the summer of 1951 when we began dating, and within three weeks we were quite certain it would be a life-long relationship. He was headed for the Gospel ministry, a student at Ottawa University — a Baptist college near Kansas City. I had decided a year before that my calling would be to marry a minister, so that was a fit. He was everything I had dreamed of and more, and — after we knocked a few edges off our theological differences — I joined First Baptist Church of Wichita.



Illustration 22: John and new best friend at Acapulco, 1952

Following our first summer together, Jack returned to Ottawa, and I finished high school at East High. Daddy returned to Seattle as Chief of Flight Test there in March, 1952, but Mother and I stayed on in Wichita so that I could complete my Senior Year. The day of my graduation the moving van was there, and we were preparing to return to Seattle. (The movers innocently packed my graduation hat in a box with the kitchen spices, causing us all to rip open boxes in a mad hunt to locate it in time for the ceremony.) The Wichita era had ended for us, much to my chagrin, though others would stay on with the B-47 project. The “middle of nowhere” had become the most significant move of my life, and leaving — even to go back to the Seattle I loved — was hard. The day after my graduation, Daddy, Mother, and I flew out to Seattle, leaving my love behind.

That Incredible B-52!

Boeing Company had many outstanding aviators working in the years John Fornasero was with them. One of those was Elliott Merrill, a graduate engineer who had been with the company three years longer than John. Merrill had been the pilot on the record-setting C-97 transcontinental flight in 1945. When John was transferred to Wichita in 1949 to head the B-47 development, Elliott Merrill became the acting Chief of Flight Test in Seattle to replace him there. Now, when John was sent back to Seattle to head up the B-52 development in 1952, Merrill swapped with him again, and took over the Wichita operation. It was, in some ways, ironic, in that Merrill had more years with Boeing, and more education than John, but served in somewhat less demanding roles. In fact, most of the pilots John worked with were graduate



Illustration 23: The incredible Boeing B-52

aeronautical engineers, but John had only the one year of electronics school after high school. That he rose so far on so little education is a credit to his intellect and his determination to excel.

The man who was his boss and best friend for all of his Boeing years, N. D. Showalter, once told our family of the day he realized John did not have an engineering degree. They were involved in some kind of design session, engineers gathered around a drafting table. Some problem came up and John made an off-handed remark, something like, "Well, you fellows figure it out — you have the degrees." N. D. said he looked up in shock and said, "John, you mean you don't have an engineering degree?" He told us, "My estimate of John Fornasero went up 100 percent right then, realizing that he was such an outstanding person without the credentials many of us had."

The family scrapbook has a two-page "Inter Office Memorandum," given to John on March 28, 1952 when he left Wichita. It was personally signed by seventy-five of his co-workers — everyone from pilots to clerks — and the message follows:

Dear John:

We probably could find a fancy, frilly card to give to you, but it wouldn't say just what we want it to. Besides, you have waded through so many stacks of paper work these past two and a half years, that one last memo is more appropriate.

We surely appreciate having had you as our Chief these past thirty months and are going to miss you like the dickens. We hope that these gifts will mark many pleasant hours for you and will accumulate some interesting phone numbers.

Our family moved back to Seattle, and, after a lengthy stay in an apartment at the Olympic Hotel, purchased a lovely home on Wilson Avenue in east Seattle, above Lake Washington. It had a view of the lake, and — on clear mornings — a spectacular view of Mt. Rainier from the south and east picture windows in the living room. The home was built into a hillside, and had a finished, ground-floor basement with a large recreation room, a laundry, and a shop for our father's woodworking tools. Mother engaged a home interior person to help her decorate the spacious living/dining area, which would be used for entertaining Boeing friends and employees. Barbara was married and living in Mexico, and I would leave that fall for Wheaton, but our parents enjoyed the home for the next three years.

An article in the family scrapbook from the Seattle paper was simply headlined: "XB-52 Rolls Out; Preparations Being Made For First Flight." It was dated 1952, but the plane had actually been in design stages since 1946. A good history is given on the Global Security web site in an article entitled, "B-52 Stratofortress History," sent to me by our son, John. In part it reads:

In 1945, the Army Air Corps initiated a design competition for a new second generation strategic bomber to follow the B-36. Following further requirements definition by the Army Air Corps in 1946, Boeing was awarded a design contract for this new aircraft. The original requirements specified an aircraft that could carry a 10,000-pound bomb load, 5,000 miles, at a tactical operating altitude of 35,000 feet. This aircraft was to be capable of cruising at a minimum of 450 miles per hour (mph) at its tactical altitude.

Great investment and research went into determining an appropriate engine and wing structure that could provide the speed and range needed for this new kind of bomber. Several early designs were proposed, including one with turboprop engines and less wing sweep. A funny story keeps popping up in many of the B-52 history articles, about the weekend the Boeing design team, headed by aeronautical engineer Ed Wells, went to Wright-Patterson AFB to present their drawings to the Air Force. Learning that the Air Force was now more interested in a fully jet-powered plane, the Boeing team holed up for the weekend in their motel room, and redesigned their aircraft to give it more potential power and range. To illustrate their ideas, they created a small balsa wood model for their Monday morning meeting. The Air Force brass was impressed, and Boeing was awarded the contract.

By early in 1949 two prototypes, the XB-52 and YB-52, were being built. But even this far into the process, the Air Force was revising its requests. Now they wanted a bomber that could be modified into a reconnaissance version without losing the performance previously agreed on. Eventually that was accomplished, but not until somewhat later in the process.

The first prototype, the XB-52, actually rolled out on November 29, 1951 — a strange tale that can only be understood in light of the Cold War era, when fear of the Russians (or a competitor) stealing the design was high. (The story is told by Redding and Yenne in their book, *Boeing, Planemaker to the World*, on page 130).

The B-52...airplane was so secret, it had been kept, literally, under wraps. The B-52 prototype was rolled out of the Seattle plant on 29 November 1951, at nine in the evening. Air Force people were so nervous about letting their secret out they demanded it be covered with muslin as a disguise. Boeing staff spent frantic hours rounding up enough cloth to cover an airplane with a wingspan of 185 feet and a fuselage 157 feet long.

Security was tight. Troops were brought in from nearby Fort Lewis as guards. Streets were closed to the public...special Air Force passes required...They also demanded that the test flight be made at night.

Carl Cleveland, Director of Public Relations for Boeing was irritated...



Illustration 24: Showing the B-52 to President Eisenhower, 1953

Even more security demands were made by the Air Force, including insisting that a large wall to be built around Boeing Field, and that all photos taken to be sent directly to Washington, D. C. for developing and classification. All of this was excessive due to the hysteria of the era, and much of it was ridiculous. Cleveland appealed to a Colonel in the Department of Defense who flew out to the scene and immediately lifted the unnecessary restrictions. The plane, covered and resembling a “huge moth,” was then unwrapped. However, it developed some system failures, and had to be rolled back into the plant for major repairs. It did not actually fly until October of the following year.

Meanwhile, its sister plane, the YB-52, was rolled out, and actually achieved its first flight on April 15, 1952, six months before the XB-52 made it airborne. The B-52 project was officially assigned to the flamboyant test pilot, Tex Johnson, who had been project pilot on the B-47 Stratojet I. Tex took the YB-52 up on its first flight with an Air Force Colonel, Guy Townsend, as co-pilot. The occasion was described years later in Boeing’s “B-52 50th Anniversary” article, published in 2002:

Boeing employees crowded office windows, the ramp and roof of Plant 2. Some likened the tense excitement to that of a Broadway opening. The roadways, hills and rooftops

near Boeing Field were also lined with spectators...Both pilots had extensive experience with Boeing's first jet bomber, the B-47.

The YB-52 was loud, but the two-hour flight was successful. When the second prototype, the XB-52, went up on October 2, 1952, Tex and Townsend were again at the controls. The family scrapbook shows the picture, carried both in the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* and in the Boeing paper, of Col. Townsend receiving the plane from John Fornasero, Chief of Flight Test, after the successful testing of the second prototype in October, 1952.

In ensuing months, many design changes and improvements were made to control the excessive noise (which damaged the plane structure), and in strength of wings and fuselage (which sagged on the ground and in flight from the great weight of the plane), and in the configuration of the flight deck.

Fuel capacity was increased by adding 1000 gallon drop tanks under each wing. More powerful engines were added, and the tail height was decreased. In later models the fuel tanks were incorporated into the wings, further strengthening the design. The result was an outstanding aircraft which became the new work horse of the Air Force. Many are flying to this day. Our son, John, commented how sad it is that "an airplane designed by my grandfather before I was born is still our main bomber today."



Illustration 25: Col. Guy Townsend accepting delivery of first B-52 for the Air Force, 1952

In the fiftieth anniversary article cited earlier, Col. Townsend, then 81, expressed a similar sentiment. He knew the plane was well-built, but he never imagined it would still be around fifty years later. "None of us ever dreamed the airplane would stay in service this long. Three generations have flown the B-52. By the time it's retired we ought to have two more generations. If you had told me that then, I would have said you were out of your tree."

The Superfortress saw duty in the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the Iraq War. A total of 744 of them were delivered to the Air Force by 1962. Talking of its future, the article in *Wikipedia* predicts that, although the Air Force is working on new bombers, scheduled for 2037, it intends to keep the B-52 in service until at least 2040, at which time it will be 90 years since original design and production. An incredible fact, unmatched by any other aircraft in the world!

John Fornasero, as noted earlier, did not accept the position of project pilot on any plane while he was Chief. Privately he stated that he did not admire a Chief who would take a project through its publicity stages to get his name in the news, and then hand it off to other pilots to do the tedious and dangerous work of testing. He let his pilots take the projects and receive the publicity, but he got in his hours piloting during the testing process. As a result of that policy, his name is not connected with the B-47 or the B-52 in the official Boeing history book, which is unfortunate. He hired the pilots and directed the testing programs for both, and was actively involved in flying and developing both planes during his years as Chief from 1948 to 1954. His Boeing flight logs show him to have fifty-six hours in the B-47, and considerably fewer in the B-52 — just under nineteen hours.

The 707 and a Big Decision

As testing on the B-52 was winding down, Boeing was into another arena: developing their first big, commercial jet airliner. The Brits had scooped them with their De Havilland DH-106 Comet, but for some reason jet airliners had not caught on in the United States. The Douglas DC-6, the Lockheed Super Constellation, and the Boeing Stratocruiser were the big liners of the day.

Wellwood Beall had told the Boeing executives that, if they were to compete globally, they would have to develop a big jet airliner, based on the technology of their B-47. Plans were being developed, but secretly, under the program designated Model 367-80, nicknamed the "Dash Eighty." Something of a cross between the C-97 /Stratocruiser and the B-47, the Boeing history book describes it thus:

The fuselage was longer than that of the C-97 or the Stratocruiser with a more pointed nose, and did not show the 'double bubble' of the original 367. Early drawing-board versions of the 707...differed in the location of engines and landing gear. Aerodynamically, the Dash Eighty was closer to the B-47 than the piston driven C-97.

Boeing had to fund the project itself to the tune of fifteen million dollars, because they were unable to get the airlines to buy into it in the beginning. And, though the project was kept secret, Boeing leaked to the media that they were working on a prototype jet airplane which would serve both the airlines and the Air Force in 1954. The announcement was designed to soften the air traveling public to the idea of flying on jets.

John Fornasero was still Chief of Flight test at Boeing during the development of the Dash Eighty. We have no hard data about our father's role in the development of the 367-80, but these things we know. He had top security clearance from the Air Force much of the time he was Chief, and spent considerable time running to the Pentagon, negotiating design and contracts on the B-47, the B-52, and the 707. In those times, he was quite far removed from his true love — test piloting. Meetings with the Air Force were demanding and frustrating, and he dreaded



Illustration 26: 707s over Mt. Rainier

them. He became something of a “middle man,” running between the Air Force and Boeing, and for him personally the whole business of aviation lost most of its joy in the process.

About that time, in January of 1954, the British Comet was grounded because of two fatal accidents over the Mediterranean. It was a serious setback to jet airline travel, but Boeing persisted with the development of the 707, and eventually the Air Force bought into the project. The airlines were slower to come aboard, however. They were pondering between Boeing’s Dash Eighty design and the new Douglas DC-8, which was similar to Boeing’s 707. It put Boeing and Douglas into something of a race to see which company could court the airline contracts. Pan American finally decided to risk on the 707, and United Air Lines followed by ordering the DC-8s. Boeing had won the race by a nose, mostly because their design hit the market about a year ahead.

John Fornasero was still Chief in Seattle during that “great Boeing-Douglas jet transport sales race” and when the 707 first flew on July 15, 1954 — just a month after our wedding. It must have added to the intensity of this era for our father that Jack and I set our wedding for June 19, 1954, at First Baptist Church in Wichita. It was best for us — all Jack’s family lived there, including his two elderly grandmothers who could not travel. But it must have been terribly disruptive for John and Elouise, who had to “move back” to Wichita for a week or so to see to the wedding and attend all the festivities.

Grandmother Marguerite and my cousin, Eleanor Fornasero, came in from Tulare. Barbara and Joe and baby Marilyn Kay Grimes (who had been born the previous February in Mexico City) came from their teaching assignments in Norman, Oklahoma. It was all of our first

time to meet Marilyn, and she almost upstaged the bride, but nobody minded. Our Uncle Jim Fornasero, then an airline pilot for Capital Airlines, flew in from Muskegon. So it was a wonderful family occasion and reunion. After the wedding Jack and I began our journey toward seminary in Ft. Worth, and the ministry. Everyone else returned to their lives, including our parents, who flew back to Seattle to their now empty nest. And back to the development of the 707.

Although the test model went into testing in July, 1954, as noted above, the 707 did not begin flying commercial routes until 1958, three years after John had left the employment of Boeing. The 707 was the last large aircraft he tested for Boeing. His flight logs show that he first flew the “367-80” in October of 1954, and he continued to test it through November and December of that year. His accumulated time in that plane was given as 31 hours and 33 minutes.



Illustration 27: Jack and Janet Burton wedding, 1954.

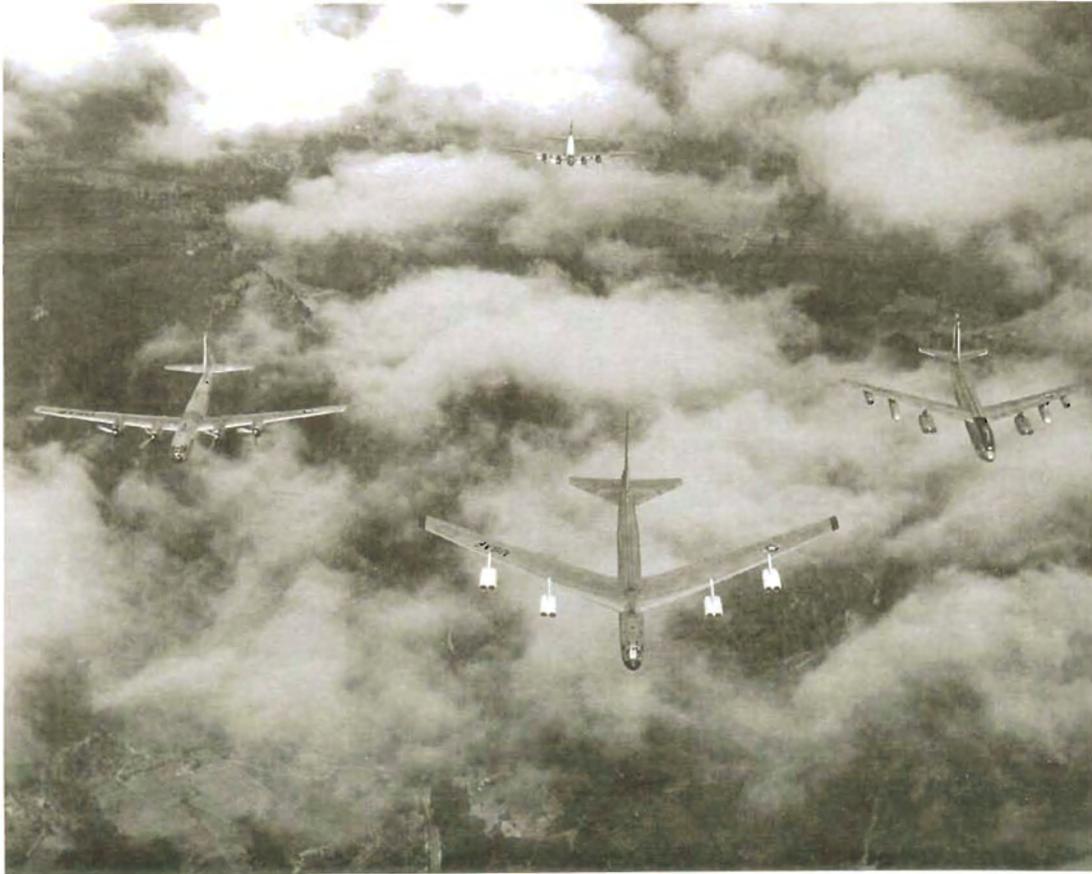


Illustration 28: Four of the Boeing planes tested by John -- XB52 (lead), B-47 (r), B-50 (l), C-97 (rear)

At some point (the date is lost to us) John made the decision to resign his position as Chief of Flight test for Boeing. He had been in that position about six years. Several factors led to his decision to step down as Chief, return to test pilot status for a time, and ultimately leave the company. He was fifty years of age, and was beginning to have symptoms caused from an enlarged heart. His years as Chief had been extremely stressful, both from the standpoint of the pilot losses and accidents, and because of the pressures from the Air Force and the Boeing executives during contract negotiations. He missed flying — time in the air just testing planes — which was his first love. And he had some issues with Boeing over the way his test pilots were being paid as compared to what the other aircraft companies were offering. Some combination of all the above led him to decide to “become just a test pilot again.” Tex Johnson replaced him as Chief.

The new status lasted only a few months. He tried to be “just a test pilot” again, but it wasn’t the same. He had flown too high, and knew too much. He was stressed and tired. In March, 1955, as he turned fifty-one, the decision was made to leave Boeing altogether. All his family and friends were sad to see him leave, but it was ultimately his choice. He had to find a

new challenge and a fresh start for the rest of his life. He would continue flying a few more years until heart trouble caught up with him, but only in small craft.

From our view, he left quite a legacy at Boeing from his eleven years there. He contributed to the testing and development of the B-17G, the B-29, the C-97, the Stratocruiser, the B-50, the B-47, the B-52, and the 707. Several of our family who have visited Boeing's Customer Service Training Center in Seattle, tell us that a life-sized photo of John Fornasero stands in the Flight Training Center there, with a quotation from one of his articles. The quote is:

Regardless of how good an airplane looks on paper, John Fornasero once wrote, "The only way to prove it's good is to fly it." And fly he did. Fornasero led the 377 through one of the most comprehensive flight test programs of the time, using 3 separate airplanes and covering 250,000 miles



Illustration 29: This photo of John hangs in the Boeing Customer Training Center, Seattle.

A New Compass Setting

It took about three months after leaving Boeing for John to decide on a new career. His time was well spent, though. With another grandchild due in August, he was called on to build some baby furniture in his basement workshop in Seattle. The finished product was a wardrobe for his new grandson — a chest which stood in the Burton nursery for many years.

In July of 1955 he accepted a position as Director of Flight Test with the Aircraft Division of the Rheem Manufacturing Company, based in Downey, California. Better known for their expertise in water heaters, heating, and air conditioning equipment, Rheem was now interested in developing a surveillance drone, and securing missile contracts from the Government. John was employed to plan the flight test program. In that capacity he selected and procured test equipment and facilities for the testing of unmanned aircraft. John and Elouise sold their lovely, East Seattle house, and moved to the Los Angeles metro area. They rented an apartment in Whittier for about a year while he worked in the Downey office.

In trying to better understand what our father did during his almost-three years with Rheem, we found an Internet story, written by historian Andreas Parsch, about their venture into developing the AN/USD-2 drone for the U.S. Army's drone surveillance system. The drone, more commonly known as SD-2, was developed in the years leading up to 1957. John Fornasero was Director of Flight Test for Rheem from 1955 to 1957, which would have been those developmental years. Securing contracts with the Government was very difficult — especially for smaller companies, new in that business — and Rheem was hopeful that John, with his history of negotiations between a major aircraft developer and the Air Force, would have some connections that could get them an inside track for a contract.

In those months, John flew often in small, rented planes. His log records flights in a Luscombe, Cessna, Piper, Aero Commander, DC3, and DH Dove. It was his intention to own his own plane; so he was probably testing them all out to decide which



Illustration 30: John Fornasero, Rheem Company, Dayton c.1957.

make and model he would buy. We saw the Piper in September, 1955 when he flew into Ft. Worth to visit his new grandson, John Dwight Burton, who had been born in August — Grandchild Number Two. (Mother had come earlier to be with me during the week before and after his birth, caught pneumonia, and was hospitalized while there.) Many of the family gathered on that Labor Day weekend to meet the newcomer, including Joe and Barbara Grimes with little Marilyn, now eighteen months old. John made other flights around California, both on business and to visit the Tulare and Bay Area relatives.

According to his 1960 resume, after a year in California he “was assigned to the position of manager of the Rheem customer relations office at Dayton, Ohio for a period of one year.” Dayton, of course, was near Wright-Patterson Field, a center of military activity. That move came in the fall of 1956. John and Elouise rented a home in Dayton for that one-year stay. Another grandchild, Charles Edward “Chuck” Grimes had been born in Mexico City the April before — Grandchild Number Three.

Shortly after moving to Dayton, John purchased a Beechcraft Bonanza, which he flew for most of the next year. It was a mid-fifties model, probably a BE35, single engine plane, with V-tail. The Bonanza was a truly modern, high-performance personal aircraft, sleek and fast, and he was very proud of it. Many of his flights in the Bonanza were business related, and in the Dayton area. But in November, 1956, he recorded a trip to Muskegon, to visit his brother Jim and wife, Dee. Jim was still piloting for Capital Airlines out of Chicago. The following month, for Christmas, he and Elouise flew into Wichita; and we all spent Christmas together at the home of Jack’s parents, Arch and Georgie Burton. Mother later revealed that John was experiencing heart pains on that trip. Leaving Wichita, they made a stop in Albuquerque where his cardiologist worked at Lovelace Clinic. (This is where he had been diagnosed as having an enlarged heart, thought to be caused from earlier high-altitude flying before proper pressurization.)

Realizing that his flying days were going to be shortened because of his heart condition, John continued on in the Beechcraft to spend New Years with his mother and family in Tulare. From there, he and Elouise took a jaunt down to Hemet, where Paul and Alma Wilcox had settled. Determined to make the most of what flying time he had left, they turned south, and flew into Mexico in January, to visit Barbara and Joe out in the “tribe.”

The people group Joe and Barbara had chosen, into which they had gone to live and do Bible translation work, were the Huichols of western Mexico. The Huichols live and are scattered throughout the Sierra Madre, above the city of Tepic, Nayarit. They are an agricultural, mountain people, whose lives are structured around the planting and harvesting of their crops, mainly corn. To travel to and from the mountain *rancharias* where their language helpers were living in 1957 required Joe and Barbara to hike and ride on horseback for days, ford rivers, and pack in supplies, which was especially treacherous with two toddlers in tow.

There was an airstrip in that mountain village; so Joe chose to learn to fly and got an airplane — a Piper Cub. That cut their family’s travel time from four days to a half hour, and

lessened the dangers involved considerably. It was that airstrip that John and Elouise used when they went to visit their “kids” in January, 1957. The flight log reads that they flew into Hermosillo on January 7, then on to Mazatlan, and into the township of Guadalupe, which was where Joe and Barbara were living. They stayed with them there from January 8 to 10, living in Barbara and Joe’s house. Two of their language informants, Higinio and Virginia (relatives of trusted Believers, Roman’ Diaz and his wife, Vicenta de la Cruz), graciously invited everyone — Elouise and John, Barbara and Joe, and the babies — over for a dinner of turkey cooked and served in its broth, with tortillas and chile peppers on the side.



Illustration 31: Grimes family in Huichol costume, c. 1959

Interestingly, it was not John’s first flight into interior Mexico. Way back in his Ryan days he had been called on to fly the body of a man back to his home in Ruiz, Nayarit for burial. Ruiz was not far from Huichol country, and Barbara relates a fascinating connection to that event.

After Joe and I began our work among the Huichols in May, 1952, we stayed among the Huichols during the summer (rainy season), and then walked out in the fall, went to Tepic where our car was stored, drove up the west coast highway to Ruiz, where we stayed overnight, and then walked out to visit McMahons, who were a Wycliffe family working among the Cora, a neighboring tribe. But while we were at the small inn in Ruiz, I asked the lady innkeeper if she remembered a time about 1933 [nineteen years before] when an American pilot had flown a body back there, and she said, “Yes, he stayed here and he sat right there”, pointing to a chair nearby. He had to land on the road, because there was no airstrip there. Because Daddy spoke Piemontese which is related to Spanish, and had studied Spanish in high school, he was able to communicate OK with them.

Barbara remembers that Daddy brought her back a little toy straw man on a donkey from that trip, which she kept until our family moved from San Diego to New York in 1937.

Joe Grimes adds a very colorful description of John’s 1957 flight into the mountains, and the later history of that airstrip at Guadalupe Ocotán.

When your father and mother visited us in Guadalupe Ocotán, Nayarit, I figured that your dad already knew Ruiz. So I told him to follow the coast down to the San Pedro river, which goes to the coast from Ruiz, then to the Santiago river not many miles away, then turn left (I gave him the compass heading) across the first range of mountains after he crossed the north-flowing stretch of the Santiago. I gave him the exact latitude and longitude. They came right on in.

The Huichols we lived with were enchanted with the fact that Barbara really did have parents. They all enjoyed each other, with Barbara and me as interpreters.

Much later, after we were long gone, the government shut down the airstrip. The drug cartels had discovered that because of the mountains, no radar signals came into the area. They could transfer their cargoes unobserved. So the government sent Army guys in to destroy the airstrip, then build another one near the center of Guadalupe, an hour and a quarter away, with a fence and caretaker to register everybody that went in or out.

After leaving Guadalupe Ocatan' on January 10, 1957, John and Elouise flew back to Mazatlan' for a four-day vacation. That was one of his favorite deep-sea fishing spots. On January 14 his flight log puts them heading north to Monterrey and Laredo, and then to Ft. Worth. The Burtons were living in Blum, Texas, about forty miles south of Ft. Worth where Jack was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. They spent two more nights with us there, and then flew back to Dayton, via Dallas and Memphis, arriving home on January 18, 1957. Then he folded his wings in deference to his heart problems, sold his Bonanza, and did not pilot a plane again.

From open-cockpit bi-planes to large jet aircraft, it was an amazing nearly thirty years of flying. His career spanned some of the most exciting and significant developments in aviation history, and he was right in the thick of it all, testing, designing, negotiating, administrating, hiring, and loving the skies. He had logged a total of 7,558 hours and 55 minutes in the air. At nearly fifty-three years of age, he could look back with satisfaction on achievements few others could match or imagine.

Tucson Sojourn

In the fall of 1957, John completed his assignment with Rheem in the Dayton, Ohio office, and was transferred to Tucson, Arizona "to assist in the administration of an active project with the U. S. Army at Ft. Huachuca." That year, 1957, was the year Rheem released their AN/USD-2 drone surveillance system, mentioned earlier. The system included the drone itself, known as the SD-2, and related ground equipment.

Rheem was a late-comer to the field of surveillance drone development. Boeing had entered the field back in 1945 when they began to develop "Ground-to-Air-Pilotless Aircraft." Although their early experiments were canceled after a time, the information and expertise gained allowed them to develop the Bomarc interceptor missile, test-fired in 1952, and put into production in 1957. These remote-controlled missiles were designed to find and destroy high-speed enemy bombers. Boeing produced the Bomarc from 1957 to about 1962, and went on to design and produce better missiles as technology advanced. And, while Rheem's design was propeller driven, Boeing had moved on into jet-propelled craft.

Up against the big aircraft companies like Boeing, Rheem really did not stand much chance at getting Air Force and Army contracts in the missile field. In February of 1958, after making a valiant effort for Rheem, John concluded that it was probably a lost cause, and resigned from the company. In 1959, Rheem sold their defense business to Aerojet General, which took the SD-2 and improved it into the MQM-58 *Overseer* drone. Photos of the Rheem drone, probably used by him during his years at Ft. Huachuca, are still in John Fornasero's personal files.

From a family perspective, the move to Arizona had brought John and Elouise back to the West. They were comfortably settled in a home on Edison Place, on the northeast side of Tucson, with a great view of the Catalina Mountains. Desert life appealed, and John busied himself putting in a low-maintenance yard with patio for enjoying the wonderful Arizona winter weather. The latent farmer came out in him, and he studied desert flora, and loved the many kinds of cactus plants in the area. The wheels had been turning, and John had decided that he would venture into real estate and investments for his next career.

A serendipity of their move to Tucson for the Burtons was that Jack and I were called to pastor a little church in the village of Hatch, in western New Mexico, in January of 1958. That put us just four hours' drive from Tucson; and it was nice to be closer to family again. All the four years we lived in Hatch, we were able to "run back and forth" to visit Mother and Daddy. He liked taking us to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, and helped us develop an appreciation for this desert land in which we all now found ourselves.

It soon became more than convenient, because the Burtons had another baby due in September of 1958, and there were no reliable medical facilities in Hatch, and none near enough to use for safe delivery. So in August Jack drove Johnny (now turning three) and me over to Tucson to stay with my parents until the baby could safely arrive. They were gracious in allowing us to "camp" with them nearly a month, while he returned to Hatch and his ministry.

During that time Barbara also arrived from Norman, Oklahoma, with her two little ones, to stay a few days while Joe returned briefly to Mexico to renew his residency papers. So John and Elouise now found themselves with two daughters back home, along with Chuck (two), Johnny (three), and Marilyn (four and a half). Unaccustomed to a house full of preschoolers, John found frequent reasons to be away for a good part of each day, dove hunting, seeing clients, and making business deals. Elouise was left with managing the active household.

Marilyn, always a picky eater, went on a hunger strike, and Chuck followed her lead. Johnny, who generally ate well and heartily, joined his cousins in solidarity. So mealtimes were a cacophony of whining and cajoling. Chuck was in the “No!” phase of his two’s, and Johnny not at all disposed to sharing his toys. In the midst of it all Johnny developed a high fever, and had to be kept isolated from his two cousins. It must have been a stressful time for Elouise, who was seeing to meals and laundry. Fortunately Joe returned to claim his brood and take them back to Ithaca, New York, where he was working to complete his doctoral studies in Linguistics. A few days later Jerald Alan (Jerry) Burton arrived — Grandchild Number Four — leaving Elouise home to baby-sit little Johnny while Jerry and I got acquainted in St. Mary’s Hospital.

Two of John Fornasero’s favorite pastimes, fishing and wood-working, were not readily available to him in Tucson. He had sold his wood shop when he left Seattle. But real estate and investing became a very consuming vocation for him. He worked for a year (1958-1959) with Roth Realty; but later found a more compatible situation in Oracle Realty, run by Mr. Hans Wagner, another former pilot, who dealt in commercial real estate. With Hans, John became involved in purchasing second liens (or second mortgages), and invested much of his retirement nest egg in many of those. Second mortgages paid high interest, but were risky, and he was very cautious about those he purchased. However, in time he found himself forced to foreclose on a few, and become a landlord. At the height of his real estate holdings he owned several multifamily properties in the Tucson area.

A serious tragedy interrupted life on Monday, January 18, 1960, when John’s younger brother, Jim Fornasero’s Capital airliner crashed, taking the lives of everyone on board. It was a devastating blow to John, who had mentored his younger brother through flying school at Ryan in 1931, and remained close to him in succeeding years. Jim was piloting Capital flight 20, a Viscount prop-jet, en route from Chicago and Washington D.C. to Norfolk, Virginia, late on that foggy, winter night. A veteran of almost 20 years of flying, including experience in the Air Corp flying the “Hump” during World War 2, Jim was considered an excellent pilot. His plane was due into Norfolk at 10:30 PM, but at 10:20 it was heard circling low, engines coughing, and in trouble. Very soon afterward it crashed into a wooded ravine on a farm near Holdcroft, Virginia, and burst into flames. There were forty-six passengers and four crew members on board. The fire was so fierce that it was nine hours before rescuers and investigators could approach the wreckage.



Illustration 32: James Bernard Fornasero (Uncle Jim), USAAC, c. 1944

Eye-witnesses to the wreckage the next morning said the plane just "sat down" like a helicopter, indicating that it lost power. Bodies of those who died were found strapped into their seats, suggesting that they may have been told a crash landing was probable, and that they died on impact. John took off on Wednesday for Virginia to represent the family as the sad process of identifying bodies began. He was in close touch with all of Jim's family; but especially with his widow, Dee, in Muskegon, and their mother, Marguerite, in Tulare. Cause of the crash was never known for certain, and the FAA investigation lasted for almost two years. Because Jim had not made contact with the tower when the plane was in trouble, and because of the way it settled down through the trees without shearing trunks, it was thought to be either a total electrical failure or an engine icing problem, or both. (This accident happened before the FAA ordered the installation of "black box" recorders in planes, so that the data could be found in the wreckage after accidents of this nature.)

Two of our family (Keith Grimes and John Burton) have tried in recent years to research Uncle Jim's accident, to make sense of what happened that night in the light of more recent knowledge. Our son John wrote:

Remember that ambient temperatures do not have to be below freezing for icing to occur -- the movement of the air around the wings and into the engine intakes can create ice in high humidity conditions (due to venturi effect). So fog near ground level would make icing in an already iced engine intake worse, not better. The Capital pilot [operations] instruction to "descend to warmer climate," would have them giving up altitude while in a reduced power situation -- a last resort at best, and deadly if descending into more humidity. According to Keith's cite, the manufacturer had changed this operating instruction several months before this crash, but Capital didn't change their manual until afterward.

We should remember that flying was very different in those days. Much less was known and instrumentation was not as it is today, not to mention that the Viscount was an early model turboprop. Faced with a dangerous and deteriorating situation, Uncle



Illustration 33: Four Fornasero siblings c.1956: Frank, Jim, Ann, John

Jim was obviously fighting for the plane and passengers until the very end. Diving the plane to try to unfeather the props, getting everyone buckled in (including the flight attendants, indicating he had instructed them to prepare the passengers in time), circling at low level and trying to restart engines, and the attempt at a soft landing, all show the efforts of an experienced and brave pilot at work, following the directives of the company, aircraft manufacturer, and FAA in force at that time.

Many of our family flew as guests of Capital Airlines to Muskegon for our Uncle Jim's funeral on January 18th. John and Elouise flew in from Tucson. Grandmother Marguerite flew in from California with several other family members including their brother Frank's wife, Rosie, and son, Frankie. Barbara flew down from Ithaca, where she and Joe were on a study furlough at Cornell University. I flew in from the El Paso airport. John received the remains which were flown into Muskegon; and escorted and supported his brother's widow, Dee, through the ceremonies. It was, of course, a closed casket. Identification was from dental records. Jim was only fifty years old when he died.

Our family had lived with the daily fear of a fatal plane crash for many years. We were fortunate that our father had not ever had a crash after his student days — had never even used a parachute to bail out, though he had many close calls. The reality of our Uncle Jim's crash sobered us to the core. John and Elouise stayed close to Jim's widow, Dee, for the next year. John was executor of the estate. (Jim had left no written will, so his mother and wife shared his estate according Michigan law.) He made several trips back to Michigan during the months to follow. But perhaps the deepest grief was felt by his aging mother, Marguerite, now seventy-five years of age. All of us ached for her loss.

Joe finished his PhD degree from Cornell that winter, and their family returned to Mexico, and to the Huichol people, to resume their translation of the New Testament into the Huichol language. When they came up to Norman, Oklahoma in the summer of 1960, Barbara was expecting their third child. Late in the summer, Jack and I met them "half way" (somewhere in West Texas) and brought Marilyn and Chuck home with us to Hatch for three weeks. The four cousins, ages almost-two through six-and-a-half, had a great time together. In September their family was reunited and returned back to their work in Mexico. That November, Keith Douglas Grimes was born in Mexico City — Grandchild Number Five. We were not able to meet him until the following summer when they returned to Norman to teach in the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which they did each year.

Daddy and Mother came to Hatch to collect Johnny, Jerry, and me, and we all drove to Norman to meet Keith, then about seven months old. We had a reunion that lasted two or three days before returning West. Daddy continued building his real estate and investments career the remainder of that year and through 1961.

As the months of grief over losing his brother, and the estate settlement ended, John and Elouise re-evaluated their lives and decided to move into early retirement. In the fall of 1961, John "got his house in order," bought a twenty-seven foot Airstream travel trailer, sold their Tucson home — including nearly all its furnishings — and began planning an extended tour of

the United States. Life was showing itself to be too short and unpredictable. It was time to change pace and enjoy life, and that is exactly what they proceeded to do.

Back Home in California

John and Elouise lived for a short time in an RV park in Tucson, where they planned their itinerary for a year-long trip around the United States. The goal was to see new country and visit old friends. During that time John made arrangements to have his mail sent to him at certain stopping places, so that he could keep his second mortgage business current. In November of 1961 they pulled into our driveway in El Paso for a two-week visit.

Jack had just accepted the call to Valley View Baptist Church in El Paso in November, 1961, and we were newly moved into the parsonage on Navajo Trail. It was a four-bedroom, red brick house overlooking the lower valley of El Paso and the Rio Grande River, with the outskirts of Juarez in view. We were happy to finally have a parsonage large enough to accommodate guests well. John parked the Airstream in our driveway for the duration, and used it as his office each afternoon. On Thanksgiving, El Paso had a record snowfall, and we all togged out to make a snowman. By early December they were on their way east for their big adventure.

They dawdled through Louisiana and Mississippi, visiting places of interest and old friends, and stopped to spend the winter in South Florida. Sailing out of Ft. Lauderdale, they took an extended Princess Lines cruise of the Caribbean islands, seeing Barbados, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Thomas, St. Maarten, and going as far as a port in Venezuela. When springtime came, they moseyed up the East Coast, visiting old and treasured friends like the Harwoods in New Hampshire, and the Bevins in Connecticut. Then cutting across the northern states, they made visits with Dee Fornasero in Muskegon, and with Margaret Albinson (Barbara's college roommate from Wheaton) in Minnesota. At some point they crossed into Canada to enjoy the Canadian Rockies, and sent us pictures from Banff and Lake Louise.

Back on the U.S. side, they stayed a while in Seattle, took in the World's Fair, and visited the now-famous Space Needle. Friends from Boeing days threw parties, and they had a



Illustration 34: The Fornasero grandkids, 1962. Clockwise from top left, Chuck, Johnny, Jerry, Marilyn, Keith

wonderful time with folks like Showalters, Knutsons, Plaths, Vaniks, and McKeans. Seattle is a great place to summer because of the temperate climate. Leaving, they motored south through the lovely Oregon Coast, and spent the fall in California. In the Bay Area they visited Ed Huett, husband of Elouise's middle sister, Velma, who had died in February of 1961 of heart trouble — a great loss to Elouise. His daughters, Ruth and Myrna, and their families were in the area. They also made contact with Elouise's youngest brother, Clifford, and his wife. In Sacramento they saw Elouise's oldest brother, Milton; then took a side trip up to Yosemite, where John's Buick balked at pulling the Airstream up over the pass.

The next extended stop was for a long visit with the Tulare relatives. Grandmother Marguerite was seventy-seven, slowing down, but still busy with her garden club and altar society. John's older brother, Frank, and his wife Rosie, were still farming the home place south of town. Sister Ann and her husband, Joe Esteves, had a farm east toward Porterville. Elouise's older sister, Ida and her husband, Slim, were on Salida Place with their boys, Jim and Bill. Frank's children, Frankie and Eleanor, were both married, but came for a family gathering. While in Tulare they attended a social at the Roma Lodge, to see old friends from school days. It was a good way to begin to draw the year-long adventure to an end. They had seen most of their family, many old friends, and met new friends in the RV parks along the way.

Before returning to Tucson, they made several more important stops. One was in Hemet with Alma and Paul Wilcox, their oldest and dearest friends. One was in the Los Angeles area to see Elouise's middle brother, Howard, and his wife. The last was in San Diego, where they looked seriously at retirement possibilities. San Diego had always been John's favorite city of all, and his memories were calling him back. By the time they arrived home in Tucson their minds were made up: they would move to San Diego the next year.

The winter of 1962-63 was upon them, and Tucson was a good place to begin; but they had one more trip on their minds. Barbara and Joe and their three grandchildren were in Mexico, with the Huichols in the Sierra Madre, and they had not seen them for some time. John and Elouise headed the Airstream south to Hermosillo and Mazatlan to take in some deep sea fishing, and to connect with that part of the family. Joe and Barbra and the children met them in Mazatlan for a few days. Then John and Elouise returned to winter in Tucson and make plans to move. Because the situation in the mountains was becoming dangerous due to bandit activity, Joe and Barbara's family left the tribe in January of 1963 and moved to the Wycliffe center in Mexico City to continue their translation work.

In the early spring of 1963, John and Elouise moved to San Diego area, and lived in the Airstream in La Jolla while finding permanent residence. They decided to purchase a new mobile home and move inland to La Mesa, a suburb east of San Diego proper. They chose a lovely adult retirement park with a club house and pool. It was just as they were about to move that John was diagnosed with a large aortic aneurysm, and told that he would have to have immediate surgery to repair it. He delayed long enough to get the new mobile home in place, and Mother settled in, and in July of 1963 he had an aorta resection — an operation that replaced a large section of the aorta and an adjacent artery with a webbed Dacron tubing. It was a pretty

new procedure then, and I went out by bus to stay with Mother during the week of his surgery. He came through it fine, and they went on with their lives for four more years.

Those were good years for them. As his strength returned, John put in a low-maintenance yard on the mobile home lot. He planted a hibiscus at the front which flourished into a large shrub in San Diego's mild climate, and a bougainvillea next to the front porch which eventually trellised up to the porch roof. Being sociable folks, they soon took up with several couples who lived in their little corner of the park. John and Alma Cook lived just across the way. Pinkey Phillips of old Ryan days, and his wife, Bee, were about half a block east. Opal and Al McGue were just next door. But probably the darlings of the crowd were Jackie and Jimmy Madden, a generation behind the others, who kept everyone feeling young. With these they celebrated birthdays, went out for breakfasts, and enjoyed covered dish socials at the club house. They became family to each other, and retirement was exciting and fun.

John continued his second mortgage investing in the San Diego area, but did not join a real estate firm there. In time one of those liens defaulted, and he found himself landlord to another multifamily property in San Diego, to add to the two he still had in Tucson. Although he put a property manager in charge of each place, his handyman skills were called upon more than once.

But the main thing for John in San Diego would be fishing, and for that he purchased a twenty-three foot, single cabin cruiser, which he named, "Elouise." He kept it at a marina on Mission Bay. It wasn't difficult most days to find a fishing partner in the park who would go out with him for a long morning on the bays around San Diego. He rigged a smoker out of an old ice box, and kept all his friends and family in smoked fish for happy hour snacking.



Illustration 35: John and Elouise aboard "Elouise," San Deigo, 1963

"Elouise" made many wonderful vacation memories for all the family. At least once a year the Burtons would strike out from El Paso, drive cross the desert, and show up at the mobile home park for a few days. It wasn't really a "kid place" but we found lots of things to do in the San Diego area, from Sea World to the zoo; and even more up the road in Los Angeles. Always John would take Jack and the boys out fishing for a day — a highlight of the week for all of them. Often Mother and I would pack a picnic of fried chicken or sandwiches, and we would just motor around and enjoy the sights. The boys loved being at the marina, walking the piers and looking at all the boats and yachts, smelling the salt air, feeding the gulls.

Barbara and Joe's family also came when they could. It was a multipurpose trip for them, since Joe's parents lived in the same area, and they could see all the grandparents with one California visit. There also were churches in that part of the state which contributed to the Huichol translation work, and, from time to time, they were invited to speak at one of them.

Grandmother Marguerite's health began to fail, and she was in and out of hospitals. By then she owned a small house on D Street, two doors down from the one we had known as children. John and Elouise made frequent trips up to Tulare to check on her. John's sister, Ann, became the main caregiver, and it was decided in time that their mother should go into a care facility.

She had always been such an independent and active person (widowed now over forty-five years), and giving up her car and her home were difficult choices.

I had occasion to meet my mother and dad at her home in Tulare during one of her hospitalizations. We visited her in the hospital, and I took her some early spring flowers from her yard. Her memory was unreliable, but she recognized those and remembered them for weeks afterward, I am told.

On that visit, John opened the old sea trunk she kept, which had come over on the ship from Italy with her parents. Among the treasures was the Italian wedding



Illustration 36: Burton family, 1965. Janet, John, Jerry, Jack



Illustration 37: Grimes family, 1967. Joe, Barbara, Marilyn, Keith, Chuck

apron which our great-grandmother, Teresa Delmasso, had worn when she married in the 1880s. A length of brilliant purple taffeta, trimmed with black lace, it was worn as a wrapped skirt by a bride on her wedding day. "Here, take this," he said, handing it to me. "It should be kept in the family." I have kept it to this day, and it remains like new.

In June of 1967, John and Elouise made a trip east by car, to spend time in Norman, Oklahoma, where Joe and Barbara were teaching at the Summer Institute of Linguistics. That summer Marilyn was thirteen years old, Chuck eleven, and Keith six and a half. After a few days there, they came down to Carlsbad to see our new home. Jack had accepted the call to First Baptist Church of Carlsbad in November, 1966, so we were settled into the lovely parsonage provided there. Johnny was almost twelve, and Jerry was going on nine.

An unusual incident should have alerted me to what was to come. Daddy called me out to his car, opened the trunk, and showed me two metal file boxes. "These are my business files," he told me. Then he explained how he had organized each of his second mortgages into a separate file folder, dated and alphabetized them. Next he opened his ledger, and showed me how he kept the payment records, and when each one would pay out. "If anything happens to me, you girls will need to take care of your mother," he finished. "We will," I promised, somewhat confused by it all.

Early Thursday morning we took pictures out in our driveway. They were leaving to go to Tucson and check on the real estate properties there. We were on our way up to Glorieta Baptist Conference Center near Santa Fe to teach Sunday School Leadership courses. It was mid June, and that was the last time we would see him in this life. Mother and Daddy spent several days in Tucson, seeing old friends, and making repairs to the apartments. Then they returned to La Mesa, and grandson Chuck came to spend a few days with them. In the early morning of July 6th Mother phoned to tell us that Daddy had died in his easy chair during the night of heart-related problems. He was sixty-three years of age. Little Chuck and his grandmother tried to comfort each other. The neighbors came to stay until Barbara and I could get there. I flew in that afternoon from Santa Fe, and Barbara followed from Oklahoma City. Jack and our boys drove in from Glorieta a day later.



Illustration 38: John Fornasero (last photo), June, 1967

John's memorial service was two days later, on July 8th, at Lewis Colonial Mortuary Chapel in San Diego, with Rev. Homer Grimes officiating. It was a great comfort to us to have Joe's father help us at that time. The chapel was filled with friends who came from all the chapters of his life. Mother felt honored that Claude and Gladys Ryan were there, with Paul and Alma Wilcox and their daughter, Marilyn. Adelaide Prudden, whose husband Earl had been Ryan's vice president for many years, attended; as did the Verne Murdocks. William Wagner, an aviation historian, who was also a vice president of Ryan's in later years, was there. Friends from Seattle years also came: N. D. and Bernice Showalter from Boeing, and Jim and Aslaugh McKean from among his pilot friends. Many of his Quiet Birdmen (QB) lodge brothers signed in, along with some from Rheem's Downey office, and many from the mobile home park. It was a wonderful tribute to the man they had known, worked with, and admired for many years.

Flown West

Elouise took her husband of thirty-seven years back home for burial in the Tulare Cemetery, in a space they had selected, within sight of his father's grave and those of his maternal grandparents. Family came from all over California to say goodbye. Especially poignant was his precious mother, Marguerite, now eighty-two, coming in a wheelchair to bury yet another son. She would live to remember and miss him another twelve years. Rev. Jack Burton officiated at the grave side for his father-in-law. Friends, relatives, and school chums of the Fornasero and Denbo families gathered with us that morning to honor a life well lived. Among the floral tributes was a long set of pilot wings, covered in chrysanthemums, sent by his QB brothers with a farewell poem which said, in part:

Brother QB, valiant friend,
Go with a heart at peace!
For though alone thy flight shall be,
Such journey is not strange to thee
Whose years have compassed land and sea
So long without surcease.

It has been said that, "*The true test of a great man — that, at least, which must secure his place among the highest order of great men — is, his having been in advance of his age.*" John Fornasero's life was lived in the company of men who were giant steps ahead of their time, planning, designing, and testing the planes in which we would fly years down the way. It could be said that, the true test of a man's life is that his work leaves a footprint in which others can walk. The planes he flew, the risks he took, set a course for aviation many decades beyond his own. He reached for the skies, and found them.



Tribute to His Co-Pilot

This is John Fornasero's story, but Elouise Denbo Fornasero was in the cockpit all the way. She lived with his memory for twenty-eight more years, going bravely on with her life, but choosing never to marry again. Elouise lived in their mobile home until the park was sold about thirteen years later, and then transitioned to apartment living, and came to Texas to be near us until her death in 1996. She found comfort in, and kept near, the lyrics to "Lara's Theme" from *Doctor Zhivago*.

Somewhere, My Love there will be songs to sing,
Although the snow covers the hope of spring,
Somewhere a hill blossoms in green and gold,
And there are dreams all that your heart can hold.
Some day we'll meet again my love,
Some day — whenever the spring breaks through.
You'll come to me out of the long ago,
Warm as the wind, soft as the kiss of snow,
Till then my sweet, think of me now and then,
Godspeed my love, 'til you are mine again.



Illustration 39: Elouise Denbo Fornasero, 1965

Acknowledgments

My sister, Barbara Grimes, who now lives in Hawaii, has worked closely with me by email in putting this story down; and I am grateful to her for sharing her memories and advice. It is as much her story as it is mine. In addition, our son, John Burton, who is an experienced technical writer, was a tremendous help, reading and editing the manuscript and sending research along the way. Beyond that, he made a trip to Austin from his home in Phoenix to assist me with many of the technical details, such as page layout and graphics. I am deeply indebted to him and his wife, Kimberley, for that time and help. Also to our daughter-in-law, Lori Burton, Jerry's wife, who used her gifted skills as a public information officer to design the cover of the book for us. Our husbands, Jack Burton and Joe Grimes, acted as manuscript readers and sharpened our memories on many of the stories, which they also experienced with us. As you can readily see, it was an absorbing family project. And many other family and friends cheered us on.

As noted in the *Foreword*, Mother's scrapbooks provided the basis for the story. She carefully preserved photos and articles; and to these she added copious notations, and handwritten "bookmarks," to point the way for us. These put us onto many Internet connections, which fleshed out the book. Mother's collection of books was very valuable for research also. Most cited in the body of the text were:

Ryan, the Aviator, by William Wagner in collaboration with Lee Dye, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company in 1971;

Ryan Guidebook, from the American Aircraft Series, Book 3, by Dorr B. Carpenter and Mitch Mayborn, published by Flying Enterprise Publications, Dallas, Texas, 1975; and

Boeing, Planemaker to the World, by Robert Redding & Bill Yenne, published by Crescent Books, Greenwich, Conn., 1983.

This is a book about family and for family, and just a few close friends and relatives who will smile as they remember, and see John Fornasero between the lines. We thank all of you who loved him with us. It is a story that deserved to be told.



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