

The Model Club

As a serious model builder for over for over 40 years I can't imagine not being a member of a model club! It's really an amazing place when you think about it. It turns what otherwise would be a hobby of solitude into one of comradery and fun. For me personally I would have probably have grown bored and moved on to another hobby decades ago if it were not for a model club.

Like most model builders, I started building car or airplane kits as a kid. My brother and I would each buy a kit at our local hardware store, thrown in a bottle or two of Testor's paint and a brush and rush home to give Mom change of her two bucks. That part of the hobby has most certainly has changed over the years.

It started for me in my late teens when the guy at my local newsstand said he had just got in a new magazine called 'Military Modeler' and that I may be interested in. It revealed a model medium that combined my love of models and military history, and the world of modeling was forever changed for me. One day while waiting for the fresh stack of Military Modeler magazines to be unwrapped, I was approached by older man who was also waiting for the latest edition of MM. He introduced himself as Bart Holmes and asked me if I too was a military modeler and what I built. We chatted for a few minutes before telling me about a club he belonged to that was solely dedicated to building models and asked if I would like to go with him one day and check it out. Keep in mind that this was 20 years before we ever dreamed about the internet and what we call the social media today. This was actually how you made friends 'back in the day'.

A few weeks later we agreed that I would meet him at his house and then drive into Brooklyn from Staten Island together where the meetings were held. I had my latest build, a Tamiya M-60 in a little shoebox and I was pretty excited to show this old guy what talent really looked like, in fact I was actually feeling a little sorry for this old geezer. That was until he invited me in to see his models and workshop. No sooner had we walked downstairs and flipped on the light did feel like a caveman climbing out of his hole into a modern 21st century city. His entire basement was made up of model kits of every kind, built and boxed, tools large and small, a spray booth and a work station that today would immediately be recognized as one used by a terrorist bomb maker. I was literally dumb-struck and amazed.

It was about there that my little model world crashed in around me when Bart saw my shoe-box and said "let's take a look at what you built". Out came my once proud and prestigious M60 which he put on the work bench next to the Tiger tank he was working on. He flipped on a few lights, put on his glasses and started going over my model. "Nice job, I like what you did here, you have some real talent" is what he said. What I heard was "Nice piece of crap, looks like it was painted with my wife's eyebrow brush, you may want to think about taking up photography".

But that's also where it all changed. Bart started using terms like 'dry brushing, weathering, air brush, oil wash" and I found myself intrigued. I could have moved into his basement and never leave but after a few minutes it was time to packed up and head into Brooklyn. Along the way he explained the basic rules of model club etiquette, what to expect and more importantly, not to be embarrassed by my level of work. That if I was serious, I was going to improve ... quickly!

The meeting was held in the back room of Marcy's Photographers Studio and on the wall was a sign that read "IPMS Brooklyn Chapter – Welcome". I had no idea of 'IPMS" meant, but if they went through the trouble of making a sign for it must have been important.

After a few minutes Bart convinced me to put my M60 on the table alongside the other models and as the guys filed in, the table started to fill up. It was like a miniature museum filed with perfectly built cars, tanks, planes, figures and vehicles scenes, and even a few ships that looked like they were going to steam off the edge of the table.

I was introduced to the club which consisted of about 30 guys from 20 to 80 years old and asked to tell everyone what I was interested in and a little bit about my eyebrow brush painted M60. After the formal meeting we all gathered around the tables full of models and the guys chatted and conversed and described how they did this and that. I was all over these guys, asking questions like a machinegun and trying to digest all the wealth of information being fired back at

me. Often the guys would recognize my bewilderment, put their hands on my shoulder and say “don’t worry kid, you’ll get, we’ll help you”.

The meeting lasted about 3 hours, but to me it seemed like a few minutes. On the ride back to Staten Island I couldn’t stop talking and asking questions. I was blown away by the whole experience. Imagine, a whole room full of modelers like me, with tips and techniques that I could use to make my models better, perhaps someday even as good as theirs. I realized then and there that I had just been bit by what I would later call the ‘model bug’. Before getting back into my car, Bart pulled out a little notebook, made a list of a few items he wanted me to buy and set a date for me to come back to his house where we would work on my next model. The rest is history!

Although Bart was 40 years my senior, we shared a common bond in models that spanned the years between us. As the years went on, my skills eventually surpassed his and as I steadily collected awards at model shows Bart was never far away and proudly telling anyone who would listen that I was once his student. He was right! Although he may not have taught me everything I knew about modeling as time went on, he did teach me what mattered most about the hobby as well as changing my life forever. Years later I would become an officer of the club he once introduced me to as a kid, and later I would even form an IPMS chapter of my own, IPMS Staten Island. He went on to become one of closest and dearest friends and when he passed away in 2002 a piece of me went with him.

Today, I am as old as Bart was when we first met and every time I walk into an IPMS Las Vegas meeting I think of him. Perhaps someday, with a little luck, I’ll be some other kids ‘Bart Holmes’ by introducing them to the hobby and the magic of the ‘model club’.

While at our recent Best of the Show held at The Orleans an old friend came to visit and asked me about the hobby and what exactly I saw in it. I found the question a little hard to answer. How do you explain ice cream or pizza to someone who has never tasted it, or seeing your new son or daughter for the first time to someone who has never had children? I tried nonetheless to explain that its more than the simple construction of a model kit, or the development of skills and techniques. Mostly it’s the comradery of being around others who share the same passion and the nurture and development of close friendships that come as a result of that sharing.

In today’s day and age, you can buy just about anything you want from anywhere in the world on your smartphone and you can show off your work in an instant to people thousands of miles away. But to really experience the hobby and learn what the hobby is really all about there really is only place. The Model Club! See you there.

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