

# A Waco *Kind of Family*





# The Applegate clan and their YKS-6

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The entire family enjoys flying the Waco all over the Midwest and beyond. The color scheme evokes the colors chosen by Wiley Post for his record-setting Lockheed Vega, the *Winnie Mae*.

“I was about 6 years old, and Dad had taken us to a fly-in in Ottumwa, Iowa, in my dad’s Tri-Pacer. We were flying home when we flew up alongside a cabin Waco. My brother took a picture of it, and I looked at that picture for years thinking, ‘I’d sure like to have one of those, but it’s probably just a dream.’ I still have that picture and looked at it often, and remembered the dream.”

The speaker, Harve Applegate of Queen City, Missouri, has more than the aforementioned picture to

show for his youthful fascination with things that fly. He now has what he wished for when looking through the window of the family Tri-Pacer so many years ago, a cabin Waco. A YKS-6 to be exact.

It’s a little difficult to describe Harve Applegate’s aviation history because to do so, it is absolutely necessary that his dad be brought into the picture. And his mom, who also earned a private pilot certificate. And his wife, Carolyn, who refers to their Cub as “her” Cub. And the three Applegate kids, Taryn (22), Matt (24), and Shalyn (15).

Aviation families are quite common within the sport aviation community, but few have made aviation to be something so consuming and genetic that is passed from generation to generation.

Harve says, “I suppose it started with Dad. He was a B-36 crew chief in the Air Force, and when he got out, he used the GI Bill to get a pilot’s license. Eventually he was farming 1,500 acres, so it was only natural that he would put a runway in. Except it wasn’t just a runway. It was an airport in our backyard that was later named Applegate Air-



port. That was in 1964. So, basically we've lived on an airport from just about the moment I was born. Now that I think about it, since I was born on the farm, it could be said I was born on an airport."

With that kind of family background, soloing when he turned 16 would be totally expected. However, even his solo indicated that his aviation life was going to be a little different than most folks.

"When the day came for me to solo," he says, "the weather was lousy. In fact, it was below minimums. And I was really bummed.

So was Dad. So, we called the FAA and got a 'special' VFR clearance. The last words my instructor said before I took off in the C-152 were, 'Stay out of the clouds, come around, and land.' So, I did."

There he was, a certificated pilot and still riding the school bus to his little country school and living the life of a typical high school kid, including going to local fairs.

"It was at a local fair right after I graduated that I met Carolyn, and I asked her out for a date. On our second or third date I took her flying in Dad's Decathlon. I guess that must have impressed her because we got married a year later."

Carolyn says, "He's such an aviation addict that our honeymoon had us stopping at various airports as we traveled. But, I'll tell you what. I'd much rather he be out flying or hanging out at airports than out drinking." And she laughs. She laughs a lot.

Often it is at this point in an aviator's life story that the individual says his flying stopped while he built a business and a family, to be resumed as a later date. Harve, however, managed to sidestep that layoff. For one thing, he essentially lived on an airport, his wife liked flying (she says, "I decided if I couldn't beat him, I'd join him and started taking flying lessons."), and he'd grown up banging knuckles working on airplanes. So, where so many young fathers find their aviation career has stagnated, he started building up his own airplanes, the first being a Cessna 170B.

"The 170," he says, "was actually a flying project. To say it was a flying airplane stretches the definition of airplane a little. Yes, it flew and it was a very straight airplane, but it was certainly not an eye-catcher. Carolyn was even a bit taken back at the suggestion of actually purchasing it. Its aluminum looked like an old galvanized tin building, and the interior reeked of mold and mildew. There was nothing good about it other than the straight sheet metal. So, little by little I rebuilt it.

"Because we live barely 40 miles from Blakesburg, getting hooked on vintage airplanes was unavoidable. Dad would take us to lots of fly-ins, including Blakesburg, and from the very beginning, I actually liked vintage airplanes better than he did. And I loved working on them."

Harve's love of vintage mechanics showed through many years of polishing and restoration of the C-170. It went to Oshkosh for 16 years. At first it was noticed because it looked dreadfully forlorn, but over the years it began to gain more attention and for better reasons. The judges were impressed enough in 2000 to give it the best 170/180 award. Then, it won Grand Champion in its class at the AAA Fly-In at Blakesburg the next year.

"First, I have to say that I don't build airplanes to win trophies, and I don't go to fly-ins to be judged. I build airplanes to go to fly-ins. Period. We love going to fly-ins and attend at least 15 or 20 a year, and we do it as a family. Eventually, the kids got too big and we out-grew the 170 after putting a little over 1,200 hours on it."

While Harve might say he was building a family, the truth is that Carolyn was the one having the babies and trying to build a career. And her schedule was more than just a little tight: She started college right after Taryn was born and missed her own graduation because she was busy finishing her own homebuilt, Shalyn. Today she puts that diploma to work teaching second grade, while Harve farms 1,500 acres of soybeans and corn.

Besides their growing family, another factor driving their need for a bigger airplane is that 24-year-old Matt has special physical needs, and to guarantee his mobility and comfort at air shows means carrying more equipment.

Carolyn says, "Matt absolutely lives and breathes fly-ins and air shows. No one on the grounds is more enthusiastic than he is. If we go to a fly-in, he goes. He's been going to shows with us for so long

that he has made a huge number of friends out of the other participants, and that's good for all of us."

"I was looking for a bigger airplane when a friend of mine told me about a beautiful 195 with a blown engine sitting out on the ramp in Tullahoma," Harve says. "I contacted the airport to find out info about the owner. I contacted him and discovered it not only had a bad engine, but the finance company held the note, as the owner was going through bankruptcy. I flew down with my stepfather (who had become a pilot after marrying my mother...dad had died by then), and we looked it over.

"I put in a bid and got it. I sold the 170 to a wonderful friend, and fortunately, it stayed at our airport, where it is well tended. We put a new 330 Jake from Radial Engines Limited on the 195, and it won awards at both Oshkosh and Blakesburg, as well. We kept the 195 for three years. But, it still wasn't a Waco, something I just couldn't get out of my head.

"When I started looking for Wacos," he says, "like everyone else, I was assaulted by the incredible number of different varieties. But I wasn't looking for something to rebuild, nor was I looking for a rare variety. I wanted an airplane that would serve our family well. The fact that it would be an incredibly cool antique was just a bonus. Because of that I passed on a lot of projects and focused on airplanes that were flying and needed a minimum of work and could be fairly easily supported. That meant an engine for which parts were plentiful and had a reputation for reliability. If I was going to use it to carry my family around, both were absolutely necessary. I also wasn't looking for one of the big-engine airplanes, like an SRE. Those were out of my price range, both to buy and to fly. So, basically I was looking for Continental 220-powered aircraft or any of the Jacobs-powered birds. I leaned towards the Jakes because of my 195 experience.



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Most of the Applegate family during AirVenture 2010 from left to right: daughter Shalyn, Harve, Carolyn, and son Matt. The Applegates' other daughter, Taryn, couldn't make the trip.

"I looked at a few airplanes before a friend, Doug Parsons, turned me on to N16249, a 1936 YKS-6. It was last restored by Pete Covington in 1994, so it was in really good condition. In fact, well-known antiquer Morton Lester had owned it at the time of restoration. It was a good solid airplane that was due for some freshening up, not a rebuild. This was exactly what I was looking for. It had been through two owners since Lester owned it and was now part of an estate sale.

"I got it home in July of 2005 and began working on it," he says. "Because it had been restored nearly 15 years earlier and hadn't been a hangar queen for all that time, it was starting to show a little of its age. The seats, for instance, were worn, as were other parts of the interior, so we redid all of that. We went over the entire airplane, doing a lot of touch-up work, including repainting the cowlings and a few other panels. At the same time we added Cleveland wheels and brakes.

"By far the hardest thing we did was to change the entire firewall forward. The work itself wasn't very

difficult, but the paperwork turned out to be a headache.

"The original engine was a Jacobs R-755-9, which is 245 hp, but I wanted more power. We have a pretty big useful load with this airplane, but it needs the extra power when it's heavy. So, I wanted to go up to the 755-B2M, which is 275 hp. I had Air Repair in Cleveland, Mississippi, build up an engine for me. Since it's virtually identical to the original Jake, putting it on was nothing. At the same time, we installed a new Sensenich wooden prop. But, then we started working on the paperwork.

"This shouldn't have been nearly the problem it was because the YKS is exactly the same airframe as a ZKS, but sometimes things that look logical take more patience than you'd expect.

"Our local FSDO wouldn't approve the change because they said it was too much of a power increase. We argued back and forth for months that the ZKS, which was 285 hp, and the YKS were on the same type certificate. They just couldn't get it through their heads that the



The Applegates camp every year just south of the VAA Flightline Operations building so son Matt and the family can enjoy visiting with their many friends and watch the afternoon air show.

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two airplanes were one in the same. Finally, we got a hold of Jeff Janus at the FAA's Aircraft Certification Office (ACO) who said it was a no-brainer and sent it back to the FSDO and told them to sign it off.

"We've been flying the airplane for five years now, and it's exactly what we wanted and what we thought it should be. First, for an airplane this big, it's really easy to fly. In fact, it lands a lot like our Cub and even on pavement isn't hard to keep straight.

"On takeoff, you can't see anything straight ahead, which is okay because the view to the side is good. When the tail comes up, you can obviously see more, but you're not on the ground long, and if there's even a slight headwind, it literally floats off the ground.

"Once off the ground it has a really solid feeling. I know it's a big airplane, but it feels as if it is even bigger. But, I don't know how much

## A Lesson in the Learning: Caveats When Donating

At one point Harve's dad began having airport problems, and there's a lesson to be learned for a lot of us here.

"The airport had never gotten huge," Harve says. "It was just a nice, friendly airport with a few hangars and some local tenants. But, it was the only airport in the area, so Dad deeded it over to the city. I guess you could say he donated it. For years this worked out really well, and all the aviation guys in the area loved it. We host a fly-in there each year, and that became something of a local event that everyone looked forward to.

"Dad died suddenly in 1981, and we decided to build a house right near the hangars on our adjoining land. Then, just as the house was all finished and we were about to move in, the city announced that they were selling the airport. They said they didn't want the liability of it anymore. Plus, it was attractive to developers.

"That was a pretty scary time. Here we had a new house adjoining the property where friends flew in and enjoyed hanging out, and then it was going to be sold.

"After some stressful conversations with city hall, we discovered that there was a reversionary clause in the original donation documentation that said the property would revert to dad's heirs, if it was to be sold. So, we got it back. It was at that time that the airport was officially named the Applegate Airport in honor of my dad."



MIKE STEINEKE

Another gorgeous picture of the Applegates' plane flying over the Midwest.

bigger you'd want. The back seat is an honest three kids wide, and the two front seats are separated by nearly a foot. So, you feel as if you're flying your own little airliner. And how many airplanes today let you crank the side windows down and fly with you elbows up on the windowsill?

"It's not a rocketship in climb, about 500-600 fpm, but it'll give you that, or close to it, whether you're loaded or not. Those big old wings can really carry a load.

"It's also not a speed demon, but it'll indicate 120 mph, give or take 5 mph, at about 14 gallons per hour and fly straight ahead with no help from the pilot until you're tired of sitting there. It's amazingly stable and comfortable on cross-countries. Of course your visibility isn't the best, since you can barely see straight ahead most of the time, but if you stretch just a little, you can. Extra cushions help.

"On landing," he says, "You're over the fence at about 80 mph, but it decelerates in ground effect really quickly, and you just keep pulling to get the steep deck angle. In a three-



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The overhead skylight windows really add to the sight lines as you fly the YKS-6, especially when you roll it into a turn.

point, it touches down at about 50 mph. It also wheel lands, my preferred landing method, super easy and is almost cheating. If you get it on straight, with no drift, it is literally a pussycat on the runway. If you plant it crooked, it's not a pussycat."

Now that Harve has his childhood dream airplane safely in the hangar,

what else is there for him to do?

"Well, our Vagabond is getting a little tired looking, and I need to re-rag that. And I suppose the Cub could stand a few touches here and there.

We'd say the moral of this story is "Don't ever give up on your childhood fantasies. Make them come true." 