

Beneath His Wings

By Robert E. Hilliard

In the late 1970's, a man from Vancouver, British Columbia traveled to Hawaii on vacation. While there, he noticed a group of people flying kites on the beach. While he had always thought that flying kites was for sissy's, he became interested in the fact that they were flying kites with 2 lines instead of one. It peaked his interest and when he returned to Vancouver, he tried his hand at flying a sport kite.



Little did the kiting world know that from these humble beginnings a man would develop and hone his kite piloting skills to become a 3 time American Kite Association champion but most of all, he would become a man of deep passion for the sport that desperately loves kiting and his fellow man.

It took Ray Bethell a number of years to learn how to fly. He started by flying one sport kite, then he tried flying two which he became successful at in a short period of time. He achieved this by flying one sport kite from his hand and the other from his hip. Living in Vancouver, Ray would develop his piloting skills at

Vanier Park located next to the downtown area. Every day, the Chinook winds would make their way into Vancouver from the Strait of Georgia affording Ray the clean winds he needed to hone and perfect his craft. It would take him hours and hours of grueling practice, days of successes and failures.

By 1980, Ray was flying in team competitions on the West coast of Canada and America. It was during this time that Ray decided to try flying three sport kites simultaneously. Within a matter of a few short years, Ray had developed his unique style flying a sport kite from each hand and one from the hip.

Once the word got out that there was a pilot able to fly three sport kites simultaneously, Ray was asked to compete at kite competitions in the Freestyle and Ballet categories. His popularity grew with each competition. Soon he attracted the attention of kite manufacturers and event organizers from all over the world.



Successes like these don't come easy. It takes a lot of hard work to perfect a style that Ray was becoming known for. But for Ray, this was more than just flying kites at a kite competition. Ray brings with him the human element. He loves to fly and he has developed the passion it takes to give back to his audience. Ray is one of the very few kite pilots that make you feel he is performing just for you. As a spectator, one can see the passion that Ray exudes in his performance and Ray doesn't want anyone to walk away without falling in love with kite flying and the joy it can bring.



The flying records and awards have mounted up. In 1991, he flew 2 kites, one from each hand. 1992, 3 kites, one from each hand and one from the hip. In 1993, he flew three kites simultaneously for 8 hours and 42 minutes. 1994, Ray flew three kites for a record breaking 12 hours and 12 minutes. In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Ray flew a number of stacked kites, the highest totaling 39! While accomplishing all this, Ray's considers his greatest asset to be the kiting fans and friends he has developed along the way. For Ray, this is not about

popularity and ego... it's about people and the joy of kiting. He calls this, "Good Stuff" and he's been featured in numerous videos talking about not just his flying skills, but about his passion for life and his interest in the success of his fellow man.

Age has slowed Ray down a little bit, but it hasn't stopped him. He is the picture of health although he can't attend every event he would like to. When Ray is not attending a kite competition, you can find him flying in his beloved Vanier Park. In October of 2006, A park bench was installed in Vanier Park in Ray's honor. He considers it to be the most outstanding gesture of love a man could have. Next time you're in Vancouver, take a stroll through Vanier Park and sit on the bench dedicated to Ray. On some days, you can even watch Ray perform his multiple kite flying technique. Ray would want that for you. In Ray's mind, the wind will forever be beneath his wings. He beckons you to join him.

