A pilgrimage from the US to see an iconic Yellowknife plane

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Kate McDonough said she is the first in her family to visit her uncle's plane, the Bristol freighter, that acts as a Yellowknife monument to northern aviation.

Her uncle was Don Braun, the first pilot to land a wheeled aircraft at the North Pole, and he did it in the Bristol freighter on display off Old Airport Road.

McDonough said Braun flew for Wardair, the airline started by aviation legend Max Ward. It was for Wardair that Braun made the historic landing on May 6, 1967. The plane was decommissioned a year later and donated to the City of Yellowknife.

While many people in McDonough's family are involved in the aviation industry, McDonough described Braun as "the pilot in the family."

McDonough remembered Braun describing how he built a glider on his family's farm aged 16. McDonough said Braun pulled the glider with a tractor to get it off the ground.

"The interviews that people have done with him, he says, 'Oh, of course I flew. I was up at least two feet and it was four seconds in the air,'" said McDonough.

"He loved working on the planes."

McDonough's other uncle was also a pilot, her dad was a hot air balloon pilot, and her mother and sisters were flight attendants. McDonough is the outlier in the family: "I didn't fly in an airplane till I was a senior in high school. It wasn't something our family could afford."

McDonough said she's making the trip to Yellowknife now as part of a retirement road trip to Alaska. She said the NWT she's experiencing fits pretty closely with Braun's descriptions of northern summers.

"He wrote a lot about when it was snowy, so it's hard to imagine this full of snow because there are green trees and grass everywhere," she said.

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