

Biography of Steve Wade

Steve Wade was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on November 1, 1946. His parents were Aubrey Wade and Dorthea Cutshaw Wade. He grew up with a sister, Gaylia, on a thirty-seven acre farm at Richland near Kalamazoo. Their father worked as a tool and die maker, but he gardened in his spare time. Steve said his dad would have liked to have been a farmer, but he just didn't have time. When his dad bought an Allis Chalmers B, his mom was less than pleased. Steve received most of his farm experience by helping bale and haul hay for friends.

While growing up in Michigan and later as an adult, surprisingly, Steve enjoyed the winters most of all. That is explained by the fact that his favorite sports were riding snow mobiles and ice fishing. He said that's what he misses most of all here in Arkansas.

In 1964 Steve left the eleventh grade to join the U. S. Navy to see the world. His first year was spent working on a navy golf course at Brunswick, Maine. He thought the service was just fine up to that time. Reality set in when he was assigned as a boiler tender on the appropriately named U.S.S. Nitro, an ammo ship bound for Vietnam. On arriving in the Vietnam area, his "tin can" ship would transfer the ammunition to other larger vessels such as the carrier Enterprise. Other voyages were made to Japan, to several posts in the Mediterranean Sea, and to Ireland. Not much sightseeing was possible since the ship usually remained in port only two or three days and then head back to sea. While in the navy, Steve earned his G.E.D. and certification as a welder, which would serve as a basis for most of his work career. He left the navy on July 1, 1967.

After leaving the navy, Steve joined the civilian workforce with employment at the Claridge Fan Company in Kalamazoo. The company had built steam engines in the early 1900s, but when Steve went to work there, the company built blower fans from about one foot to as large as thirty feet in diameter. He worked as a welder for the company for about three years.

Still with a bit of wanderlust, Steve and a friend worked as welders building carwash machines in New York State. He saw lots of the area by installing and repairing the carwash facilities all over the region. He said he spent a good bit of his time untangling the rotary brushes from vinyl topped cars.

When he returned to Kalamazoo, he opened his own welding shop. He did general work, but many of his jobs involved contract work for the many paper mills in the area. Incidentally, Kalamazoo is often called "The Paper City" because of the many cardboard and paper mills in the area. The industry also includes parchment mills, which make the special paper from vegetable byproducts. For those of us who are not familiar with the area, Kalamazoo is also known now or in the past for familiar products such as Shakespeare fishing equipment, Gibson musical instruments, Checker Cabs, and much more.

Steve's next employment in Kalamazoo was with American Cyanamid, a large, diversified, chemical company. Since not many of us outside the chemical industry are familiar with the company, it is interesting to note that the company's pharmaceutical branch makes Centrum and Stresstab vitamins and the consumer division makes Old Spice cologne, Breck shampoo, and Pine-Sol floor cleaner. Steve worked there for eleven years as a maintenance mechanic, a job where his welding skills were put to good use.

Most importantly, it was at this time that Steve met Marilyn (maiden name Curran), a native of Highfill, Arkansas. Marilyn had transferred to Kalamazoo with the Welch Company when the Welch plant in Springdale, Arkansas, was closed. She was employed at American Cyanamid when they met and married. She brought that northern boy home with her in 1994 when she felt the need to move back home to be near her parents. This explains the mystery of why Steve would leave his fun, cold winters for the slightly warmer south. And too, the marriage created a family which includes Steve's son and daughter and Marilyn's son. Together, Steve and Marilyn now have five grandchildren.

In Arkansas, Steve went to work at the Flint Creek Power Plant (SWEPCO). He only worked there as a welder for fourteen weeks before being employed at American Tubing in Springdale. He worked there as a mechanic, fabricator, and welder. A highlight of his work career was when he altered the method of changing dies when different size pipes were to be machined. He noted that the process of changing the dies was a time consuming, difficult task. The thirty year old process involved removing tiny screws to change the dies. The screws were often lost in the copper filings and much time was lost in the process. He showed that the sides which held the dies could be made in such a way as to simply remove a set and insert another. The company patented the new procedure, and Steve got a pat on the back.

Steve next worked at Rockline, a company making wet wipes. He worked as a metal fabricator there for three years. His recurring back problems led him to leave Rockline and seek temporary jobs. It was a perfect solution for him to work for placement companies, including Willstaff, Manpower, Express Arkansas Employment, First Staff, and Skillspan. He would often work for three or four different companies while employed by one of the placement agencies. He never got bored. Each job, mostly welding, was different. Finally, at the age of fifty-nine, he had to take disability retirement because of those back problems that would not go away. It was discovered that his years of lifting heavy products and machines had aggravated a long-time problem with his back. These days, Steve enjoys working in his home shop and doing welding chores for Tired Iron folks and other friends.

Tractor and engine clubs have a long history with Steve. As early as 1954, his father was a member of the National Steam Thresher Club of Michigan. Big projects for his dad included working with a Mr. Weber, the owner of Weber Tool & Die, to build two Stanley Steamer autos. A story Steve remembers his dad relating involved his dad and Mr. Weber installing a leftover Stanley Steamer engine in a 1930 Dodge. They used the gas tank as a water reservoir for the engine. On an occasion when they were driving the steam car, they stopped at a station for water. The station owner gave them a five gallon can of water, which, to the amazement of the owner, Mr. Weber poured into the gas tank. When they started, the steam popped off as usual and they left in a fog of steam. The fellow was still scratching his head when they drove out of sight. Early on, Steve began his interest in antique engine clubs. While in Michigan, Steve was a member of the Kalamazoo Antique Engine Club.

Steve is a long-time member of Tired Iron of the Ozarks since he joined in 1994 soon after moving to Highfill from Kalamazoo. Club meetings were handy for him since he lived at the time north of Highfill and the meetings were held in the Highfill Community Center. He and Marilyn have shown items in his collection all these years. His collection includes a Galloway 2 ½ horsepower engine, AC and DC generators, five Wisconsin engines, and several four cycle engines, including a Novo and several Briggs. Steve has a nice display of his generators and other engines at the shows. Until recently, he enjoyed driving and giving rides around the show grounds in his open-topped Model T Ford auto, but he has sold that one. He is currently working on a 1929 Model A pickup. We'll be looking forward to its appearance at our shows before too long.

Steve and Marilyn recently moved to her family's farm where she grew up. They appropriately call the property, about a mile east of Highfill, "Homestead Farm" since it was homesteaded in 1860 by

her Douglas family ancestors. The original home is gone but the old barn and the spring run remain. Douglas Cemetery, a local landmark, was donated by the family during the Civil War when a burial site was needed for soldiers killed in the area.

It is indeed a pleasure to have Steve and Marilyn a part of Tired Iron. They bring their RV and make a long weekend at our shows. Be certain to visit with them under their canopy at their exhibit. Steve is very knowledgeable about his engines and great to chat with.

