

Biography of Mel Current

Meldon "Mel" L. Current was born at home in Walla Walla, Washington, on November 27, 1932 (d. August 20, 2016, Siloam Springs, Arkansas). His parents were Phyllis Marie (Vinton) and Paul Lincoln Current. Mel was the youngest of the children, except for an adopted sister. In the home, there were two brothers and one more sister. There were also two half-brothers, one who died in a tragic accident at the age of twelve in 1939 and a much older brother Mel did not meet until he was eighteen. Incidentally, this brother established a good relationship with the family and visited often until his death in the 1970s.

Mel's father worked in the Pacific Northwest sawmill business, and the family moved pretty often during his youth. He was only a few months old when the family moved from Walla Walla. His first memory of a town was White Salmon, Washington, where he started school and lived until he was about eleven years old. Mel's dad was a skilled lumber "edger" machine operator and in demand throughout the region, so the next move was to La Center, a small town near Vancouver, Washington.

Mel started school at a one-room school back in White Salmon. He continued school at Cedar Creek until the ninth grade. He then entered Columbia Academy, a Seventh-Day Adventist school near Vancouver. It was while attending there that he met Anna May Graham at a ten-day tent meeting at Gladstone, Oregon. Lots of youths were there, but Anna May singled him out and, to get to know him, asked him if he was from Cedar Creek. For the rest of the meeting, they visited and became interested in each other. Mel followed up the courtship by riding his bicycle the ten miles to Anna May's home on a regular basis. This was over substantial hills, and he would not arrive back home until after midnight on many occasions.

Mel and Anna May married on July 12, 1951, and then shared a fifty-five year life together. They had three children. Lois, married to Gary Warner, now lives in Colorado. Duane and his family live in Washington. Rose and her husband Billy live near Mel east of Gentry. The extended family includes twelve grandchildren, eight great grandchildren with one on the way, and two great great grandchildren with another on the way as of this writing.

Mel's working experience began, as did many young folks' in that region, by picking strawberries for pocket change. He worked too in the hayfields. By the time he was sixteen he was working from time to time in sawmills along side his father. When he got married at the age of eighteen, he began working full-time. In 1950 and 1951, he worked at "gippo" mills, also called gypsy mills, that moved about and sat up in the forest to cut lumber on-site. In 1952 he went to work for the lumber giant Weyerhaeuser at Long View, Washington. He worked there for about eight years and learned to spell "Weyerhaeuser" because much of the time he worked at the machine that stamped the name into the end of the boards.

In 1961 in Willamina, Oregon, Mel set up his own mill to produce "band sticks," which were 19-½ inch slats used to help hold cedar shingles in bundles for shipment. The mill also made handle squares and wood lathes for plastering, shims, and "stickers," which were the spacers for stacking lumber for curing. The price for the stickers was one cent each but proved to be one of the better selling items in a region devoted to lumbering in general. Mel, with his dad and Anna May helping, ran the mill for about five years, but when a flood of the nearby Yam Hill River damaged much of the machinery, he

went looking for other employment.

In 1965 he began work at a Volkswagen dealership as a mechanic. Mel had grown up watching his “fix-anything” grandfather and an uncle who was an expert mechanic. Anyone who has ever watched Mel work on any machine knows that he has a natural affinity for such work. He attended a mechanic’s school for a while in conjunction with his work at the dealership. He worked there for about eighteen months. Next, he worked for a short while spotting logs at a veneer machine at a plywood factor and then at a furniture factory in the finishing room for about a year. He then went back to another Volkswagen dealership at Pullman, Washington, for about a year in 1967.

About July 4th, 1968, Mel and his family moved to Boulder, Colorado, to work in construction with his brother in a home-building boom. After a year, he started his own construction business as a contractor to do the exterior trimming and siding work on the homes. With one or two workers, he did this work on many new homes. His son-in-law Steve, who became a craftsman at this work, later joined him. After fifteen years in the business, when Mel got ready to move to Arkansas, he turned the business over to Steve. Unfortunately, Steve contracted an illness and passed away a few years later.

In 1980, Mel and Anna May had visited friends in Arkansas after returning to the States from a mission trip to South America. These friends were in the chicken growing business, and Mel thought that business might be good for him because of an ailing back that limited him in his construction business. They went back to Colorado and began selling out and getting ready for the move. The move was made in 1984. He bought a chicken farm east of Gentry to start out. After back surgery in 1985, he began to expand his chicken houses. At one time he operated two chicken houses on his original land, three at Sleepy Hollow south of Gentry, and three that were leased at Highfill, Arkansas. In 1994 Mel more or less retired by selling the property at Sleepy Hollow to Jim Kincade and renting him the two east of Gentry near his home.

Mel’s interest in tractors and engines was fueled by those owned by him and his family in earlier years. His dad owned and used a small, 1917 or 1918 Cletrac crawler. It had been heavily used and had required reconstruction with a Model A engine and transmission. His dad traded the Cletrac for an even smaller Windolf crawler. Mel has been trying to track down the location of the Windolf for repurchase if possible.

Involvement with Tired Iron of the Ozarks came when he learned of the formation of the club from Don Christensen. Mel and Anna May attended the third organizational meeting of the club and both became charter members. Membership in the club caused Mel to expand his antique collection. He already had a 1936 McCormick Deering crawler he used around the farm. He added other tractors that include a 1942 VC Case and a 1949 Gibson. He has a 6 h.p. Witte diesel engine and a pre-1940s Fairbanks Morse magneto driven engine. He has numerous single-cylinder engines, which include several Maytags and Briggs & Strattons. To assist him in his work on his collections, he has a well-appointed shop where he uses his mechanical and machining expertise to repair and fabricate parts of all types. Anna May was always by Mel’s side at meetings and shows. She passed away September 22, 2006. We all miss her greatly. Mel continues to be deeply involved with Tired Iron and is always ready to assist in our projects with time, effort, and financial support. Thanks Mel.

