

Herman Smith

Tired Iron member Herman Smith was born September 10, 1946, in Bentonville, Arkansas, and grew up on the family farm near Hiwasse, Arkansas. His father, Herman Smith, Sr., was a local farmer with a varied background in occupations. In the mid to late 1930s, during the Great Depression, Herman, Sr., was the manager of the Centerton Canning factory. This was one of the numerous canning factors located in Northwest Arkansas from the early 1900s. With the depression and the effects of the Dust Bowl reducing opportunities in Arkansas, he and his first wife and their children, like countless others, headed west. For a time he owned a general store in Campo, Colorado, and, as a further effort to make a living, drove his freight truck after hours to Springfield, Colorado, making deliveries on a regular basis. When World War II began, he went to California to work in a munitions factory. Here fate played a hand.

Herman's mother, whose maiden name was Pansey Presley, was from a large family in Greenville, Tennessee. When she was seven years old, she moved with her family to a log cabin in Arkansas. She attended school in a one room schoolhouse, called Rocky Comfort, north of Hiwasse along what is now Highway 279 to Bella Vista, Arkansas. (Interestingly, her second grade teacher, then young, was a lady named Ester Beasley. Forty-four years later she was Herman's fourth grade teacher in the same school. In the early 70s, Herman did repair work on her, bought new, 1954 Chevrolet Bel Air sedan.) Pansey completed her schooling when she finished the eighth grade. Later she married her first husband, Ollie Funk. Pansey and Ollie bought a 360 acre farm near Hiwasse. After the death of Ollie, Pansey sought opportunities by heading west for employment.

Fate would play a hand in life circumstances for Herman, Sr., and Pansey. They had both lost their first spouses earlier, and now they worked in the same munitions factory. The single parents met and soon married. Incidentally, they had a Las Vegas wedding.

When Pansey married Herman, Sr., she still owned the 360 acre farm near Hiwasse. The newly married couple, by the end of World War II, felt the lure to return to the farm in Arkansas. As a late arrival to the Smith family, Herman, Jr., would be born not long after his parents came back to Arkansas.

Back on the farm, Mr. Smith farmed the original acreage and soon added 120 acres north of Hiwasse close to the original farm. As a small child, Herman, Jr., learned how to help with the farm work. With his half-brothers and sisters already grown and on their own, he had lots of chores. The commercial activities of the combined farms included cattle and dairy herds, broiler chickens, and row-crops of corn, beans, and tomatoes. Herman remembers that one of his main tasks, before and after school, was to see that the chickens were fed. He said he never resented being on the farm. For one reason, he was attracted to anything to do with machinery, especially tractors and trucks.

From a very early age, he drove the family tractor with assistance, but by the time he was about 10, he was able to work the row crops alone and to do other chores with the tractor. The first truck he drove was the farm work truck. At first, as he drove to and from the fields, he was too small to handle the clutch, gear shift, brake, and accelerator very well and did not get out of second gear for a long time. After much practice, he mastered that vehicle also and was ready to start driving the family car.

In the mid-1950s his father sold the 360 acre farm. The two farms were far enough apart to be a problem from time to time. Now, farming centered on the 120 acres but also included some leased land when needed. However, a further reduction came when the cattle herd was reduced to twelve head and much of the land was put into the federal soil bank program.

Herman's first car was a 1953 Chevrolet that his dad had traded in for a 1955 Chevrolet station wagon, which was a better family car. He told Herman that he could buy the '53 from the dealer for \$150. His dad refused to loan him the money; so he mentioned the problem to Mr. Shaddox, the owner of a truck stop in Jane, Missouri, just across the state line where he worked after school and weekends. Mr. Shaddox, who had been very supportive of Herman and recognized him as an honest and hard-working youth, agreed to loan the money to be paid back at \$10 per week. He drove Herman to the dealer in Joplin, Missouri, to purchase the car. Herman worked at the truck stop and even caught chickens at \$1.20 per hour. Herman really needed the car. He attended school at Hiwasse until the 8th grade when that school closed. He then attended school in Gravette, Arkansas. There, he noticed a girl he instantly stated he would marry some day. She was Elizabeth "Liz" Haggard and she did, a bit later, become his wife.

In the meantime, Herman decided he did not like school, and it was easy for him to decide he had learned enough. In his Sophomore year, he quit school. Two days later he had a full-time job at the Jane truck stop. He pumped gasoline at the station and did farm work for Mr. Shaddox, and of course, he continued working the Smith farm.

A lot happened to the determined youth in the next year or so. His father passed away in April 1963. For a short while his mother lived with an elderly lady who needed someone near. Herman was left to run the farm. This changed too when his mother decided to sell the farm and buy a house in town. She offered to let him stay on and have the farm if he would take over the mortgage with \$3,000 owed with yearly payments of \$344. He mentioned that he sometimes has had second thoughts, questioning if he should have purchased the farm. His desire to do other things meant he would turn down the offer. By the way, this farm was located 1 1/2 mile from town in Gordon Hollow and became a part of Loch Lomond when the lake was built in Bella Vista in 1982.

In 1963 he accepted a job offer at the Farmer's Co-op service station in Gravette for more pay. The Gravette Co-op was a part of a business which included four feed mills, three with service stations, in four Northwest Arkansas towns. This job also included truck delivery of fuel to the surrounding area after hours and often well into the night. Warehouse management was a part of the Gravette service station operation since it supplied all the support for the other service stations. The service station job pleased Herman since it allowed him to involve himself in automotive mechanics, which was work he always liked.

Herman would need the added wages and overtime pay for deliveries since he and Elizabeth were married in 1964. He stated he went to town and returned with the marriage license in one hand and with his military draft registration papers in the other. He had just celebrated his 18th birthday. Herman took off from work for a few days for the marriage. While he was away from work, the man hired to handle his tasks quit. When Herman returned to work he was moved into management of the Co-op. He was taught the ins and outs of management in that job and became the manager of the facility, still at the age of 18. He would stay at this job until late 1965.

Herman's next job was with the Crane Company in Rogers, Arkansas. The plant made water well pumps and other similar items. He liked the factory work since he worked with his hands in this job, a factor always in determining his employment if possible. Meanwhile, Elizabeth worked at the Bear Brand Hosiery factory in Bentonville. In 1968, to supplement their income, Herman bought a 1953 GMC cab-over-two-ton truck with side boards. He and Elizabeth hauled hay commercially after hours, sometime as late as 2 a.m. All this was done to provide funding for a long-time dream of Herman's, which was to attend automotive school.

In September 1968 Herman quit work in Rogers and began a program in automotive mechanics at the Wichita Automotive and Technical School in Wichita, Kansas. The schooling involved a grueling

effort in one calendar year with classroom time and in-shop experience. He attended school five nights a week for six hours each night. It was a great program for Herman, but added to the thirty hours of schooling were forty hours of employment at an aircraft factory, and later, at a Goodyear tire store. And too, Elizabeth had not moved to Wichita. Herman went to classes Friday until 10 p.m. and left to drive 265 miles to Bentonville for the weekend. Early Monday morning he would head back to Wichita to begin work Monday morning at the factory. The seventy hours of school and work and the long drives home were tough, even on a relatively young man. He said he was encouraged to persevere by a great friend and classmate from Ft. Scott, Kansas, by the name of John Finley. John's main support was that he made everything about work and school fun and did not allow Herman to lose heart. John has passed away but he is much remembered by Herman.

After completing school in September 1969, Herman went to work at the Chevrolet/Pontiac dealership in Noel, Missouri, as the front end man for the agency. He liked this job, but in July 1971, he started his first automotive shop near Bentonville in a rather small 40' x 50' building. The first day he made \$120. Business was good and he hired mechanics and added an "L" to the building to expand work space, and later, added more work space and a small office. Along with the mechanic work, Herman added a wrecker that was big enough to handle overturned 18 wheeler trucks. Later he would own an automotive parts business with partners. Wife Liz came into the family business in 1973 and, through the years, has been a staunch supporter of all Herman's enterprises.

In 1972, Herman and Elizabeth had a great sadness come to them. Their first child, a daughter named Lisa, died in infancy. It is plain to see that this is something that is never overcome in a parent's emotions. In 1974 the arrival of Herman III, known as "Tray," and then the birth of their daughter Trisha in 1978 was wonderful in the Smith family. Today, Tray and his wife Kim have triplets, Grant Michael, Hudson, and Charlotte, and Tray's two step-children, Joanna and Zachery. After working in the Sam's Club automotive replenishment department for a few years, in 1995, Tray entered full-time in the business with Herman. Trisha is a CPA and is employed in a high-level Walmart home office managerial position. She and her husband Sean have a one year old daughter named Liby.

In the Fall of 1979, Herman wanted to expand more. He purchased 2.39 acres near Bella Vista, where he built a 10,000 square foot shop. The company moved into the new facility in May 1980. For several years, the business continued to grow, which meant Herman did not have the opportunity to continue his hands-on mechanical work. He had plenty of hired mechanics to deal with the business, but he, personally, became stressed with the demand of the shop, the wrecker, and the parts house and faced burn out in the business world.

By 1987, Herman had started H & H Classic Parts with 584 part numbers. With this business, he began attending auto swap meets in six states. He used a 1980 truck to transport parts to the meets. To relieve stress from all his business activity, he began restoring about three Ford or Chevrolet vehicles each year. This activity helped, but by Spring 1993, he was thinking of closing the automotive shop and auctioning off the equipment of the shop. In 1986, he had already sold his half of the parts house to his partner. That parts business was separate from the H & H Classic Parts. When an equipment salesman heard of the plan to sell, he told a Missouri company of Herman's intentions. This company, MFA Petroleum, had started purchasing small service stations and turning them into tire stores. They needed a location in Northwest Arkansas. Herman sold the automotive shop inventory and leased the land and the building to that company.

Herman left that business June 1, 1993, and moved to his original shop between Bentonville and Hiwasse to operate the H & H Classic Parts for Chevrolets. The following are now included in the business inventory:

By 1994, 1955-1957 Chevrolet passenger car parts

In 1995, 1955-1972 truck parts

By 2000, 1958-1970 Impala parts

And by 2005, 1964-1972 Chevelle parts, and 1964-1974 Nova parts

In 2006, 1967-1981 Camaro parts.

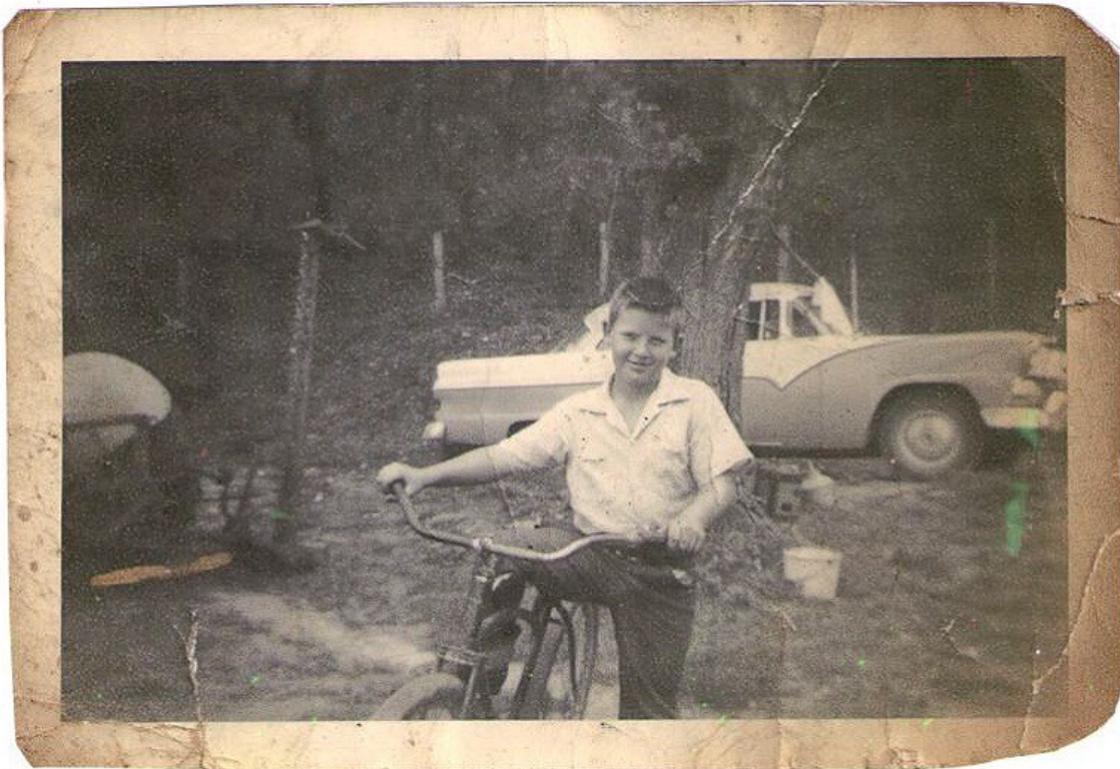
Next to be added will be 1973-1987 Chevy and GMC truck parts.

The facility has grown, and today it occupies 23,000 square feet of office, a showroom, and a warehouse with two-level storage. The stock-keeping unit (SKU) inventory numbers 24,200 offered, with 19,300 in stock. The non-stock items are special ordered and drop shipped. It is computerized for ease of shipment and handling and replenishment. The business is nation wide and in eleven foreign countries. (In 2017, a customer from Iraq walked into the showroom and ordered parts, which were shipped to Iraq. There is a photo of him and his 1961 Impala on the H&H Facebook page.) Everything about the operation and buildings is impressive to see.

To support the business, which is nationwide and in eleven foreign countries, Herman and his team use a customized truck to visit shows and meets to advertise and sell parts. They are on the road about 100 days each year with 24 shows in 18 states on their itinerary. Herman and Tray were featured recently in a segment about a disc brake conversion on the TV program Motorhead Garage. There is a link to the program available on the Internet on hhclassic.com. Incidentally, Herman says as long as possible he will stay in the business he loves. Take a look at Herman's website to further acquaint yourself with the business.

Herman was aware of the existence of Tired Iron, but when he was driving his restored 1957 Chevy convertible in a Decatur parade, he met Johnny Burger who interested him in becoming a member of Tired Iron. After he purchased a 1946 John Deere tractor and an antique manure spreader from the estate of Mr. Oliver Cowger, a well thought of neighbor near Hiwasse (See the story in the January/February 2013 Tired Iron Newsletter), he decided it was fitting to get involved with Tired Iron.

Herman joined Tired Iron in 2011 or 2012 and has been a very active supporter of the club and all it stands for. Herman, thanks for being a part of our organization.



Herman and bicycle made from two bikes.



Home Away From Home