

OSU/NASA Education Projects: Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP) Archive

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Spacemobile Memories by Wes McCoy. Written 2001.

Spacemobile Memories
By Wes McCoy

As a junior high school student in 1967, a Spacemobile program at my school impressed me with the importance of the imminent Apollo moon landings. It may well have been Bill Nixon presenting that program in our gymnasium. I ran in to the Spacemobile program again when I was a classroom teacher, put in charge of the astronomy program at our high school. I attended Steve Dutzak's Lunar Sample Certification workshop. I invited NASA to send a representative for the Spacemobile assembly programs, and six months later Mr. Philip Murphy showed up on our doorstep. His presentations were excellent and a lot of fun. Our media specialist kept telling me, "You can do that, Wes. Go ask him how to get a job like that." Little did I know that Spacemobile folks get that question almost as often as "How do Astronauts go to the bathroom?" As it happens, Phil told me, he was engaged to be married that summer, and would be leaving the nomadic life of the asphalt astronauts.

So, I sent a letter to AESP, filled out the application, and found myself in a March 1983 meeting with the mysterious Dr. Ken Wiggins. I was given a tour of Kennedy Space Center by George Gnann from Public Affairs (later I found out that his daughter was a teacher in Moultrie, Georgia.) He asked me if I wanted to meet an astronaut, and I said yes, and ten seconds later found myself talking with Woody Spring, who told me about how to practice using tools in space. Ray Corey and Ken Wiggins asked me if I wanted to start work that June, just before STS-7... how could I turn it down?

I worked with Phil Murphy and Edd Romans that summer. Later, Les Gold took over for Edd and became my frequent partner in Florida as well as Georgia. I was honored to be included in this company for four years, especially at our training conferences. I was able to visit Stillwater, Goddard, Langley, Stennis, JPL, and Ames (it was my first-ever trip to California). During my time with NASA, we started using Apply IIe computers for the first time. Everyone got their first LaserDisk players. Remember those cool "little blue box" telemetry units made by Ben DeMayo at West Georgia College? And the Space Station model built for us by Nelson Ehrlich? I resigned to return to classroom teaching in August, 1987, a year and a half after STS-25.

My impression of our impact on the educational community? I felt that my most worthwhile days were those when I drove miles and miles and miles down narrow roads to seemingly remote, infrequently visited communities. There I saw children and adults who genuinely appreciated the visit and were excited and proud of their nation's space program. They were happy hearing "the NASA story" in my programs, but they also were impressed with the importance of science and mathematics basics as tools for exploration. I am told that many hundreds of school children really buckled down on their studies (for a while) after I left. These people from small towns felt very much a part of their space program. They felt honored to be included. They felt proud that America was doing so much and doing it so well. They felt shattered by the Challenger tragedy, perhaps more than I did. They appreciated my explanations and my assurances that NASA would not stop exploring.

One of my favorite days during my tenure with NASA occurred in 1985, soon after I had visited schools in Paulding County, Georgia. I took my wife, Deborah, to the North Georgia State Fair. We rode the Ferris Wheel, ate some cotton candy, and pitched a few baseballs. We also went to see the competitions in the pavilion buildings. There were prize-winning horses, pickles, floral arrangements and quilts. We saw 4-H demonstrations on home safety and sewing. Then, as we walked through the children's art display, I spotted a large colorful picture of a table filled with rockets, satellites, and airplanes. There was a spacesuit and a model of the future Space Station. Standing in front of this table was a bearded man with glasses... it was ME!!! A child from Paulding County had won first place in the art contest by drawing a picture of the "NASA man" who visited his school. Honestly, it was one of the most memorable honors of my life, to see a drawing of me on display at the State Fair.