



Tennessee
TECH

<https://www.tntech.edu>

<https://www.tntech.edu/engineering/news-events/news/2014-2015-coe-news/paul-r-rader-rip>

Paul R. Miller, 1929-2014

Obituary courtesy of Dr. Miller's son Paul



Paul Rader Miller came to Tennessee Tech in 1966 because he wanted to share his passion for Mechanical Engineering with engineering students. Most of us who took thermodynamics, measurements, senior projects, and other courses with Mr. Miller in the 1960s thru 1990s will remember how his experience working in industry made the subject matter more relevant and less academic. He seemed always able to come up with a funny story to make the boring parts seem interesting. I still remember the vivid imagery of tempering a sword in the belly of a Nubian slave.

Paul was born in Rantoul, Kansas in 1929. His mom loved to listen to the pioneering radio evangelist Paul Rader, broadcasting over WLS out of Chicago. His sermons so impressed her that she named her son after him.

Paul attended school in nearby Osawatomie, where he lettered in multiple sports, leading the basketball and football teams as team captain at Osawatomie High School (OHS). While at OHS he caught the eye of an upper classman, a pretty and energetic bobbysoxer named Elnora who wooed him with boogie-woogie piano and saxophone. They married and Paul turned his knack for repairing cars and motorcycles into a career as a machinist's apprentice, learning his trade in the railroad workshop in Osawatomie.

When Korea came, he enlisted in the Navy and served as a machinist mate aboard a landing ship dry dock (LSD), a ship for repairing landing ships and small submarines at sea. After the Navy, Paul used the GI Bill to earn a degree in Mechanical Engineering at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. Then he moved Nora and their young son to Omaha, Nebraska, where he went to work for Western Electric, helping to create state-of-the-art telecommunications equipment.

After three years at Western Electric, Paul decided to earn a Masters in Mechanical Engineering at Oklahoma State University (OSU). So he moved Nora, their son and baby daughter to Stillwater, Oklahoma for a couple of years. While there, he taught some courses as a graduate student. He also became friends with several classmates who eventually became faculty members at TTU.

Several interviews yielded opportunities in different parts of the country. One was at the Arnold Engineering and Development Center (AEDC) in Tullahoma, Tennessee. He put it to a vote. The family unanimously chose Tennessee, mentioning Tennessee's rich history, beautiful scenery, and Daniel Boone as reasons for their decisions.

Paul worked in the AEDC J4 test cell on rocket engines for the Saturn V. He said that there was a row of high-speed strip chart recorders, which would shoot paper across the room during a test. Each member of a team of engineers would retrieve a ribbon of paper, fold it and take it back to their desk, where they would analyze the data using their slide rules.

His experience as a graduate student at OSU inspired Paul's aspiration to teach. His friend and former classmate Dr. Hudy Hewitt convinced him to interview for a position in the Mechanical Engineering Department at Tennessee Tech. At the time, a PhD was not a requirement for faculty in the department. Paul accepted the offer and moved the family one-more-time to Cookeville. In time, Paul's son, daughter, and wife Nora all earned degrees at TTU.

Paul's career took several more turns before retirement. In spite of completing all of the necessary coursework for his PhD at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Paul stopped short of completing his thesis. He did not feel that a PhD would make him a better teacher. He decided to leave the university and went to work for Fleetguard in Cookeville. A visit to a truck show as a part of his job at Fleetguard, perhaps coupled with the then popular trucking culture brought about by Smokey and the Bandit, gave Paul the wild idea of driving a semi. He left Fleetguard and went for training with North American, buying a semi-tractor with a sleeper, as an owner operator. He and Nora took off for a yearlong tour of the USA, as a truck driver and wife. It was a bold move and an extraordinary adventure.

Next, he sold the truck and went to work with his son in his son's foreign car repair shop in Cookeville. Then he took a job as plant manager at Nu-Fuel Industries in Loretto, Tennessee. Nu-Fuel manufactured fueling stations and kits to run cars and trucks on compressed natural gas. Nu-Fuel went under, when the price of gasoline went down and the availability went up in the mid-1980s. Out of work, Paul searched for, found, and successfully applied for an open position in the college of engineering as a staff engineer overseeing the lab in the basement of Clement Hall with Don Williams. This ended up being Paul's favorite job of his career. He was able to teach as many courses as he wanted and play, I mean, work on projects in the lab with Don.

While working on his PhD, Paul commuted back and forth to Knoxville a lot. Always economical, Paul bought a 305 Honda Superhawk motorcycle to make the commute and save on gas. From then on Paul was always either on a motorcycle or a bicycle, touring or commuting. He bought a BMW R90/6 on which he and Nora toured a good portion of the lower 48 states. He often toured with his friend Dr. Warren Essler of the Electrical Engineering Department, another BMW rider. Dr. Essler was well known as a loud whistler, and with BMWs being quiet as they are, you could hear Paul and Warren coming from some distance as Warren whistled while they rode.

Until his retirement, Paul regularly commuted by bicycle on a 20 mile round trip from his farm in Poplar Grove. Paul, Nora, assorted kids, and grandkids went on a number of weeklong bicycle tours, the BRAT in Tennessee, the TRIRI in Indiana, and the Safari in Florida. He even rode his bicycle from Cookeville to Osawatomie for his 50th high school reunion at OHS, winning a key to the city and leading the homecoming parade as his reward. He rode 70 miles with Nora on her 70th birthday.

Paul passed away August 2, 2014, at the age of 84. He now lies with Nora at Crest Lawn Cemetery in Cookeville, not far from where his cycling friend Warren Essler rests.

The thing that made Paul passionate about teaching was his interaction with his students. He enjoyed ASME and SAE activities, hosting picnics at his farm, arranging plant tours, and other activities. His family has arranged with the College of Engineering and the TTU Foundation to create a memorial fund in Paul's name to support student activities. Please consider making a donation to TTU Foundation, Paul R. Miller Memorial Fund, Box 1915, Cookeville, TN 38505.

Last edited 2015.03.17 by Davis, Cynthia.