

## Daughter takes over salvage business from Sonny

**T**eresa Litfin runs the family salvage yard in Delano. Her grandfather Maynard started the yard in 1936 and her father Sonny joined him in the business a decade later. Sonny's two sons helped him growing up and he had hoped one of them would take over the yard when he retired. They had other plans, however, and it was Teresa, his daughter, who took a fondness for their large assortment of unique old vehicles.

"I played by the cars when I was little and I always got in trouble," she remembers. "It was fun and challenging to leap from hood to hood or roof to trunk, often times many feet apart."

Litfin didn't get involved again until 2005, when she helped set up a website for the yard. Her father passed away the same year and her mother became the sole owner. She didn't know what to do with the business, so Litfin said she would help out part time to try to get those cars and parts into good hands.

"We could have had an auction and gotten rid of everything, but I didn't want to do that," she says. "I just wanted to see if I could find homes for all or most of this stuff. I think these cars are very cool. They have so much personality. I didn't want to see vehicles crushed without giving it some thought."

Most of the 500-plus remaining cars are from the 1950s, with some going back to the '40s and '30s. Some of them are rare and unusual, including 1950 Wayfarers, '41 Mercury Club Coupe, '53 Lincoln hardtop, '55 Chrysler Windsor Deluxe St. Regis two-door hardtop, plus a few cars

from Kaiser, Frazer, Nash, Hudson, Rambler, Desoto and Studebaker. The yard also includes many complete flat head motors.

Litfin uses email to correspond with prospective customers. If they live too far away to drop by for a visit, she takes their wish list, photographs the relevant vehicle and parts, and emails the photos so they can see how the parts stack up. So far, she hasn't had any unhappy customers.

One recent and rewarding transaction involved a 1956 Studebaker President. A couple from California were interested in many parts, particularly the steering wheel and column. Though half a century old, what they saw in her photographs, they wanted. When they got the wheel, they contacted Litfin to tell her how happy they were. The steering wheel on

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their car had been restored and they were not aware of the original color scheme. What Litfin sent them was still in excellent shape, giving their car that extra edge of originality they had hoped for.

It is customers of this sort that drive her business and for which she decided to keep it going. "When someone wants a jack for a '57 Mercury, it has to be that exact one, not a reproduction or something



from another car. They'll never use it, but they want it because that's what came with the original vehicle. Some people are happy with reproductions but the real diehards won't settle for anything less than the exact part from the same year," she says.

Getting people what they want isn't always easy. Almost all of the cars have been stored outside and metal close to and sitting on the

ground has deteriorated. But the steel in old cars is thick and upper portions, even those with a layer of surface rust, can still clean up well, as can trim, engine parts, interior items, grilles, tail lights and bumpers. People find other things too, including old bottles, antique farm equipment, kitchen gadgets and various cans in and among the cars. Those items are for sale with everything else, and Litfin is happy to send them

off with someone who cares about them.

Not every vehicle was stored outside. One gem she sent off to a buyer from England was a 1925 Ford Model T Roadster pickup. A distant relative of her father's had asked Sonny to store it, which he did for 30 years. But the owner died and then so did Sonny. A roadster pickup is a rare vehicle and the buyer was very excited to get it. Those are the sorts of connections that make her job worthwhile. Litfin also has many old parts that were stored inside, including Model A and T Ford pieces, vintage glass, radiators and additional farm equipment.

Litfin hopes that internet searching will help more enthusiasts and collectors in need of her parts to find her. The yard is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays for browsing and parts removal. And email inquiries are a great way to make contact on other days, or from locations far from Delano. The Sonny's Salvage collection is viewable at [www.sonnysalvage.com](http://www.sonnysalvage.com). Inquiries can be made to [customerservice@sonnysalvage.com](mailto:customerservice@sonnysalvage.com) or (763) 972-2497. ■

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