

I.D.: Ruth Konhaus Wade [Originally published on: Friday, June 22, 2007]

Ruth Wade is accustomed to getting a jump start on things: skipping kindergarten and beginning school in first grade, dating her future husband at the age of 14, then graduating from college and marrying that same guy when she was just 20. Now the former elementary school teacher and principal has taken an early retirement and thrown herself into a range of volunteer work, from heading the Amherst Survival Center's board of directors to tutoring students in ESL (English as a Second Language).

Wade, a Pennsylvania native who lives in Amherst, was at one time the staff development coordinator for the Amherst-Pelham schools and a principal in three Connecticut elementary schools; she also was a consultant for the Connecticut Department of Education. She figures her academic background has come in handy as an ESL tutor and as a mentor to two families. All this makes for a busy retirement, but Wade says she has no complaints: "Working with other volunteers, especially some of the incredible Survival Center volunteers, along with seeing the joy and gratitude on the faces of the people you help, are the biggest rewards anyone could ever hope to receive."

- Full name: Ruth Konhaus Wade
- Date and place of birth: Feb. 17, 1947, Mechanicsburg, Pa.
- Address: Amherst
- Job: Retired principal, reborn as a volunteer worker
- Who lives under the same roof as you? My husband, George, and a student we mentor, Dan
- Children: Jennifer, 35, Courtney, 32, and Alison, 32
- Education: Cumberland Valley High School, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 1964; Penn State University, B.S. in education, 1967; Westfield State College, M.Ed. in guidance and counseling, 1979; University of Massachusetts, Ed.D. in research and evaluation, 1984

- Books you'd recommend to a friend: "Mountains Beyond Mountains," by Tracy Kidder; "The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors and the Collision of Two Cultures," by Anne Fadiman
- Favorite singer or group: Anyone performing at the monthly open mic nights at the Amherst Survival Center
- What do you waste your money on? Travel, plants for my garden and massages, but I really don't consider this a waste of money
- Life-changing experience: Marrying my husband and lifelong partner, George, 40 years ago, and having our three amazing daughters
- Funniest memory: Our 2-year-old daughter, Jennifer, after learning she was going to have a sibling, began announcing to others that her mommy was having two babies. We carefully explained to her that there was only one baby but then found out, in labor, that there were indeed two! When her father called her from the hospital to tell her we were having twins, Jennifer said, "Come on, Daddy, there's only one baby in mommy's tummy!"

- Strangest job you ever held: Working in my father's turkey processing plant. My job was to lift the entire turkey up and hang it on the moving line after it had been killed, dipped in scalding water and put through a picker to remove the feathers. Occasionally the turkey was still moving, so I didn't last very long in that job
- A little-known fact about you: I was the 1966 Pennsylvania Poultry Queen and the 1967 Northeastern States Poultry Princess. I also twirl fire batons, do fire devil sticks, walk on stilts and can do the pogo stick with no hands (my next career may be in the circus)
- Dumbest thing you ever did: Burned down our newly built house in Amherst in 1987 four days before we were to move in. I was finishing floors and hung an oily rag over a shower curtain rod to dry it. Spontaneous combustion resulted, and our new house was mostly destroyed. I learned that there are only three ways to safely dispose of rags with linseed oil on them: carefully burn them, put them in an air-tight metal container or wash them with soap and water
- Celebrity encounters? I had a fabric art business for a short while, and the first thing I ever sold was to Joan Rivers. I met and chatted with Eleanor Roosevelt while on a high school band trip. Also, I was supposed to be on the Merv Griffin show when I was the Poultry Queen, but I got preempted, and only got to sit in the audience

- Favorite Web site: www.people.umass.edu/support/asc/
- One thing you would change about yourself: I'd like to be a little less driven, more patient and more tolerant
- Whom do you most admire? I admire exceptional teachers because they can truly make a huge difference in the life of a young person
- Parting shot: There is no better test of a society (or a person) than how we treat our least fortunate citizens