

people to know AROUND THE WORLD

Over the years, Jim Stori has fabricated a lot of steel—and seen a lot of the planet.

THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY has long been built on images of relaxation, adventure, broadening one's horizons, and getting away from it all.

Of course, travel can also be eye-opening and moving—and on occasion pretty stressful.

Jim Stori, CEO and cofounder of STS Steel, Inc. in Schenectady, N.Y. (AISC Member/AISC Certified Fabricator) and AISC Chairman of the Board from 2003 through 2005, has experienced the gamut of what world travel has to offer. One of the more harrowing travel moments for him was in Kabul in 2003.

“Our friend's wife was to take us to town, to the bazaar” he recounts. “That morning there was a bit of a demonstration against Americans. We went anyway but were told not to bring cameras. We went in two little Russian-built yellow cabs, three of us in the second cab following the first. However, our driver thought he knew a shortcut and soon we were lost in the middle of Kabul. He eventually wanted us out of the cab. We knew no Farsi (the spoken language), had no contact names or phone numbers and our friend was in the other cab, one of thousands of identical looking yellow cabs!”

“Fortunately, before the cabs separated we noticed that the other one had one distinguishing feature: a soccer ball decal on the back window. We refused to get out of the cab, made the guy drive around and all breathed a sigh of relief when we spotted the soccer ball again!”

Globetrotting

Travel has always been part of Stori's life. As his kids (he and wife Sue have three) were growing up, the family took several trips to Europe to visit family—Jim's parents are both Swiss, having immigrated to the U.S. during World War II—and he also traveled to Europe multiple times during his youth, even spending a couple of summers there.

He recalls his first international trip, in 1955, to Zurich: “I can still picture waking up late (because of the time change) the morning of the first day in my grandmother's chalet in the Canton of Glarus. Towering mountains on either side, looking down the valley towards the Tödi—still my favorite mountain of all time!”

While those earlier journeys were geared more toward visiting family, many of his more recent travels have been service-oriented. The 2003 trip, for example, came about when a friend from church asked Stori if he had any interest in helping to replace vehicles for Noor Eye Hospital in Kabul, as the Taliban had confiscated the original Range Rovers. Afghanistan has an extremely high rate of eye problems, and the hospital would use the vehicles to reach remote, sometimes difficult-to-access areas where doctors could perform

cataract surgeries. The trip lasted four weeks, and Stori had the opportunity to drive one of the vehicles through Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

Another trip, in 2007, took Stori to India and Bangladesh; the trip was organized by Interserve, a Christian organization that sends professionals (mostly medical and educational) to areas of need around the world.

“In Bangladesh, we spent time visiting a hospital in Dhaka set up primarily to deal with the intestinal diseases that take many lives each year when the flooding comes, and along with it the polluted waters,” Stori explains. “At another hospital about eight hours north by train, we saw more dedicated people committing their lives to helping those living in this incredibly impoverished country. While we were there, we spent a memorable evening at a feast prepared in our honor. We walked for a half-hour or so through rice fields to a little village. When we got there, before the celebration started, they washed each of our feet, individually. The local fuel for cooking and heat was dried cow dung. They played instruments and danced in beautiful local costumes, and we all ate together. A night to remember!”

Stori has also been to Egypt, Jordan and Israel, and last year fulfilled a long-time desire to visit friends in Papua, Indonesia who have lived there for more than 30 years. No matter where he goes, he keeps things in perspective.

“One of the key things to be learned from travel, especially to lesser-developed countries, is how much we have to be thankful for. We have been truly blessed, both as individuals and as a country,” he says.

▼ Stori, on Lake Pleasant in Adirondack Park.



Steel Upstate

Besides frequently going abroad for family, enjoyment and the common good, Stori also happens to run a successful steel fabrication shop and has been involved in the steel industry since graduating from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he obtained both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in structural engineering. He credits his high school guidance counselor for recognizing his love of math and science and suggesting he go into engineering.

Upon receiving his Master's degree, he interviewed with Bethlehem Steel with the goal of designing ships—which didn't quite work out as he had hoped.

"I hadn't done adequate research and found out during the interview that Bethlehem no longer built ships," he says. "But they offered me a job in fabricated steel construction, and I was soon in love with steel. I spent about five years there getting invaluable experience on monumental projects (the Hartford Civic Center and Caruthersville bridge over the Mississippi, to name a couple) before Bethlehem decided to get out of the fabrication business."

A couple of jobs later he met Glenn Tabolt, with whom he would go on to found STS Steel in 1984; Tabolt is the company's president.

"We both had the entrepreneurial spirit and decided to start out on our own," Stori recounts. "Our first shop (in Troy, N.Y.) was a rented 7,000-sq.-ft warehouse with one welding machine. We did everything ourselves—estimating and books at night, and layout, welding and painting during the day."

STS moved to its current facility, in Schenectady, in 1989 and has fabricated progressively more complex buildings and bridges ever since. The shop is just finishing up fabrication work on the Fulton Street Transit Station in lower Manhattan, which involves approximately 1,900 tons of steel. Stori describes it as by far the most complex and challenging job his shop has done... as well as being "an architectural masterpiece and geometric nightmare."

"The structure rises about six stories, with an oculus on top to let in daylight," he explains. "The perimeter steel is all built-up members designed to take blast-resistant glass. It has certainly been a challenge, but fortunately we're working with a very competent general contractor and have an erector (Imperial Iron Works, an AISC Member/AISC Certified Fabricator) experienced in New York City work."

STS also does bridge work. "My favorite bridge was our first truss bridge, completed about eight years ago," Stori says. "A 300-ft span over the Hudson River in Riparius, N.Y., it required full assembly of the trusses on the shop floor, per NYSDOT specifications. It fit perfectly—not a single hole reamed!"

Mountain Retreat

In addition to his international travels, Stori is also able to get away from it all—and also enjoy some waterskiing—close to home. For the past 28 years, he and Sue have owned a property on Lake Pleasant in Adirondack Park, not far from Schenectady. The two met at a camp in the Adirondacks as teenagers and agreed that if they were able to have a second home, it would be on Lake Pleasant.

"The opportunity came up and we purchased the property jointly with our best friends," he says of the lake house. "Originally planning to take turns using the place, we ended up spending weekends together, adding a second floor and porch so both families could be there at the same time. We had kids about the same age and spent every weekend there. Our friends retired and

moved to Florida about ten years ago so now we have it alone, but it remains the place we love to spend time—and now with six grandchildren!"

"And it's there that I developed my love of waterskiing. The kids had no interest in dad's sailboat, so we got into motorboats about the time we got the lake house. They picked it up quickly and I had no choice but to get into it. I was quickly hooked. Nothing beats getting up early, when the water is like glass, and skimming around the lake!"

MSC

“One of the key things to be learned from travel, especially to lesser-developed countries, is how much we have to be thankful for.”



▲ Stori, in the central highlands west of Kabul, watching Hazara farmers thresh wheat “the old-fashioned way.”