My F-100 steering dilemma resolved

In 2003 I had my engine rebuilt for touring. The transmission was overhauled along with the rear end. Mechanical brakes were completely rebuilt and cast iron drums installed. With the engine out I removed the front end and added a new spring, shackles and bushings. My original steering seemed fine so I did not spend a lot of time inspecting the pitman arm, drag link and tie-rod. All the balls were fine with no signs of wear. Wishbone ball was in spec and I converted back to the original style getting rid of the rubber ball. It was suggested to me to install an F-100 steering box because it was "just like power steering" (I hate that phrase). So my friend and I located a very tired '56 F-100 box and he set about having the mods done here in Tacoma. With the car back together it was time for a test drive. All seemed fine but I was never completely happy with the steering. It was just OK. Not long after the rebuild I added on modern tube shocks. Initially they were ok.

About five or six years ago I began noticing a bit of wandering when driving. It progressively got worse and much of the time I was never sure if I was steering the car or it was steering me. I did have some tire wear on the very edge of the tread on the right front tire. I checked the toe-in and made a feeble attempt at adjusting the steering box. I posted about this and got a lot of advice and then again not so good too. I was told to check everything imaginable from alignment to wheel weights and dyna beads. You name it and I was made aware of it. Meanwhile the steering was getting worse. Over the past several years I have spent 40 hours plus on the internet and the archives here on FB. I was firmly convinced it was the steering box. This time last year I realized my shock housings were dented and one was completely dead. I ordered up a complete set of shocks from Stipe Machine. I love them! However the steering was just not improving. One day Randy Gross contacted me and was very concerned that my steering box was one of his units. I assured him no and got right on Ford Barn to state that. He had been following my posts for quite some time and suggested I remove the box and ship it to him for evaluation. He also wanted the pitman arm. Last September as I was prepping for shipment I noticed my pitman arm was galled. In earlier inspections it was perfect. Randy reported back in very short order that whoever did the machine work did a fine job and it was safe to use. He sent along a new pitman arm and suggested new spindle arms just in case. I re-installed the box and the new pitman arm and steering arms and while I was at it new original style "innards" for the tie rod and drag link ends. The car still did not steer well. I took it to an alignment shop and they did set the toe-in as I was at 3/8 instead of 1/16 +or- 1/32. They also tightened the pitman arm pinch bolt as well as the end plugs on the Drag link and tie –rod ends. The car still did not steer well. With the help of fellow club member Mike Thoe, we got the car on his lift and went over the frame for cracks and everything else we could think of. We realized the right front king pin was a bit too sloppy so I replaced that as well as the wishbone ball cups. (Which was within spec.) While I was at it I cleaned the brake shoes and repacked the wheel bearings. I was doing the left front when I realized the wheel bearings were coming close to seizing and welding to the spindle. YIKES! I installed new bearings and races. So long I was at it I inspected the rears. YIKES again as the left rear drum fell off in my hand without the use of a puller. Years earlier I had made my own axle shims and one shim was totally disintegrated. I replaced the rear wheel bearings and seals. For whatever reason I thought I had NOT followed through with the shims. I installed new shims and reversed right for left. Just for the hell of it I pulled the cotter pins from the spring perches and discovered the nuts were quite loose. The D. side took two full turns and the P side took ¾ of a turn. Meanwhile Randy Gross was right there for me over the past two months. We were talking and he suggested a shortened pitman arm. I just happened to have one on hand and installed it. Immediately I noticed a huge difference in the steering and called Randy right away to order a new one from him. (We were unsure of the welding job on mine). In the meantime our club had a poker run and I put on my standard length arm for the tour. I had rotated the tires too. We went about 50 miles and with every mile the car became more and more stable. My better half notice I was no longer fighting the wheel. We were elated and cut the tour short as we didn't want to jinx the deal. The next day my new shortened pitman arm came and I installed it. I was surprised as the same old steering wander had returned. Ironically Randy had called when I was doing the install. We both agreed to reinstall my new standard length and go for a test. The car handles like a dream……just like power steering. What the root cause was ……I have no idea but my guess is a whole lot of small details.