

Acquisition July 2002

Keep

### **My memories of Dad's huckster truck (1932-1967)**

In addition to a grocery store in Whitestown, IN Garold W. Allen (1911/1975) had a huckster route from 1932 to the mid-sixties. The huckster truck route was primarily on rural roads in Worth and Eagle townships on Wednesday and Thursday of each week.

Dad would buy a used school bus and convert it into a huckster truck. He would paint it grey, remove all the passenger seats, except one. This bench seat he would turn and bolt the back flush to the left wall behind the drivers seat. Customers could sit on this seat while making their purchases and get caught up on all the latest news and gossip.

With the seats removed, Dad would bolt wooden shelves to the inside walls on both sides from the front to the back door. Inside the back door on the right side was an icebox to keep milk, meat, cheese and other perishable orders.

Across the bus aisle from the icebox, empty egg cases were kept to exchange to those farmers who would sell dad eggs.

Underneath the back door of the bus attached to the frame between the back dual wheels was a wooden coop for the chicken's Dad would buy from the farmers. I look back now and wonder how the chickens in that coop made the route alive with all the dust from the gravel roads. Farmers would either sell their chickens and eggs or trade for groceries. Usually Dad would pay them first for the chickens or eggs and they would know how much money they had to spend on groceries.

We would fill the shelves with fresh bread, potato chips and pastry, canned goods of all types. Watermelons and bottled pop were kept on the floor in front of the shelves. Traveling up and down those bumpy, gravel roads with all the merchandise rattling and rolling was really a "trip". There was no need to "shake before you open" on anything sold off the huckster truck.

No "check-out lanes or cash register" on the huckster bus. Dad kept a coin change box on a shelf to the left of the drivers seat. This box was a small wooden 4" x 12" x 4" American cheese box with no lid. Dad kept the "folding money" in his pocket. Very few customers paid by check and plastic credit cards were not around back then. More often than not this little box of change would be left on the bus from week to week. No security problems back then.

Dad would leave the passenger door open in the summer (no air conditioner back then). Brother Charles or I would sit on the first step with the door open to keep cool and watch the world go by. One time Charles was doing this and accidentally fell out the door while the bus was moving on the gravel road. Dad locked up the brakes on that old bus and thought sure he had killed his first-born. One more foot and he would have as Charles was lying on the gravel road within inches of being run over by the dual wheels of that big old bus. Fortunately, he was just scratched with a few bumps and bruises.

Dad started letting us steer the bus when we were hardly old enough to see over the steering wheel. As I recall, he would start the bus moving down the road and go through the gears and then get up and let us sit on our knees in that big leather drivers seat and steer. We were too small to reach the pedals but what kid wouldn't think this was fun. What 's the harm, not much traffic on those country roads back then.

Very rarely would he miss a day. I don't recall any accidents he had in the thirty some yrs he traveled his route. He did have a few near misses though. Once he almost was hit by a freight train in Whitestown at the Big-Four RR crossing. The train came so close that it knocked the back door off the bus. One other time a tie rod broke taking dad and bus down an ice-covered hill into the ditch.



Speaking of ice, one time on Steve Sprong's farm Dad had to get out of the bus and go to a shed and pick up a case of eggs. (A case held 360 eggs). Dad was walking down the sidewalk with the case of eggs on his shoulder when he slipped on ice. His feet went out from under him and the eggs went up in the air and lit on the sidewalk. I don't believe one egg survived that fall. Dad paid Steve for the eggs but most were scrambled or sunny side up on the sidewalk..

He also had many encounters with dogs. Most all farms have dogs and some are not too friendly. One time we were west of Whitestown on a farm. Dad pulled in the barn driveway and got out and went around to the back of the bus. No sooner had he opened the back door of the bus than I heard him yell and shout a few choice words as the dog had just bit him on the leg and tore his pants. Dad was so mad he threw a small truck jack from the bus as the dog was hightailing as fast as he could to get away. Dad did like dogs or any animals for that matter. He came home with at least three puppies at different times that people gave him on his route. All were Heinz. The first I recall was Nancy who was part chow. Next came Tippy who was a rat terrier. The third dog was a black Springer spaniel and I don't recall it's name. All three met their fate on the streets of Whitestown.

When Uncle John Allen was in the army in WWII, he brought home a puppy from boot camp. This pup was a short hair German police dog. John named him Duke. John returned to the army camp after his leave and then was married and lived elsewhere. Duke stayed with grandad, but he was a family dog and would roam up to Dad's store or over to our house. Duke never got much attention at home so he enjoyed the attention he received from the children. He also liked to eat.

Duke became fascinated with dad and the huckster truck. Duke would follow Dad and the huckster truck on his Wed route. This became a problem because he would get in fights with customer's dogs on the route. Duke knew when Wed rolled around and would be waiting for dad along the road so he could go with him. One Wed morning dad left the huckster garage and started on his route. He first noticed people laughing and pointing at the bus and wondered why. After a few times of this he stopped the bus and got out to see what people were pointing at. To his amazement, somehow Duke had got in the garage and climbed on top of the bus and was riding there going down the road.

Part of our duties was to "load the huckster truck" the night before his route. We would prepare the special orders from people who telephoned and replenish the shelves of canned goods and fresh items. After dad returned from his route, it was necessary to "unload the huckster truck". I hated this job and would hide on Tuesdays, if possible.

Dad had about 60 customers on wed. and 20 on Thurs. When brother Charles and I were little and not in school, we would go with dad on his huckster route up and down the dusty gravel roads of Boone County.

On Wed some of his customers would invite us in to have lunch with them or we would stop in the Pleasant View Cemetery in the shade of a tree for lunch. After lunch sometimes dad would play hide and seek with us in the cemetery. We would hide behind the tombstones. Dad passed away 9/28/75 and is now buried in this cemetery which is now called "Hutton".

On one occasion, he stopped at the Clarence and Fairy McCoy farm west of Whitestown and they brought Dad a hot sandwich of meat. He started eating while they were shopping, complimenting and thanking them for the sandwich until Clarence told dad the meat in the sandwich was rocky mountain oysters (hog testicles). Dad got this terrible look on his face and hit the bus door running and started throwing up that sandwich.

An old bachelor by the name of Jimmy Lemon was another possible lunch stop. He lived on the Whitestown/Zionsville road on the east side of the road between the Dulin and Pock farms. I remember Jimmy slept in the basement in a hammock hung from the ceiling. Above his head, hanging in the water pipes was a shotgun for protection.



I wish I could remember all the people on Dads route and the exact route he took each week, but one customer does stick out firmly in my mind because I married her daughter Jayn in 1958 and not until we were married several years did we realize that we first met on the huckster truck. One day after we were married several yrs Jayn was talking about a gray school bus that her mother sent her out by the road to flag down. They were not a regular customer but on occasion would flag Dad down to make a purchase. Jayn lived on hunt club road west of Zionsville. Jayn and her two sisters would come out of the house and make their purchases. She recalled and described the bus and dad to a tee in his gray work cloths and this freckle faced boy about 8 yrs old who was helping him. Jayn would have been 5 or 6 yrs old. Little did we realize that about 10 yrs later our paths would cross again and we would marry some 3 yrs later. I firmly believe this was all providential and we were pre-destined. I thank God for that.

On another occasion Dad stopped for lunch at Lon Powell's home south of town where Emmett and El St Clair once lived. He made the mistake of leaving the bus door open and Lon's dog "Jit" got inside and trashed the bus. This dog literally ate and tore his way through the entire stock of goods on the bus. Lon thought this incident was funny (Dad didn't) and wrote the following poem.

### OUR DOG "JIT"

"Folks, here is a true story  
As sure as you live;  
And if it hadn't happened  
A lot I would give  
We had a huckster  
Who comes once a week  
With a truck loaded full  
Of fine things to eat.  
This huckster drives many a mile  
And when he comes in the house,  
We usually visit for a while.  
On this particular day  
He left open his huckster door  
Something he will never do anymore  
For we have a large dog that had jumped in,  
And to name the things he ate I could only begin,  
As you look list over you may think he's a hog,  
Or you may ask the question, why don't we feed our dog?  
We will have to admit, he ate with vigor and vim,  
For most of the food was brand new to him.  
He grabbed stuff right and left, Grabbed and lapped.  
Even ate stuff that was not unwrapped.  
Bacon, macaroni, lemons and cheese,  
And was standing in crackers up to his knees.  
He had eaten bananas, Stuff sour and sweet.  
Things an ordinary dog never would eat.  
Perhaps because the things seemed so handy and free.  
His sides stuck out like a jar of sour kraut,  
To our surprise he did not pass out.  
When the huckster came out he seemed petrified;  
His fruit was all gone, both the green and dried.  
All he would say was shame on you Jit  
If he would have been raving mad we would have not blamed him a bit.  
We felt might sorry, but to late for tears,  
Although we have traded with this huckster for a good many years.  
But he is good natured , doesn't grumble and fuss,  
But as he backed out of the drive, I thought I heard him cuss."



**Lon Powell Whitestown Dispatch Newspaper 1942**

My only regret is that I did not take a picture of Dad and his huckster truck before he sold it in 1967. I don't think there is one picture of any of Dad's huckster trucks he had over 35 years, except in our memories. If I close my eyes, after all these many years I can still smell the warm country air permeating the inside of the huckster truck along with the scent of weeds, flowers, livestock and dust.

Ken Allen  
Whitestown