

THE STORE'S STORY

-- PART 2

Where we left off: The year was 1967, and Barb and Ernie Gommel had asked Fred Vessels, the local Reche Canyon realtor, what a guy could do to earn his way and be productive. (How quaint! What a concept!) Fred answered that the little cracker box store next door to his office was for sale. The Gommels had never run a store before and considered the idea of hiring a manager to run it.

"... [But] God had other things in mind. He had no intention that my folks would continue playing church while turning the store over to a manager. What did He have in mind?"

Upon investigation the Gommels found that the little store was being leased and run by an older couple whose name I believe was McMahon. (I wasn't present at the time, having left to attend college.) The building and property were owned by a sweet elderly lady, Mildred Maddox, who lived at the mobile home park next to the store, and who was caring for her husband who was suffering from dementia.

Mrs. Maddox was more than willing to sell the property to us, and even to carry the note. McMahons were delighted to be relieved of the burden. And so God placed the Gommels in the store to become storekeepers themselves as they soon realized that no manager could be supported there.

So here they were, in this ugly little 2500 sq. ft. box* with a sloping floor and a big drain right in the middle, due to its history as a turkey processing location, with groceries and sundries scattered on the shelves, somewhat haphazardly. What do we do with this??

The first thing they did was to ask around and find out that McMahons used Smart and Final for their supply, with a cash and carry store in Colton, so they took \$1000 to Smart and Final and went on a

*For perspective, this store is 33,000 sq. ft.



Hitchin Post and gas pumps

shopping spree to fill the shelves. Even though \$1000 was a lot of money in 1967, it wasn't nearly enough to fill the shelves, but at least they looked better.

Then they embarked on a series of improvements.

- They planted trees in the strip of dirt between the parking and the road, by the hitching post. Yes, there really was a hitching post there.
- Pappy Gommel (my grandpa) worked with Gommel to design an expansion, adding a wing on either side of the cracker box, and a false front over the original box so that it looked more attractively western.



Bill in the Hitchin Post snack shop

good! If you knew your stuff, you managed to make just slightly more shake than would fit in the customers' cups, and guess who got that little bonus!) Tables were



Hitchin Post Garden Shop

built out of old utility wire spools. There was a steamer that made the best hot dogs anywhere, and later an infra-red oven to serve pre-made, heated sandwiches that were surprisingly good. Later we



Hitchin Post feed trailer

got a microwave oven, when they first became available.

- A wooden porch with a railing added to the homey look of the snack shop, which had its own door with a bell that rang when someone entered. Barb, my mother, made curtains for the window and doors of the Snack Shop.
- The checkout area was expanded to include a large counter with a register at each end on the side facing the store, and the ice cream fountain and counter on the other side facing the snack shop.
- A small hardware section was added in the new south wing, as well as expanded grocery shelves and a new beverage walk-in box.

Later improvements included:

- A little coin-operated car wash that used a wand for the water. You had to scrub your car yourself!

- Two self-service Texaco gas pumps, one of the earliest self-service installations anywhere and a first for Texaco. Marty Roelle (related to Rick Roelle of Apple Valley, I believe) installed a little mechanical device that was hooked up to the gas pumps. Each pump had its own "clicker", a dial that ticked the dollars going into the customers' gas tanks. We recorded license numbers and stabbed the paper onto a nail at each clicker. We did this through the Jimmy Carter gas rationing crisis during the 70's, with lines of cars out to the street.

- A tire cabinet out front so we could sell Goodyear tires.
- A small hay shed out back so we could sell the bale of hay here and there, which then grew into a full pole barn receiving truckloads of hay for numerous larger orders.
- A feed truck that Gommel built on the chassis of an old Chevy (?) truck, making the box look like a western barn. He would drive the truck to Fontana and fill it with Purina feeds there, then return to the store and back it up to a small dock he built.

- A Garden Shop in a garage-type building that he farmed out to two construction guys to build. He later disgustedly called them wood butchers.

- A thriving auto repair business that he and an assistant did out on the "car pad" at the south end of the store. The first time they tried out the used engine analyzer scope they had purchased, it didn't work, and so in frustration they called the guy who sold it to them. "Did you plug it in?" he asked. "Plug it in?! Ohhhhhh!" And guess what? When plugged in, it worked fine!

The little cracker box on a barren weedy, sandy, empty lot bloomed into a destination for both the desert rats and for the up-and-coming suburbanites who were slowly moving into the canyon, gradually urbanizing and civilizing it.

How did the Gommels handle all of that extra work and growth of the

business? Who was there to help them? The other members of the little group of Believers all had jobs, families, kids, obligations. They contributed what time they could, but before long, the little store outgrew them. Again, what did God have in Mind?

(To be continued. . .)

Linda Gommel

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

LVEDA Meeting

(Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association)

WED. APRIL 7, 5 PM.

at the Moose Lodge

on Foothill Road, just west of Tradepost Road.

Probably outside patio.

Food service available.

- Updates/reports from Sheriff, CHP, Schools, Sup. Rowe's office, Federal and State reps, etc.
- Report from local realtor Edie Downs: What's happening with residential and commercial properties?
- What's opening up around town.
 - Pending solar projects.
- CHP's Age Well Driving class.
 - County and Cal Fire's burn permits.
- Update on County and Caltrans road projects.
 - Future of the Leader

e-mail address: Market.Hardware@lucernevalleymarket.com

website: lucernevalleymarket.com

LIMITS & MULTIPLE PRICING

Please, unless otherwise indicated, **ON AD ITEMS NO MORE THAN 6 TOTAL (including all flavors or varieties) OF ANY ITEM, PER FAMILY, DURING THE AD PERIOD, AT THE SALE PRICE**, except in produce and meat, which are limited to normal retail quantities, or which carry limits specifically stated. Sorry, we must reserve the right to further limit or refuse sales.

ON MULTIPLE PRICING, when purchasing items in quantities more or less than the multiple stated, the register is built automatically to charge the "each" price times the quantity. (Example: Price of item is 3/\$1. The price of: one = 34¢, two = 68¢, three = \$1, four = \$1.34, five = \$1.68, six = \$2.00).

ECHO RECYCLING

760-220-4232

On the Northeast side of the parking lot.

Open Mon. - Sat. 9AM - 4PM

Closed for Lunch Noon to 1PM.

Closed Sunday

Aluminum CRV \$1.65/lb

#1 Plastic CRV \$1.28/lb

Pricing good thru March 31, 2021

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THOSE WHO SPONSOR THIS STORE; SEE <http://thenewlightcls.com>