

THE STORE'S STORY -- PART 4

(From Part 3: Our little group had grown to about 15 people, several of whom worked at the Hitchin Post, so between needing to find work more for people, and the increasingly encroaching smog and urbanization, we became restless. Was it the Holy Spirit bugging us? Did He place in the Gommels' minds the idea of doing something in Lucerne Valley?)

Some people of our little group who were sitting on the curb in front of West End Market (yes, there actually was a curb!) felt comfortable with the idea of developing that little store after the pattern of the Hitchin Post. But somehow, the idea never took root. We were all still bugged and restless.

We continued our "mission" at the Hitchin Post, waiting for clearer direction from God. The Gommels took their days off in Big Bear as usual, most often returning home via the back road through Lucerne Valley. On one trip home, they decided to stop at a local real estate office, one of which was operated by Pete Pedersen and another of which was operated by Carol D'Auria. Our memories are a little hazy here, since we weren't there with them, but one of the offices was in the building shared by the barber shop; the other was in the little building directly across Hwy 18 from the Post Office.

The Gommels went into one of the offices and out of the blue asked those sitting there, "We want to buy Leo's Market and we don't have any money." That was the truth – the Gommels had been living off their savings from his job as General Manager of a pipe mill in Canada while Gommel attended seminary in Indianapolis, and while he lived off donations during the year at Campus Crusade for Christ. The rest of us were a bunch of wet-behind-the-ears kids who hadn't ever done anything to earn substantial money.

The realtors thought the Gommels were joking and so didn't do any follow-up. Besides, Leo's Market wasn't for sale, as they told the Gommels. Still, the next time Gommels came that way (the next week?), they stopped in again, with the same "We want to buy Leo's Market, and we don't have any money." My memory says that they stopped at both real estate offices and made this strange statement to all of the people.

Finally, one of the realtors decided that maybe the Gommels were serious, and so one of them went to the owner of Leo's Market, Danny Regensberg, and asked him if it was for sale. To their great surprise, Regensbergs were eager to sell the store and get out from under the burden.

The realtors were ready for the next time the Gommels came by, and they delivered the amazing news that yes, Leo's Market WAS for sale! Oh, my goodness, we all thought. Really?! We don't have a clue about running a grocery store that big!

For those of you who may not know where Leo's Market was: it was located in the Lucerne Valley Shopping Center, in the pinkish concrete block building now occupied by the new medical clinic and a couple of other organizations. The store took up that whole building. On the opposite side of the parking lot, where the liquor store now is, was a pharmacy, Mlinarovich Pharmacy, then Western Auto, and lastly Bauer Electric, where Harold Bauer fixed motors and stuff. His service came in handy several times in ensuing years. Remembering these people with whom we once had relationships makes a person think about life, death, and eternity. Most of those mentioned above have passed into that eternity. Let's hope that they are enjoying eternity with their Creator and not with His enemy!

So here we were with the challenge – is it from God? Do we or don't we take it on? It's just not our bag! Somehow it seemed that the push was from



God, and that this was where He wanted us, whether or not we felt comfortable or familiar with that kind of operation. Also, we knew next to nothing about Lucerne Valley itself except that it is beautiful desert and that God had something in mind here.

The Gommels got together with the Regensbergs and agreed to buy the business and lease the building, paying Regensbergs over time so that our lack of money was no issue. We began to operate the newly named Lucerne Valley Market on March 10, 1975. The Gommels themselves moved up here permanently, at first in a single wide mobile home at Inslee's trailer park, located behind Adelita's restaurant. (They quickly found out how porous the windows and doors of a mobile home are. The first big wind filled their little house with piles of the finest dust you've ever seen. Actually, you most likely have seen it, maybe even in the last few weeks as we've had some of those big winds!)

Bill and Jan Lembright stayed behind in Reche Canyon, to run the Hitchin Post, along with one other group member and one or two hired clerks. At first, I spent half of the week in Reche Canyon and half in Lucerne Valley. All of us would meet together on Sundays, alternating between the two locations to share the burden of the long drive among us all. Later on, I moved up here permanently, also. I and a couple of others rented an "apartment" at a house that is now a burned out shell, about ¼ mile west of the LV Shopping Center. The Gommels moved into the house attached to the apartment. (We built our current residence in 1978.)

It didn't take Gommel long to begin changing things around. The first thing he did was to move things around to make room for a single desk, stuck right there in the

middle of the floor! Danny had never had a desk, much less an office. He did paperwork in the back room, on cases, standing there while he did it. I remember working at that desk, feeling somewhat like an idiot sitting there in the middle of everything, but that didn't last long.

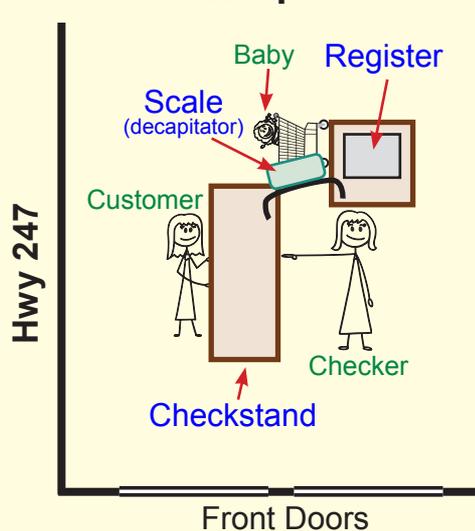
At the front wall of the store, to the left as one entered, there were miscellaneous displays, a couple of which were old refrigeration cases that no longer refrigerated and so were filled with bags and bags of candy. I believe one of the cases that did still work had produce in it. Gommel removed the "dead" cases and in the space made available, he built an office platform, not unlike the one at this present store, with room for 3 desks and a copier. It was open to the customers and had room for large bags of dog food stacked underneath. In 1979 we added a computer (God help us!) with accounting software being developed and written by a Victor Valley College

accounting professor. That turned into a "promises made but never completely fulfilled" nightmare! Ahhh, and that was just the beginning of the computer age. Now we have about 25, including registers, back office, ordering computers, etc.! Oh for the pre-computer days!

The store had two checkouts right at the front doors, with an interesting arrangement. The registers faced the west wall of the store, so that the cashier's back

was to the doors. The checkstand was parallel with the south wall so that the customers faced the store. The cart would enter in a gap between them, but the gap was bridged by a table with a scale on it. The checker couldn't see the cart, so beware anyone who had a baby in the baby seat! If the checker didn't notice the baby and pulled the cart through, well, that could be disastrous. I never did see baby's heads roll onto the floor, but I guarantee you, that was the next change to come. We cleared out the area immediately in front of the new office platform and brought in three checkstands that had no baby decapitators!

Checkstand set-up at old store



What other changes did Gommel make? That will have to wait for Part 5 to come.

Linda Gommel

ON THE PORCHES AT THE STORE

SATS, April 17, 24, and May 1, 10A-2P, SALE WORM RACE SPONSORSHIPS, by L.V.
Roadrunners. \$10 per worm, you name it! The racing worms are coming from all over the country. The race is May 7th.

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 April 21, 2021

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).

