

PEARSONVILLE

THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

By Janice Pearson

IN 1959, MY MOM AND DAD DECIDED TO "GO FOR IT" one more time again. They both must have shared the dream to succeed in a big way despite the fact that my mom did not want to move again. They started exploring their opinions by looking around and trying to plan and think things out. We had met property and real estate developers when we purchased the Palmdale property. I think they made good off the Palmdale property that my parents gave back to them by reselling it to somebody else. We started taking road trips with them again. As a young child I remember being at their home in the Los Angeles area and typing on a typewriter (actually playing on the typewriter) while Mom and Dad and the developer and his wife talked grown-up business in the other room.

The developer scheduled a road trip to Cartago/Olancho, California, to show us property they wanted to sell us. They were trying their best to convince us to settle in Cartago. We never purchased property from those real estate developers again and we did not buy property in the quaint town of Cartago. My dad and mom thought that Cartago would not be a good choice to start their business. On the way home from Cartago, just 35 miles south, Mom and Dad saw a sign in the middle of nowhere advertising, "Property for Sale." This was the beginning of Pearsonville.

I remember the excitement as my mom and dad wrote down the telephone numbers and their excitement as they drove back home to Sylmar, 130 miles further. They talked about what they wanted to do with the property. In those days, there were no such thing as 'cell phones' and they had to drive home to make the call, that ever-so-important call to ask details about the property that was for sale in the middle of nowhere.



Mom and Dad ended up buying forty acres, and they talked Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv Richardson (my mom's sister and brother-in-law who moved from Ohio) into buying 40 acres, also My mom and dad's enthusiasm must have been contagious about the possibilities of the desert property. However, Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv did not like living in the desert and they sold their 40 acres to our best family friends, Art and Gertrude Weiman. Years later, after Art's death, the Pearson family purchased the Weiman estate. As a condition of the sale, Art's widow, Gertrude, was given rights to live in her house until she dies. She is in her 80s now and still lives in the house that her husband built her although it is on Pearson land now.

I remember living in Sylmar on Stratton Street. It was wonderful years back then. We were living the American suburban dream of normal and average people with piano lessons, horseback riding, camping trips, fishing trips, vacations, riding bicycles, and roller skating on city streets. We had a very comfortable house and we bred American Kennel Club Smooth Dachshund dogs. We had modern appliances and plenty of food on the table in this nice modern house on a cul-de-sac.

We were living on Stratton Street but all the while Mom and Dad had plans for the 40 acres of desert. They wanted to open a fancy restaurant that served steaks and southern fried chicken in the middle of the desert for the weary traveler to stop, rest, and eat. So the question was how did they plan on doing that from 130 miles away?

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Daddy worked double shifts at Sloan Manufacturing Company making new items called PVC pipe and fittings. He liked working for Sloan's because they were good to him. He became good friends with Wayne Spears, who married Sloan's daughter. Wayne would take all the old broken machines that Sloan's did not want anymore and take them home. He would work all night sometimes to fix them. Wayne kept salvaging these broken machines until he had enough machines to go into business for himself. He became a lifelong friend of Mom and Dad and he became a successful businessman who now owns a multi-million dollar company, Spears Manufacturing in Sylmar, California. He started his business from the throwaways (trash) from another company

Mom worked by day at some place in San Fernando soldering electrical wires and teaching other girls to do the same work. And of course, Don and I were in school by day. We were living the American dream except my daddy was always missing because he was always at work or sleeping.

Daddy purchased a four-ton flatbed freight truck. He worked his double shifts at Sloans and when he got off of work, he would take his big truck to purchase cinder building blocks. He would bring the blocks home and he, along with Donnie, would hand unload the blocks into his two-car garage. When Daddy had enough blocks stored in the garage, he would work his double shift and come home again to hand load a truckload of blocks Daddy and Don would drive the load to the desert 130 miles north. They would unload the blocks by hand again and drive home to Sylmar, another 130 miles south. Daddy would drive all night back to the Sylmar house just in time to eat breakfast and go back to work (mostly without any sleep). If he was lucky, he might get one or maybe two hours of sleep. These were the work ethics of a very determined family. This is where we kids learned our work ethics also.

To this day, I do not see how my dad could do what he did on such little sleep. He seemed so tired all the time and very grumpy too. He had a violent temper and we tried not to make him mad to avoid his rage. Mom did her job by taking good excellent care of all three of us. She treated Dad like a baby and she loved him so much for the little time they were together. They always worked as a team. Always! There was never jealousy between them, no fights over money, no extravagant spending, and I remember my dad turning over his paycheck to Mom every week. Occasionally, Mom and Dad would get into a huge argument but I did not know why. They never argued over money. Most of the time, my mom and dad would sit at the dining room table and do the family finances together over morning coffee and make their future plans. Daddy didn't have to worry about mother or us. She did her Job so well. What a team my mom and dad were!

Sometime during this time frame Daddy accidentally grabbed a 440-electricity line at his work with Sloan's Manufacturing. He was burned very badly. His right hand was burned so bad that he lost two fingers and most of the use of his hand. He was handicapped after that. I was told his right arm was already weak from being shot up in WWII, and that is maybe why his hand got into the 440 line. Dad took some time off work to heal and when he recovered, went right back to work for Sloans Manufacturing.

Mom and Dad started making weekend trips to the Mojave Desert site and transported additional materials such as cement, camping supplies, building materials, tools, etc. We slept out on the ground in sleeping bags with the sidewinder snakes, scorpions, and other desert critters. Mother cooked on an open fire. Life was simple back then and it was like camping out. Daddy constructed a one-room shack to keep us out of the weather for our weekend visits. Soon, my daddy expanded the shack to a two-room shack. The rooms had no insulation at all, just wood boards with black tar paper over to help block the wind. The desert winters were

very cold, below freezing, with a wind chill factor that would cut through you like a knife. The summers were incredibly hot. The temperatures went from one extreme to the other.

Soon, my mom and dad had made another difficult decision, sell our beautiful suburban house on Stratton Street. The proceeds from the sale would finance the final push for making it a success in the desert. With the house sold, Daddy moved Mommy and us to the desert. Mom said about the move, "I'm moving to the desert and I'm not moving no more!" She held true to that statement. She never moved again.

We moved into that two-room shack that Daddy built for us. In the wintertime, we had a woodstove in the middle of the floor and our beds were set up around it for warmth. Mother would cook us food and heat water for bathing on that old woodstove. I remember eating a lot of soup and beans cooked on that woodstove to. We could not afford to buy firewood so we dug greasewood roots out of the dirt. This was a good job for me and I thought it was fun. I hiked to collect the firewood roots from the ground. They would burn all night. Greasewood roots are a very hard wood and are free for the digging.

During the summer, my dad cut square holes out of the plywood for windows to let the cool breeze into the shack at night and he hung tarps for shade. However, when the winter came again, Mother nailed wool blankets over the open-air windows to try and keep out the icy wind. We had a 'pee pot' so we would not have to walk all the way to the outhouse in the middle of the night. I learned what 'don't have a pot to piss in' really means.

Daddy would come to us on Friday nights to work the weekend and stay with us. On Friday nights, on the drive up, he would stop in Newhall and buy the best steaks and bring for us to eat. He would make that long drive and would get to us about 9:00 to 10:00 pm. Dinner was served right after his arrival with those steaks cooked on the old wood stove. After the steak feast, Donnie and I

would go to bed with full bellies in the shack that my daddy and mommy built. Nothing was ever said, but I am sure Mommy loved up my daddy really good after we kids went to sleep (Mom turned red and giggled when she read this).



L/R: Janice, Lucy, Andy, and Don Pearson

On Saturdays, we worked. Worked! Mother would make coffee for my daddy. After coffee was finished, the work began. Daddy would hand-dig footers for the big building. He would then mix cement by hand and haul water in fifty-gallon drums from Inyokern, California, 13 miles away Daddy would lay the blocks by hand. Mom worked too, only stopping to cook food for us to eat or get us refreshments. When Mom was finished, she went right back to work. We all worked nonstop through the weekend until it was time for Dad to return to his work in the San Fernando Valley Monday morning. I remember helping too. I hauled cinder blocks (one in each hand) and handed them to my daddy on a ladder for his immediate use in the

construction of the walls. Sometimes I would find sidewinders and rattlesnakes sleeping under the blocks! Daddy would always come and kill the snake before I would be bitten.

We had drilled a nice deep well but we did not have electricity to pump the well water. As a result, we had no running water; we hauled our water in the old truck in the 50-gallon barrels. For bathing in the summertime, we filled up an old bathtub sitting outside and we cleaned ourselves while wearing our bathing suits. Actually, it cooled us off in the summer evenings. We were creative back then.

While my daddy stayed in the San Fernando Valley, he stayed with Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv and he would give them money for room and board. Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv forgot to make Dad a house key. As a result, sometimes when he got off of work, there would be nobody home at Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv's house. Dad would sit outside the house and wait for one of them to return so he could go in and go to sleep. I want the reader to understand that my daddy was still working double shifts at Sloan Manufacturing at this time.

Surely this was hell for my dad! He was such an independent person. A Real Man! Yet, he was very dependent on his family. He was at the mercy of Uncle Belv and Aunt Ethel. That must have been very humbling and humiliating. He was separated from his family he loved so much and was working so hard with no affection or love being shown towards him except when he came to us on Friday night. And I want to stress here none of this would have been possible if my mommy and daddy did not give 110% each. They worked together so beautifully. They were a team.

I remember in 1960, my dad got a big Christmas bonus at work, it was \$500.00. That was a lot of money in those days. Daddy came up on Friday night as usual bringing his \$500.00 bonus. Saturday morning, he took us to Hazelton's Department Store in Ridgecrest. He bought us some needed warm clothes. However, at the time, I thought it was a fantastic luxury not a necessity. I remember he bought me a bright red beautiful wool coat. I was so proud. I felt I was the luckiest kid in the world having this beautiful coat. Mommy and Daddy always shared everything. Can you imagine this? When my mommy and daddy went to dinner, we all went. We never had a baby-sitter because we did everything as a family. They always shared everything they had. If Mommy and Daddy had steak, we all ate the same food. In some families, if the parents eat steak, then the kids are fed hamburgers or hot dogs. Not with our family. We always feasted on whatever my mom and dad ate.

After about six months of commuting, my dad quit Sloans and moved to the desert to be with us. He had been unhappy and I think he worried for our safety living in that shack in the middle of that big desert all by ourselves. Now, all four of us were living in that tiny shack. We lived there about two years because the building was so large and we did not have enough money to finish it quickly. Some of the local people there in the desert treated us poorly because they felt we were too poor to be associated with. This discrimination did not hamper my mom and dad's enthusiasm. They became stronger and more determined. They just kept forging forward and they never looked back. Over the years my mom and dad proved those people wrong for thinking badly of us.

We needed electricity but the electric company refused to allow us to have it, even though they ran their electric lines directly through our acreage. After all, we were living in a shack, and it looked like we were just fly-by-night people. So, Dad told Mom to take out the property deed. They both read the deed and lo-and-behold, there were no easements for the electric lines. The electric lines were on our property illegally. Dad came into the electric company's office in Ridgecrest and said, "Look, you have your electric lines on my property illegally. You have 48 hours to get them off or I will be cutting down the poles myself, personally." The manager of the electric company was shocked that my dad said this. He immediately told my dad that he

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could have whatever he wanted, just don't cut down the poles. The next day, we had electric crews out to our shack to hook up electric from the power lines for us. We then had our well pumping water, thanks to the electricity, and we had power to the shack. Lucy says, "Everything was a struggle and nothing came easy. We had to fight for everything we got."

The day finally came. We moved into half of the building that my dad had made into an apartment for us. The other half of the building was still designed to be a restaurant. However, people started breaking down in their cars and coming to us for help. Don and my dad would tow them in using a chain. Mom would go buy repair parts in Ridgecrest (50 miles round trip) and charged the customer \$10 for a road service fee. The customer would be back on the road in the shortest time possible. This went on 24-hours per day on call, seven days per week, until the late 1990s. Lucy continues, "The old Chevy V8's were bad on fuel pumps. I would go to town to get one for a broke down customer and I would buy one extra. This way, when the next Chevy customer broke down, I did not have to go to town again." Dad helped by rebuilding generators himself and would charge the customer \$10.00 for it.

Don started bringing in old cars that he got free or traded for. We did not have any money to buy cars so Don did what he could to bring in everything he could find. By 1963, Don was getting quite a collection of old cars going. When Don had brought in about 30 cars, we got a visit from the Inyo County Sheriff. He threatened to give us a citation for operating a junkyard without a license. Dad told Mom to go to town and get our first dismantling license from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The DMV gave my mom a really bad time because she was a beginner at the paperwork end of the business. They made her feel stupid. But she did get the license anyway. Once we were legal, that's when Dad started helping Don get more and more cars in by buying cars every month with his Army disability pension. A big push was made to have a "big wrecking yard" and the old junk cars just kept coming in. Andy was mad over the sheriff's citation and he wanted to pull in lots and lots of cars just to aggravate the County by having hundreds of cars brought in. That was the way Dad was!

We started using the old cars for parts to help customers get going by using used auto parts for repairs. One day, Dad knocked a garage door out of the back of the block building so the disabled vehicles could get into the shelter where Dad could fix them easier shelter from the 115-120 degree heat, from the high desert winds, and from other weather elements. One customer that broke down, Slim Pickins, the actor, was stranded in his Jeep. Dad fixed his Jeep in an hour or two and he was on his way again. After that, we had many actors and singers stop to visit or get their vehicles repaired. Many of them were quite famous. We had doctors, lawyers, vacationers, and people from every walk of life breaking down and getting fixed again. I don't remember one person that did not get their car fixed. My dad fixed them all.

We were very broke during this time. Money was so very tight for us. Mom started cleaning private houses in Ridgecrest for extra money. One particular lady had a new freezer and she did not like it because it was a chest-style freezer. Mom negotiated a price with her and worked it off by cleaning her house. Now we had a freezer of our own. Of course, my mom put the freezer to work. The Ridgecrest iceman refused to stop and sell us ice because he thought we were 'fly-by-night' people. So, Mom started freezing water in half-gallon cardboard milk cartons and sold these blocks of ice 25 cents each. Some of the neighbors started helping us by saving their milk cartons for her. The milkman and soda pop man also refused to stop so my mom had to get soda and ice cream from Ridgecrest and bring it home to sell. This was tricky because of the super hot temperatures in the summer. This made extra money for our family. Sometimes you do what you have to do.

We had men drive up big trucks of car seats to us from Los Angeles. They wanted to burn the car seats on our property. It seems that Kern and Los Angeles Counties refused to allow them to burn the seats. As a result, they crossed the Inyo/Kern County line and began burning their car seats. They were a hardworking bunch of men. They paid us \$1.00 per tier of seats. Most trucks held four tiers so we collected \$4.00 per truck-load. We would have four or five trucks per day burning their seats. After they were finished burning, they would stop and buy ice cream and soda before returning to Los Angeles with their seat springs. We did this for two years until Inyo County stopped us from burning. They said the China Lake Navy base was complaining about the smoke. However, the money enabled us to get through the rough times. We picked up burnt coins for years and years. To this day, I have a gold coin that was leftover from the seats. Along about this same time, my mom decided to apply for a job at Art and Helen's Cafe in Inyokern. One of her friends told her, "Don't bother, Art is real mean to work for." Mom went and applied anyway and went to work there. She found Art to be a fair boss. He was strict about what he wanted and he wanted things done his way. Art was a smart businessman. This is where Mom developed her taste for Art's homemade cheesecake. Mom would cut little slivers during her shift and eat it. Mom never had any trouble working there and she found Art was good to work for. The money that Mom was paid, along with her tips, took care of the groceries and utilities Mom would always bring home the leftover soup from the steam table and freeze it. That helped with the grocery bill too, our freezer was always full of ice and soup. Mom quit to help with the business one year later. Art and Helen, along with my mom and dad, became and stayed friends for the rest of their lives. Helen died several years back and Art moved to Lancaster to a retirement community.

Along about this same time, my dad took his income tax refund and purchased our first tow truck. This working vehicle started the tow business. Now Andy could tow cars into our garage when the calls came into our phone number of Little Lake 12, which was an 8-party line. Sometimes the phone lines were busy, so we got another phone line. That second line was also an 8-party line and the number was Little Lake 11.



We had some really rough times. I remember a cow getting hit by a car one night. The California Highway Patrol called my dad in the middle of the night. Dad went to the wreck and waited with the highway patrol for permission to "put down" the cow. The highway patrol shot the cow and my dad drug it home with the tow truck. My dad butchered that cow outside the back door with lights powered by extension cords. I remember that night. We set up the kitchen table outside and my dad started butchering. We did the freezer wrapping in the kitchen where there was lots of light. All that meat went in our chest freezer. I also remember eating that meat and it was tough. It didn't taste good either. It sounds gross, but sometimes you do what you have to do.

Don joined the Navy Seabees and went to Vietnam. Mom says she couldn't sleep because she was worrying about Don so much being in that war. Then I got married and moved away. Lucy states, "The 60s and 70s were two really hard decades. We really had it rough." Lucy continues, "The old tow truck was getting old, so in 1967 Andy purchased another one from Hildreth Motors in Ridgecrest. Hildreth's got a brand new one so Andy bought their used one. We had the only tow truck that could tow customers in and fix them the same day, no matter if it was in the middle of the night, on Sunday, or anytime. We went 24 hours per day and seven days per week on the business. In 1969 we were going strong. Andy and Don went to Los Angeles, paid cash for a brand new tow truck, and drove it home being able to buy that new truck using cash gave us a great amount of pride."

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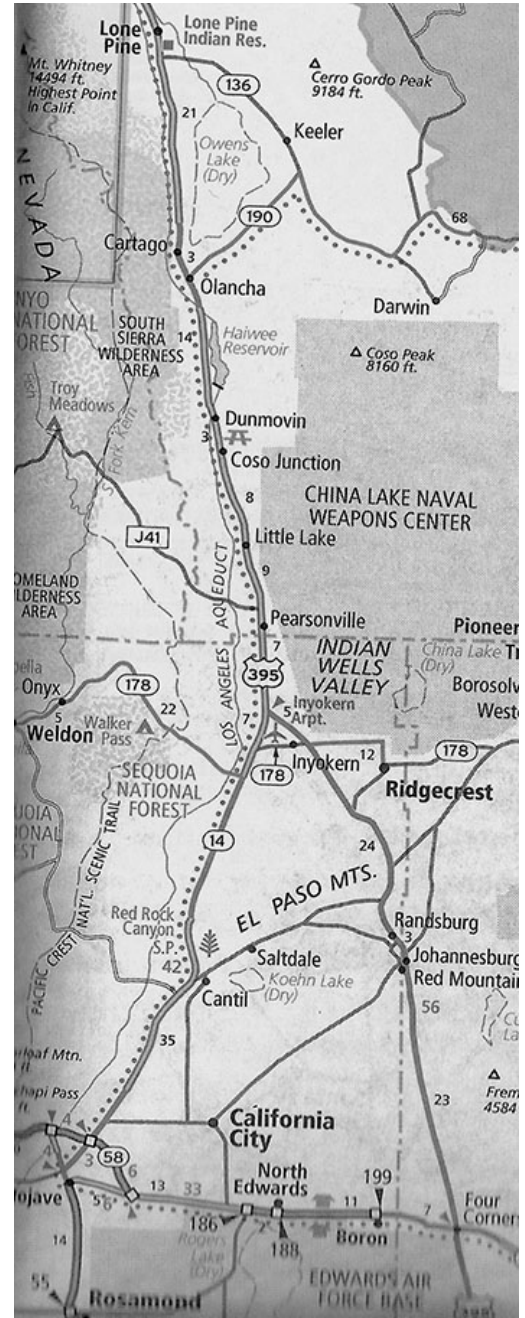
In 1969, the State was running a freeway through the property. However, they would not give us an "In and Out" street. The State had already developed their plans and did not want to budge. Mom and Dad started reading up on their rights. This was a little difficult for them to do because my dad had a third grade education and my mom had a sixth grade education. After knowing his rights, Daddy ran off the State officials. He was good at that. If my daddy did not like you, he ran you off. Against the advice of their attorney, my mom and dad refused to sign the contract until an 'In and Out' thoroughfare street for their business was redesigned into the master blueprints. This held up the freeway construction crews for two weeks. The State finally gave into Mom and Dad's demands, they signed the final contract papers and the freeway went through.

Working 16 to 20 hours per day was really hard. Mom says now, "It's hard to talk about it. The entire 1970s were a blur because we worked so hard." When Don returned home from the Seabees, he started working for us again. Don bought a doublewide mobile home and he moved his wife and first child David, in. Don started running the gas station and garage while we ran the parts store and we shared the tow truck responsibilities.

Dad and Mom built me a cafe, which I opened in the summer of 1971. I ran it for several months. However, I was very pregnant at the time and my then husband, Tom, forbid me from working. As a result, mother started running the cafe (in addition to the auto parts duties) and the cafe was later leased to Aunt Ethel and Uncle Belv. They ran it for 20 years. When I look back, I can see what a fool I was not to stand up to my husband and continue running that cafe myself. However, they say that hind-sight is better than foresight.

The Inyo County officials wrote an official letter to Rand McNally Map Company recommending the addition of Pearsonville to the travel maps. Then the County Supervisor recommended our small town be designated a township. This gave credit to Pearsonville for not only being a town, but it also gave us the right to have highway signs installed directing travelers to our town. This helped us become recognized tremendously.

In between all the other work he had to do, Don started a Motocross for motorcycle riders. There were a lot of motorcyclists participating in the races. However, there were many people who were getting severe injuries. As a result, Don shut down the motocross permanently. He then started a racetrack in 1975. He worked hours and hours and hours grading it down and getting it ready. We all, as a family, worked with Don to help make the racetrack a success. Don's wife, Diana, got a job at the Little Lake Post Office as Postmaster, and that extra money helped out the family financially. That Postmaster job was a really big help for their family. By the late 1970s, the racetrack was running at full throttle thanks to the whole family pitching in. Nobody ever got severely injured at the racetrack. Pearsonville



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was in its glory in those days with the racetrack, gas station, parts store, restaurant, 24-hour towing, garage, trailer park for 20 families working at Coso Geothermal, and a general store all operating.

Most of the planning for the businesses or houses was done over coffee at the breakfast table. My mom and dad had been living in a 10 by 50 foot trailer. It was really cramped. Lucy recalls that one morning Andy got up and said. "Lucy, do you know what I'm going to do today? I'm going to build us a house." Lucy told him, "That's the best word I've heard for a long time." Andy did just that. He drew plans on a napkin at the breakfast table that morning and he had the napkin made into blueprints. He then proceeded to build a 2,000 square foot house totally by himself. At one point, he had the walls up but did not have a roof. He did not ask, but I offered to loan him enough money to put the roof on. Dad paid me back later I felt good that I could help him.

Dad finished the house about three years later. He even used wood paneling and closets out of the trailer they were living in to make gorgeous knotty pine bedroom closets in the new house. Daddy went to a yard sale and purchased a hanging chandelier for \$2.00 which he hung that night with a chrome car speaker cover mounted to the ceiling. It looked great! Everything they did, they did with cash no mortgage. I was always proud that I could help with the roof. You know, sometimes family must help family whether it is lending money, lending muscle, or just lending an ear. Your family is with you from the beginning to the end. Family loyalty is a must. You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family.

In the late 1970s, Mom started collecting hubcaps. She really became serious at it. I remember one time she purchased an entire truckload of hubcaps. Daddy came to me and said, "Janice, I think your mother has lost her mind." I knew better because mom would think of an idea and she would not stop until that idea or dream was realized. Why, I remember one time she made homemade burritos and told me they were in the freezer I opened the freezer and there was a tray full of burritos but the tray was a huge upside-down Cadillac hubcap. It was at that moment that I knew my mom was really serious about hubcaps.

In the 1980s my mom and dad sold the business to my brother. Mom kept her hubcap business and Don concentrated on developing the Ridgecrest yards. My mom and dad kept the Pearsonville yards going strong. My husband, Warren, and I opened two mini-mart grocery stores (one in Pearsonville and one in Olancha). Daddy decided to retire but Mom kept working for Don managing the Pearsonville businesses.

After much campaigning, the U.S. Postal Service gave Pearsonville a contract post office for several years. Dad built the Pearsonville Post Office building and installed the post office boxes. He donated it to the exclusive use of the U.S. Postal Service. Mother and I donated our time to handle all the work and the mail. We paid the utilities and all expenses associated with a post office. However, after several years, we had hoped that the Postal Service would give us a real post office. That did not happen, and the contract was closed. All of the local residents were sad that the U.S. Postal Service did not see fit to give us a real post office instead of a contract post office. We put forth our good faith and were hoping the U.S. Postal Service would do the same as they said they would. There were plenty of customers for the post office mail flow, but it was not going to happen. All of the people that consider themselves part of Pearsonville must go to Inyokern (13 miles south) to do their post office business. Some people coming out of Kennedy meadows have to travel a total of 40 miles to go to the post office. Nowadays, with all the people moving to the north side of Brown Road, the U.S. Postal Service may reconsider a post office. Possibly, if they were approached again from the locals, the post office may allow us a post office. This would take an intense letter writing campaign. However, it would be a good thing for Pearsonville to have it's own post office and a zip code. Well worth the effort.

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In the 1990s, Mom had all of her hubcaps outside in the weather. Don told her he would someday build her a big building for them. He did exactly what he said he would do and put up a 50 x 240 foot warehouse, which now houses Hubcap Lucy's collection of hubcaps. In 1995, Don sold one of his Ridgecrest properties to a national rental chain so he could take the extra money and build the modern gas station and truck stop in Pearsonville. At the same time, he started building a community park for all to enjoy in Pearsonville.

After all these 40+ years have passed, my daddy worked for 40 years in Pearsonville and kept his family close by his side Daddy never moved again. As the 21st Century has arrived, Pearsonville is still thriving with the addition of new homes. Mother has been on many television programs featuring her hubcap collection and has gained notoriety for being called 'The Hubcap Queen.' Some of the shows were "Travels with Harry Smith", "To Tell the Truth", "Bill Cosby Show", ABC and NBC news documentaries, and many more. Mother has also done several television commercials. There have been movies filmed in Pearsonville. Whoopi Goldberg and Jim Belushi came here to film "Homer and Eddie." Pearsonville has also suffered its losses by the death of my dad in 1998 and Don in 2006. Mom and I are still here in Pearsonville and we are still going strong. We hope to be here for many years to come. Check back with us in a few years, we'll be glad to welcome you to Pearsonville.

