

How Many Anniversaries Are There, For Pete's Sake?

OK, if you insist that it's only one, the year a business started from nothing, then the anniversary of this store (and business enterprise) is July 7, 1967. At that time, about 10 of us were meeting together in a house in Reche Canyon (near Loma Linda), having left institutional religion and with the desire to follow God with abandon, no holds barred. Knowing no better, we set ourselves up as a mini-church, with typed bulletins, hymnals, and even a radio program for a short time!

However, my dad, Ernie Gommel, became restless, since he was the leader (and Pastor or Minister, though he disliked the title) and had little to do for such a small group. Having been a rising executive in the steel industry just a few years before, and a top seminary student after that, he was used to the pressure to "do the job", and he was highly organized and ready to go. The early days of this little group of Followers were anything but that.



Gommel and the others decided to ask God what he might do with his time to serve Him. They approached a local realtor, Fred Vessels, who had his office on a lot between Reche Canyon Mobile Estates (a retirement community) and a little grocery store. In his high crackling voice he motioned toward the little store next door and told them it was for sale.

A store? Really? "God, is that what You want us to do?" they asked. Well, yes, that seemed to be what He wanted them to do. Ernie and Barb Gommel became the proprietors of that little store without the slightest idea how to run one. Fortunately, in 1967 the choking government regulations and micro-management we now suffer had not yet been developed, so the Gommels were free to poison customers, mistreat employees, and pollute the earth, right? Yeah, right!

The store was sparsely merchandised, so the first thing the Gommels did was to go to



Smart and Final in Colton and buy \$1000 of stuff to put on the shelves. S&F delivered it, they put it out, and it was off to the races.

Over time, the little group began to see how God was using this store as His mission. They were able to serve the seniors who walked from the mobile home park to the store for exercise and relaxation, and also the residents of Reche Canyon when they needed to stop by for a couple of items and good conversation. I worked at that store during my summers off from college and enjoyed it

thoroughly, and after graduating, joined that mission permanently.

Over time, the Hitchin Post expanded products and services to include two self-service gas pumps (an early version), a tiny wand car wash, hay and feed, hardware (yes, a small section because Bill Lembright had to start small to learn hardware from scratch), a snack shop that had a full service soda fountain, tires, and auto repair. All were added as customers expressed the need or desire.



Second anniversary: March 10, 1975. Gradually as the Hitchin Post grew, and the little group gained a few members, they all became restless to find responsible work for each person to do. Again, they asked God to show them what He wanted. We found the answer from the Gommels' habit of returning from their day off in Fawnskin down the desert side of the mountain. Here was this little town with a couple of markets, and maybe we could buy one of them. The Gommels approached a couple different realtors with the statement that we wanted to buy Leo's Market but we had no money (and we didn't!)

A few weeks of this passed, and one of the realtors decided that the Gommels were serious, so they asked



the owner if Leo's Market was for sale. To their surprise, it was! Financing was arranged, and on March

10, 1975, Leo's Market became Lucerne Valley Market.

Much work was needed to transform it into the kind of store we had in mind: turning gondolas 90°, building an elevated office in the front, replacing the two antiquated checkstands with three more standard types; removing old, dead refrigeration cases being used for candy and other non-refrigerated items, and more.

When that business had tripled and the 5-year lease plus 2 more years ran out, we found ourselves without a store, but plans to build a new store.

Third anniversary. Drawing on all of the experience Gommel had in business, plus his own intelligence and drive, Gommel over-

saw the design and building of the present store, but it was only half as big as it is now. In one of the wettest and coldest winters in memory, we fought the elements to get the roof on just before the first rain, enabling us to continue the work inside.



On Thanksgiving weekend, 1982, we held the groundbreaking out where the large water tank is, and we even had a visiting dignitary. Sheriff Floyd Tidwell arrived from down below by helicopter to dig the first shovel of dirt. It was cold and windy, but an occasion to celebrate.

Just 4 months later, on March 26, 1983, we opened the store. We had extended our finances about as far as possible; it was a time of recession, when interest rates were 20%; First Mountain Bank was an infant in its second or third year and stuck their necks out to finance



our store. Many improbable things came together to make the store come together to serve our wonderful desert community. "Improbable" is the way God seems to work, making it interesting to watch what He does!

Fourth anniversary. You'd a thunk that Gommel would rest on his laurels and pass the remaining years of his life enjoying this remarkable achievement, but then, you'd a thunk wrong. By 1990, business had grown about 10% per year, and we believed we should build the second half of the store, which idea had been anticipated and de-

signed into the original building. Without specially closing even for an hour, we built the second half and remerchandised it. Just in time for the economy to go south. Just as we increased overheads and mortgage payments, the Gulf War started, George Bush I's tax increases slowed the economy, George Air Force Base in Victorville closed, real estate values tanked, and Southern California entered a long period of economic stagnation, which put the High Desert into a recession/depression that lasted past the year 2000. Talk about a lesson in the need for thankful spirit and for faith in GOD, not in a successful, comfortable business!

As you can see, I cheated a little on this last anniversary. Yes, building the second half was a huge undertaking worthy of a grand opening, and maybe we held one at the time. If we did, I don't remember it or the exact date.

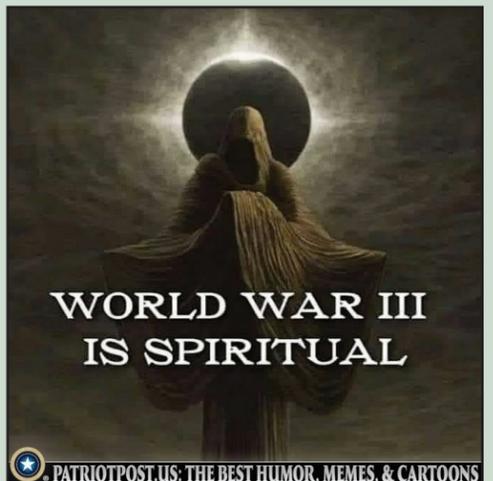
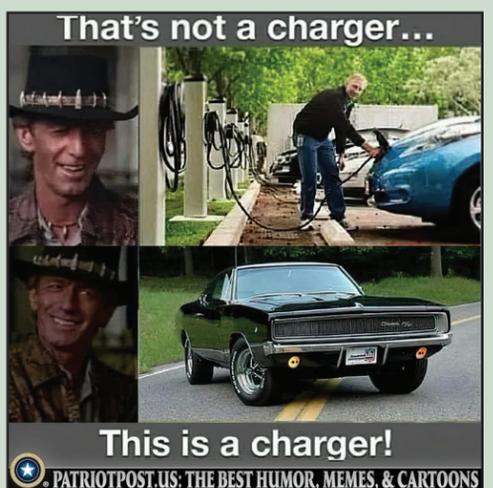
What does matter is that all of these anniversaries reflected our desire over the years to serve God in the mission He assigned us. As of this date, March of 2024, we have been doing the store thing for 50 years (!), without accumulating any of the "profits" (Profits? What are profits??) for ourselves personally, despite the rumors you may have heard about Gommel's gold buried in the back yard. If there is such a thing, neither we nor any of our dogs have been able to unearth it!

At present, we live in unsettled, dark times. All of the foundational principles we older generations grew up with have been turned upside down. Existential threats are growing inside our country to the point that we no longer feel safe in our homes (except in Lucerne Valley, which is somewhat safer). We at the store look forward to harder times along with the rest of all of you.

May God protect us, lead and guide us, and may we do our best to listen, surrender, obey, commit our lives to him. We will do our best to keep the light of the Spirit shining brightly. Hopefully you can keep His light bright in your lives, also!

Linda Gommel

On The Lighter Side of Serious Stuff . . . from the Web



Lucerne Valley Residents:
HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION
March 23, 2024
9 a.m. to 12 p.m.



Behind Lucerne Valley Fire Station
33269 Old Womans Spring Rd
(Enter through gate on Ladera Rd)

- We **DO** Accept...
- Antifreeze
 - Auto & Household Batteries
 - Computer Monitors, TVs
 - CPUs, Printers
 - Fluorescent Tubes
 - Home-Generated Sharps/Needles in approved container
 - Household Cleaners
 - Medications – separate liquids from solids (excluding controlled substances)
 - Microwave Ovens
 - Motor Oil/Used Filters
 - Musical Cards, Clothes Irons
 - Paint Products
 - Pesticides & Fertilizers
 - Space Heaters, Stereos, Radios
 - Telephones
 - VCRs/DVD Players

- We **DO NOT** Accept...
- Asbestos
 - Business/Commercial Wastes
 - Explosives
 - Medical Wastes other than sharps
 - Radioactive Wastes
 - Reactives
 - Tires
 - Appliances, Furniture, Air Conditioner, etc.
 - Wastes from fore-closed properties & non-profit organizations

For questions or more information, contact:
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Household Hazardous Waste Program
1.800.OILY.CAT
(1.800.645.9228)
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