

## THE WIENIE TRUCK

I knew that it was an abomination the first time I set eyes on it . Franklin Driscoll was saying that I would be assigned a two hundred mile route, and that I'd get a commission on everything over three hundred dollars per week. All the while I was looking over his shoulder and wondering if that damn thing would fit in my garage with a nine foot wiener stuck up on the back of it, painted red and mounted on a GM chassis.

I took the job because it didn't look like the Clugg Body Works would be calling me back there any time soon, even after my fifteen years as a loyal machinist .

Ross Burnheart, our union rep and a deacon from over at Waymire Penecostal, called us together in the cafeteria while they were setting out the bowls of green jello and said the bosses had give him the news about our "limited layoff," whatever the hell that meant.

"The Japs didn't get us this good at Pearl Harbor, boys," he said. "We are purely licked. I done seen the writing on the wall. Nobody wants good old American cars with the doors we make here at the body works. If I was you, I'd be lookin' for steady work

and ripping off the grill of all them little rice beaters you see parked at Walmart 'cause that is the kind of loyalty that has took the bread right off your kids' plates. I think you will remember 1981 as a year when America lost its balls."

So I drove it home, the Driscoll Hog Dog truck, right up the main street of Clugg, Kentucky, grinding the gears and watching people's mouths hang open like they was trying to catch flies.

My oldest girl, Nona Jane, come out of the porch and damned near choked to death on a Nu Grape Soda when she seen me turn in the drive way.

Beckah Sue, my wife of twenty-one years, come out on the porch and put her hands on her hips.

"Jimmy, what are you doing with your righteous ass sitting up there in a truck which looks like it has got a giant penis stuck up on the back of it?"

Well, it went on half the night, and Beckah Sue did everything short of taking the kids and that green Sears suitcase and going home to her mama's house in Sedalia. But I just drank me another cold Dr. Pepper and said that a man has got to do what he has got to do to feed his family. Finally, faced with bankruptcy and humiliation before God and China, she agreed to the job as long as I got me a tarpaulin and covered up that big weinie every night. It wasn't going to keep her quiet, but it might keep her from going snap goggling off into the wilderness , running naked and scarring her flesh. There was no reasoning with the Colder women 's streak of stubbornness.

Next morning, I drank me three cups of Maxwell House , strong and black. Beckah Sue give me a half-ass kiss, and I went off in the wienie truck to try and keep us out of the welfare line.

At the warehouse in Owensboro, a black man named Dred Scott Jefferson loaded me up with wienies and cold cuts and ignored me when I tried to make conversation. His family had moved in thirty years before when the Peabody Coal

Company hired scabs to try to break the union. Everybody knew the Jeffersons were defensive about their heritage, so I ignored his ignoring me and got out my route map, listening to Willie on the radio , singing "On the Road Again."

I sold wienies like a house afire that first day. It seemed like every little jot em down store I stopped at was run by a distant relative or a cousin twice removed. At the end of the day, I calculated that I had raked in eighty dollars commission, never mind my hourly wage.

I parked the wienie truck behind the garage and put a tarp over it I had picked up at the K-Mart over in Struppvile. I was bone tired , having driven over two hundred miles that day , mostly over winding two lanes, up one hill and down the other, through about thirty or forty hair pin curves calculated to catch a drunk off guard and make his wife a rich widow.

Beckah Sue had put some meat loaf and mashed potatoes with sauerkraut in the oven. She left a note saying that she and my daughters had gone to a tent revival eight blocks over by the side of Brindle Creek sponsored by the Holy Message of the Word Church of Christ. They had a traveling evangelist who had once played bass for Hank Williams or said he had anyway which amounted to the same thing since nobody in Clugg ever knew Hank Williams to ask him about it.

I got me a Dr. Pepper and took the meat loaf plate in front of the t.v. and watched Richie and Potsie try to score with a pretty blond at Arnold's. She had the kind of body that would make a man write bad checks, and I begun to idly think about Myrna Sue Goodpastor, Leroy's girlfriend who he left out in that trailer on Reese Ridge while he went in Oklahoma to work on an oil rig as a roughneck which is what he had done before he worked at the Body Works beside me there on the line.

What I started thinking about just then was that Myrna had always been kind of partial to me, and we had once played each other like harps on a Methodist hayride

several months before I met Beckah Sue and married her whereupon she commenced to gain weight like it was some kind of contest she wanted to win real bad.

Now while I am writing this down, it is hard for me to calculate exactly how things happened after that and turned out how they did. All I am certain of is that the next thing I know, like I was sewed into somebody's else's skin, I was on the phone talking sweet nothings to Myrna and asking her if I could come out there and check on her plumbing.

"Jimmy Ed, you are just talking as dirty as a sixth grader," she said, but she was giggling when she said it

Well, truth be told, although it is not something that I am proud of and would want written down in the family Bible, I took the wienie truck right out there on Reese Ridge that night and Myrna Sue offered to show me the new velour picture of Elvis she had hanging back in her bedroom. Then I came straight home, ate some more meatloaf and was asleep in my stratolounger when Beckah Sue and the girls dragged in, squealing and hallelujahing , all spicy and glittery with the Holy Ghost.

"Jimmy Ed, he is a pure dee wonder," Beckah Sue reported to me, "that preacher is. He calls himself Son of Luke the Drifter, you know, after Hank Senior. His real name is Calvin Swears. but he said he don't, swear that is, which I think was just a little joke. But he could stomp and dance and call the Devil by his very name, and the Dewdrop Girls were singing "Abide With Me." And Linda Murchinson threw herself on the altar and asked everybody's forgiveness for running over Looney Bell Hargrove's Pekinese Cujo last summer. She had never told anybody, and now she had to get it out in the clear. And Looney Bell hugged her neck, and said how she missed Cujo, but he was getting incontinent and mean and had bit her grandson Worthmore twice and she might have had to shoot him anyway."

"Well, ain't that nice," I said, which is about all she normally requires.

She went into the kitchen and fixed herself a bologna and cheese sandwich and got herself a big RC and came in to watch the news about a group of teenage Satanists who were burning cats up at the French Lick cemetery and spray painting pentagrams on the interstate over pass.

"Have you got the wienie truck covered?" she asked me .

I told her that it was taken care of, and then I mentioned the eighty dollars worth of commission and threw in several side stories I had picked up about relatives, like Nona Hargrave granny falling down the cellar steps and Luther Pendrick's cow giving birth to a two headed calf. Just the kind of stories that Beckah Sue likes to hear about in-laws and out laws and recent luke warm acquaintances.

We went into the bedroom and I turned on that little Sears window air conditioner. She was sawing logs in five minutes, and I lay there thinking of Myrna's young supple body and how early six o'clock was going to be.

I drove the wienie truck for another two weeks, having good days and bad. It was hard to sell to the big stores because they had regular suppliers. It was easier to sell to the old maids and widows who run them ten shelf bologna and crackers operations because they kept watching out there to that giant dong of a wienie nestled there on my truck. Then they would look at me and then back to the wienie truck and then back to me, and I have to confess that they were making connections between their brains and their ovaries , their faces getting all flushed. Finally, they'd hang out the closed sign and take me into the storage room and pray over me while they put their hands in some pretty odd places and asked the same of me.

When I mentioned it to Harve, he give me a shit eating grin and a wink.

When I mentioned it to Dred Scott Jefferson, he just shook his head and said something about a "cracker peckerwood."

I am inclined to think that the wienie truck would have been the ruination of my life and well being, given that Myrna Sue had called twice about fixing her plumbing. This caused Beckah Sue to give me a witchy eye . But it was Son of Luke the Drifter who was my salvation in the end.

The revival had been dragging on a week too long, and the crowd was mostly sickened out on Hank Williams stories. Son of Luke the Drifter had healed most of the goiters in the community and revived a number of cripples who stumbled around with his help a few steps before they collapsed in the saw dust, laying there kicking like turtles on their backs. Then he seen me over on Wheeler Street one day while I was headed home, and he was driving his old Pink Lincoln to the tent revival.

"How you?" he said up to my open window.

"Ain't bad. I'm the wienie man," I told him.

"You know what that thing looks like, don't you?"

"I been told," I admitted.

Then the light changed, and he pulled away, but that truck had changed his fortunes, and he had what he needed to spark up the works and get out of town on a high note. That preacher had seen the light, or must I say, he had seen the wienie . He knew his crowd was an eighty-twenty mix older females and young girls, and he knew what they had been warned against and talked to about and discussed and rehearsed and fought past every day since their first blood.

THAT OLD BEAST IN MAN was what he called it. And he set that group on fire on a dull ass Thursday night. The beast in man turned out to be that old animal that drove men crazy, frothing dogs at noon on the public square- LUST.

All up and down a seven block hilly section of town, you could hear him and them holy stompers groaning and moaning and shrieking. Any man with a testicle to his name

could feel it shriveling up and trying to find a place to hide because the noises we were hearing primitive and scary, noises of menace.

Beckah Sue and the girls came home that night, a white hot fever on their skins.

I trucked out early the next morning before my family got up. stopped and got me an Egg McMuffin with a giant size coffee. As I drove by out near Reese Ridge, I happened to notice that Leroy had come home . His seventy-nine Thunderbird was parked there right by the coon dog run. I was hoping that Myrna Sue had not been at the revival and felt a desperate need to confess a lot of things better left unconfessed.

I guess I didn't move more than sixty dollars worth of wienies all day. For one thing, the clutch on the wienie truck was starting to slip which can play hell with your progress on two lane blacktop hill country. For another, I was starting to feel rode hard and put away wet. I spent a lot of time parked back up little fishing roads there close by one creek or another where I drank Fall City beer and pitched acorns into the water. You might say I was having moments of reflection and minor remorse. That old life at the Body Shop, hanging them doors and eating Hostess Twinkies and telling jokes to the boys around lunch table seemed like a wonderful thing, never mind that I had complained a lot about it while I was there.

When I got home that night and parked the wienie truck, I didn't even bother with the tarp. The Fall City beer and the fatigue and the hopeless look in those women's eyes had wore me down to a nubbin. I just went inside and got me a Hungry Man Swiss Steak dinner which I ate in the Strato Lounger while Mork and Mindy tried to sell pizzas off the back of a Harley hog. I was asleep in half an hour, dreaming of being lost at sea while Beckah Sue and Son of Luke the Drifter stood looking down at me , praying and singing, but refusing to throw me a life line.

When I first heard the noise, it sounded like a hundred crazy banshees. Once I come completely awake, I got a strong whiff of something burning. My first thought was

that some kids had been smoking in the garage, and I was up in a second, hoping to save my John Deere riding mower.

When I reached the back porch, I seen that the revival had moved right on up the hollow. Son of Luke the Drifter had brought his troops into combat, and there was nothing more clearly the enemy than that wienie truck with a giant penis mounted on it. They were dancing and screaming and speaking in tongues. When I saw Beckah Sue using a Bic lighter, I knew what was going to happen, never mind what I did or didn't do, so I went in and got me a Dr. Pepper and sat there on my back porch in Clugg, Kentucky, while the preacher and his anti-lust females torched the wienie truck.

It give quite a whoosh when the diesel tank went, and for a while, it looked like the forces of darkness were being routed, what with Beckah Sue and the women whooping and hugging while that preacher slapped a cheap guitar and sang "When the Saints Go Marching In."

After twenty five minutes, the volunteer fire department showed up, and they were having some hand to hand combat with the anti-lusters when I give up and went to bed.

The next morning, I called in to the Driscoll Hot Dog company to report that the wienie truck was burned down to four hot, smoldering rims. They said that they had insurance and then added that I was fired. I told them that they could kiss my ass and call it chocolate. Then I hung up and went in to eat some Wheaties.

I did some fishing and hunting for a few days over in Pikeville with a cousin of mine who is a Greyhound driver. He took me to a place called the Bon Bon Club where this woman named Bonnie Sue could twirl her tassels both ways at once while she bumped and danced. I told her that I was impressed , and she said would I buy her a five dollar drink.

"Five dollars a drink is a lot of talent," I said.



"I'm a lot of woman," she said.

I went and sat in the restroom in one of them little stalls for an hour and read on the wall all sorts of stories about a man named Drexel who could perform services I had never heard of before.

Becka Sue called the next morning to say that Ross Burnhart stopped by to say that the whole work force of the Hebbardsville Body Works was being called back from lay-off and that we had a new three year contract.

"Well, that's good news," I told her.

"The girls and me miss you, Jimmy Ed," she said.

"Well, that is even better news," I told her.

I came on home, and on Monday morning, she kissed me good-bye, and I got in my pickup with my old red lunch box loaded with two bologna sandwiches, a Dr. Pepper and some Hostess Twinkies.

It has been three months now. I have never mentioned the wienie truck, although I have noticed that big black burned out spot near the garage every time I mow back there with my John Deere riding mower.

Son of Luke the Drifter was arrested in a restroom at the Greyhound Station in Evansville, Indiana, for making indecent proposals to a fourteen year old boy named Wilburn Cantrell. I cut that piece out of the paper and put it up on that refrigerator, but it was gone the next day.

Leroy is working next to me on the line at the Body Shop, and he talks about his coon dogs and buys me a beer every Friday night at the Come Back Inn, so I figure that Myrna Sue has developed some amnesia of her own.

I seen Dred Scott Jefferson over near the interstate the other day, hitchhiking, and I stopped and give him a lift to the Marathon Station. He was real cordial and didn't even complain about my George Jones tape.

I have looked temptation in the mouth and come out whole on the other side, and  
I think I am a lucky man. It don't do to hold a grudge.

In the words of that folk song, I think this has been a lesson to us all.