

Biography of Herbert Cleon Schirmer

Herbert Cleon Schirmer was born at the family home in Muncie, Indiana, on December 7, 1925. His parents were Herbert and Lela Faye Smiley Schirmer. Cleon was an only child, but grew up with lots of cousins in the area. His father was a butcher at a local shop but later went to work at the then very large and well-known Kuner Packing Company of Muncie.

During his school years, Cleon's family moved about the area from time to time. As a result, he attended several Muncie area schools, including some one-room schools in the nearby farm communities. While very young, he started earning his spending money by working on local farms. He began by working with horse and mule teams but soon had the pleasure of driving a 10-20 Farmall tractor with steel wheels. The farms he worked on were family farms with some of the produce for market. The crops included corn, beans, alfalfa, etc. Cleon remembers the days before corn picking was done by machines. The pickers used a gloved hand with a sharp hook on the back to cut the corn off the stalks.

The Great Depression began while Cleon was still a small child; so he remembers the difficult lives many people lived during the time. He recounted the fact that his dad and a friend of his dad collected loose coal from the railroad and the rail cars to sell for cash money and to use in the coal-fired stoves at home. Cleon's family had no electricity in the home until he was about twelve or fourteen years old. He was in high school when the family had its first telephone installed. The Schirmer six-party number was 4673.

Cleon had his sixteenth birthday on December 7, 1941, on the same day Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the nation entered World War II. Muncie was a bustling factory town before and during the war years. The availability of jobs played into his hands when he had a run-in with a school coach causing him to quit school in the eleventh grade. He immediately went to work with his first real job at Warner Gear, which made transmissions for army trucks and Jeeps. Muncie also boasted the Ball Brothers Glass Company, which made, and still does make, the famous Ball canning jars. Cleon worked for the company loading boxcars with cases of jars.

The rationing of gasoline during the war was not a serious problem for Cleon since he did odd jobs for people who gave him extra gasoline ration stamps, which he used to purchase fuel to keep his two Model As running. Another auto he owned at one time was a 1930 Roosevelt Straight-8, which was made by the Marmon Motor Car Company of Indianapolis, Indiana. It was named after Theodore Roosevelt and was intended to be priced as an "affordable" automobile, but it was produced only in 1929 and 1930. On one occasion Cleon went to a salvage yard and obtained a rear axle from a Whippet auto for his Roosevelt. Unfortunately, since the car would be worth a fortune today, his mother gave the car away to a local junk dealer.

In 1946, at the age of twenty, Cleon married Donetta Osborne. He met Donetta at a church function and was immediately attracted to her. He told a friend he was going to ask her for a date to the near-by drive-in theater. His friend told him he wouldn't, but he did, and she accepted. Apparently, she didn't share the attraction since she told a friend, "I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth," but she soon changed her opinion. The couple soon had two daughters, Joyce Elaine and Debra Lois. Joyce moved to Decatur, Arkansas, after she married and lived there for about thirty years until

she recently moved back to Muncie. Joyce worked at Little Debbie all those years and on weekends at the Taffy House in Branson, Missouri. She recently moved back to Muncie. Debra has always lived in the Muncie area. Cleon has three granddaughters, four great grandsons, and three great granddaughters.

At the time of his marriage in 1946, Cleon worked for a while for Untied Parts, an auto parts company with several stores in the Muncie area. He then began work at a local bakery where he worked in the bakery and on the road making deliveries throughout nearby towns. His bakery truck driving led to his main career of interstate trucking. His truck driving career lasted for thirty years with stints with several trucking companies. Among them were Craig Trucking, Interstate Motor Freight, Renners Express, and Yellow Freight. He sometimes worked for more than one company at a time by calling a company for available deliveries while he was off from his main company. He drove in twelve states during his career in trucking.

After retiring from trucking, he has worked at several occupations to keep busy. For a time he drove limos in Muncie, just missing out on driving for David Letterman, who, as a graduate of Ball State University in Muncie, is a noted local personality. Another driver took the call and made the drive. Perhaps his favorite retirement job was delivering tractors for a local Muncie Ford tractor dealership. He also worked as a tractor mechanic for the company. He went full circle in his work career when he went back to work for Warner Gear for about four years.

After his wife passed away in 2007 after almost sixty-one years of marriage, Cleon moved to the Gentry, Arkansas, area to be near one of his daughters, He joined Tired Iron four years ago and has been a hard worker for the club ever since. He is most noted for his diligent work in placing signs at all approach points for our club grounds. He also has several tractor projects in the works. All of us who get to spend time with Cleon are pleased that he chose our club as a place to use his talents and to show his enthusiasm for old iron.



Cleon at the 2010 Decatur Festival



Cleon's Farmall