

## PROFILE: A Special Man Making Special Bikes

Remember that special red Schwinn you finally got after saving your money for months? Or maybe it was your brother's bike—purple with speckles of glitter and a "banana" seat—that you coveted. Perhaps, it was a hand-me-down model badly in need of a fresh coat of paint.

No matter. Like every other kid who ever owned a bicycle, you learned quickly that what counts isn't what a bike looks like but what it can do. It gives a kid freedom.

Multiply that sense of liberty by a thousandfold and you begin to understand what a bike means to Jerry Clark of Denton, Mont. Jerry was born with spina bifida. He has never walked. He has never run. He has never jumped, skipped, or leaped.

But he does ride a bike. Retired farmer and fix-it man Charles "Bud"

Lee, Sr., also of Denton, made sure of that.

Jerry's bike cruising began a short time after his mother, Barbara, saw an article in an antiques magazine about a bicycle powered by hand. She immediately thought of Bud. Almost all of Denton's 356 residents know this man's talent for fixing or creating anything made of metal.

Although retired from farming, Bud still works full time. He goes to his downtown shop almost every morning to repair lawnmowers, toasters, or whatever his friends and neighbors bring him.

Says Bud, "When the kids get bike troubles, they come to me." Designing a bike for then four-year-old Jerry, the only child in town in a wheelchair, was an appropriate task for the unofficial grandfather of Denton's children.

"I put a crank on top where the handlebars were and made it so he could drive it with his hands," Bud explains. "They called it his 'Hot Wheels.'"

"Being able to get out and go on the bike gives him a little more freedom," Barbara adds.

Although Jerry rides with the other boys and girls in town, he often explores the sidewalks and backroads by himself.

"If he needs to turn around in a tight corner, he grabs hold of the front tire and pulls it," Barbara explains. "That brings him around."

In the 10 years since building the first one for Jerry, Bud has made 40 special bicycles for children in 15 states.

When asked how much he charges, Bud says, "Sometimes they'll give me a couple of hundred dollars. If they don't have the money, why, I don't charge them." More times than not, Bud, a Shriner, donates the money to the Shriner's Hospital.

Why he does it becomes clear when he talks about the kids and their bikes.

There's the boy in Burley, Idaho, who uses his trusty bike to help his grandmother pitch feed to the calves. And there's the determined little girl in Walhalla, N. Dak., who trium-

phantly completed 8 long miles in a local bike-a-thon on one of Bud's hand-powered bikes.

The names and places change, but Bud's stories have the same delightful theme: a child's joy.

He and Helen, his wife of 53 years, try to deliver each of the bikes personally when possible.

"We took one to a little nine-year-old boy in Centerville, S. Dak.," says Bud. "We got there on a Friday, and his birthday was the next Monday."

"I gave him his bike, and he rode it around and said, 'Boy, this is the best birthday present I ever had!' He was really tickled," says Bud, sounding a bit tickled himself at the memory.

There's a pause, then, "It gets pretty close to you." That's about as expressive as a man gets who is most at ease when working with his hands.

All of Bud's bikes are three-wheelers. Seats are cut from wood and upholstered. Ingenious hand pedals replace handlebars, and a basket is added to hold necessities.

A special step is included for the child's feet. "They can't control their feet, you know," Bud says. A flag to make the low-riding biker more visible and a seatbelt are also standard features.

Each bike is strong enough to hold 200 pounds, a claim 78-year-old Bud readily proves by hopping on and taking a spin.

The handyman tries to keep an assembly line of about five bikes going and does his best to fill the many requests he gets. Still, it's a struggle. That's probably why he has concluded that a bike given to a hospital is the best placed, at least in terms of how many kids get a chance to try it out.

"They tell me the kids get off [the bike], get on their wheelchairs, and go right around and get back in line to ride it again," says Bud. He laughs out loud, delighted at the thought.

Perhaps the most vivid memory in Bud's years of bike giving is the very first.

"Jerry's not one of those people who's really exuberant," Barbara explains. "But he was really thrilled [when Bud gave him his bike]. He



*Happiness radiated from Jerry Clark after Bud Lee made this bike for him. This photo was taken just after Bud gave the bike to Jerry, then 4 years old. Photo: Roberta Donovan*



just beamed. Let's face it. You hand a kid a new bike, and he's going to be pretty happy," the mother says and laughs.

Bud Lee understands that. He knows a bike is more than just metal and rubber and paint. A bike is a means for a kid to learn just how far he can go in the world.

*Nancy Dorman-Hickson*

*Editor's note.*—If you know of a child who is disabled and you are handy in the shop, Bud is more than willing to share general instructions on how to make a hand-powered bicycle. For free plans, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Bike Plans, *Progressive Farmer*, Box 2581, Birmingham, AL 35202.

## LETTERS

### Love Those Movie Stars

Dan Hager (see "What the Stars Say" in "My Thoughts," February 1991) laughs at people who buy "high-priced organic stuff" and raves about cheap food and "vital pesticides." He only shows that he can no more spot a great potential market than he can a great actress.

Your March "expert" (see "A Lot of Hot Air" in "My Thoughts," March 1991) explains that, all evidence by world-class scientists to the contrary, there is no such thing as the greenhouse effect.

Now we know what Dow Chemical, Du Pont, and American Cyanamid want us to think. It's a shame that *Progressive Farmer* doesn't live up to its name.—*Joe Smucker, Newton, Kans.*

*Editor's note.*—The "My Thoughts" column is a page of opinion from our readers. *Progressive Farmer* doesn't always agree with the comments of the guest authors. But we did agree almost entirely with what these two "My Thoughts" articles said—first, because movie stars aren't scientists; and, second, because predictions of global warming are based mostly on computer simulations—not actual facts.

### Yamming It Up

As three generations of growers and shippers of Louisiana yams, we take exception to your article in the "Notebook" section of the February 1991 issue of your magazine regarding the description of yams.

It is true that the production of yams has decreased in the time mentioned, but the quality has increased because of the new varieties that are offered today to growers.

Yams are as much a Southern tradition as fried chicken and apple pie, and that is no "pish-posh."—*J.P., Sr.; David; and Mark Fields, Gibsland, La.*

### Wills Not Always Last Word

Wills do not always solve problems of an estate (see "If Only He'd Left a Will," March 1991). My husband, an attorney and 12 years my senior, died of heart failure in September 1988 leaving an estate of well over \$750,000. Prior to his death, he was assured that his will and wishes would be carried out to the letter.

This has not been the case. The will left all of his personal property (except for his life insurance of \$85,000) and our farm home to me until my remarriage or death. My stepson went to court and argued that his dad did not mean everything, just his personal things.

The judge agreed with the stepson and rewrote the will. In the past three years, I have spent well over

\$10,000 on lawyers and have been in court more times than I care to count, just trying to settle this estate.

The estate's assets are now depleted, and the executor has petitioned the courts to sell all of the farm equipment.

So, as you can see, leaving a will is not always the answer. The courts now have the power to rewrite or interpret a will in any way the judge sees fit.

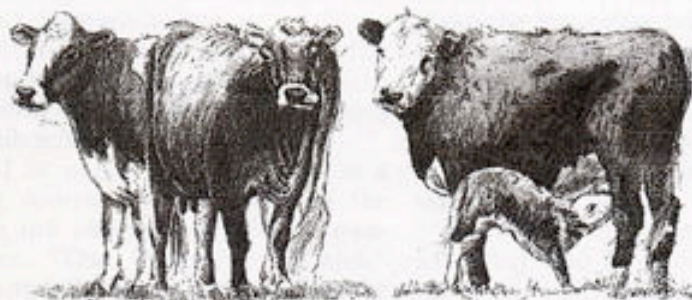
The article was great. Keep up the good work. There are lots of us widows living on farms and trying to continue what our husbands left.—*Dorice Hensley, Geronimo, Okla.*

## FROM PAST ISSUES

### 100 Years Ago—1891

• Our court system is painfully slow. No man can predict the end of a lawsuit. During this age of steam and electricity, we can cross the Atlantic in just six days. But if we must navi-

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