

Walter Wylie retires after delivering mail since 1958



Mountain mailman

MOUNTAIN— After 31 years as a rural postal carrier, the first thing Walter Wylie did after retiring was clean his car — for a week.

"As a mail carrier it is hard to keep your car clean. You would not believe the dirt and dust that gets in the car from driving on the shoulder with the window down," said the 63 year old, who joked that he was not sure if he retired or was just tired.

As a postman Wylie had been driving more than 60 miles a day on the RR2 Mountain route, which covers a wide area of the township from the boundary between Grenville and Dundas up to Reids Mills boundary between Mountain and Osgoode.

"Many people think it's an easy job, just putting mail in the box, but that's not the case," said Wylie, who retired from his job at the end of June.

Wylie explained that his job would start at 8:00 a.m. or later depending on when the mail truck arrived in Mountain from Brockville. He would then sort the mail with the postmaster before heading out on deliveries to the 450 householders and boxholders on his route.

When he started out delivering mail in 1958, Wylie said it took him about four hours to do the route which has now more than doubled and takes about seven and a half hours to finish.

During his three decades on the job, Wylie says he has seen many changes, some

good and some bad.

He says he misses the personal involvement which used to occur when he just had a small route and he could stop and talk to the people, rather than rush on to get all the mail delivered on time as was the case in later years.

As well, the retiring courier does not have many good words for Canada Post. Unlike his fellow inside postal sorters or outside letter carriers, Wylie and the rural mail couriers do not belong to a union and thus get taken advantage of to no end.

The rural carrier has no benefits, no unemployment insurance, no pension, receives small pay increases, has to pay for his own car, gas and insurance and doesn't get any holidays. "If you want holidays you have to train someone else to take over for you," said Wylie, who hasn't had any real holidays in over 30 years.

Doris said she was surprised when she phoned Canada Post to tell them her husband was retiring due to ill health and a woman at the headquarters said that rural mail carriers were not allowed to get sick or even die.

Wylie was also disappointed by the fact that although he took pride in his job, hurried to get the mail delivered on time, and delivered the mail in all sorts of adverse weather conditions, no one at Canada Post seemed to care.

While not particularly happy with Canada Post, Wylie said he did enjoy his job and he is sorry to give it up. "Sure I'm going to miss it. You can't do something for 30 years without missing it," he said.

Wylie says now that he finally is retired he will have no problem occupying his time.

He says he will work keeping his Hallville area property looking sharp, take it easy, and putter around with some of his electrical and welding tools.

As well, Wylie plays a variety of instruments, from accordion to violin and guitar, and he used to have a band with members of his family, called the Bar W Rangers.

"If I need to amuse myself I'll do some picking and a grinning."

The Wylie residence is probably the only home in Mountain without a mailbox.

"I guess I'm going to have to buy one," says 63 year old Walter Wylie.

Wylie began to deliver the mail to Mountain residents in 1958. His last day was June 30.

"He never missed a day in his 31 years of service," said Marjorie McDermont, Mountain Post Mistress.

Wylie has been a fixture of Mountain over the years, he has brought the mail to the people of Mountain, travelling along the rural roads in whatever car he had at the time. A rural mailman goes through a few vehicles over the years. "You wouldn't believe all the tires and brakes I replaced," he says.

The hazards of a mailman are many, but those of a rural mailman in Canada include a few more; the weather, the weather, and the weather. "Back in the sixties, that's when we had winter. I can remember snow drifts as high as a house," he boasts.

When Wylie took over the route, it took about four hours to complete, but when he left it, it took about eight. "This was a job that started off to be a part time job that turned out to be a full time one."

As people moved into Mountain, and along his route, his job became bigger. There was Sandy Moun-

tain, the St. Johns subdivision, and many others like them.

His day began at about 8 o'clock each morning. He went down to the Mountain Post Office, and waited for the mailtruck to come in from Brockville. After the mail was sorted, he would set out to get the mail to the people. But the hardest trick was to get everything delivered in time to get the outgoing mail on the truck that left the Mountain Post Office at 3:45. "Sometimes I just didn't make it."

Through rain and sleet and hail... is a cliché' oath meant for the American mailmen who didn't have to put with a Canadian winter. "The Post office says you never have to beak your own track (in the snow), but I broke plenty in my day," says Wylie. "I would look down a road and try to figure out whether or not I could make it. Sometimes I didn't," he explains. "If I got stuck, I would get a farmer to pull me out."

But it is not just the natural elements that get in a rural postman's way, the human element can be just as obtrusive.

"I got to the point where I refused to play flag games," he says. "I would put the mail in the mailbox, and try to put the flag up. But when I couldn't, I couldn't. Some people with broken mailboxes would hold up the flag with a little stick or a block of ice. Some people just don't look after their mailboxes. After a while, you learn who knows how to use their mailboxes and who doesn't."

The winter can play havoc with

those who work outside. "When a snowplow would come and plow a road, where do they put the snow?" he queries. "So I would come along, and someone has put a cardboard box on top of the snow drift where their mailbox was."

And there are some people however, who are not satisfied with sending a conventional letter or package.

"I once delivered a crate of 100, day old chicks. I drove them twenty miles until I delivered them," he says. "He didn't want to pick them up at the post office, he wanted them delivered."

And, as expected, humans are not the only problem. Wylie says he often had a problem with birds. He says they like to make nests in mailboxes. He says he would put the mail in the box, and bird would come along, and fly away with it. "They can't read, so they'll take cheques," he says.

But one of the more peculiar occurrences was when two german shepards kept nipping at the front tires of his truck. "Every time I came, they were there both biting the two front tires. They were pretty strong because I could feel them on the steering wheel. After a while, the tires were covered with teeth marks. But one day, they came out, did the same thing, and I could hear a 'ssssssss'. They put a hole right through the tire. I wouldn't of believed it if I didn't see it."

Wylie began working as a schoolbus driver. And at sixteen that made for some interesting circumstances. "I drove my own

classmates to school. After that, I drove their kids."

And that is probably the biggest asset of being a bus driver and a mailman; the contact with people.

"I know everybody on the route," Wylie says. Not all of them personally, but by name. He says after a while, you get to know "how" to deliver the mail.

If Wylie has to deliver a letter to a Smith, and there are four Smiths on the route, he can usually tell who it's for.

"You get to know who people deal with. If a Smith gets a letter from Ford, and he has a Chevy, well, you can tell who gets what."

But after years of delivering the mail, Wylie's health slowed him down a bit. A bout with skin cancer and being diagnosed with diabetes made him finally decide to call it quits.

"It was an interesting job, that's for sure."

But just because a man retires, that doesn't mean he slows down. He and his wife have six children, and he says he has plenty of catching up to do. "I've been letting things slide around the property, so I've got some work to do."

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