

Randy Henson – *Interview conducted by Willard Watson in Randy's cabin in Sugar Grove, NC.*

Q1 – Who are you, when and where were you born?

My name is Randy Henson and I was born in Emporia, Virginia in October, 1962. My parents are from this area but moved up there to get a job teaching, they were both teachers. When they graduated Appalachian State they moved up to Emporia, stayed up there a year then we moved to Winston and then I was actually 18 when I finally made it back to Watauga County.

Q2 – So your parents where teachers, did you contribute to the family income in anyway?

Not directly, I contributed by, I started working when I was 12, so that had to benefit them a little bit so they didn't have to throw pocket change or allowances a lot. I like to make my own money so early on in life I decided, I want my own money, that I can spend my own way, so nobody can tell me what I can and can't buy.

Q3 – What was your first job?

Doing construction cleanup, my dad was a building contractor as well as a teacher. We happened to live in the neighborhood where he was building all the houses and so after school I would go down to the job and pick up bottles, I would get a nickel for every bottle, and box up wood so people wouldn't trip over and break their ankles, so basically just jobsite cleanup. I never got to nail my first nail until I was 15 and that would just drive me crazy because I wanted

to build, but you know I was 13, 14 years old and wasn't ready for it, so basically doing construction at first.

Q4 – What did you do for a living?

Well for 30 years I was a state employee. For the first 15 I worked at the DMV, basically as the school bus trainer for Avery, Ashe, and Watauga Counties. I did that from 1988 until 2002. Then the second 15 years starting in 2002 I was a state inspector for school buses and had a 33 county area. So there were 3 of us for the state and I had the western territory which basically ran from Mount Airy, down to Charlotte, to Murphy - that was the area I covered. I would inspect about 800 (buses) a year, 600 to 800 a year. Our goal was to inspect 10% of each fleet, I think there was like 5,000 buses in my territory. If I could get around 500 a year it kept my boss happy.

So the first 15 years when I was involved in the bus training I got to incidentally know all the school employees, I knew all the principals, all the teachers, all the lunch ladies, pretty much anybody who had to get a bus driver's licenses and so that got me engrained with a lot of the local families because back then it was so many locals working the school system.

I had replaced a trainer who had been pretty grouchy, I think, (laughs). So when I came along, I have a very friendly demeanor and got to be rather popular in that job - to where like a nervous teacher's assistant I'd put them at ease in five minutes and then 30 minutes later I'd have them driving up George's Gap in a school bus, and they couldn't believe it, but I'm like it's really easy just drive and if you want to go five miles an hour, just do that until you get used to

it. But I really enjoyed the comradery of that job, getting to work with all the school system employees, and then my office was in the DMV office so just sitting in my office was people filing through getting their licenses renewed every day and it was fun to work in that office, if you can call workin' the DMV fun, me and the two people I worked with, we had fun.

Q5 – So you worked for the DMV, you worked with school buses for 30 years, how did you land on that?

Ok, this is easy, when I was in tenth grade you could start driving the school bus. When I heard over the intercom, hey does anyone want to take a bus class? Well I just looked at it as a way to get out of class. So being lazy is what changed my whole life, and it turns out that I put way more work into that bus class than I would have if I put the same effort into Algebra, and I probably would have finally learned Algebra. But I took to everything about driving and started driving the bus in tenth grade, I never knew I would make a whole lifetime career out of it, but it just worked out. I always made a point to network carefully. So when I got out of college the guy who trained me at 16 still remembered me and he called me up and says, "Hey, have you ever thought of training bus drivers?" I said, "no." "Well I've already recommended you so if you apply..." so it worked out.

I had two routes went all the way from kindergarteners to seniors. And at that time it was quite a challenge because I weighed like 120 pounds, back then you know, everything was about physical size so I wanted to be a good negotiator to get them to do what I wanted them to do as far as riding the bus and not smoking and that kind of stuff. It taught me people skills

very early in life. And it was at a time with a lot of segregation and integration so I learned to be color blind at an early age also. But the culture back then kind of taught me to be racist a little bit, especially growing up in Winston-Salem, but I just thank goodness I got over that real quick because one of the routes I drove was all African-American children and by the time I quit they were all crying. They didn't want me to leave their route, we just had a good time. Whatever a bus driver can influence, I think I have influenced a lot of lives through little bitty actions here and there.

You get to see stuff, I'm tellin' you sometimes it would make you cry, and you can see the homes they are coming from and the fact that they literally look like they just got out of bed as I rolled up, no food, no nothing and so it was unfortunately a really, really poor side of town and I kinda grew up in an affluent area, so it kept me humble - I was always appreciative of trying to stay humble.

Q6 – How would you say the work changed from when you started?

I would say it got more complicated. It got more paperwork involved and more regulations and rules. See you spend a lot your day working with rules and regulations and I wanted to face the public, I wanted to be out doing. When I inspected school buses I wanted to be out doing that job, but it's like a large part of the day was doing paperwork, because you have these people in Raleigh they didn't have a job unless you sent them the paperwork and then their job was to file it away so nobody ever sees it again. At least that's how I always felt.

It was data, we collected tons of data and I never knew really what happened to it. We would get told by the General Assembly, "We want to know how tall the buses are in your area because we want to build bridges." Just weird stuff, it is amazing how they would think about school buses in the large picture of especially the infrastructure, just to make turning radiuses, someone would call me, "Can you go out and measure the turning radius at Cove Creek School? You know it's just down to that kind of detail that you would never expect the General Assembly was paying attention to, but they are awarding bigtime contracts to the pavers and contractors and I guess they'd had enough experience with the architects making a drive way with not enough room for school bus access. It was never a dull moment.

We have to yell a lot to keep our budget good and with the children not being voters it was a struggle to keep funding for non-voting people, it's weird to say that but it's the truth. It was me and seven people who ran this department and we were always jumping up and down like, "You say you want to save school buses, but you're cutting our funding." They would make us run cheap tires and stuff like that, so we did what we could to keep the fleet as safe as we could. We had a half a billion-dollar budget which sounds like a lot but it's not when you have 15,000 buses and 15,000 driver's salaries, the money goes quick. Then we would replace 1,200 (buses) a year, we spent a lot of time at the factory when they built buses and we inspected every single bus that came off the line, because they were \$87,000 each and we were really trying to be good stewards, and the companies would get lazy sometimes, like "Oh, its tax dollars they'll send us a check no matter what." So we finally showed them no, we are not sending you the check unless you give us a decent product.

There was a lot of tentacles to the second job I had, just like deciding the brake lights, what company got the brake light contract, everything was big, big money because everything you did we was multiplied by 15,000. Even if you wanted to put a paper towel holder on a bus that would amount to tens thousands of dollars around the fleet. Or we decide we want to change motor oil and sometimes we would realize, oops we made a mistake when we started blowing engines, then we find out that *that* engine from *that* company doesn't like that kind of motor oil or that kind of antifreeze. And it's just again more detailed, I could put you to sleep.

Every year the contract changed so we never could stay with the same company, so that made it difficult. Mechanics were always having to learn new equipment, that was part of my big role with the state. I was basically in charge of all mechanic training, we had 900 bus mechanics and I didn't really have a mechanical background, but I was smart enough to know what they needed to figure out. So I would spend a bit of time researching, how do you change the oil in a Detroit engine? Because it's not the same as a car, because they could have five different oil filters and use 30 to 40 quarts of oil.

Trying to stay ahead of the mechanics put me going to a lot of conferences, I went to conferences all over the country, and try to see what the cutting edge stuff is out there and try to look at it and decide if this is horse crap or if it is something good. Because salesmen want to sell you everything, and once they hear you have a half-a-billion-dollar budget, they come after you hard. I would get calls here all hours of the night, people wanting to sell me the greatest rear view mirror that has ever been designed, there's a lot of snake oil out there, a lot of snake oil salesmen out there.

Q7 – Describe a typical work day

Well the first 15 years I would teach a bus class once a month, I'd switch Avery, Ashe, to Watauga, it would be a three-day class, usually 20 people would show up, after the third day they took their written test and then I'd schedule them for road work training and that would be three-day slots for three people so I was always having three-day relationships with people. So that would be 8:30 (a.m.) – 2 (p.m.) because the bus had to be returned so it could run the route in the afternoon. So I had a great work schedule because sometimes if I didn't have anything to do at the office I would be done at 2 (p.m.). The DMV job was kind of a pie job I would call it. But I ended up working really hard. I even had a boss tell me one time to slow down because my numbers were spiking way harder than other guys around the state doing the same job, because they somehow convinced Raleigh that oh if you train five drivers a month, *you are doing good!* I would put out 12 to 15 drivers a month.

Then the second 15 years where I worked for DPI which is the Department of Public Instruction, since I had a 33 county territory, I would drive. If I was working the Watauga Bus garage I can be there in 30 minutes but if I was working in Murphy, well that is four hours one way. So I spent a lot of time driving and then when I'd get there, you know its like I'd be driving three hours and I'd be a little jet lagged from driving and then as soon as I got to the garage they wanted me to hit the road and start doing stuff immediately. Well they weren't really supposed to pick the buses out that I inspected, but I kinda let them, because I knew they knew the county where I didn't know. If I'd a said I want to see BUS 117, I want to see BUS 322, and I want to see BUS 77, they could be on opposite sides of the county so I would kinda just let

them pick and I'd always say, "just make sure we end up near a good lunch spot," that kind of thing.

But to begin with since I didn't have a mechanical background everyone was really skeptical of me and because I had a college education sometimes that was, I don't know, certain people give you a hard time because you had a college education and no common sense. But over time people found out I am a listener so if a mechanic is fussing at me about the kind of lug nuts we are buying or something silly like that, I would say, "Really! Well tell me why they're not good." So I found out that by listening I actually became more educated than my other two co-workers, who were actually bonafide mechanics, but they were so sure, their opinions were made up so they were harder to work with.

The mechanics trusted me and they would call me at night and say, "I know I really shouldn't be telling the state inspector this, but have you looked at the pipe that runs to the left of X? Well, don't use it against me! I am just really concerned" It's like recently they have a lot of fires in Charlotte buses and the reason is, there is this one wire repair problem and it is overheating after like 18 years of vibrating and it finally wore through the coating and is shorting on some metal. But we were always just looking for stuff like that. Everyday my target would be to inspect eight school buses a day, but that depended on how far I had to drive. I only got paid for nine hours a day but usually I worked 12 or 14 hours, because by the time I got back home then I had e-mails to answer, we didn't have a staff, we didn't have a secretary, we were like a one man show, we ran everything.

So one minute I could be meeting with a superintendent and then the next minute I'm meeting with a bus driver who is upset about a bus stop on a dangerous curve you know, and then different stuff like I said, like different people in the state government would want data, it's like these slick salesmen would go through the General Assembly, "I sell the greatest headlight that has ever been sold!" then the legislative person would say, "Oh I've got this new contact for headlights!" Well we'd know how sucky the headlights were so we had to tell them, "Well we've actually tried that before. You didn't just discover the wheel; we've already gone through that." So sometimes they would force us to purchase things we didn't want.

I'd spend a lot of time on the phone and in the car. I tried to get home, and when I got home I tried to be available to my wife and to my kids, but it was tough because there were so many e-mails coming through and these people don't just send an e-mail to say hi, they want an answer, you know, because we were in charge of all the policy, state board of education-transportation policy, so we had to decipher the ways the laws were written or make decisions. Sometimes you would have to make a decision like, I know the law says you can't have a bus stop less than half a mile from the school, but sometimes there are bus stops within a half mile of the school so you look at the situations. Like out where you live, there is no way those kids could cross that road safely to get to Hardin Park. So it's just kinda like situations like that we know the law is this but we have to look out for the safety of the children. So typical work day, there was never a typical work day.

Q8 – What time did you work?

Well along this whole time I also had a part-time job teaching driver's ed. at Watauga High School, so if I wasn't doing the day job there was never any shortage of kids wanting to do driver's ed., so I spent every Saturday and Sunday doing that for a long time. I did driver's ed. almost 20 years and so finally about 2012 I just got burnt out and so I just quit, and then I realized I didn't even miss the income. It was basically just a way to spend more money, so I just learned it doesn't matter how much you make, that is what you are going to spend. So I cut back and you know spend more time with my family and I got two children and it was a struggle to make soccer games and stuff like that when you are traveling all the time. It also makes for an upset wife when you can't be there for the dance recitals cause she would think it's a personal choice I'm making, "Oh, you *choose* to work!" "Well, I choose to make a paycheck so you can stay at home with the children." So it's always a catch-22, it was a juggling act. I tried to help my wife stay home with the kids, we made that decision, but it kept me out of the house a lot trying to *make that dolla*.

It keeps you busy and it was really unfair that the state only allotted for three inspectors, even the state of Arkansas has like 12 or something. We have the 900 bus mechanics but our jobs as state inspectors was to make sure they were doing their job, because they had a very strict routine they were supposed to follow because the buses were supposed to get inspected every 30 days. So we'd go through and I'd pull their paperwork and then I'd say, I need to see this bus and I could see what they checked off, especially if it had been done the day before. If they say the tread depth is so many thirty-seconds (of an inch) deep and I go through and I'm like, "Uhhh, I think you were just copying numbers rather than actually

checking because I got a whole different reading.” We were kinda like the sheriff, keep everybody honest.

Q9 – What type of people did you work with?

Again everybody, every education background, we had mechanics who could not read, we had again superintendents who were highly educated but were not all that smart. A lot of superintendents, they just want to focus on the classroom, everything else is just static noise. They didn’t want to know about the buses they didn’t want to know about what lights were out in the gymnasium, they didn’t care about that, they just cared about what was going on in the classroom. So it made it again, a struggle for us to say school bus safety is as important as anything out there. Even though the job of the school system is education, some people were not as good. But I worked with every background, you just never knew who you were going to be dealing with. I could go to Charlotte and Charlotte has a fleet of 1200 buses, I could have literally spent all my time in Charlotte, because they had 35 mechanics there and for what the school system would pay for a bus mechanic, sometimes I don’t know how to tactfully say it, but they weren’t the brightest lights in the hall, so sometimes it was a challenge to convince them that you might not be making that much money but if you make a mistake, by god some kid could die! And they wouldn’t always get on board with that but I would try to help push them on out of the system if they didn’t.

We had a saying, you gotta bleed yellow, because if you don’t bleed yellow you need to get out of this business because you’re not in the money for it at all. I never could say I was a

state employee for the money because the salary I made was pitiful compared to the responsibilities I had, but now I'm sitting on a salary so I can say I'm happy, I'm happy I did it.

Q10 – What did you do with downtime at work?

Downtime at work would be, I helped write a lot of policy. I wrote manuals because my boss figured out I was good at that. Or he would just give me a white paper project that had never been done before and I would just sit at my office in the kitchen over the laptop and make phone calls to people all over the country. By going to all these conferences, I knew people all over the whole United States. So I would call up somebody in Colorado and say, "Do y'all have a policy on this?" and they would say "no," or they would share it with me.

There was a lot of policy written. That's something you don't want is a bored state employee, because once they get bored they start coming up with all this (expletive) stuff. Teachers know better than anybody the DPI comes up with some crazy (expletive). I'm sure its bored employees who are feeling the pressure, "I gotta do something! My boss is expecting something."

Or if its nice weather I'd go out and mow my yard or something, I'd just come in and check my e-mail, they'd never know the difference. When I used to keep a garden I'd set my laptop out on a chair, my hands be all muddy and I'd answer e-mails as soon as I saw them pop up, and I could without research.

There was a lot of research because sometimes the questions would be so that I couldn't answer them off the top of my head, especially for the first five years I had the DPI job I thought, "I'll never learn this!" Because every day it was a different question would pop up and it's all technical stuff, like if I wanted to put a seatbelt in this type of school bus, what do I have to do? And it turns out you have to replace the floor with stronger plywood because it has to take a 10,000-pound impact and your like well you can't just pop a seatbelt in there or your likely to just hurt the kids worse. Stuff like that.

One time we had to buy all new glass, we spent weeks researching windshield glass, I never knew there was so much to learn about windshield glass. But I got pinned with a lot of that because I think my boss recognized I'm kind of a researcher type mentality and anyway, I didn't refuse a project otherwise, he'd ask me to do something and I'd say sure, I didn't give him any flack, I'd say, "Yeah, it might take me two years," because I'm doing all this while I'm trying to keep up with all the other job.

Always in addition too. That's the thing that got me out of the job - just kept getting busier and busier. And more policy and less qualified people to deal with it was another problem. They're not hiring the best people because they are saying, "Oh yeah you're going to do all of this and the salary is only \$36,000 a year." When the same job in the corporate world would be \$150,000. I was talking to a friend and he wrote manuals but he would get like a \$50,000 contract to write a manual and let's see I got X amount of dollars a day and I probably got \$1,000 to write a manual.

But the reward to me was not the financial, I can look at school buses going by every day and see my influences on things that when I was on the specifications committee, and we changed a lense, we put a reflective stripe down the side, just stuff like that I can see my influence. I'm a people pleaser so I try to be helpful. That is my modus, I always want to be helpful.

It created a lot of hardship for me because they wanted a badass inspector, they wanted a guy that would come in like a drill sergeant, I told them in the interview it's not my personality, I told them if you want somebody that is going to be an asshole hire somebody else. I found out that you win more flies with sugar than vinegar. So I always went with that, I tried to be helpful, courteous, friendly, and at the same time get people to obey the policy that they are supposed to obey. But I did it in a different way, I had co-workers that would go in, yell and shout and scream, that was never my style.

Q11 – Does your occupation have any special sayings or expressions?

It'd be about everything, unless you are a mechanic. I don't know that it's slang, there's like five to six thousand parts that make up a school bus, everything would be foreign. That's the way it was for me the first five years at the job, it was all foreign. Thank goodness I didn't have a strong mechanic background but I was good friends with the mechanics up here at Watauga, from where I'd been a bus trainer and so I would come to them and get to be stupid, "Hey guys, I have to ask this question today, what do I do?" So they really took me under their wing, even

though I was their boss kinda, I was also their student and they really appreciated the fact they got to help train me.

I also go to get very close with a lot of mechanics because we spent a lot of time in trucks riding around from school to school and I'm a very personable person so we would talk about everything but school buses, generally family stuff and they would share their lives and I would share my life and after 15 years you get to where you might only see this person once a year but you are like, "How's Gav doing?" I would remember kids names and stuff, and they knew I was involved in the music stuff, and when I was involved in that Merry Tanksters, in fact some of them would drive up and see us play.

We got involved in other aspects of each other's lives, in fact I just went to the beach with one of the mechanics from Yadkin County, we still stay in touch all the time. My girlfriend and him and his wife, we went to Oak Island and had a great time, we do it every year, and then I had a mechanic call me yesterday and I have been retired a year and however many months but he is calling me and asking questions and I'm reminding him, "Look I'm out of it, I no longer, I'm less than dirt now," and he said, "Well I know you'd tell me the truth." People still call, it's crazy, and I'll talk to them, I was working on a project and I stopped and chatted with him for an hour and I told him over and over again, I have nothing to do with it now, but he just wanted to hear my opinion. But that's just the rapport I've gained with people, a lot of trust. It's not all business, he shared with me he's going through a divorce and I shared that I had, so we compared notes on divorces.

It's like, I never went to work a day. Every day was just joy. There were hard days but every day was rewarding. I would say if you have to go to work then you have the wrong job. I never thought about how much I was making, I just jumped in my car and would go do it.

Q12 – Any special knowledge, skills or abilities you needed for your work?

Computers, and that was something I was not really up on. I also had to also learn Excel, Word, PowerPoint. None of this stuff I knew before I got the job. During the interview they asked if I knew Excel and I had made spreadsheets before like make x row equal this, but then when I got this job it was like a whole new level. Luckily my boss was like a computer guru so I would sit in meetings with him and he would have everything up on a screen and I could see where he put his mouse, what formulas he was entering. So computers was really where I was lacking, then I ended up being an instructor for the state computer network they had. Actually they hired me to be a computer instructor based on the fact that I used to be a teacher but they didn't seem to care that it was drivers ed.

So they gave me this book and said you need to teach this program to all the clerks, there's 100 clerks around the state, and they didn't have the computer program up and running at the time, so I just had a book. We had to go on faith, like if you press F4 and then whatever it was going to do what you wanted it to do. So I was going around teaching a class I had no idea about, but somehow we made it work. And the cost clerks were typically ladies and they wouldn't let you off the hook on just a general answer, they wanted to know details so I finally had to fess up, I don't really know what I'm doing here but us collectively we can figure this out.

I ended up running a lot of committees. Again I would run the committee by letting the group figure out how to do something. Computers was like my big Achilles heel until I finally came to, now I'm extremely proficient.

Q13 – What are things about your work an outsider would not expect?

Probably how we are a fairly efficient state agency. That is weird to say that, "efficient state agency," but because we were only eight people we didn't have a lot of red tape. We could get decisions made in a relatively short amount of time. I was always impressed with how dedicated everyone was, we could have easily been on the take because companies who wanted us to buy the world's greatest fuel tank would basically send a lot of money your way and as far as I know none of us ever took a dime. My boss had a thing that you could take a hat, but that's it, if they gave us a baseball cap with their logo on it, that's about as much as we could take.

I got to work with some extremely dedicated people. Well when you only have eight people everyone has to give 100% otherwise someone else has to pick up the load a little bit. We all recognized how hard we had to work, and everybody didn't want to make our co-worker work harder because we were slack. Team work.

Q14 – What was originally the most difficult aspect of your job?

When I left, DMV my job consisted of like two functions and that was it. When I applied for the job at DPI I thought I knew everything there was to know about the bus business, but when I got to DPI I found out I didn't know anything about the bus business besides the two things that DMV wanted me to know. I thought I was well versed, but once I got into the business it was like I said it took me five years before I felt comfortable in the business. But everyone was patient with me, and then at the same time I was going through a really nasty divorce, I felt like I was a computer I had this background program going that was draining all my energy and resources, but at the same time I'm learning an incredible vast amount of information that somebody somewhere put together about the school bus world, somebody super complicated.

But single policy about a school bus is probably the result of a death, or an injury, or a crash, and then we see like, OK this has happened seven times across the state in the past few years we need to do something about it. It was just an insane amount of research in the first few years. I stayed in about 100 hotels a year. So I sit in my hotel a lot and study, I tried to make that time useful. I'm not a big TV person so I wouldn't just go in and turn the clicker on at the hotel, I'd just sit there and be a geek, I just wanted to learn my job.

Q15 – What's the most satisfying part of your work?

Just knowing how much respect was out there between me and everybody I worked with. The relationships and knowing the buses were safe. Knowing that we haven't had a fatality since 1991 inside a school bus. So there's a lot of effort put forth to make sure that continues and

nobody gets killed by a bus. There is a tremendous amount of safety thrown towards the school buses, a lot of dedication.

And the bus drivers, there's not enough said about the bus drivers and their dedication, because they are making a super low salary and doing it every day they have to drive to work twice a day so that means twice the fuel expenses to get to work and when they do get to work they might only be working two hours a shift and so it's like they have to invest as much money as someone working an eight-hour day but they might just be getting four hours of pay. And unfortunately there is always a bunch of pressure from Raleigh to get the routes shortened or get more kids on one bus so you can park another bus, so there's a lot of pressure to do more with less and still try to maintain the same safety standards.

Q16 – What advice would you give to someone beginning this line of work?

Money cannot be your motivator if you are going to get into the state employment business, it doesn't matter what job, any agency, you're not in it for the money. It takes a certain person to want to stay with a low paying job for 30 years. If you're doing it for the money, don't go to the state. But if you can think about the big picture, the retirement's worth it, because the retirement fund is not going away like some private industries, they can dry their retirement funds up and then you got nothing. I went for security over the quick bucks, there were several times that I could have gone into the private industry and made a lot of money but I also could have had the job axed the next day. If you want security go to the state, if you want money fight, scrap and go out there to make some money, do it some other way.

Q17 – Describe a memorable moment

I had been asked to come and address the school board in Cleveland County, there county had just got a big accolade, I can't remember the thing now. I go down to what I think is going to be a small school room building, but they put me in a big auditorium that was packed. As soon as I pulled up there were seven TV trucks, seven TV trucks sitting outside the building. I was like OK something is up. Turns out they were having a big meeting about school prayer, and they had me at the podium, the whole front row is Bikers for Jesus so all these big (expletive) looking dudes are on the front row. I figured out once it was all said and done they put me up first to try and soften the crowd up because it was a really angry crowd about school prayer because Cleveland County was trying to not allow it.

I hate to say it but they are big rednecks and they were like, "Well if you allow a Christian prayer, then you could also allow a Voodoo prayer, you can have a Buddha prayer." So everyone was really anti-against designating prayers or something. So that was very noteworthy because here I am talking to hundreds of people and I just decided I'm gonna go for it, so within five minutes I had the whole place laughing and carrying on, and I'm bragging about their bus garage, and tellin' stories," cuz I knew each person, I could tell like, "Oh so and so down there, man, that dude loves a liver mush sandwich." I could carry on about the people and so that was extremely memorable. So when I rolled up and saw all those TV trucks with the antennae up in the sky, I thought, "OK what is up?" Then I walked in there and realized, oh I'm there to soften up the crowd. So that was a fun moment.

And then we used to do a national contest for school bus mechanics and I would take them every year and so the first year we won the national championship was awesome, we were just jumping around and carrying on, you know it's a big deal in the school bus community and we are usually hosted and Caterpillar hosted us that year so we went up to the Caterpillar plant and there's like 90,000 employees and you know we're just having a good ol' time and then we ended up winning the contest. We went on to win five more times through the years.

But that was a program that the boss said, "Hey you should do some kind of contest," and basically I wrote the rules and the policy and got the contest together and then collaborated with about 17 or 20 other states. We would all meet every year and figure out who the best bus mechanic in the country is through a series of questions and tasks and we would take school buses and bug them with weird stuff they would have to try to find. Then one year we took a tube of calk and duct taped it up and made wires sticking out and wrote "bomb" on the side of it and stuck it up in a weird place, "We found the bomb!" you know stuff like that. And then another thing I did was I was in charge of the website I would get to write all the articles, so that was always fun, interviewing a lot of people. Like one year I wanted to do an article about all of our veterans who are also bus mechanics. I didn't realize it was gonna end up being such a big article, I just thought I would work with a couple guys, I just sent an e-mail out state wide, would anyone like to participate in this article, (expletive) I ended up its like 12 pages of web pages to try and put this article together because I had pictures, and they were part of this company and they served in Iraq or they served here and there. And then it got picked up by some other agencies," Can we share this on our website?" Then it got sent

through all of state government, that little article that I put together. I spent a lot of time working on articles.

In the winter time I'd just write a little, "Watch out have your chains ready, and your headlights cleaned off and your windshields," you know just little articles like that or if we had some new cutting edge thing something everyone needed to learn about, I'd figure it out. And usually it was me and my boss and I also felt like a field secretary because he would tell me to write something, I'd write something and send it back to him and he would go through it and say, you need to change the fourteenth sentence and I just remember wanting to go back to him like, "Why don't you changed the (expletive) sentence!?" Instead we would play this e-mail back and forth, back and forth, back and forth and he's like, "It's not right, it's not right yet." I'm thinking, "Oh my god!" I'd end up writing a lot of his state e-mails. He would say I need an e-mail on this, and I'd sort of write it and then the game back and forth, "I need something better, I need something stronger, you need more policy, you need some reference pages" or you know, oh my god. I'm starting to get shakes just talking about it, I forgot I did so much.

But I looked at their website the other day and they have not updated since I left, everything is still October 2016. Nobody, the guy that came in after me did not have those kinds of skills to write articles and stuff, he's a pure mechanic, he is the best bus inspector ever. He can find anything anywhere, but it just wasn't his forte to write articles and update websites.