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Could Jimmy Hoffa Be Buried In Coleman?

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Jimmy Hoffa

One of the great unsolved mysteries of Michigan began on July 30, 1975. That was the day former Teamster union leader Jimmy Hoffa disappeared. He was last seen at the Red Fox Restaurant in Bloomfield Township, 30 miles northwest of Detroit.

Many of you may recall the scenes last May that made the national news. The FBI, on a tip, had brought in backhoes and excavators to dig up a horse farm in Milford Township looking for Hoffa's body.

After several weeks of looking, they produced many empty holes but no Hoffa. Few people noticed just days after the Milford search was called off, the dump truck with a trailer and backhoe parked across the street from Coleman's City Hall. A few days later they started digging. Could they be looking for Hoffa here?

I've lived in Coleman for almost a decade now, which is just about two decades short of a native. A few things have changed since coming here. We have two new streets; a fully operational traffic light; a new library everyone uses and a new skating rink that isn't used enough.

There are advantages and disadvantages living in a small town. I grew up in a suburb of Coleman, Midland, which isn't exactly a giant metropolitan area but try driving near the Mall at noontime. To the postmaster I was an address; to storeowners, just a nameless customer; to the bank employees an account number.

I don't know everyone in Coleman but I do know quite a few of the residents; my mail "person" tells me I owe her the cost of a stamp the next time I see her; 20 seconds is a long time to wait at a street corner; I know most of the bank employees by their first name and I know all my neighbors because we look out for each other. I like that.

What makes living in a small town so special?

Everyone knows everything about everyone - not true. You can disappear even in Coleman if you want to or you can get to know almost anyone in a short period of time.

Granted, some things will never change in Coleman but people do notice when a big hole is being dug in the downtown area and I have noticed several holes being dug around here lately.

There are no Giacolonos or Provenzanos (the names of the two people who were supposed to meet Hoffa at the Red Fox in 1975) or even any Teamsters for that matter in Coleman to my knowledge. But I went to some of the locals anyway to find out what makes Coleman special and ask them their opinion on whether Jimmy could be buried here.

Bill "King" Cozat

Bill is the Director of Public Services for the City of Coleman. I refer to him as King Cozat because in every small town there is usually one person you can go to that gets things done- in my opinion Bill is that person. Water, sewer, streets and parks all fall under his supervision - pretty much everything except the Police Dept and City Hall. He has lived in the Coleman area his entire life and within the city limits for 24 years.

ROR: You've had opportunities to move but have stayed here. Why?

Bill: We have the same amenities as other bigger cities just on a smaller scale. I live on one of the busiest streets in Coleman and when I back out of my driveway I may have to wait for 2 or 3 cars. That might not seem like much but one thing I hate is waiting for traffic. We're not immune from many of the problems bigger cities have but we have less and have a tendency to address those problems quicker.

ROR: Could Jimmy Hoffa be buried in Coleman?

Bill: The changes of that are very slim. I've seen a lot of holes and dug a lot of holes in Coleman. So I would say no - my job is to know about all the holes around here.

Sue Harsh

Sue owns the local flower shop in town- Heaven Scent. Her business started in the basement of her home five years ago and now is located in the downtown district (3 blocks of Railway St.). She's nice enough to remind me of those important dates to buy my wife flowers, which in the overall scheme of a harmonious marriage is priceless.

ROR: So does this business smell like heaven or was it sent from heaven?

Sue: It was definitely sent. All my ability comes from above and although I think it smells nice in here I would hope heaven smells much better.

ROR: What do you think makes Coleman special?

Sue: I think it's our friendliness. An overwhelming percentage of my customers are just down to earth friendly people.

ROR: Just across the street they dug a big hole recently- could Jimmy Hoffa be buried here?

Sue: Maybe but they didn't say they found anything. What if he's not dead? I heard there was someone over to the Senior Center the other day eating lunch that no one knew. He'd be pretty old by now so he wouldn't even have to disguise himself. (*He'd be 93!*)

Crissie J. Thorn

Crissie has lived in Coleman for 5 years and been the Manager of the Coleman Shell Service Station (Blodgett Oil) for two years. Last year drive-thru fast food came to Coleman when Blodgett added the A & W Restaurant. The gas station is the only 24 hr. service available between Midland and Clare, which has saved many a stranded motorist. Crissie works hard to see that the station is clean, well stocked with diet coke (my personal preference) and makes sure one of her staff, usually Connie, saves the Sunday papers for me when I'm outta town.

ROR: You are fairly new to Coleman. Where from? What brought you here and why did you stay?

Crissie: I came from an even smaller town, Milbrook (southwest of Mt. Pleasant). There are no traffic lights there. I got a divorce; needed a fresh start and my sister lived here. When I moved here it was intended to be temporary. I started at Blodgett as a temp. But I found the people here very accepting. As a single mother, people can be judgmental but I was treated with respect and was given a chance. I met my husband here and have no plans to move...to a smaller town.

ROR: When they dug the hole for the restaurant did they find anything? Could Jimmy Hoffa be buried here?

Crissie: Anything's possible. My initial reaction is to say no but then I'd say why not. A small town far away from Detroit back then might have been an attractive spot. I guess maybe Milbrook would qualify too.

"Super" Dave Sweeny

Dave moved here from North Carolina 20 years ago because 'my wife was pregnant and her mother lived here - it's a maternal thing.' He was unemployed and on welfare when he spotted a business opportunity in an ad. That was the beginning of Dave's Super Service, which is the only full service station in town. To say the service is "super" can't be stressed enough. Consider the looks you might receive when you say 'I trust my auto mechanic.' Let's put this in proper perspective: THE MAN MAKES HOUSE CALLS!

ROR: What do you like about Coleman?

Dave: Coleman is not small but rather an intimate community. People care about you here and if I can't find something here I'm only 20 minutes away from virtually everything I need.

ROR: Earlier this year, there was a big hole in front of your station. Was King Cozat looking for Jimmy Hoffa?

Dave: I don't think so. There was a broken pipe. They did find an old cistern down there but no bodies. It makes a good story but I think Jimmy is probably somewhere else.

Steve “Pizza Man” Miller

Steve is also a native of the Coleman suburb, Midland. He moved to the big city of Coleman 30 years ago to work as a milkman for his father-in-law. The Millers bought the Pizza Man’s Restaurant in 1990. One of Steve’s passions is hot rods and classic cars. He and a friend started the Rod Benders Street Association, which now sponsors one of the premier car shows in mid-Michigan every June right here in Coleman. In addition to knowing what I like on my pizzas, I love it when he delivers them in his latest hot rod.

ROR: Coleman is much different from Midland. What makes that difference to you?

Steve: Coleman is the Mayberry of Michigan. This is a stress free zone.

ROR: Dow Chemical Co. property might have been a more appealing burial site but could Jimmy Hoffa be buried here?

Steve: Anything’s possible. You never know and until proven otherwise, hey why not.

Bob Simons

About the same time the railroad came through mid-Michigan, Bob’s grandfather started a mercantile store in Coleman (1870). His father started the Coleman Elevator Company in 1911, which Bob eventually took over and sold in 1980. If there is a need to check historical records because someone started a statement with ‘I remember back when’ or ‘whatever happened to’, Bob is the man you speak to for verification. There are some things you just can’t Google.

ROR: You’ve lived here your entire life. Why?

Bob: When I was young there wasn’t a lot of entertainment around here but I don’t recall being bored. As I get older I appreciate the quietness but I also feel safe. I’ve been all over the United States and there’s no other place I’d move to.

ROR: Jimmy Hoffa probably didn’t know much about farming but could he be buried here?

Bob: In one of those fields out there? I wouldn’t say no but rather highly unlikely. Could he be buried in town? I’d say no way. A strange vehicle coming into this town doesn’t stay strange very long.

Wanda Lewis

Wanda is half of a marriage between two founding families in Coleman—the Lewis’s and Cozat’s. Her husband, Denny, operates Lewis Brothers Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, together they run Coleman Laundryland and several other businesses. Denny also made a service call to my house in the dead of winter, middle on the night because my furnace stopped working...in his pajamas and overcoat! Wanda has been the head honcho at Yesterday’s Depot Restaurant for ten years (built from the old railroad depot) and is also on the City Council. She’s smart, quick with a laugh, great for a listening ear and serves up some fantastic home cooked meals.

ROR: Do you think Coleman is unique?

Wanda: Yes. People here are real and by that I mean it’s comforting to know you’re going to get a straight answer from them. I also like the fact if I have car trouble for instance I can knock on almost any door for help. I can afford to live anywhere I want but why would I give that up.

ROR: When you remodeled the depot, Jimmy Hoffa wasn’t buried there but could he be here somewhere?

Wanda: Maybe somewhere in Michigan but I’d like to think not here.

Kay Wilkie

Kay moved to Coleman with her family in 1945. Her Dad bought the KD Supermarket and changed the name to George’s Fresh Meats & Groceries in 1961. When he passed away in 1980 the name was changed to Kay’s - just Kay’s. Every small town should have something similar to Kay’s but there really is no other place like hers. It’s not a snack bar, ice cream parlor or eatery. A better description would be an international emporium for knick-knacks (none for sale), a great place for a snack and a 50-cent ice cream cone. It’s safe to say President Reagan’s trickle down economics never got to Kay’s but that’s probably also the last time she raised prices too.

ROR: What do you like about Coleman?

Kay: I like the kids. I love to see their faces when they come in here. I like to think they keep me young in spirit.

ROR: The Rail Trail is right behind your place and they didn't find Jimmy Hoffa when they dug up the tracks but could he be buried in Coleman?

Kay: I don't know much about him but sure why not. Wouldn't that be something?!

Dave Bolenbaugh

The last possible burial site for Mr. Hoffa was a horse farm. So why not a horse farm in Coleman, right? The closest one is Starwin Farm just 2 miles south on Star Road. Dave is a native. He practically built his farm from scratch and now has a rather large herd of horseflesh wandering around his 80 acres.

ROR: You went off to college then came back and built a horse farm. Why?

Dave: I didn't like the job options available after I graduated so I came back to familiar territory. Coleman is a nice community but the reason I stayed is because of my family ties. That's also a reason some people might want to stay away. My family was here and those family roots have always have a strong hold on me.

ROR: The FBI thought Jimmy Hoffa might be buried at a horse farm. Any chance he could be here?

Dave: Well, my farm wasn't here back when he disappeared so I'll say no. I've dug many fencepost holes since 1979 and found no signs of Mr. Hoffa, yet.

Mike O'Laughlin

It seems appropriate to include a funeral parlor in this discussion and the funeral business has been operating in Coleman and in Mike's family since 1891. Mike bought O'Laughlin's Funeral Home from his dad in 1993.

ROR: Why is Coleman appealing to you?

Mike: Probably for the same reasons it's unappealing to others. Coleman is a small community where you know almost all the people. But I'm raising children here and I like the idea of knowing all the kids my children are associating with. I can run up town to do errands and it can turn into a whole afternoon just talking to people.

ROR: It's your business to know where the bodies are buried. Could Jimmy Hoffa be buried here and have you ever been contacted to move a body?

Mike: Yes, he could be buried here although I don't have personal knowledge of that. You might be interested to know my father was contacted about Jimmy being buried in Midland County after he disappeared. It's my understanding someone once made a statement at a sealed casket burial in Midland County 'for all I know, it could be Jimmy Hoffa in there.' Well, the police heard about it and got involved. My dad had to verify that the proper documentation was filed. True story.

Remember the TV show Cheers, where everyone knows your name? Well, I'm not quite there yet in Coleman but I'm getting closer.

If you're coming for a visit be sure to check out some of the local spots like Yesterday's Depot, the Pizza Man's or Kay's. Buy some flowers for someone you love or maybe yourself. If you want your windshield washed Super Dave's there for you.

There's not many more pretty sights in the world than a herd of horses to me. Just drive a little south of town and you'll see what I mean. If you happen to run into Bob, Bill, or Mike while in town tell them Rick said 'howdy.'

It turns out that big hole across from City Hall is now the new ATM machine but if you stop into the Shell station take a look out back behind the A & W. That's Coleman's Industrial Park and I recently noticed an excavator digging holes...



Coleman's Industrial Park