



Text Version of Audio Story: Kippy

McAlisterville, Pennsylvania, wasn't much different from other rural American communities in the 1960s and '70s. The families there in our tiny village each seemed to take their turn at going through hard times — car wrecks and farming accidents that left men unable to work, fire, flood, loss, tragedy, disease.

For as picturesque and Rockwellian as our little village was, it wasn't immune from trouble. But when that trouble did hit, the people of McAlisterville would rush to each other's aid. Every family there will tell you about their hard times, and in the next breath quickly name a list of people who helped them through. You'll hear his name on most of those lists, how if it wouldn't have been for Mr. Kipp, they say, we wouldn't have had food on the table.

Mr. Kipp — or Kippy, my family called him — was the local grocery store owner. He was as nice a man as there ever was. My dad one time, when he was first starting his oil business, fell on hard times and went without income for nine months. Even when it looked as if he wasn't going to make it in business, as if his dreams were about to collapse, Mr. Kipp allowed my parents to continue buying groceries on credit. Mr. Kipp was very kind and generous about the whole thing. He told my parents he had no doubt he'd get paid when things turned around for our family.

You'd have thought, being in such a rural area, miles and miles from the nearest supermarket, Kippy would have gouged a little on price, or maybe even a lot. He never did. He was such a good manager he didn't need to. It would have never been in his character.

In comparison to modern day supermarkets, Kipp's store was just a tiny place — two aisles, a long, narrow building, just one door for people to come in and out of. It wasn't an automatic door like you see today; it didn't need to be, because the people coming in always held it for the people going out.

Almost every kid who went into Kippy's with their mom went in the front door and ran straight to the back of the store, back to the meat counter. That's where you'd find the big smile of old Henny Lightsel, Kippy's right-hand man. Kids loved Henny, and Henny loved kids. He was Santa Claus at the firehouse at Christmastime. We all knew it was Henny, but sitting on his lap was even better than the real thing. When I went to the store, I'd always ask Henny if he had a bone for my dog.

“Yep, let me wrap it up for ya.”

Henny was the best.

At Kippy’s store, you could get anything from a frozen pizza to a T-bone steak.

Other people tried their hand in the grocery business there in our little town. They came and went, but Kippy’s was a constant. He liked everybody, and you couldn’t help but like him. He retired some years ago, sold his little grocery store. But the new people, as nice as they were, just couldn’t seem to make a go of it. It was the end of an era.

At the time of this writing, there’s a little bakeshop there where Kippy’s store was. Mr. Kipp is alive and well, living the good life. He deserves it. Everyone you talk to marvels at how good he looks. I guess he’s eighty or close to it, or maybe more. He looks like a man of fifty. He still has the same friendly smile. I hope he lives forever. McAlisterville wouldn’t be McAlisterville without him.

Somewhere in that tiny little town today, I can assure you someone is talking about the hard times they had gone through. And in that conversation you’ll hear, “Oh, if it hadn’t been for Kippy, don’t know what we’d have done.”

From somewhere behind the radio, with the music of Johnny X, I’m the American Storyteller.