

Remember when
Monday, Feb. 6, 1995

Intelligence

On the road again with Franklin's family

It started with a few dozen people commuting to Belleville from Marmora. It doesn't sound like the base of a successful family business, but, for the Smith family, it was exactly that.

In 1953, Franklin Smith was working as a mechanic in his father's GM car dealership when the business was sold. Smith decided he wanted to work for himself — and time has proven he, and his family, had the skills and determination to make it.

Smith bought a bus and a route that ran between Marmora and Belleville, and began transporting passengers to school and Deloro-Stellite each day. From that route, the business expanded.

It needed a name, but Smith seemed too common. The mechanic decided to go with his own name, and Franklin Coach Lines Ltd. was born.

That same year, the oldest Smith boy was born. Young Monte would soon learn the bus business himself.

Before long, Franklin got into school buses.

"Whenever we had some money we'd buy another school bus and a line to go with it," recalls Franklin's wife, Doris.

Eventually, the Smiths amassed 36 of the big yellow vehicles.

As soon as Monte was old enough to go to school, he was put to work in the family business.

"I grew up in the business...I used to have to get the buses ready before school," Monte recalls.

In the early hours of the morning, Monte started the buses and fuelled those that were low. At the end of the day he cleaned the buses and put them away.

Monte's younger brothers, Stephen and Craig, also got involved with the business. Now, along with their father, all

three sons are registered mechanics.

"Our sons helped the business survive...We were very fortunate. They're still interested — we couldn't have managed without them," Doris says.

Franklin Smith later bought licences from Charlie Crawford to operate a charter. Then, in 1964, the business took a giant step forward.

Doris, a nurse, got more involved.

"In 1964, she decided to devote more time to the company. She, at that time, formed Franklin Tours Ltd.," Monte recalls.

Her motor coach tour company proved enormously successful.

"We were one of the first ones in the area to do that sort of thing," Doris says.

Because they needed the income, Doris kept her nursing job at the hospital. In her free time, she set up and sold tours.

Getting customers was no problem for the hardworking, friendly nurse.

"I wrote them personally," Doris says. "The business really expanded...People came from all over to join us."

The first trip Franklin Tours Ltd. embarked upon was down east and it was a family affair. While Doris acted as hostess, Franklin drove the bus and kept it in good repair. Doris kept her job at the hospital throughout.

One year Doris filled a coach entirely with people from Sudbury. Another year customers drove from Alberta to go on one of their trips — the Smiths let them stay in their home overnight before the departure.



Business

One of Franklin's coaches, in the early '70s.

It was not irregular for clients to travel from the Maritimes to join the Smiths on a trip. They also picked up passengers *en route*. Doris advertised in church papers, but most of their business came from word-of-mouth recommendations.

An especially exciting trip was a 30-day excursion across Canada to Alaska.

"We went all the way by unpaved road and back down and we all worked. There were no garages on the way, no phones. We corresponded by mail," Doris recalls.

At the time, Franklin Tours may have been the only company in Ontario to make the

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Monte Smith