

Jessie "Sambo" Ard, 87, was named after a family mule because they were both as stubborn as the sultry dog days of summer.

The mule has long since gone, leaving a smile on Ard's face because a savvy stubbornness has served him well.

Ard founded Ard Trucking Co. in 1945 with a used 1938 truck and a wrecked trailer that he fixed. He found somebody to drive the truck for him because he was working full time and couldn't afford to quit.

Fifty-seven years later, Ard Trucking has 120 employees and 100 trucks. They haul dry freight to 48 states for such companies as A.O. Smith, Wellman Inc., Honda of South Carolina Mfg. Inc., and Coca-Cola.

And Ard, wearing his trademark base ball-style hat with the bill turned up, still drives to work every day in his compact 1983 pickup.

Ard's youngest son, Allen, is behind the wheel as President and CEO of the family owned business. Middle son, Tommy, daughters, Carolyn and Grace and a daughter-in-law Janice, round out the operation at 1702 North Governor Williams Hwy.

A third son, Willard "Speedy" Ard, has retired.

Ard likes to give his family credit for the company's success. But he paved the way with a concrete work ethic honed to perfection since dropping out of school in the fifth grade to help support his family.

He got the work ethic from his father, who walked six miles to work before daybreak and back late in the afternoon to help his sons farm.

His daddy's words still ring clearly decades later, You might give out, son, but don't ever give up. Keep going no matter what."

Ard was 21 and Gena came up hard during hard times that made you appreciate what you got."

Gena helped make ends meet through her sewing expertise, which she still does out of the modest home they have lived in since 1943.

Ard worked as a mechanic for Harold Brasington Sr. founder of the Darlington Raceway, who owned a trucking company. After World War II, he worked for the Psillos brothers at Darlington Construction Co.

Saving and scrimping, he bought two more trucks while keeping the concrete trucks rolling at Darlington Construction.

I helped them (Psillos brothers) get what they got and they in turn helped me," Ard said. "People tended to help each other more in those days because most of us had been through the hard times of the Depression."

The company moved to its current location across from the old Perfection Gear Plant in 1969, thanks to another longtime friend of Ard's.

He scribbled a message on a torn piece of notebook paper and told me to take it to the bank". Ard recalled. "The message told the bank to loan me the money to buy the property and he would stand behind the note. They wrote me out a check, no strings attached".

Allen Ard was fresh out of high school and took over the operation. They had four trucks, four trailers and enough optimism to pave an interstate highway from coast to coast.

Within a year, Sambo had repaid the loan and Ard Trucking was trucking into a new age.

But images in the rearview mirror are still sharp to Sambo, who, among others, hauled hogs to Baltimore when interstate 95 was but a figment of the imagination.

The 15-hour trip up U.S. Hwy 301 winding through numerous towns, including Richmond Va., and Washington, D.C. Bypasses were a rarity and the scenery featured lots of billboards and Burma Shaved signs.

There wasn't any reason to get in a hurry, either, because the pungent truck strained to get up to 35 miles per hour. The sparsely appointed vehicle, many of its time, didn't have a heater, air conditioned, power steering or a radio.

But a long the way. Coffee was free at the trucks stops, showers were 10 cents and one could put a nickel in the jukebox and hear a song about a truck-driving man.

In retrospect, Sambo said, he has gotten a good deal out of life.

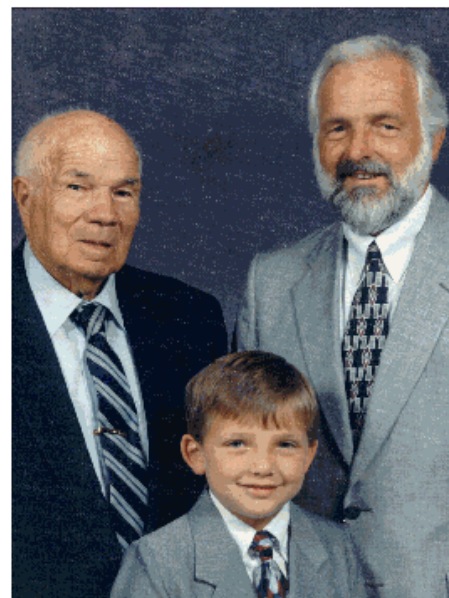
I got my first car out of a junkyard for \$8 in 1937, fixed it up and got me a heck of a deal when I traded it on a 1932 Ford coupe with a V-8, "he laughed. It cost me \$3.50 to get married and \$200 for that first truck." To top of all the high finance, Ard said he had four children, Allen was on the way and he was making \$40.00 a week. But he had two more trucks, two more drivers and an office in his garage by the time "I Love Lucy" debuted on television in 1952.

Through all the years, Ard has had a soft spot for animals. And Sam, a brindle pit bulldog mix with white feet, stands out in his heart more than any other. The two were inseparable until Sam's death in 1997. They rode together with Sam leaning up against Sambo and giving him a slurpy lick in the face every chance he got. They even looked a like.

Among Ard's current menagerie of ducks, goats and a visiting cat is a miniature horse named Rusty, who caused quite a stir last Fall when he fell into Sambo's septic tank. All you could see was his head and beady eyes poking up out of the ground," Sambo said, noting Gena summoned Ard Trucking personnel to rescue Rusty from his perilous predicament. "He must have been embarrassed because he wouldn't come near me for a couple of days", Ard laughed. "but he comes running now every time I call him. I'm the only one he will come to."

Mean while, Ard admits he's come a long way in 86 years because, I've had a lot of help from friends and family who wanted me to have something.

"And I'm not going to forget it," he added. "when I leave, they'll be all right."



Showing from left to right (Jessie "Sambo" Ard), (Taylor Mac Ard), (C. Allen Ard) as you can see the youngest Ard is in the middle and is eager to become the next CEO of Ard Trucking. If you asked him about trucking he's one young man who can tell you all about it.



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