

Rudy Slane & The Kinmundy Express  
*(Interview by Jeanette Hoeinghaus - January 2017)*

Rudy Slane enjoys talking about cars and the newspaper business. He is especially proud of his vintage Corvette that he still enjoys driving around town. Later in this story, you will see the connection the two have in his life story.

Rudy was born in 1938 and attended first grade some distance from his home located at where the present day Prairie Chicken Preserve site is, south of Kinmundy. By second grade, the family had moved a few miles east to Meacham Township and Rudy had started second grade at Rockhold School located on Louisville Road. During World War II days, it was hard to get new overshoes. Since mud roads and short cuts across fields were impassable with leaky overshoes, he missed so many school days, his teacher, Florence Weiss, recommended that Rudy go back to first grade and start his education all over again.

When Rudy was 16, he started working at The Kinmundy Express. The first newspaper in Kinmundy was the Kinmundy Telegram started on March 13, 1867. The Kinmundy Register followed in 1878 printing 26 issues. The Kinmundy Express started on November 8, 1883 and ran until 1918 with R.F. Lawson as editor featuring his column, "Lawson's Local Labyrinth—A Concise Condensation of Timely Town Topics." The co-publisher was Owen Scott, a resident of Effingham, publisher of the Effingham Democrat, a lawyer, and mayor of that city. He was with Mr. Lawson for 11 weeks. Mr. Lawson came to Kinmundy as a small boy and lived on a farm northwest of the city. He worked on various papers before establishing the Express where he continued until October 1893 when he sold it to N.H. Lingenfelter. His father was a Methodist minister who was sent here as pastor of the local church when Nelson was five years old. Their stay was brief, but after Nelson graduated from McKendree College, he brought his parents and returned to Kinmundy. He purchased the paper and then sold it in 1896 to Mr. D.S. Lord, a former station agent for the I.C.R.R. Mr. Lord sold the Express to P.L. Sapp and S.R. Wooley in August 1898. They sold it in November of the same year to Mr. F.O. Grissom who operated it for 18 years. Another paper, The Journal, began publication, but Mr. Grissom purchased it and combined it with the Express, calling his publication The Express-Journal, and making a twice a week issue out of it. Business was not brisk enough for publishing twice a week so the Journal was discontinued. Mr. Grissom was burned out in 1903 and again in 1904. With his appointment to postmaster, Mr. Grissom sold the Express in 1916 to Mr. G.A. Spitze, who came here from Edwardsville to teach at the local high school. Mr. Spitze operated it until 1919 when he sold it to Mr. J. Lem Ballance who operated it until December 1, 1921 when he sold it to J.N. Vallow. J.N. was born in Kinmundy and moved away during his grade school days but returned to Kinmundy for high school. While in high school, his teacher and The Kinmundy Express editor, G.A. Spitze, hired J.N. to work at the newspaper sweeping, folding newspapers, and sticking a little type. After high school and a variety of work experiences, J.N. went to work for J. Lem Balance and later purchased the business. He employed Kinmundy native Marie O'Brien and his

brother, Audrey Vallow who also served as Justice of the Peace and was “always willing to do your marrying while you wait.” (The preceding history of The Kinmundy Express was taken from material written by J.N. Vallow in 1933.) Now for Rudy’s memories of The Kinmundy Express--Rudy learned the newspaper business from J.N. Vallow, a sharp character who knew a little about everything. J.N.’s column was called ZATSO which included humorous stories about his wife, referred to as “gm,” society notes, and local news. He wasn’t looking for sensational news. If something controversial or illegal was going on, everybody in Kinmundy already knew about it anyway. However, one man became angry about something J.N. wrote and brought a knife to the newspaper office to threaten him. An apology was given, and the man went next door to the restaurant and ate. Case closed without legal intervention.

Rudy remembers the staff at The Kinmundy Express as including J.N. Vallow, editor; Otis Tate and later Vera Johnston, linotype operator; Mildred Kleiss and later Audrey Feather, society editor; and Rudy, the high school worker. Since Rudy came to the job knowing nothing about the business, his first duty was tearing up the newspaper. After the paper was printed on Wednesday, the forms were left in place for a day or two in case extra copies were needed. Then Rudy lit the melting pot to melt the lead/tin/zinc alloy for reuse in the pigs (16 pound linotype machine molds.) The linotype keyboard could produce 7-8 lines of print a minute. Rudy used the linotype machine until the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1977. His machine is now on display at the Kinmundy Historical Society Museum. In 1977, he started using the newer Phototypesetter machine to produce type for the newspaper. Then The Kinmundy Express was taken to Carlyle to be printed. The old printing press could not be used for the new way of printing. The computer was the next new way of producing type with some newspapers doing so by the mid 80’s.

Getting back to the 16 year old Rudy, the next job he learned was feeding envelopes into a small hand fed press for printing return addresses. He used emery cloth attached to his finger with rubber bands to grip the envelopes. The newspaper printed for several small businesses, and had larger orders of 10,000 and up from time to time. It was easy for ink to transfer to another sheet called “offset” or “setoff” when heavy with ink, so Rudy learned to crisscross the printed pieces to prevent transferring. Then he learned to print sale bills and larger sheets on an automatic press. This machine had a round drum that turned like a mimeograph machine. After high school graduation, the student worker would usually move on, but Rudy stayed until he went to the Army in September 1961.

After basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Rudy spent 7 days on a ship to Germany where he would serve as a cook’s helper and then a baker feeding 400 military personnel. His net pay was \$80 per month. After his tour of duty, it took his ship eight days to get back across the ocean. He was seasick on the trip there and again on the way back. He soon found himself broke and back at work at The Kinmundy Express.

This is the point where newspapers and cars connect. J.N and Rudy went to an out of town meeting, where they passed a car dealership selling Corvettes. Later that day, J.N. told Rudy that if he had money for a down payment on a new car, he had enough money for a down payment on the Express. Two or three days later in early 1972, J.N. had talked Rudy into buying the newspaper. In June 1974, Rudy married Judi Gray, the love of his life. She was a valuable asset to the business by serving as society editor, proofreading, record keeping, and being available to help at any hour of the day or night. Arlene Roberts helped in later years with setting type and computer work. Rudy's daughter Denise helped a lot when she was growing up. One of her first jobs was keeping the mailing list up-to-date by using a Graphotype machine. It cut names and address on small metal plates. Later she helped meet printing deadlines with her writing and proofreading skills. The last issue of the Kinmundy Express was published the second Thursday in November, 2006 and continues to be missed.

Rudy is modest about his accomplishments, but the "Gleanings from The Kinmundy Express" (which was compiled by Dolores Ford Mobley from the many years of our hometown newspaper), are available at [www.kinmundyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.kinmundyhistoricalsociety.org), and have been enjoyed around the world for many years. Recently, Rudy gave his permission (as final owner of "The Kinmundy Express") and allowed the Kinmundy Historical Society to contract with [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com) to make complete issues of the paper available to the public. Access to this website is available with a membership fee, or free at the Kinmundy Public Library.

Rudy calls his approach to newspaper reporting as "amiable." He wanted to stay out of trouble and receive as few cussings as possible. Others would say he reported good news that was true and didn't write anything to insult anyone or hurt their feelings. He didn't write "fake news" or biased stories. Rudy completed a very successful career with 50 years in the newspaper business.