

Subject : Life Histories
Address: 6 00 Broad Street,
Richmond, Virginia.

Date: February 17, 1939.

Nationality: American
Industrial Classification: Street Salesman of Popular Songs
Writer: Russell Carpenter

The Babbitt Of Broad Street

A biting, piercing north wind, from Frederickburg and the Potomac, whips mercilessly across Broad Street. Shoppers are scarce. Can you blame them, Not this day. Who wants to face this cold bitter wind....with "pay day" still a whole week away.

Dressed in a slightly tattered, blue overcoat, the hawker--we'll call him John--stands on an old, discarded cardboard box labelled Kellogg's Cornflakes, shifting his weight from one foot to another, while chanting his customary --but melodious-- "Jeepers Creepers...I Ups To Her; She Ups to Me... Hurry Home... Umbrella Man..I Feel Like A Feather.."

"Cold, ain't it ?, ? ", he volunteers. He peers at me through his tortoise shell glasses perched on his hawklike nose. I said he has a hawker.

"How many these do I sell ? 'Bout 60. Sometimes 100. Have sold 120 in a good day. All depends. You know how 'tis. Have sold ret here 50 in an hour. That's a fact."

"How much do I make ? Oh, sometimes three, sometimes four dollars a day. All depends."

"Me married ? Not me, brother. Know better"

"Oh, I been here in Richmond 'bout five, going on six years. Went to Mardi Gras last year. Boy, you oughta go there some--if you want to see the women. That's a real place for yuh"

"Sure I like this job. Have a good time. No Boss. All that sort of thing. Wish I had a business though like that A B C store 'cross there. No competition there"

These pickets with the signs on them ? They don't do no good. That class of people don't have money to spend in that store..they go to Woolworth's I know. Have watched them. They want too much money. Wish I was a bricklayer though. I know one feller that gets twelve dollars a say..think of it ..twelve dollars a day. That's a fact, brother "

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"Who buys most these things ? Girls and women mostly. Oh yeah. I can always tell when one of 'em is going to buy. Just watch their 'spression. You'll see 'em stop, turn their head and listen for me to call out the song they want . See? What did I tell yuh "

" Sure, you can sell just as many for 10 cents as you can for a nickel. That's a fact. Have tried it. They will spend a dimeel just as quick as they will a nickel"

And with this bit of street philosophy he again returns to his his "Umbrella Man..Jeepers Creepers..I Feel Like A Feather...Hurry Home ..."

I took this last remark literally and did while listening to his sojorous and cadenced voise trailing away.