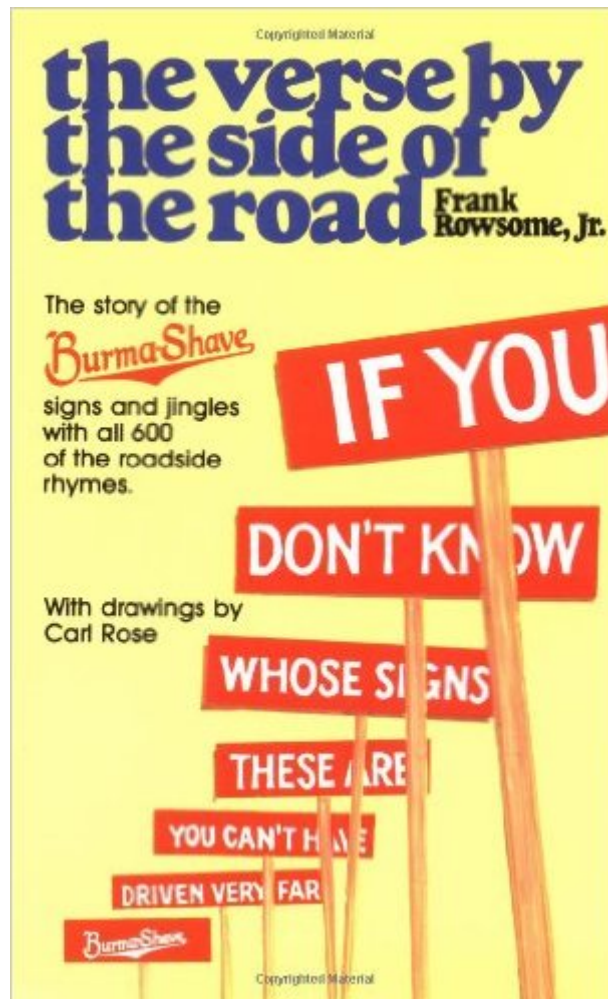


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Verse By The Side Of The Road: The Story Of The Burma-Shave Signs And Jingles (Plume)



Synopsis

The story of the Burma-Shave signs and jingles. All 600 of the roadside rhymes are indexed.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (69 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Pretty wretched doggerel. But the sentiment is sincere. From the time I learned to read (about 1955) until the sets of signs by the side of the road were relegated to history and the Smithsonian, I kept a keen eye out for them on family car trips. They were far better than counting cows or VW Bugs and Beetles. Then the signs disappeared. I never really knew what happened to them until reading this book, THE VERSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. In about seventy engaging and well-written pages, Frank Rowsome, Jr. tells the story of the Burma-Vita Company, its effort to develop a brushless shave cream, and then its novel and serendipitously successful marketing campaign - installing sets of six red-and-white signs along roadsides, the first five of which usually rhymed in some fashion and the last of which proclaimed BURMA-SHAVE. In their thirty-six years (1927 to 1963), the BURMA-SHAVE signs became a classic of Americana. Other advertisers aped the formula, but as the public drove past their last sign they invariably substituted "Burma-Shave" for the name of the imitator's product. The story behind the product and the merchandising campaign is heart-warming: from its start as a family business; to Fidelia, the secretary who kept track of all the sign locations in America and all the leases with farmers and all the routes for the crews going around maintaining and rotating the signs; to the board of directors meetings to choose the next

year's roster of slogans. One highlight is Arliss French, a manager of a supermarket who responded to the jingle "Free-Free / A Trip / To Mars / For 900 / Empty Jars" by collecting empty Burma-Shave jars from his customers and then presenting 900 of them to the Burma-Vita Company.

When I was growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s my parents and I traveled by car through much of the United States (and some of Canada as well). I have always appreciated the fact that, despite not being wealthy, they introduced me to this great country of ours as well as much of the local culture. In those days before interstates became ubiquitous and an interstate culture introduced sameness and uniformity throughout America (with Holiday Inns, Super Eights, Perkins Restaurants, etc.) replacing locally owned ten to twenty-unit motels and small-town greasy spoons with their typed menus and Formica-top tables, travel was fun, exciting, and diverse from one part of the country to another. There were a few things that you were guaranteed to see wherever you went. Advertisements for Wall Drug, in Wall, SD (which, sad to say, once we got there in 1962 was a bit of a disappointment after all the hype), Harold's Club in Reno, and, above all, Burma Shave signs. Every several miles or so, especially out in the country, one was guaranteed to see those five or six placards that stretched for maybe a tenth of a mile or so and always ended with the words "Burma Shave." And, if one wasn't the driver, one could look back at the signs facing the opposite direction and read those too as one passed. Twelve years ago my daughter came upon "The Verse by the Side of the Road" in a bookstore and bought it for me for Father's Day. She knew I'd love it, since I had taught her some of the jingles that I had memorized as a youth. (That was one of the neat things about the signs. The rhymes were almost always memorable.) I began reading that afternoon and couldn't put it down. By evening I had read every word and had had a wonderful walk down memory lane.

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