

# High-Spirited Hughes'

Willard, Utah

Melvin Dummar, 31, the gas station operator named heir to \$125 million in the first of many wills attributed to Howard Hughes, drives his rattling, 12-year-old pick-up slowly along the Ogden River, pleased to show off some of the most beautiful country in America.

Dummar practically bubbles with natural high spirits, chatting about anything that comes to mind. He especially likes to talk about himself.

It's great to get away from the station for awhile, he is saying. He hates pumping gas. Actually, what he always wanted to be was a country music star.

But he never had time to learn to play a guitar. And, frankly, he's not sure his voice is all that good.

But the songs he writes are good, he adds and enthusiastically belts out a few bars from "Santa's Souped-Up Santa Sleigh." The tune is borrowed from "Queen of the Silver Dollar."

He grins. Yes, he's been told before that he resembles an overweight Glen Campbell. But the Hollywood people think he looks a little like Jon Voight too, so Voight may play his part in the movie they're making about his life.

Dummar hesitates in mid-sentence. Maybe he shouldn't be talking about the movie. That's one of his big problems, he says. He talks too much.

He offers a hang-dog smile. Too late now. And it's not in his nature to brood over things done. They're going to write a book about him, too, he confesses. His life story. His lawyer already has signed the contract.

Anyway, Dummar rushes on, the best thing about the whole deal is that the Hollywood people may use one of his songs as a theme in the movie about him.

It's his favorite song, too. One he wrote just a few months before that fateful winter's night in 1968 when, he says, he picked up a bleeding man in the Nevada desert and drove him to Las Vegas. A man who claimed to be Howard Hughes, which only convinced Dummar he was "just another wino." Which, in turn, was the reason why Dummar says he only gave the man a quarter

## A Good Samaritan justly rewarded — or a con artist?

before letting him off at the Sands Hotel. He didn't want to contribute to "that sort of thing."

Even now, Dummar adds, he doesn't know whether it was really Howard Hughes. But it must have been. Why else would Hughes leave him so much money?

Dummar also is convinced that although some 30 different wills have now turned up, the first one must be authentic. Who else would know that Melvin Dummar once gave Howard Hughes a ride into town?

Dummar, his blue eyes direct and his voice quivering, says he never expects to see a penny of Hughes' money. Even if the first will is finally declared authentic, he'll probably be too old to care.

Which is fine, he says, because he has no need for "mansions and fur coats and all that." He'd like to send his kids to college, maybe, but that's about it ...

Then, in the next breath, Dummar adds that he'd like a little ranch somewhere in these splendid hills, too. A modest little house, not so cramped as his current quarters over the station.

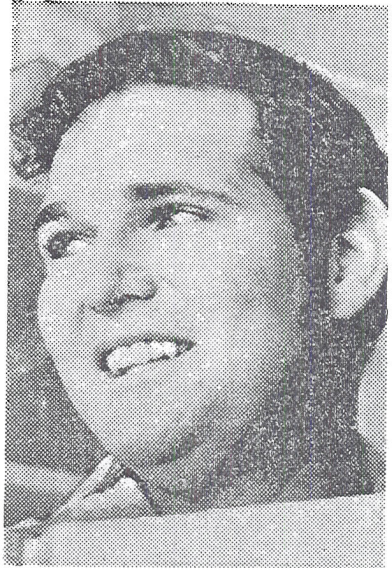
And if he couldn't have a little ranch, a little grocery store in Ogden, like his dad's, would be nice.

Or a music shop. Or a real estate business. Or perhaps even a small nightclub featuring country music.

Or, maybe, what the hell, all of them.

Even if the Hughes money (\$37 million, after taxes) is never forthcoming, he's likely to come out of this a wealthy man, anyway. There are the movie and the book and people who want him to endorse products.

But, he adds, even if he becomes rich and famous, he'll still



MELVIN DUMMAR  
"I don't want the money"

always be just plain old Melvin Dummar. Hopefully, now he'll be able to sell some of his songs, too, especially if Glen Campbell sings the movie theme song. His favorite, he calls it, "A Dream Can Become a Reality."

*A dream can become a reality, and this is all you do.*

*Work hard, have faith and courage and it will come true.*

*Yes, you can rise from a beggar into a king,*

*With hard work, faith and courage, you can conquer anything.*

★ ★ ★

Dummar has come a long way. Not two months ago he was looking halfway dazed by shock and confusion, practically sobbing into national network TV cameras as he offered his version of why Hughes chose to treat him so generously.

He had found the man when, having "to go to the bathroom," he'd pulled onto a dirt road off the highway.

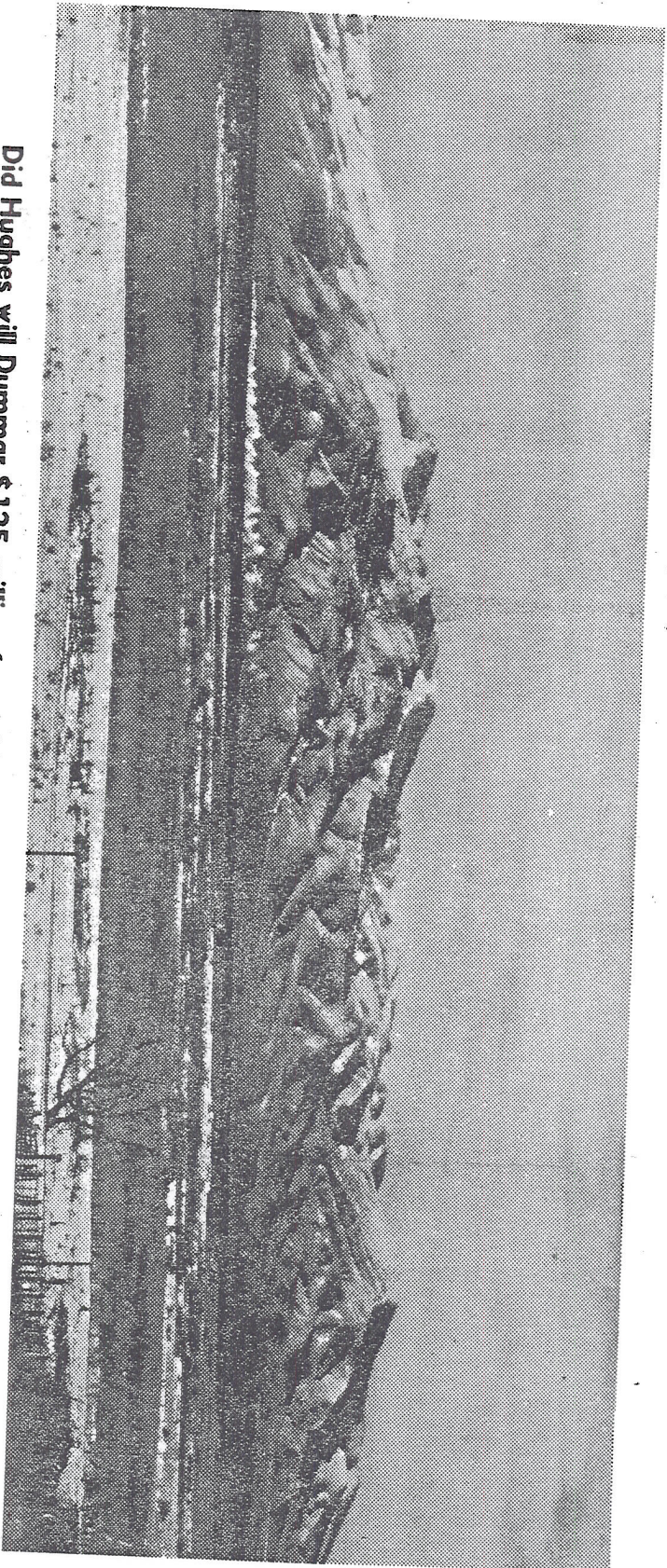
And Dummar didn't know how Hughes might have gotten there, because the man refused to talk about himself. And so, for nearly 120 miles, they discussed Dummar's life instead.

To some, Dummar's story was downright refreshing, proof positive that no good deed, however small, goes unrewarded.

To others, however, it sounded

# 'Heir'

CIA



**Did Hughes will Dummer \$125 million for picking him up one winter night in the Nevada desert?**

mighty fishy, a too-pat script straight out of Hollywood.

And it didn't help any when assorted sleuths, who immediately began digging into Dummar's background discovered that earlier this year Ogden officials charged him with receiving stolen property, a deer rifle, but the charges were dismissed on the ground the court lacked jurisdiction. Then, in 1969, he was arrested and tried for forging a payroll check but the jury was unable to reach a verdict and the charge was dismissed.

Added to that, Dummar left his job as a milk route driver for a Downey, Calif. dairy owing the company almost \$5000 in unpaid milk bills.

And, finally, it turned out that Dummar also was something of a game show freak. He'd appeared at least three times on "Hollywood Squares" and "Let's Make a Deal," winning several thousand dollars in cash and furniture, and a 1975 Pontiac.

The implication was clear. Dummar, ostensibly a happy-go-lucky country boy, was not shy.

Dummar, almost wailing, protested all these insinuations, pointing out that he'd never been convicted of anything, that he was making payments on his dairy debt and that the game shows were simply fun. He'd take a lie detector test any time.

The whole business, Dummar concluded, was a nightmare, and he didn't even want Hughes' money. All he wanted was to be left alone.

But even if the legal battles take 50 years, many local residents privately doubt that Bonnie and Melvin Dummar, brushed overnight by Hollywood and buoyed by hopes of untold riches, can be content, ever again, to sell gas and beer and a few assorted groceries from their small store.

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