

Lever Shortening, Soap Character Good Advertising Combination

"Rely on *Spry*."

-- Dan Seymour ■

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

On Monday, January 18, 1937, *AUNT JENNY'S REAL LIFE STORIES* debuted on **Columbia Network's** daytime schedule for *Spry Shortening*. As the listeners found out, this serial program wasn't your typical radio soap opera--- and it wasn't your typical relationship between program and sponsor, either!

Several daytime shows during radio's golden age have had some long running relationships between program and sponsor. Almost by instinct, the listeners associated *Oxydol* with *MA PERKINS*, *Bab-O* with *DAVID HARUM*, and of course, *Spry* with *AUNT JENNY*. The relationship between program and sponsor was very impressive, but the relationship between *Spry* and *AUNT JENNY* was not only impressive, but also unique in how they helped each other out.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. First, let's take a look at the program. *AUNT JENNY'S REAL LIFE STORIES* featured the people who lived in the town of Littleton. These people had their share of happiness, sadness, romance, and the other good emotional stuff radio soap operas were famous for. The stories were usually completed in 5 episodes, and a new one would begin the following Monday with different characters. You may notice that I didn't mention Aunt Jenny's name among the people who were involved in the story. There was a good reason--- she wasn't in the story. On the program, Aunt Jenny served as hostess and narrator. Here is where the unique relationship between program and sponsor took place.

When the story for the broadcast was completed, Aunt Jenny and program announcer Dan Seymour briefly talked about the latest events in the story; then turned their attention to the recipe of the day. Of course, the recipes varied from main dish to dessert, but they all had one common denominator--- the services of *Spry Shortening*. Aunt Jenny wasn't bashful in the least for mentioning *Spry* when it came to using shortening. She stated that no other shortening or baking fat came close in bringing out the flavor of the ingredients as *Spry* could. Since *Spry* was mentioned and talked about frequently between Aunt Jenny and Seymour, the recipe of the day also served as *Spry's* closing commercial.



Since the program achieved respectable ratings during its long run, the on-the-air combination of Aunt Jenny and *Spry Shortening* was a formidable one--- but it didn't stop there. There was another form of advertising the character and sponsor were featured.

In ladies magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Woman's Home Companion*, *Spry* magazine ads featured a recipe that, of course, required the services of *Spry Shortening*. To cap off the ad, a picture of actress Edith Spencer (who played Aunt Jenny on the program) was found. She informed the readers that they could all be better cooks if they used *Spry*. Of course, it didn't hurt if the magazine ad gave a gentle reminder for the readers to tune in to *AUNT JENNY'S REAL LIFE STORIES*--- as if the readers needed reminding of that fact!

This type of magazine ad continued until Ms. Spencer left the *AUNT JENNY* program--- but the character of Aunt Jenny continued to be featured in *Spry* recipe magazine advertising until the program's demise in 1956. The character of Aunt Jenny (whose facial features were different from Ms. Spencer's) were either pictured in cartoon form, or her name was mentioned with the latest recipe without a picture.

The final episode of *AUNT JENNY'S REAL LIFE STORIES* aired on Friday, September 28, 1956. With sponsors pulling out from radio at an alarming rate, *Spry* stayed all the way with the program (*Franco-American* products co-sponsored the program with *Spry* and other *Lever Brothers* products during its final 3 months on the air). The radio listeners lost a good friend when Aunt Jenny said her final good-bye to the listeners. For nearly 2 decades, Aunt Jenny helped any cook from "**butterfingers**" to "**expert**" become better cooks with her numerous and easy-to-follow recipes. Of course, they would be better cooks if they used *Spry Shortening*.