

Cryts, a farming celebrity

The name Wayne Cryts doesn't mean much to the typical newspaper reader here in the urbanized east. But in farm country, he's a celebrity. His daily activities are chronicled in newspapers, and on television and radio. He signs autographs wherever he goes, and letters pour into his southeast Missouri farm home by the hundreds — many of them stuffed with money. He's in demand for speeches all across the country and he's a frequent talk show guest. All of this because he took a stand for what he believed was right.

Cryts' notoriety began back in 1981 when he defied the federal government and raided a bankrupt grain elevator. In some people's minds, that was a terrible thing to do. He defied the federal government and took something the government said didn't belong to him. But there's another side to the story because as he sees it, he was taking back what was rightfully his. Around that point have developed all kinds of problems for the young Missouri farmer, in-

cluding a jail term, a \$278,000 legal judgment, a \$1,500 a day fine, and his own 35 million dollar lawsuit.

Prior to the Great Soybean Raid of 1981, Wayne Cryts was just another Missouri farmer. He grew soybeans on the Stoddard County farm that had been in the family for well over 100 years. He belonged to the American Agriculture Movement and went on the tractorcade to Washington in 1979, but other than that had done very little to draw attention to himself or his beliefs.

Then a grain elevator went bankrupt — an elevator that just happened to be holding a year's worth of Cryts' soybeans. As part of the bankruptcy process, the elevator was padlocked, which meant his crop would stay there and become part of the bankruptcy proceedings. He still owned the beans, they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time — stored in that elevator that declared bankruptcy. Be federal law that meant they were part of the problem and would remain there until the bankruptcy mess

was sorted out and all creditors dealt with.

But Cryts didn't see it that way. He saw it as a year's worth of work for him and his family. He saw it as income that he needed — something that was his that was simply stored at an elevator that had gone out of business. This mild-mannered Missourian decided it was time to take a stand. And so, gathering up a few neighbors and a few farm trucks, they went to the elevator and took what was his. Defying federal marshalls he went in, broke the locks, and unloaded 32,000 bushels of soybeans.

They were his beans, there's no question about that. He had receipts to prove that he had stored 32,000 bushels of soybeans at that particular elevator. But the bankruptcy laws say that everything on the property at the time bankruptcy is declared becomes a part of the bankruptcy process, and theoretically could be used to settle the judgment against the elevator. That could mean a farmer who stored there would just be out of luck.

It happens all the time. Grain elevators go broke. An owner simply padlocks the door and leaves town, and by the time farmers realize what has happened, bankruptcy proceedings have been filed, the federal government is involved, and they've lost everything that was stored there.

But Cryts decided that wasn't going to happen. He took a stand and he's paid a pretty heavy price, and it's not over yet. So far, the courts have ruled against him on several occasions. He was jailed for a month for failing to tell the courts who helped him remove the soybeans. He's had a \$278,000 judgment leveled against him for taking back his own soybeans, and

he's now being fined \$1,500 a day because he refuses to pay the judgment. He's spend \$75,000 in legal fees and has been under unbearable pressure over these many months because of his actions.

Cryts is convinced that he will win eventually, and supporters around the country feel that way also. Each day the mail brings messages and prayers from those who stand with him, and money — upwards of \$100,000 from those willing to share the financial burden of his stand.

What was he thinking when he risked his future, the farm that has been in his family for generations, the security and well-being of his wife and children over a few thousand bushels of soybeans?

"I couldn't live with letting a bunch of lawyers take the soybeans that represent a year of my family's hard work," he told a reporter. "On the other hand, I can live with the penalties for my actions."

What kind of a man is Wayne Cryts? Joe Dan Boyd of Farm Journal magazine describes him this way: "Wear and worry have combined to etch a single deep crevice between the eyebrows. A ruggedly handsome face reflects daily battle with 35 years of wind and sun. His deep voice is both sincere and commanding, softened only by the gentle brown eyes of the family man who seems so in touch with himself. A robust 190-pounder, he stands an inch or two under six feet, in brown cowboy boots and tooled leather belt that dramatize jeans and western cut shirt."

Cryts is a family man who has spent his entire life on the land he now farms. He attended a one-room school, joined the Masons when he was 21, and was con-

sidered a loner.

As he puts it, "I farmed my crops, loved my wife and two kids, honored my parents, worshiped God, paid my taxes, and voted for people to represent me in government. I thought that being correct would assure right on my side."

Until the soybean raid, he was just another farmer. But now, despite his own wishes he's a folk hero to thousands of farmers who identify with his problem. He's an average citizen who finally drew the line and said that's enough. He stood up to the government because he believed he was right and he's willing to suffer the consequences.

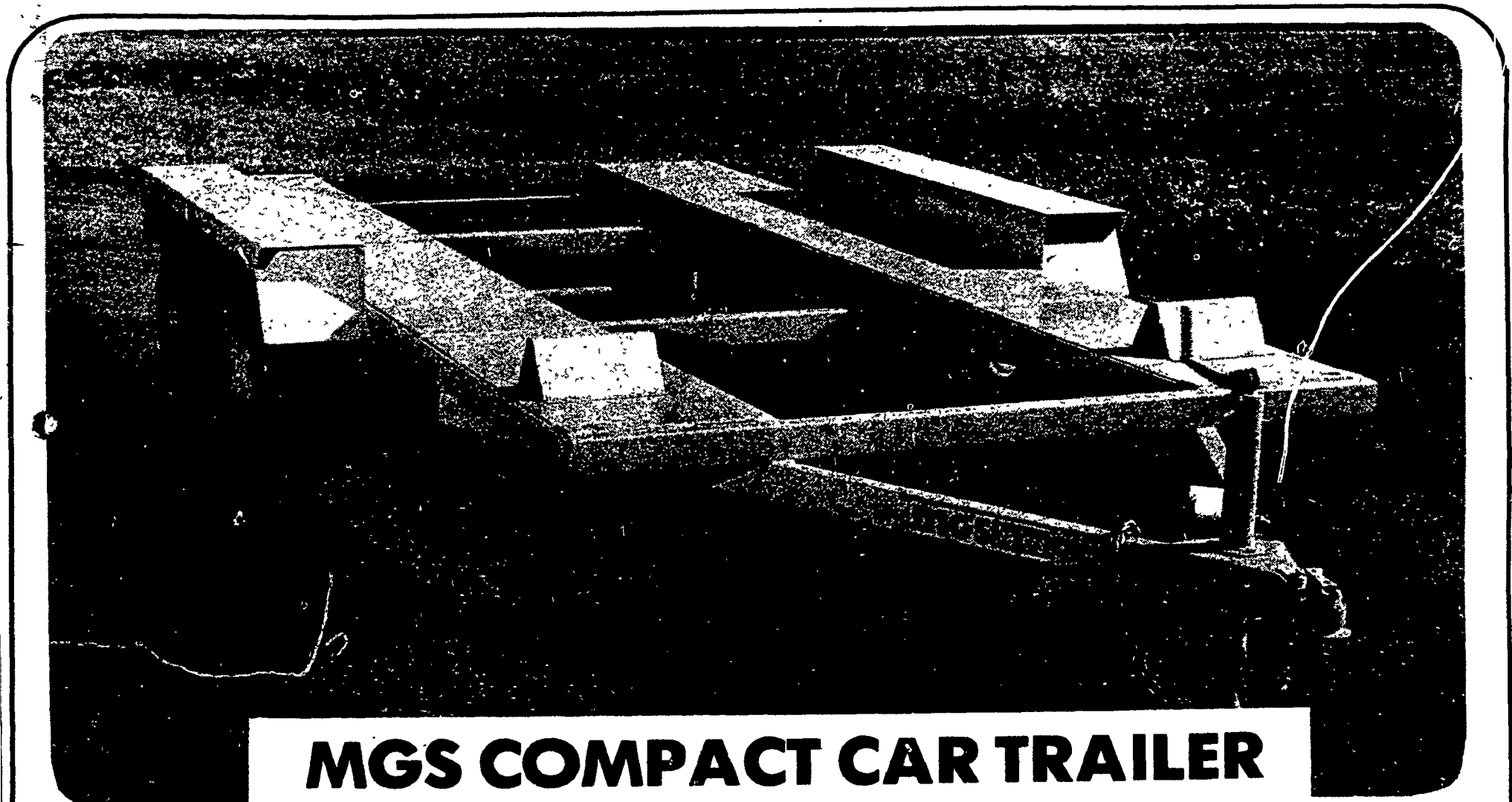
Where this saga will end is anybody's guess. I can't help feeling that the rightness of his position will eventually win out and he will be exonerated. In fact, the laws will probably be changed to prevent this from happening again. After all, why should a farmer lose his property simply because it's being stored in an elevator that goes bankrupt?

Besides exoneration, and perhaps a change in the law, what will be Cryts' reward for all this effort, for the unbearable pressure, for the months of stress, the legal expenses and all the rest?

Who knows? There's talk about a movie or a TV documentary, and no doubt he can spend a lot of time and make some money on the agricultural banquet circuit over the next several months.

And then there's the lawsuit. He recently filed his own 35 million dollar suit just in case things don't work out too well for him. That will still have to be unravelled.

It's a continuing story — one that's a long way from ending. Hopefully, it will serve some good purpose.



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