

OPINION

Uncle Bert's wild ride

NICK JACOBS



Nick Jacobs

It was a Sunday in 1957 when this tale became a reality. My favorite Uncle — Alberto, or Albert, or Bert — was sitting at the kitchen table. He was 39 years old, single, living with his parents and painting houses for a living.

Before you judge him about any of those things, he had been in active battle in World War II in Northern Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge before being wounded and finally returning home. If you don't think that amount of exposure to war changes you, you've never been around those who have.

He finally had begun to dig out of his PTSD, or battle fatigue, or shell-shocked state of mind by the early 50s and, except for the fact he didn't feel ready to settle down, he was the most fun, and coolest uncle in the world.

He didn't just seem fun. He was fun! He took us fishing, swimming, built me a go cart, and even set up old government surplus army tents and cots and slept outside with my cousins, brother, and me on mini-camping expeditions in my grandparents' back yard.

He went on hikes with us every Sunday, and one autumn, he even built us a 10-foot by 12-foot cabin made of discarded wood slabs from a local sawmill. The hikes sometimes included him taking us to Indian burial grounds and telling

us about the things that were typically buried in the graves. He let us shoot his 22 rifle at tin cans and charcoal targets and showed us how to carve pronged sticks to protect ourselves from venomous snakes along the trails. Uncle Bert was no stranger to our home either. Every project ever completed at our house had Uncle Bert's involvement. He used to brag that our dad was the brains, and he was the brawn. Bert was my dad's best friend. They built bathrooms, a powder room, enclosed a side porch, laid tile, and painted our house several times. Most nights he'd stop over for ice cream and coffee before heading out for a night of whatever a single guy in his 30s did in the 1950s.

Well, on that memorable Sunday afternoon like any 10-year-old worth his salt, I began complaining about being bored. That's when, without hesitation, he said, "Let's go for a ride, Nicky." Bert had a light green, 1952 Chevy Bel Aire two-door coupe. It was not a normal car. He had adapted it to his personal use in ways that could only be described as unique.

For example, when you sat

in the passenger's side of the front seat, you couldn't help but notice a handmade wooden drawer that had been built immediately below the glove compartment. It was attached to the metal dashboard. In that drawer was a collection of "Bert stuff" that only a nephew could really appreciate.

He had a ball of bailing twine, a hunting knife, black tape, a red handkerchief, pliers, duct tape, fishing gear, and a dozen or so other things like nail clippers, screwdrivers, and of course, a pack or two of tobacco and Zig Zag rolling paper for his cigarettes.

We left the yard and headed out the road for about three miles when, suddenly he said, "Let's drive through this field." What I didn't know was it was a corn field. He made a sharp left, and we plowed through that field like a Sherman tank with corn stocks and old field corn cobs flying everywhere. It was too much fun. I'm sure it put a lot of scratches on that ole Chevy, but he was laughing, and yelling and having as much fun as I was.

Uncle Bert's philosophy was very wise, and he reminded me of it all the time. "Keep life simple, and keep laughing." He always drove well-used cars and lived below his means.

He was a great uncle.

(Nick Jacobs of Windber is a senior partner with SMR and author of the blog healing hospitals.com.)

AMERICAN'S VIEW Day of prayer

The coronavirus that has plagued the world has stopped many things.

It's closed businesses and schools. However there is one thing that it definitely can't stop and that's the power of prayer.

This Thursday is the National Day of Prayer. As everyone around the globe deals with the stress, anxiety, sickness and death caused by this virus, it's clear prayer is needed more now than in most times.

Usually the annual event is held at noon on the steps of the Somerset County Courthouse. However because of social distancing concerns, that won't happen this year. But the event will continue.

The local observance will be online at noon Thursday on Zoom. The program will also be on Facebook.com/somersetprayer. It will air at 8 p.m. Thursday on the Laurel Highlands news, talk, sports network: 990 AM, 1490 AM, 103.5 FM or 104.5 FM.

There is a link on the Facebook page that will go to the Zoom meeting, or watch live from that page. To join the prayer meeting on a computer, iPad or smartphone, download the Zoom app. Click on "join a meeting." The meeting ID number is 827 5680 0154. The password is "prayer." Type your name in the place provided. Participants will need to allow video and audio on their device.

To hear the program on a regular phone, it will be long-distance. Dial 1-929-205-6099 U.S. (New York). On your phone it will ask for the meeting ID: 827 5680 0154 #. Then for the phone only, use the password: 981230#.

The program will include prayers and musical selections to provide hope and strength for the future. After the pandemic ends, the group will plan to have a service back on the steps of the courthouse.

It's good news to see that this tradition of National Day of Prayer will continue. Those who organized this year's event are to be commended for their efforts to provide this alternative way of uniting people in prayer.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Wednesday, May 6, the 127th day of 2020. There are 239 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On May 6, 1915, Babe Ruth hit his first major-league home run as a player for the Boston Red Sox.

On this date: In 1865, the Civil War Battle of Chancellorsville in Virginia ended with a Confederate victory over Union forces.

In 1882, President Chester Alan Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred Chinese immigrants from the U.S. for 10 years.

A reflection on the value of conservation efforts

LEN LICHVAR

District Manager of the Somerset Conservation District



Len Lichvar

This is Conservation District Week in Pennsylvania.

There are 65 conservation districts in the state and the Somerset Conservation District has been in existence since 1957. The district provides ongoing leadership, technical and administrative assistance to other organizations and on the ground project implementation in natural resource conservation providing public benefits to every citizen in the county and the region.

Those benefits of improving and using our land and water resources properly are not always thought of in economic terms. The traditional economic engines are thought to be the ones that manufacture, distribute or grow products we then use and consume. Yet the district, existing as a small independent and unique public entity, brought in \$1,034,185 of direct economic impact spending into Somerset County in 2019.

A few of the ways that real dollars are generated and distributed include that the District purchases materials from vendors and pays contractors puts and keeps people at work in order to implement District projects. Just a few of these include erosion and sediment reduction oversight and streambank improvement projects, abandoned mine drainage (AMD) abatement projects, environmental education events and agricultural assistance programs.

The district's Dirt and Gravel Road Program alone contributes several hundred thousand dollars a year that employs people to improve our rural roadways and transportation system and at the same time minimize stormwater runoff into local waterways, which is the actual goal of the program.

The district, through assisting farmers to secure funding from federal programs such as the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP) has enabled local producers to secure no-till drills and other management equipment and bring in \$172,223 of state tax credits all aimed at improving our agriculture economic sustainability.

The district's required responsibility to maintain multiple AMD passive treatment systems brings in hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to sustain and improve the county's water quality that is the foundation upon

which the county and region's booming eco-tourism industry is built on.

A study sponsored by the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce found that Somerset County residents pay \$600 less a year in local taxes because of tourism generated revenue that did not exist only a few decades ago when our land was scarred and water impaired.

To further drive home the point, the district was part of a consortium of conservation organizations that oversaw the creation of the Valuing Clean Water Report that put together a data driven economic value of ecosystem services. These services are benefits people receive from nature for free such as clean air, clean water and fertile soil that produce a real dollar input into the economy. The report has determined that our regional waterways alone in the Laurel Highlands region, of which

Somerset County sits in the middle of, contributes \$3.7 billion a year into the economy from ecosystem benefits.

Often inaccurate perception and misguided opinion, that conservation or environmental efforts and organizations slow or negatively impact economic growth or prosperity, is too often generally accepted.

The fact and reality, that can be backed up, clearly shows just the opposite is true. In this time of uncertainty the Somerset Conservation District continues to be part of the solution by keeping our economy moving forward while at the same time assuring that our natural resources will continue to be viable enough to generate the ultimate source of where both our economic future and our quality of life originate from.

For more details on the Somerset Conservation District visit www.somersetcd.com or call 814-445-4652 Ext. 5.



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Today's prayer

By Brent Williams, pastor,
First Christian Church of Somerset

Dear God, Help me to get better, every day, in every way. Amen.

Letters to the editor

The Daily American welcomes letters to the editor which express a specific view on issues of general interest. Letters submitted for publication must be signed and contain the address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be limited to about 350 words. The Daily American reserves the right to edit all letters. Letters cannot be returned. Letters may be mailed to Reed Garden Forum, Daily American, 334 West Main St., Somerset, PA 15501. Fax: 814-444-5980 or e-mail: brwilliams@dailyamerican.com