

“Tell Me Why”

BY BANJO JACK WILLIAMS

Eight summers at sleep away camp, for two months, was not Sunny brook farm. At the tender age of 6 and a half, My parents sent me to sleep away camp. The time I spent at Camp Lauraweld on upper Baker lake in New Hampshire, was not a waste of time or money. It was the most important experience of my formative years, thanks to Uncle Lou Sorg, my mentor and ego ideal.

Uncle Lou grew up in Hells kitchen, played basket ball at Springfield College, Mass and graduated. Became a teacher, met fellow teacher, Laura Wenworth and got married, having one daughter. It may be remembered that the sport of basketball was founded at Springfield College.

Uncle Lou was in charge and lived up to the high expectation that our parents expected from him always. Leading songs at every meal at the camp

they founded, was a tradition, I will never forget.

“John Jacob Jingle himer smit his name was my name too,” “one, finger, one thumb, one hand keep moving,” “Down at the station early in the morning see the little puffabellies all in a row,” and, “take me out to the ball game,” “East side, West side.” “smile” and “I’ll build a bungalow big enough for two.....”

He always lead vespers on Sunday night, at the main lodge, where we ate. One of the songs we always sang was, “Tell Me Why”. I would be a miss, if I did not end this short story by recalling the words of this song. Every time I do, I remember the joy of knowing Uncle Lou, being grateful for the impact that he made on my life. Tears come to my eyes when I remember this time and I will never forget his love and real devotion to God and all of us during this very troubled time. A country going to war is not a happy place. We all got through it because of this wonderful man and his camp. The music he brought to every gathering sure helped.

World war II was coming and my parents felt that it was safer for me to be out of Washington D.C., where bombs could fall, at any time. Sending a boy at my age away for two months, would be seen as child abuse in this day and age. At first I was home sick and like many of the boys in my cabin wet the bed on a regular basis. It was a daily routine washing our sheets in the lake every AM. It was just the way it was. There was no shame in being a bed wetter at 6 ½. A number of us had to with stand the teasing and ridicule for this behavior. Years later, when My child hood friend John Frances Conner, built a house for us in East Hampton, N.Y. we still remembered fondly our Camp adventures. He went to the same camp for 12 years in a row. When asked in my seventies how long I had known Red Conner's, I was happy to say I've known him since we both wet the bed. He was 5 and I was 6 ½. This was always good for a laugh.

I once wrote a song to him called, "bed wetters in the sky." Actually surprised him by playing it on a full flight to Reno, NV, where he was to complete in the senior national indoor track meets. I drove he

and his wife to the airport and at the last minuet got on his flight with a ticket, and with the help of a very nice hostess, surprised him and the other passengers with the song, before we took off. As we deplaned in Reno, one passenger, said to John, "I hope they gave you a rubber sheet?" John won a gold metal in the mile and I think the song may have helped. Taking my guitar to Reno was a blessing.

How I found my self at this sleep away camp in the summer of 1938, is a story that needs to be told. Meeting Uncle Lou and his wife Aunt Laura actually took place, in the winter of 1936. When my parents decided, we would drive to Miami, Florida for the Christmas vacation. My Father was exhausted, driving his ford, all the way from our home in Chevy Chase, MD. It was 4:30 AM and he was driving through, Daytona Beach, FL. When he ran a red light. A cop pulled him over and my Father, who is the greatest talker of his age, attempted to talk his way out of the ticket. Related our long journey from Washington, and his exhaustion and need to find at rooming house. The

police officer, was very understanding and took us to his sisters' house, as she rented rooms. We moved in. In fact we never got to Miami. For the next three Christmas holidays, we stayed with this family in Daytona Beach.

It was while swimming in the ocean there, the next day, that My Father, who has the gift of gab. Met a couple named Sorg. They were teachers in a New England private school. Told my Father that they were planning to start very small sleep away camp in New Hampshire. My Dad, always looking for an opportunity to give his only son a rich and rewarding experience. Asked, "could my son John Go to your camp?" When they found out how old I was they refused, but said maybe next year. So at 6 ½ I was going to sleep away camp. I honestly did not know what sleep away Camp was all about.

I still remember my father getting up before dawn and driving me to New York City, for the first time. There were no super highways and we had to drive through a number of cities, such as Baltimore and Philadelphia. It took about ten hours. I remember

staying in a hotel near Grand Central Station.

looking out at the action of lights and cabs and more people in the streets, than I had ever seen in my life. The next morning, My Dad took me, with my suit case, to meet Uncle Lou, at Grand Central Station, where other campers and families waited to board the train to Camp.

It was at this point that I met John Francis Conners, 5 ½ years old, dressed in an Indian costume. I was dressed in a cowboy out fit and we were going to Camp. Also on that train was Arthur Semle and older sister, Dorthy. Little did I know at the time that these Camp friends, would be in and out of my journey for the rest of our lives. I am 82 now and Art, Red and I are still very close friends. We return to the camp and we climb mountains together in New Hampshire, as we did as young bucks.

It was at this camp, that I learned to swim, sail, row a boat, hike, make trails, catch frogs, fish, horse back riding, riflery go on canoe trips, climb mountains, camp fires, cook outs, play such games

as Capture the flag and kick the can, tennis, and baseball. I even learned to dance at a very early age with the older girls. What could be more exciting than discovering, girls and finding out that love is a great voluntary thing. I still have dreams about this time in my life and Camp Lauraweld, is always the back drop of these dreams.

The point house girls like, Betty Hicks, Polly Pidgin, Dotty Semle, were 14 to 15 and were built like woman and taught us how to dance when we were 9 and 10. We were maturing physically and we were turned on by hanging out with woman, who were developing faster than us. Even the younger middler girls were beginning to look great. Our sexual juices were definitely moving in an exciting direction.

We were all cared for by Nursey Yates, who came to camp with her two young boys. Frankie and Johnny Yates. The infirmary was in the main house. Nursey took care of us when we were sick. She had a cure for constipation which we called the old one two. With 54 campers we needed lots of taking care

of.

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My first summer at camp our counselor was a guy named, Jack Finley, who may have been a freshman in College, took care of the horses. He told us Ghost stories every night. His stories were so real, I was afraid to go to the Checker, before bed. It was dark and at 6 and half I was afraid to walk up the dirt path to use the John, which we called the checker. Most likely that caused most of us as Juniors boys, to wet the bed. The name John for the head, caused me to change my name to Jack. This lasted for the rest of my life.

Our first horse back ride, with Uncle Lou in the lead, was an experience I will never forget. Five Junior boys the youngest Red Conners, his first time on a horse. We came to a place called the stretch and the horses went into a fast canter. Red, whose feet could hardly reach the stirrup, fell off and hit the road, Crying his eyes out. Uncle Lou turned his horse around and picked him up with one hand, saying cowboys never cry. He never fell off a horse again and stopped crying forever. Later he became

the Counselor, who ran the stable.

My Mother had given me a Ukelele, which she had carefully packed in my suit case. I remember that I never took it out till my third summer because the other campers would think I was gay. Or quir, which was something most boys fear at this age. Perhaps I was, but my male ego, would not let me go there.

That first summer we were all eager to get out of the crib, pass our swimming test, so we could, be good enough to swim to the float. The float was where all the older girls, counselors and leaders hung out. Art, Red and Myself were the first to pass the swimming test and get out of the crib. Uncle Lou would not let us near a boat until we proved we could swim. After our evening meal we would check out canoes, row boats and one of two sail boats and cruise the Lake at sunset.

I remember reveille, played on a bugle and our flag raising ceremony, with the pledge recited every morning before breakfast. After breakfast which

was full of song. Most about colleges, Williams, Yale, Harvard and of course Dartmouth. We returned to our bunks to make our beds or in the Junior boys cabin, wash our wet sheets in the lake. Taps was played every night on that same bugle.

Once the war began we began to attract new campers such as Hugo Hartenstein, whose family had escaped from Cuba and became one of the fastest runners in camp. Hugo became Red's best friend as Art was mine. We both were in love with Red's younger cousin Patty. The real love of my life at camp was Marian Porter Capron, the daughter of a famous author. After lunch every day we had our visit to the canteen where, we could buy penny candy and then we were made to have rest period. Following the one hour rest period, we all went swimming. I can still taste the wood on the float. Jumping or diving off the tower on the float was great. Bathing suits on the girls, showed the developments that separated the boys from the girls. That alone was a rich and rewarding experience.

During WW II we had an experience that was an example how the war was part of our daily concerns. We listen to the Radio. At 12 John McCullough and John Conner unknown to most of us, dug a two room bomb shelter in the pine woods near the Stable. They covered this deep hole with some shutters they took and covered with dirt and grass. Uncle Lou discovered it and when Bobby Rickover's father came to visit, he was shown this creative bomb shelter. His father Admiral H. Rickover, a Jewish refugee and graduate of Annapolis. Showed up at Camp Lauraweld, accompanied by two FBI officers. The Admiral, who had developed the nuclear Sub, was a very famous person. I remember they were dressed in suits and after seeing the sheltered, told Uncle Lou that the two campers, who built this shelter, should be in the Navy. When Admiral Rickover died he was buried in Arlington Cemetery with honors and President Jimmy Carter, a former Sub Captain, did his eulogy.

My Father visited London during the blitz of WWII. He was with OWI, office of war

information. He brought back some very exciting stories of his adventures, with his best friend Edward R. Murrow, who was the radio voice for CBS during the war. My Dad came to camp one summer to give out prizes for an essay contest. Uncle Lou thought that this contest would help, the campers take an interest in writing. I had no time for such intellectual pursuits at the time and was not at all interested in competing for a prize. I was only interested in girls.

Journalism would have to come later in my life.

Uncle Lou and Aunt Laura were teachers and they were big on giving out metals for achievements, in sailing, riflery, horseback riding and hiking. If there was a metal for making out I would have won hands down. I doubt that in terms of awards, sports were high on Uncle Lou's list.

Our annual trip to explore, "Lost River," was one of the highpoints of every summer. We all loved, crawling through these caves. I remember to this day "fat man's missory" and "the coaled shoot." It reminded us of Tom Sawyer in the Cave with

Becky. The visit to the Morris Museum, where we bought small pieces of elephant skin and maple sugar candy was exciting. Morris was with Teddy Roosevelt on his African safari. The museum was full of stuff brought back from Africa.

We enjoyed the stuffed animals.

The boys climbed Mt cube and slept over, cooked out and once shot a porcupine with one of our 22 riffles. I remember that Art Semle and I had the honor of carrying this dead animal down the Mountain. I believe one us, got some needles as we ~~10~~carried this great bounty down the mountain. We were paid \$.50 as a fee.

I shall never forget our annual canoe trips on the Connecticut River. We would launch the boats on a shoot, which sent our craft into the river. located in Farlee, Vermont. Once we maned out canoes with water, food and blanket roles, we paddle down the river to Hanover N.H. Home of Dartmouth College, where one of our counselor Bart attended. I remember one night we were all sleeping in a dusty barn on the river. It was raining. We all

wanted to see the movie in Farlee the next night. It was called, "The Flying Tigers." So got up early and paddled like mad up stream, so we could get to the movie. I still remember laughing, when this pilot John Wayne, said lets give the Japs the old one two. Nursey would have loved that line. We were met at the movie by the girls and it was a happy time. We were all exhausted from hard days paddle up stream. The movie was worth it.

Another memorable canoe trip was up river to Orford, N.H. Art's cousin, Tom Sheridan was our head counselor on this trip and Red Conner was too young to paddle, so he rode with Uncle Lou, in the camp motor boat. He carried the pots pans, food and an old canvas tent. During the night a bad storm hit, it poured and the tent leaked and blew down around our necks and Tom, in his under shorts, had to hold up the center pole, as the rains took our shelter away. This was the last time we used this old tent. We were cold and wet, we all laughed as we warmed our selves by a ragging fire. For a 7 year old, this was the height of adventure.

The last summer of camp, Art and I were Junior counselors and were in charge of the Junior cabin. Now we told the ghost stories and were treated with some respect. One day Uncle Lou asked if we wanted a day off. So on this special day we hitched a ride to a summer place on Lake Moray, where we had two sit down resort meals. We were living large and full of our selves on vacation. As we finished our sit down resort dinner, we realized that we had to get back to Camp. Having no transportation we hitched a ride to Farlee, Vt. Then we had to walk 20 miles back to camp. I remembered that after 11PM there were no rides to be had. Walking was our only alternative. We arrived back to our bunk after 5 am exhausted with blister on our feet. The sun was coming up. We could not go to sleep because there was an accident on top of Mt. Cube, where one of the campers, Bobby Rickover had fallen and sprained his ankle. Art and I took a stretcher, climbed the Mountain and with great difficulty carried the hurt camper down the very steep, rocky mountain trail. We arrived at the bottom exhausted. We were driven to camp in the ford station wagon. An hour later Bobby was

running all over camp, like nothing happened to him. Art looked at me and I looked at him, We laughed, knowing that we had been had. But we had, our day off. Never a dull moment at Camp.

Across our lake was an all boys camp called Mooselock. This was a mostly all Jewish boys camp and we played baseball against them and watched their giant war canoe race across our lake. What bothered us the most is that they were very attracted and interested in our girls. Protecting our older girls from these boys was something we had to be very resolute about. We, who were in love with our point house girls, were watch dogs as we got older. Making sure that we kept these viral rivals off our campus at night.

Camp was not always fun and games. I recall that Pranks and teasing were part of our experience at camp. It was normal to French a bed. New campers would jump into their bunk the first night and would find that we had shorten the sheet putting a small hole in it. The surprise for this new camper, was when his feet split out of his bottom

sheet, it was funny. Even better when we would pie a bed. Used canned pasta. That was a bit more messy and we got into trouble when caught pieing a bed. One day I caught two garter snakes cut off their heads and ran on to the dock, with the two snakes bleeding ^{is}fightening the younger girls. I was nailed by Uncle Lou for that one. I was told to bury the snakes. I was send to my cabin for the rest of the afternoon.

I will never forget one of my top most bullying behaviors, when I took one of my friends, two month supply of medication and threw it all into the lake. Uncle Lou caught me and docked me my dinner and gave me one of the great tongue lashing of my life. He gave me some cheese and told me that I was a rat, for what I had done. No meal that night and being restricted to my bunk. I cried. We choose kids to tease and do pranks, who we did not like. Our scape goats were known and I had to admit that we put them through hell at camp. I feel bad about these crimes and pranks to this day. As far as discipline, all Uncle Lou had to do was give you one of his looks. Our love and respect for this

Father figure was the highest and all he had to do was give us one of his disappointed looks and we knew we had gone too far.

Discovering my sexuality at camp was a very important right of passage. Some might call what we were going through puppy love. But to us at 12 and 13 years of age, we were ready to experiment and act out our love interest. Kissing, loving, petting and making out in the rifle range or at the stable, became one of the excitements of becoming a Junior Counselor and seeing our girl friends, after our charges were in bed. It was fantastic and I never knew when, Uncle Lou might catch us in the act. Interesting, he never did and I think he knew to stay out of our social life after hours. That is why I loved him.

Discovery of the wonder of the female body was by far the high point of these summers away from home. To my knowledge at the time none^{of} us went all the way, but we sure talked about it, sang about it and took verbal instruction from our College age counselors. They tended to stimulate us with their

war stories of making out with certain girls at camp. Many times they were girls we had designs on. We were ready and felt that we were years ahead of other young people, who had never been sent to camp. Perhaps a blessing.

Once in a while our parents would send us a care package of goodies. Cheese, crackers, salami and candy. This spread eaten and shared before we retired, was a special treat. Every Wednesday, we could not get lunch, if we did not arrive with a letter home to our folks. Mail call from home was also a big deal.

The things I learned about myself, while at camp, have been instrumental in my journey through life and I will always be grateful to my parents for making it possible for me to have this experience. Tell me why, the fond memories of this childhood adventure will last for ever. The meals were the best part of the day. French toast, crisp bacon and my favorite cinnamon toast. Turkey, grilled cheese, corn on the cob, water mellow, cool aid and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

I was a member of the sailing club, the riding club and the rifle club where we had our own range. Where later on, we would meet girls and neck. When a couple got serious, we would meet in the hay at the stables. The last summer at camp myself and Art Semle were Junior counselors and Red Conner's ran the stable. Uncle Lou got his counselors from top Colleges such as Dartmouth, Springfield and Yale. Campers came up from the ranks and became his counselors. We always had counselors, that showed us the way and helped us enjoy life full of excitement and adventure. Camp was always a growing experience and we found in this small fellowship, the meaning of what life was all about. There was always a male and female head counselor, who were adults and could be helpful. Your stuff was safe and no body would think of stealing from one another. We were brothers and sisters.

At camp happy days were here again every day. My Camp dreams continued. They are still full of happiness to this day. Years later my wife and I

went back to the Camp, which is now a motel and slept in the Junior cabin, where I wet the bed at 6. The white birch trees. The dock, the float and some of the same canoes were still there. Also Woodpecker tree, big rock and Point house, where the older girls lived, was still their and the camp still smelled the same. The pine needles never loose their smell. Wow! Maple sugar candy! The annual trip to lost River, The visit to the Morris Museum. The movies in Farley, Vermont. The banquet, parting gifts, The camp picture and the last bond fire under the star and the last sing along. Will never be forgotten. Walking holding lit candles and singing, "Good night Campers, good night." Till we meet again."

"Tell me why the stars do shine
Tell me why the ivy twines
Tell me why the sky's so blue
And tell me, dear Lauraweld, just why we love you.

Because God made the stars to shine
Because God made the Ivy twine
Because God made the sky so blue

Because God made, Lauraweld, that's why we love you

I end this short story, knowing that God of my understanding; that all of us who happened to experience his or her love, while we spent our formative years at this very special Camp, which was founded by Uncle Lou and Aunt Laura, has benefited us, beyond our wildest dreams. Our love for them and our gratitude is never ending. I am not sure what Heaven is like, but at this point I am very grateful that back during the big war, I was blessed in being sent to a special place, that for two months each summer. felt like Heaven on earth.

TELL ME WHY?

If you have read this far, as Paul Harvey would say at the end his radio show,, "Now you know the rest of the story."

We all grew up unfortunately and were better people in life because of this experience. It is fitting that these eight summers were remembered and

they may be the foundation of of the kind of persons we became in our life journey.

I read a sign on a tour Trolley ride in Fredericksberg, VA which read," I started out with nothing, and managed to keep most of it for the rest of my life."



Love

Benny Joel & Judith
12-4-14

Could sure use a
Camp picture or
one of Uncle Lou or Aunt Loretta

Merry Christmas