

JOKES

The frost is on the pumpkin in Kentucky this morning so I lingered snug in my warm bed a little longer than usual, and a couple of funny stories came to mind, inspiring me to put finger to key.

Sanford Forbis was married to Eunice Shannon, the only child of Grandma Ellie Shannon Caldwell's brother, Jim Shannon and his wife, Minnie (I don't know if that was her real name but that's all I ever heard her called), so Eunice was Dad's first cousin. We called her Aunt and Sanford, Uncle, though I guess she was my second cousin and he my second cousin-in-law (is that right, Mary Lynn?). I never met Dad's Uncle Jim but I knew Aunt Minnie. She was a little spitfire. When I first knew any of them we were living in my first abode, a white frame house on a hill on the Shannon farm at the intersection of the Matthews-Weddington Rd and Simfield (growing up, I thought it was Sinfield) Church Rd, a dead end gravel road that terminated at the black (parishioners' color, that is, the building was white, or maybe brick, I'm not sure) Simfield Church. I don't know when or who built that house; it may have been built by Uncle Jim, as Dad always called him, and/or his and Grandma's father. It sat only 3-400 yards from the Caldwell home, a 2 story white frame house that I guess (Mary Lynn will have to verify) Grandpa Caldwell, a good bit older than Grandma, built.

Sanford and Eunice had 4 boys; Jimmy Lee, who drowned while swimming in the Aleutian Islands during WWII; Kenneth, who put his eye out chopping wood when he was a kid, and was different (Today he would probably be considered on the spectrum. I remember him as being intelligent but quiet. He loved baseball. Someone said that when he was a boy he would play a baseball game all by himself. He taught Bill Carr and our age group of boys Sunday School in, it seems like, fifth grade [he may just have subbed]. We would get him off the lesson by getting him to talk about baseball. Apparently he played on a real team at some point because I remember him telling us the story of his sliding into 3rd and the ump calling him out, to which he replied, "Out? What do you mean out? I know I'm out of doors". He told the story quietly without the emphasis I'm sure I would have used and then grinned. Bill, Bill Calvert, Eddie Patton, Grady Nichols, Eddie Rhodes, [who else, Bill? I think Freddy Gordon-oops, Freudian or some kind of slip, as Freddy Gordon is an undertaker, it was Freddy Outen who probably had already run out in front of a car and been killed] laughed. I doubt if we ever got back to the SS lesson. Kenneth never married. He worked at a curtain company in Matthews and lived with Sanford and Eunice, where he got in the bottle and was constantly nagged by his mother to take a shower and shave, till they died and his brothers finally put him in a residential care unit on Craig Ave where he died); Shannon, Shank to most, who merits a story all his own (he would never ride in a Japanese made vehicle-don't know whether that applied to German or Italian vehicles-I guess he blamed the Japs for Jimmy Lee's death; and Yates, 180 degrees in personality from Shank (long time librarian at Dickinson College, now living in South Bend, In, where, I think, his daughter or son-in-law teaches classics at Notre Dame-a delightful guy, as was Shank, just in a different way. Yates' son is, or still was last I heard, a single Episcopal priest living in Africa. Apparently he's not Mr Rough and Ready as Shank and sons thought he should be. Son Ronnie, or maybe it was, in fact, more than likely it was his brother, Tommy who told me that they thought he might be different, but that they cross examined him to the point that they were satisfied that he should be allowed to keep the name Forbis and to be allowed around small children and animals. Yates, from

his then home in Galax, Va, where he and his wife, Nina first retired to in or to help her mother run her dress shop there, visited Kenneth quite often on Craig Ave, handled his \$, affairs and funeral.)

I think Sanford and Eunice lived with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Jim for a good while. Shank remembered that Sanford cut timber off the farm, had it sawed into lumber, loaded the lumber on a wagon, and after school, Shank would drive the horse drawn wagon to Matthews where he unloaded the lumber with which Sanford, who carpentered, built their little white asbestos shingle sided house where they lived the rest of their lives.

Aunt Eunice taught me the books of the Bible in Sunbeams, Baptist childrens' church. I'm going to try to say the books of the OT without help: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (please don't grade my spelling), Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st&2nd Samuel, 1st&2nd Kings, 1st&2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obidiah, Jonah, Michah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zepaniah, Haggai, Zacariah and Malachi. I think I got them, so I'll try the New: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts (which, btw, my 2 sons and friend, Danny Grossman, started reading and discussing chapter 1 of this morning via texting after reading and discussing each of the 31 chapters of Proverbs on each of the 31 days of October; they're including me in the text chain but my usual contribution is only a thumbs up emoji to their comments), Romans, 1st&2nd Corinthians, 1st&2nd Thessalonians, 1st&2nd Ephesians, Galatians, Phillipians, 1st&2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, Hebrews, 1st&2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, Jude and Revelations. Did I get them right? Learning them prepared me for the Sword Drill, the Baptist version of the quick draw contest, but no 6 shooters, just the KJV Bible. There was even a ready, aim, fire: Attention, wherein the Bible is held in the left hand by one's side, Swords Drawn, wherein it is raised and the left hand placed under it with the right hand on top, palm down (it just dawned on me as I'm remembering this, right handers had the advantage as their right hand was the trigger hand), and then, after the Book, chapter and verse was announced, the last command was, really, I think it was, Draw, or, on second thought, maybe it was Charge! The first to turn to the appropriate page won that joust. It wasn't sudden death. I think there were several contests before the victorious Christian Soldier marched Onward into ever more fierce battles, such that the swiftest swordsman would be determined for the state, and then, maybe the nation, and then, maybe even the whole earth. I don't know. I was pretty good at Matthews Baptist but never fought on foreign soil. Knowing the books certainly helped. Some went to the table of contents first thing, while others were just page flippers. I remember a few who would fan thru from Genesis to Revelation with their thumb and if not found going in that direction, they would fan back from Revelation to Genesis. The first to find his quarry would step forward and read it aloud to prove he hadn't captured the wrong verse. In addition to knowing the books, it helped that my Bible would always open to the 100th Psalm which is pretty near the center.

Uncle Sanford was quiet but sang a pretty good bass in the choir along with rumbling Ben Walters and Dad, later joined by brother Bill, then Bill Carr and me, and then David Funderburk. Bill Childs, who had a pretty good voice, made a brief appearance, sliding into oblivion after, when singing the main baritone solo, My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?, in Theodore Dubois' Seven Last Words, where, when the notes jumped from an A flat to what should have been an E flat in the songs quite dramatic conclusion, Billy, apparently looking for a fastball (couldn't resist the baseball metaphor after the last 2

weeks), swung from his heels and hit it to the F sharp bleachers, drawing quite a surprised look on manager, Jack Gill (the choir director)'s face. Uncle Sanford had retired from the choir way before then. I think he took his exit when shape notes took theirs.

As I said, Uncle Sanford was a carpenter. He worked for his brother, Charlton, who had a carpentry crew that built houses in post WWII booming Charlotte for a contractor named TJ Watson. I think I've mentioned in a previous story that Dad worked for them a while when he got out of the navy. Shank did, too, as a youngster. Dad always carried a pocket knife and apparently used it to whittle a board a little to make a joint tighter. Shank told me that Dad often used the saying I heard him use many a time while working on a project when a satisfactory joint was completed, "Ah, one fit right after another". Harry, do you say that when building your wooden boats (maybe Harry can send all of you pictures of the many, what, 8-10, magnificent, built from scratch, not kits, kayaks, canoes, dinghies, sailboats he's built and launched over the years in the Severn River in Md or Penobscot bay in Me). I've also previously mentioned that Charlton, Uncle Sanford and crew built our house on Rama Rd in 1955, and a well built house it was. Dad would pay the workers every Friday. Once I was with him. I don't remember whether he paid them in cash or wrote a check but I noticed he paid Charlton, who was gruff and I was a bit scared of, more than Uncle Sanford, who I was very fond of, and I later asked Dad about that. He knew my feelings about the two Forbis brothers, as different as Shank and Yates, and I'm sure tried to soothe my sense of injustice, probably by explaining that Charlton was older and more experienced. Intentionally or not, I didn't accompany Dad on any more paydays.

Uncle Sanford often came by the house for Dad to cut his hair. Dad also did his income taxes. Now, to the joke. Actually, it wasn't a joke but a story, a great one, I thought the first and every of the several times I heard it, and still do today. Uncle Sanford was in WWI. On his way overseas (I don't know when, or where or what he did over there, wish I'd have asked), they were on board ship in NY for a few days before setting sail. They were permitted to go ashore but when returning, the guard would ask, "Who goes there?" and they were supposed to answer with the password. Uncle Sanford was with a group that included a guy from way back in the sticks somewhere, probably the hills of eastern KY, and when he was asked the question by the guard, he answered, and Uncle Sanford would mimic his hillbilly twang, "Yew probly don't know me, I jest got'chere yestiddy" and Uncle Sanford and Dad would cackle.

That's still one of my favorite stories of all time and Uncle Sanford was one of my favorite people. Shank told me one time in talking about his father that if he wasn't good enough to be in heaven, then nobody he knew was and he didn't care about getting there either. Readers Digest had a feature about military funnies and I always meant to submit that story but, like so many things, never got around to it. In fact, I'm going to put on my list of stories to write, Things I Never Got Around To.

Well, as Garrison Keilor used to say at the end of Prairie Home Companion, you've wasted another, what, 5 minutes listening to me chase rabbits. I never got around to the jokes I woke up thinking about this morning. Maybe another time. Happy 1st day of November!