

Big Jacks to You Buddy

By Daniel J. Basta

More than 50 years ago “Big Jacks” and I had gone to High School together, although we hadn’t lived in the same neighborhood. We began to become good friends in our junior and senior year. We had sat side by side in class. It was then when we discovered our common interest in the outdoors. My other buddy in this story, who became and still is my best friend, the “Duke,” had come from a still different neighborhood and different High School. The three of us had grown-up and hung out with the guys in the small neighborhoods we each lived. In reality our neighborhoods were pretty close to one another in that crowded area in Nassau County adjacent to the borough of Queens in New York City – the “City”. This area on Long Island had been the first stop for families moving out from the City after WW II. Almost everyone in those neighborhoods were recently from somewhere in the City.

Although we had hung out with different guys, we lived near to one another and had many friends in common, especially after we all learned to drive. Both “Big Jacks,” aka Dennis James Jack, and the “Duke”, aka Daniel Allen Segal, had been given their nicknames before we met. The story behind the Big Jacks nickname is that it had begun early in high school when a shop teacher, who was pretty fond of him, started to refer to him in front of his shop class buddies as “Big Jacks.” The “Big Jacks to You Buddy” phrase started on a day when a substitute shop teacher had called the roll and asked if Dennis Jack was present. Whereupon Dennis had stood up and said: “That’s ‘Big Jacks to You Buddy’.” The class convulsed and the phrase stuck. Big Jacks was a little over 6 feet tall, thin with blond hair and fine facial features which reflected his Scandinavian heritage. He was one of the most handsome guys around. I think his quiet and unassuming manner endeared him to everyone including the ladies. I never heard him brag one word about anything. He drove a beautiful maroon 1957 two-door Pontiac, one of the classic cars in those days. It broke his heart when he got drafted and had to sell it. I don’t remember

Big Jacks playing organized sports. The Army, however, had toned him up and then sent him to Vietnam. That was the way it was for most of our friends.

Duke had been given his nickname based on a popular song at the time, "The Duke of Earl." I guess he got the nickname because he was always just cool like the guy in the song. Duke was about 5 foot 8 inches tall on a good day, from a Jewish immigrant family also from the City. Both his father and uncle had seen a lot of combat in World War II. He had curly reddish-brown hair that he sometimes let grow into an Afro and was blessed with a naturally athletic physique. He had played lots of sports and games of all kinds. He was a running back in high school for a while, and later a champion wrestler in Junior college. He was great at cards and could beat all the guys we knew at pool. He would often make money for drinks and pizza late at night shooting pool at local bars. It was hard not to like Duke. Whenever he had a devilish glint in his eyes, watch out he was up to something. Duke loved nice cars just like Big Jacks and was always working to support one, mainly because he crashed them.

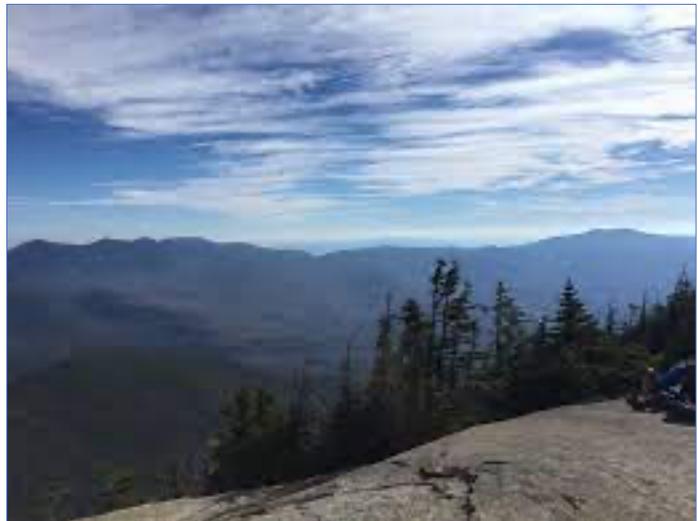
I am from an Italian immigrant family from Brooklyn, which also moved to that corner of Nassau County. All three of us had come from blue collar families which made it through the Great Depression and World War II. In our own way, we had each gotten imbued with their perspectives and ethics. And so, from a very early age we were always working and hustling to find ways to make money. We three, a Scandinavian Nassau County Sheriff, a Jewish accountant, and Italian engineer just fit in. I was near to 5 foot 10 inches tall and therefore was always in the middle.

It was in the early 1960s when we had first gotten acquainted. The early sixties were actually more like the 1950s than most people today might think. The real changes hadn't occurred until the middle sixties, when the War in Vietnam had begun and changed everything around us. We three had found ourselves rubbing together in the places we frequented and soon began to indulge in our common interest in the outdoors. It was apparent that we three had been far more interested in outdoor pursuits than our other neighborhood friends. And so, for

almost a decade we pursued hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking and back-packing, and camping in the snow, etc., always together. The adventuring was often hard work and sometimes uncomfortable, like freezing in your sleeping bag in the snow or getting lost in the mountains. There were no radios or GPS to guide us in those days and most gear had been World War II surplus – not very good by today’s standards. Our friends thought we were a little over the edge with this outdoor thing. We had simply said it was tough fun, and maybe not for everyone.

We were always pushing the envelope as much as we could in those days. This was before the “outdoor craze” had begun. We actually had some pretty decent adventures in the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains in New York, and the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Certainly no one else we knew was getting into what we were at that time – at least not in our circles.

This story takes place in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and follows two scouting trips to reconnoiter this new and to us wild country and the hunting adventure that followed. These adventures were always tough fun, but you had to have a sense of humor and be able to give as good as you got. In the end the story is a “guy story” I think. I have chosen to write it because 50 years later, we three were talking about it and it is still funny and a good yarn to tell. I have titled it: “Big Jacks to You Buddy” because Big Jacks is the focal point that drives much of the story. I hope that the families and friends of my two buddies,



especially their children and grandchildren, find the time to read this story and have a keep’s sake to always remember this side of my buddy’s way back before they had known them. (*Above The White Mountains, are the ruggedest mountains on the Appalachian Mountain Chain in New England.*)

It all began one holiday season when my sister and her family had come to Long Island from Connecticut for a visit. My in-brother Ignatius, known as Nat, had suggested to my father and I that we consider hunting the following year in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Nat was from an immigrant Sicilian family and had gone to the same high school as Big Jacks and me and of course my sister. He was probably about six years older than us. My father had so-called broken Nat in as a hunter, as he had me and others over the years. In my case I think my father always overrated my wilderness abilities. One time on a hunt, also in the White Mountains, me and Duke got lost in the fog and snow and barely made it back to camp. It was long after dark when we got to camp. Pop had simply said:

“You weren’t lost, just temporarily disoriented, you’re here aren’t you.”

He had a point, but our cockiness and self-esteem had taken a blow that day. It’s a terrible feeling being lost in the wilderness.

Since moving to Connecticut, Nat had hunted a couple of times in New Hampshire and made friends with an “old timer” named Joe in the town of North Woodstock. Joe owned the Mount Adams Inn, which was an old-time hotel and seemed more like a boarding house. Nat told us about the White Mountains country and about an abandoned line-shack that Joe had told him about. The line-shack had been built many years before to support construction of big power line towers across that part of the state. Joe passed on he hadn’t been there in years but said the remains of an old service road could get us there. He didn’t even know if the “shack” was still standing. But the country Joe had described was pretty compelling – a relatively flat high valley covered with bogs between a series of mountains.

Old Joe, as we came to call him, said the Shack had stood at the far end of a large pond that dominated a flat “bog” area between the mountains. It was remote and at least six miles from the nearest road. If we could get there, we could have a great hunt and experience. In those days we had usually set up a tent basecamp and roamed out of it for about ten days. Our hunts had been mostly about the wilderness and camping experience. Although we did kill a deer or two and did all the butchering as Pop had taught us.

First Scout

The idea of going into the White Mountains had struck a chord in me. It hadn't taken long to get Duke's and Big Jack's attention when we had been out carousing one night. However, we needed to know a lot more before planning a trip. We didn't know very much; only what Nat had



told us, and he hadn't been there himself. Before going further we had to scout the area and find this line-shack. We coordinated with Nat and planned to pick him up sometime early in the spring on the way to the White Mountains, North Woodstock, and the Mount Adams Inn. The plan was to meet Joe and get a better feel for things, then hike the six miles in to find the shack. We thought we could find the shack and get back to the Mount

Adams Inn by night fall in one day. (Map, showing the town of North Woodstock and approximate location of "Bog Pond" and the Shack) At this time we hadn't even an idea that there might need for a second scout.

It was early April when we left Long Island and drove up to northern Connecticut to my sister's house to pick up Nat. Weather had been pretty crappy with rain and drizzle the whole way. The temperature was hovering in the low forties. We had brought our foul weather gear, which comprised rubberized bib pants and knee length similar rubberized rain jackets. None of the clothing and equipment that we find so common today was available back then. For boots we had the rubberized hunting boots of the time. The boots kept your feet dry in the snow, but they were really not made for hiking. Wearing this gear and heavy clothing we sweated to death

when on the move and then froze to death whenever we stopped for very long. But that is just the way it was, and we didn't know any different.

After an early lunch at my sisters' we head northwest to North Woodstock and the White Mountains. The weather had not improved and was colder when we got to the Mountain Adams Inn. Old Joe had been as advertised. I don't know how old he was at the time but seemed to be nearer to 70 than 60. He was about 5 feet 6 inches tall, with a craggy creased face, snow white hair, wore glasses and always had a ball cap angled on his head. He had fought across Europe in WW II. *(The Mount Adams Inn circa 1920, it was similar in 1971 but is different today.)*

When Joe had come home to New Hampshire after the war he never left. I got the impression he had worked on heavy machinery. He had



the voice of a heavy smoker. Although when we met him, he only smoked "Tipparilo" cigars. He always had the plastic tip in his mouth. Perhaps the most memorable thing about the Mount Adams Inn was "Butter Cup," Joe's great white Pyrenees dog. Butter Cup was a giant sweet female and roamed the Inn at will. We were warned to keep our eye on her because she loved cigarette ashes and would lick the ash trays clean. Everyone smoked in those days, including us.

Joe was genuinely surprised we had come to hike the trail to find the line-shack he mentioned to Nat during the previous hunting season. Nat and a buddy had stayed at the Mount Adams Inn. Over the years Joe had probably told the story of the line-shack to others, but no one had taken him up on it. He told us where the trail or old road began outside of town. As he remembered it, there were a dozen streams or more to be crossed on the way up to the bog area where the shack was supposed to be. The bog area had become dominated by a large pond that was named "Bog Pond" on topographical maps. The snow had not entirely melted, and patches

of snow and old drifts remained. Joe told us the trail would be very wet and muddy but should be passable.

When we left earlier the next morning, after a hearty breakfast prepared by Joe's wife, Joe had said:

"Oh, you boys better look out for the bears, there are plenty around up there and they're just coming out of hibernation and a little unpredictable."

I thought Nat would come out of his skin. He was terrified of bears and once in a while even had nightmares about them. Of course we made light of his fear. Big



Jacks was carrying his 357-magnum handgun and was a dead shot. (*Nat and Big Jacks on the hike to find the shack*) He was on the Nassau County Sheriffs' Department pistol team. Duke and I had said:

"Don't worry about those bears, we got Big Jacks to protect us!"

And Nat, ever conscious of bears, was also carrying his own 357-magnum handgun. All Duke and I had was our good looks between us and any stray bears we might come across.

Joe, as it turned out had been right on all scores. The six miles was wet, chilly, and mostly up hill. We walked along wet to the skin from the drizzle and heat generated in our rubberized cocoons. We would stop now and then to have a drink, smoke cigarettes, open our jackets and take our hats off to let the heat out. It was gritty and beautiful country as we climbed and pretty densely wooded. Hopefully the woods would open up at the bog area. About half-way up, were fresh bear tracks in the mud and snow across our path. They looked big in the mud and the bear had crossed minutes before. The hanging light fog and melting snow drifts among the trees gave

it an eerie touch. Big Jacks touched his pistol in the holster making sure he knew exactly where it was. Nat took his out and nervously checked it. We joked about how hungry the bears must be and could be tracking us in the mist. Nat gave us a crooked smile. Later up the trail there were Moose, which were the first any of us had seen. Giant animals moving among the trees.

Big Jacks didn't mind walking, but he hated climbing up and down hills and mountains. He had thin legs and also didn't like working out, especially running. Although Nat was older than us, he was a mountain goat by nature. Duke and I generally kept in decent shape. Big Jacks had been drafted soon after High School and as his luck would have it found himself in the infantry in Vietnam. It had been hard service. At the time of this scout he had been home maybe two and a half years and probably hadn't humped like we were this day since Vietnam. Plus it was cold and slippery not a steamy jungle. We made it to the beginning of the bog area and were about to stop, make a fire and warm up our lunches and ourselves, when Big Jacks let out a deep groan and keeled over. He had severely pulled his groin muscles. At first, we thought if he sat down and rested a little the pain would pass. I went into my first aid kit and gave him pain killers to wash down. But when he staggered up, he could hardly walk. The scout had ended then and there. He could not go on. All our thoughts were now about how to get Big Jack back down the slippery 6 miles of trail and over the streams. If there was a line-shack at the other end of Bog Pond, we weren't going to find it this day.

There was no way we could carry him the six miles. The only way to get Big Jacks back had been to get him to make it out on his own power. He actually could walk a little but walked like the Frankenstein monster, with straight legs and lurched from one side to the other. But at least he could move and if we got him going, he might warm up a little and make it easier. We barely had a quick bite for lunch at the edge of the pond and then started our way back.

It was slow going and the Duke and I decided to keep Big Jacks motivated – to distract him from the pain. It's amazing what the human body can do if you can block out the pain. We soon began to taunt him with every insult we could think of back to the stone age. Cursed him

up and down, called him every vile thing we could think of and kept pushing him along. Big Jacks kept moving, once in a while he murmured a four-letter curse word at us. Duke and I thought our insults had been pretty creative, especially explaining to big Jacks his uncanny likeness to the Frankenstein monster, as Duke would imitate Frankenstein

Through streams, on slippery slopes, muddy and wet in the light rain he kept on going as we motivated him, Nat began to get worried that we were over doing it and had begun to be mean. (*The Author with Big Jack's 357 with Bog Pond in the background*) I think me and Duke had politely told Nat to mine his own business, we knew exactly what we were doing and kept at it up. When Big Jacks got close to the last stream near where the vehicle was parked we stopped



“motivating” him. He had done it and darkness had just begun to settle in. What a day that turned out to be especially for Big Jacks, but he made it out. It had been a crazy 12 miles.

Back at the Mount Adams Inn, Old Joe was disappointed we hadn't found the shack, but he clearly admired the effort, especially how Big Jacks had gotten out under his own power. Joe said he could never hike there and back, even on a good day. Duke and I had said nothing about our motivational methods! Big Jacks took a hot shower, some meds and went to bed. We stayed up with Joe describing the trail and what we had seen of Bog Pond before turning around:

“Darn,” he said: “you were so close and could have gotten to the shack in about 15 minutes.”

He almost looked forlorn. But then we told Joe that we weren't done, we planned to come back in few months and find the shack and assess its' condition for a possible base camp in the fall. Old Joe had just grinned, removed his cap and scratched his head and said:

“That'll be fine.”

The next morning Big Jacks was moving around better and gingerly got into the car for the ride back to Connecticut and then Long Island. It was a good thing I had a four door sedan at the time – a 1961 Ford Galaxy. As we pulled out of the Mount Adams Inn Joe stood on the porch in his standard worn green work pants, work shirt, and ball cap tilted on the side of his head waved good-by. I often wondered if at that moment he thought he would ever see us again. We, however, began planning the next scout to Bog Pond before we hit the highway.

Second Scout

Big Jacks and Duke were sharing a house with our good buddy John and another roommate in Levittown on Long Island. Our buddy John never joined us on our wilderness adventures. It just wasn't his thing! After all John had enlisted in the Navy to get away from the jungles of Vietnam, the hiking and all the crud. At this time I was a graduate student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and living further out on Long Island. Levittown had, therefore, become our planning headquarters.

We planned to go on our second scout to Bog Pond in early August. The plan was to backpack in for at least five days and be prepared to set up a tent camp, since we didn't know if the shack was standing. We also brought some basic tools to work on the shack if it was still standing. Our goal was to determine if five men could operate out of the shack in winter conditions in late November. My father had agreed to join us, that is if we did all the work. He got a kick out of camping with us during the hunting season. He used to tell us that he knew all about our secrets and antics, because he would pretend to be asleep in camp when we three

were talking late at night. I think Pop liked to camp and hunt with us because it reminded him of how it was when he was young.

The plan was sound, but there were a couple of catches. First, Nat couldn't get the time off work to make the scout. Second, Big Jacks couldn't get his days off at the Sheriff's Department to line up with mine and the Duke's. We eventually had settled on a staggered approach. Duke and I would drive up first, go to the Mount Adams Inn, check in with Old Joe, and then backpack up to Bog Pond, hopefully find the shack and begin whatever repairs made sense. We backpacked in the full camp: tent, tarps, food, and tools. On the third day Big Jacks was to hike up to Bog Pond by himself to where we had made it back in April. We calculated he could get up there in the early afternoon, and when he did, to fire three shots. We would then fire three shots and guide him to where we were – hopefully at the shack. It was Pre GPS and radios and that was how it was done and we didn't have a second thought about it.

When the Duke and I arrived at the Mount Adams Inn Old Joe was delighted to see us. He was grinning and smiling the whole time. Joe definitely wasn't a talkative man, but he genuinely enjoyed us being there with him. I think he had started to live a little vicariously through us. We went over the plan with him, and made sure that he would look for Big Jacks in a couple of days. He was dressed exactly the same as when he stood on the porch waving good-by that rainy day in April. After a while Joe said:

“Come with me I want to show you something.”

Out back of the Inn were few out-buildings among the trees and Joe took us into one that looked like a garage. Inside was a vehicle under a large heavy dusty canvas tarp. Joe pulled the tarp off and proudly said with a twinkle:

“What do you think?”

It was an open cockpit tracked vehicle. Joe then said:

“It's an all-terrain vehicle, I haven't started it in sometime, but I have got half a mind to try and get it working and follow you boys. I think it could make it up there and back”

Then it had struck me, yeah Joe had been in World War II fight across Europe – driving Tanks!

The next morning Duke and I were up early. We left the car where we had left it in April, aside a fast running creek. We thought it should be easy for Big Jacks to spot it from the road. The trail began right there where a rickety bridge crossed the creek. It was the only bridge and a long six miles up the trail with backpacks and all that heavy old gear. Fortunately it was cloudy and not too hot. Crossing the creeks had been a balancing act not to totter over while stepping this way and that on rocks trying not to get wet.



(Above: Duke on the trail, carrying tent poles for a camp we didn't have to make.) We cut a couple of walking sticks to help us get across the creeks and fortunately avoided falling head over heels. When we had finally gotten to the edge of the pond, where we had been in April, we took a breather and collected ourselves. Everything looked very different than it had in April. Tall grass covered the floor of the bog area, and the surrounding hills and mountains were thick green carpets. According to Joe if we hugged the shore of the pond, near the end the shack was visible among trees on a little rise off to the right. Duke and I geared-up and hiked slowly through the grass keeping a sharp eye. In a short while we spotted what looked like a shack or something up on a rise of boulders almost smothered by trees. We had been so close in April! We were ecstatic, Duke blurted out:

“Holy shit there is a shack!”

And then we gleefully high fived. It was good the shack was up on the rocks because it was dry up there, nevertheless, it looked like a massive wreck. We climbed up the prominence to the shack and stood on the boulders. They gave us the best view yet of the entire bog and pond and what can be called a high valley among the mountains. There had been nothing up there to suggest that anyone had been there in a long time. Very high towers and power lines traversed

the valley. Even at first glance it looked like a great spot to hunt from, and we should always be able to find our way back to camp – the shack. The first order of business was to assess the shack and determine not only what needed to be done but also if we could sleep in it that first night. Lots of critters had been living in it and it was a chore to clean it out.

The shack had a tin roof and some of the tin sheets had either slipped off or were out of place, we fixed that first. Fortunately, we found a ladder among the weeds and bushes. A small cast iron wood burning stove, a potbelly stove, was lying in a corner among the pieces of its' tin chimney sections which had collapsed and fell to



the floor. The tin chimney on the roof was also missing and lying somewhere in the bushes. (*The Shack from the highest boulder on the perch.*)

Inside, day light streamed everywhere through the spaces between the log walls. There was a door that hung slightly askew on its' rusted hinges, and didn't close. There was only one very small window or opening in the front wall that looked like a shooting port in a frontier stockade in the movies. But all in all the shack seemed solid. With a few pieces of wood, lying around in the weeds and bushes, and the nails and tools we brought we could bring it back. The job that took the longest and was the dirtiest was "chinking" the rough-cut log walls with mud and grass. Duke and I went to work immediately in order to sleep in the shack the first night. There hadn't been a good place to pitch our tent anyway. Of course it was cloudy and raining all

day. We decided we wouldn't do any chinking until Big Jacks hopefully arrived so he could share in the dirty work.

When the day came Big Jacks was to arrive, Duke and I wondered if he would make it? Did he get on the road on time, could there have been some problem either at home or on the road? Had he started hiking up and pulled his groin muscle's again? We kept mulling over the possibilities. Or was he playing a trick on us after what we had done to motivate him in April and wasn't coming at all? Around noon we had begun



looking at our watches every few minutes. At one o'clock we had been getting anxious, but then "bam, bam, bam," had echoed across the valley. It had to be Big Jacks! Duke ran into the shack got his rifle and fired off three quick shots. (*Re-union in the tall grass*) We hopped off our perch on the rocks and went down among the grasses to guide him in.

It was one of those reunions to remember, there in the high grasses of Bog Pond between the mountains. Duke, yelled at Big Jacks:

"Where the hell have you been you're 15 minutes late!"

Big Jacks was beaming and yelled back pointing at us:

"Big Jacks to you buddy, aren't you guys finished yet? I just was in the neighborhood and came up to inspect your work!"

We three felt pretty good at that moment, but that hadn't stop us from putting Big Jacks to work chinking logs after we had given him a tour of the property.

The next day we had had a great surprise. It was probably late morning when we heard a distant and strange sound almost like a rumble. We thought it was probably nothing, maybe an echo from somewhere in the mountains. As the sound got louder it had become a distinct rumble and an accompanying engine noise, growing louder and louder. It was coming from down the other end of the pond. We wondered:



“What hell could that be?”

Whatever it was, it was definitely coming our way. We climbed up as high on our perch as we could to get a good view. Who had even known we were in here? (*Duke emerging from a nearly completed shack, note smoke coming out of chimney.*)

Then a head was popping up and down on top of the rumble and on the head was a baseball cap it was crooked to the side. It was Joe, that crazy old man was riding his all-terrain tracked vehicle and bumping up and down in the tall grasses. We started yelling and screaming and laughing at the sight of him. Joe just couldn't live vicariously, he had to be part of it. He brought his vehicle to the foot of our perch, shut it down and got out slowly:

“I thought you boys could use a little help and a cold beer!”

He had also brought building materials and food for lunch.

Joe hadn't had much time to stay around and after he inspected our repair job and had to head back down. He was able to coerce the vehicle back down and across the streams and rocks without damaging a tread. Good old Joe! We had bid him a fond fare well and good luck

and told him to fire three shots if anything happened and we would come to him. We told Joe that if all went well to expect to see us sometime the next evening. With the tools and supplies Joe had brought we got back to work. Some of the materials we carefully stored in the shack for possible use in November.

The next day around mid-morning the shack was as good as it was going to get. Everything was buttoned up, the stove and chimney were in place, the door fixed, wood cut, the roof repaired, etc. It was ready for us in November, and to make it even better had Joe offered to drive all our gear, food, and “stuff” up to the shack in his little tank and take it all back out at the end of the hunt. All we had to do was walk the six miles in and out. I was sure that Pop could that in his sleep. Except for the mosquitoes, which had particularly loved to feast on Duke, it had been a great trip and mission accomplished.

When we started to gear up for the hike out, I notice that Big Jacks was ready to go, while Duke and I were still loading everything we had brought up into our packs. Not only that, but I also noticed Big Jacks was traveling very light, and his kit was almost nothing compared to ours. We had been so glad to see him when he had come in that we hadn’t noticed he carried only a light pack. As Duke and I were trying to pick up our pace, Big Jacks was carefully adjusting his socks and boots.

“Hey Duke look at that, why is Big Jacks wearing Vietnam jungle boots?”

“Beats” me the Duke had responded.

A minute or two later Big Jacks declared:

“Let’s go and started off.”

“Hey, wait a minute we aren’t ready, hey!”

Big Jacks kept going and was quickly down among the grasses, walking the path that Joe’s tracks had made. We barely had had time to get our gear together and were trying to follow as quickly as we could when Duke uttered:

“That bastard, what the hell is he doing, doesn’t he know we got full backpacks.” What we hadn’t quite got until a little later was that it was “payback time” for April.

Big Jacks was on a mission and kept going not saying a word. He was wearing the jungle boots because they drain water and he was plodding directly through every stream. (*Big Jacks and Duke enjoying a shooting contest*) To even barely keep up we had to plod through the streams as he did. Our leather boots quickly become a squishy aching mess as we plodded through stream after stream and the straps of our



backpacks began to cut into us. It was tempting to just let him go, but Duke had set his glare:

“That bastard, I don’t care if it kills me, I’m not stopping and giving him the satisfaction.” We plodded and stumbled after Big Jacks cursing him to the heaven’s mile after mile. He was paying us back in spade – the bastard. As we moved along the Duke, and I figured that Big Jacks ought to still be thanking us for saving his life back in April not torturing us.

The forced march finally come to an end as we approached the last creek and the rickety bridge where we parked the cars. Big Jacks hadn’t even used the bridge and plodded through the fast-flowing water and up the slope toward the cars. With renewed energy Duke and I charged through the creek, shed our packs, and with Duke’s war cry ringing in our ears, tackled that bastard and torturer “Big Jacks” and began to pummel him on the ground. In 10 seconds, however, we three were lying on the ground convulsing in laughter and that special glow of comradeship. Big Jacks had paid us back for April and we were proud of him, but we hadn’t quit either.

The Hunt

Unfortunately the hunt we had so carefully planned for November, had taken a dangerous turn and forced us into a plan B. The Duke and I had done most of the planning and crating of supplies and equipment for our stay at the shack. We planned on Joe taking our kit in and out with his all-terrain vehicle and maybe staying a day or two with us. But when we had arrived at the Mount Adams Inn in November, Joe had had some bad news for us. Apparently, some locals found out about the shack at Bog Pond and had occupied it the before we had gotten there, They had even dismantled the rickety bridge behind them so it would be hard to follow them. Joe might have slipped and told someone about the shack. We will never know. He had been so proud to be a part of what we had done.

Our impulse was to hike in and confront the intruders. But that would have been a bad idea with all the guns around.

Old Joe felt pretty low about what happened and had found an old farmhouse nestled in near Liberty Mountain we could rent very cheaply. It was a whole different area and we had not scouted it. Nat had hunted there once before and said it was rough, but he had seen some deer. *(Liberty Mountain was*



steep everywhere and very heavily forested.)

The Mount Liberty area was exactly what we didn't want to hunt and why Bog Pond had been so attractive. In that type of upland habitat deer density was always low. But we were there and ready to go and so the little farmhouse had become our base for ten days as we explored and hunted the Liberty Mountain. The last and fun part of this story takes place in the farmhouse.

Hunting Liberty Mountain was particularly exhausting day after day. We had gotten up at 4:00 or 4:30 am and were on the Mountain hiking before dawn. We didn't come off of the Mountain until dusk and had always gotten back to the farmhouse in the dark. One thing that had been good was that the farmhouse had two bathrooms, and it was great to take a hot shower. We took turns cooking dinner and breakfast. *(Pop (L), Nat (C), Big Jacks (R) at dinner in the farmhouse after a tough day on*



Liberty Mountain. Note the can of stew in the foreground, part of the rations we had planned for the shack.) One evening Joe stopped by and brought fresh Moose liver for dinner. We cooked it with butter and onions, and it still remains the best liver I ever tasted. After about a week of hunting my father and brother-in-law had to get back, and that left we three in the farmhouse for a few more days.

One evening back at the farmhouse after dark, we had made dinner and then collapsed in what might be considered the lounge room. It was about 7:00 pm and all the old black and white TV, with the tin foil wings, could get was snowmobile commercials. Big Jacks had been unable to keep his eyes open, he was bushed – that damn mountain! He declared he was done and climbed the old staircase to the second floor to his room. The three of us were sleeping on the second floor. Big Jacks had a room all to himself. Duke and I were sharing the room next to him and next to us was the bathroom. It was a pretty old house, and a single exposed light bulb

hung in the center of the ceiling in each room. Duke and I had slept on cots. The scant furniture in the house looked like it belonged at a Salvation Army give away. It had been someone's home. *(Duke (L), Nat (C), Big Jacks (R) watch Snowmobile commercials in the lounge room.)*



About 30 minutes after Big Jacks had gone up, Duke and I were also nodding off and decided to call it a day and go up to bed as well. The dreariness of only seeing and being in the farm house in the dark must have gotten to me. As Duke and I were climbing the stairs I had said:

“Hey Duke, you know we are only in this house in the dark, I bet we could wake-up Big Jacks and he wouldn't know if it was before dawn or after dusk.”

Oops, maybe I should have used my inner voice. Duke had stopped in almost mid-step and turned to me:

“Oh yeah” and his eyes had started to get that glow.

Maybe he was thinking back to August had “revenge” on his mind. Regardless, there had been no stopping him.

We went upstairs to our room and put on our hunting pants, socks, and boots just as we had done every morning. I looked at my watch and it was maybe 7:50 pm. Big Jacks had been asleep for maybe 30 minutes. Duke and I had then burst into his room, threw on the overhead light and pulled back the covers, yelling:

“Rise and shine, it's your turn to make breakfast!”

Big Jacks was stunned, and the glaring single light bulb overhead had seemed to burn his eyes. He moaned:

“I can't believe it he said, I feel terrible I don't think I slept at all.”

We then told him that was not our problem. He has got to get downstairs and start breakfast and slammed his door and left. Back in our room we had been trying to control our laughter, we could hear Big Jacks stumble around as he tried to get dressed. His door flung open, and he came to our room on his way to the bathroom. He was fully dressed and carried his toilet kit! Duke and I were sitting on our cots and pretended to go through our day packs and acted impatiently for him to get going. Big Jacks had said he didn't know what was wrong, but he felt terrible and was having a hard time waking up. We told to move on and hurry up. He went into the bathroom and closed the door. Our guts were busting and we could hardly stifle our laughter. Duke had been turning bright red trying to hold in his laughter and I thought his head would explode.

We could hear Big Jacks in the bathroom as he ran water over his head and tried to revive himself. Finally he had come out and his hair and shirt were drenched. He leaned against the door jam to our room mumbling something and rested his arm against the door jam. Duke and I kept our eyes down and didn't want to look up for fear we would lose it. As he was mumbling Big Jacks looked over to his watch, on the wrist of his arm he had leaned on the door jam. The watch was at eye level. He looked at the watch and was puzzled and then had started to shake it and then tapped on it and said:

“This damn cheap watch is busted,” and looked at us.

Duke glanced up and their eyes made connect! I suppose Duke's eyes were lit up and his face still red from laughing. Big Jacks had seen that look many times and then out it came:

“Why you dirty bastards, you dirty bastards!”

Big Jacks then turned and went back to his room and slammed the door. We of course had been so glee full we couldn't sleep and kept giggling for what seemed like hours. We were convinced that we could have taken Big Jacks out to Liberty Mountain and left him in the woods to wait all night for day break.

Early the next morning Duke and I got up and went down to the kitchen. Big Jacks was making breakfast as if nothing had happened the night before. We hunted all day and late that night about 2 :00 am in the morning both our cots on collapsed and put us on the floor!

“Damn that Big Jacks!”

It was over 50 years ago when we had first heard of a “Bog Pond” in the White Mountains. We were young men then and it had led us to some interesting wilderness experiences that we continued to build on. But by the late 70s it had become difficult for we three to undertake trips like we had to Bog Pond, as life’s rhythms began to work against those carefree days. We had done others together trips after Bog Pond, but life would eventually move on as it always does. We remain endearing friends today, and the Duke and I are particularly close; but whatever life brought to each of us, the stories of our adventures from 50 years ago are always fun tales to tell. It had always been “serious fun.”

The End



*Somewhere on another wilderness adventure 50 years ago,
Author (L), Big Jacks (C), Duke (R)*

About the Author. Daniel J. Basta was the Director of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), within the U.S. Department of Commerce from 1999 to 2016 when he retired after 37 years of government service as an engineer, scientist, and administrator. He was a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES) for more than two decades and had an extraordinary career both inside and outside of government. He is well known as an explorer, adventurer and master diver who has traveled the world. He has dived more than 160 shipwrecks. Since retirement he has become an accomplished writer and author, writing short stories and tales of his adventures, sometimes to the wildest of places, and of the colorful people in them.