

Speech given by Peter Joyce to the Sharpsville Service Club, 1979.

Reminiscences of Sharpsville, in honor of Dr. Nelson Bailey

My Dear Friends:

How does one assess a lifetime of service? What does one say of a person who has spent 56 years in intimate dedication to healing bodies and sometimes giving peace to the mind of those grieving the loss of a loved one.

Actually it's hard for men to define an action as "love". It seems at times that "love" has a gender and it's feminine.

But, let's wander back 56 years and look at the Sharpsville of that time and some of the people who have gone to their reward, whom Dr. Bailey first met. Dr. Bailey occupied Dr. Catron's old office, so we'll start down Mercer Avenue to Jackson Tin Shop where we'll see John Jackson and old Mr. McDowell making the famous Jackson oiler for locomotives. Then on down to the corner of Shenango and Mercer to Reichard's Drug Store. Dr. Twitmyer occupied the back office. He was tall and thin with white hair and a trim goatee. He drove a buggy pulled by a pure white horse. Then there was Skip himself, the inimitable Skip, short, partly bald, and quick witted. He would never let the coffees stir long enough—Mike McNerney always did it better. That building was the original Odd Fellow Temple. Tom West who started the Valley Mould held the first convention of the American Anti-Accident Association, the parent of Safety First, meeting there in 1907. The Pierce Mansion was across the street with old Jim Pierce who was Burgess. Then there was the very reserved Mrs. Pierce and Mrs. Pierce's sister, Aunt Cissy. Their maiden name was Pomplitz, and they were from Baltimore. The family had manufactured organs. Across the street at the First National Bank was brother Frank Pierce, the President. And, he was President of the Sharpsville School Board. There were five Pierce brothers. They all had six fingers and six toes, except Frank. Then there was Mr. Wickerham, also a new arrival as the cashier. There was also Lloyd Bartleson, Howard Merchant, Fred Bartleson, and Mrs. Lee. The bank was staid, sound, conservative—a bank was a bank then and not a hardware store with gimmicks.

Nearby was Barlett's Hardware and the Bloch Bros., Morris and Jake, in business since 1907. Karl Smith was the postmaster. Then Locke and Catron for gasoline and auto repairs. Then Mehl's store with old John—tall, thin, reserved, deliberate. He said to me once, "Before you spend a dollar of the peoples' taxes, just imagine that it is coming out of your pocketbook—because it truly is." If only we could recapture those values today.

Across the alley was Shaner's Jewlery Store and then Charles Hites Hardware. Charlie was slow, patient, smoke a pipe and was a Socialist. He had everything, but only he could find it. Over the hill was Frye's Store, then the Valley Mould and Iron Co., the biggest manufacturer of ingots in the world. Flanked on all sides by company houses occupied by Slavs and Italians. The Irish had been there earlier and moved up on the hills. The Slavs and Italians would follow them to the hills, leaving only the Blacks. And there, unfortunately, would they stay. I guess

that was the story of America then, as one moved up the economic ladder. It was a raw American, bursting with energy and zeal, but Sharpsville was in a Depression. Most of our blast furnaces were not working and some of the people were moving off to Youngstown and others to Detroit where Henry Ford was starting blast furnaces and promising \$5 a day to labor. The Depression lasted several years and was a forerunner of what was to happen in 1929 that precipitated the Great Depression.

Then along Shenango Street was Perry's Shoe Store, Elmore's Store and Joe Moscowitz for children and ladies apparel. And then the Colonial Theatre owned by Charles Blatt with Jennie Davies as ticket seller. Nearby Steve Gates, the tailor. Then the Parkway Apartments, formerly the Pierce House when the country was wet. For that period they were luxurious apartments. There were 39 rooms.

The town park was cared for tenderly by Johnnie Keats. His tulips were just out of this world in beauty. Across the tracks was the Pennsylvania RR with Sam Morris and nearby the B & O with old Mr. Wert – Charles Miller as yardmaster and Mr. McElvaney as the big boss.

The town park was home to Turkey Murphy, the Blair Boys, Mike Tobin, Pete Johnson and many others.

It was during Prohibition that "White Mule" was available. It was named appropriately, too. It was a ridiculous law inspired by a fellow by the name of Volstead assisted by a female judge by the name of Mabel Walker Willebrandt. It produced some new millionaires and a new type of racketeer. Al Capone became it hero. It's hard to know exactly when the rackets took hold of the politicians, but it's a safe bet to say it was helped during the reckless 20s.

The Stahls had a restaurant at the alley. Then Mehler's Barber Shop with Charlie Collins nearby in his corduroy suit. Then Davis Tailor Shop with Dave and John Gavin sitting with crossed legs on the counter. Next to them Muscarella's Fruit Stand and the Graber's Jewelry Store. His minutes of the Borough Meetings are an example of handwriting at its best. Then, Bob McFarland's house and McLaren's Drug Store, LaMont's Market, Roth's Market and Dick Patterson's sodas, candy and confections. Above him was old Whig Thompson's Print Shop and across the street Dickson's Furniture Store, Shannon's Hardware, where Martha sat on the swing, and Homer Sheasley helped Clair Plum. Homer always had a chew of tobacco in and sometime it used to escape down the corners of his mouth. Well, everybody chewed, at least all the kids in Irishtown carried J.T. Plug.

Then there was Pat Connelly's Bicycle Shop where he entertained the Robinson Brothers, Charlie Carney, Billy Young. Across the street the Odd Fellows with a bulging membership, and on down the street Cora Fuller gave music lessons. Elmer Masterson managed the A & P Store with Bob McFarland's Drug Store nearby with Bill Seifert always there to run errands. One of Bill's legs was shorter than the other and he had to have about a six inch sole and heel on the short leg.

Then there was Ralph Miller's Soda Shop, then Squire Turner as the Justice of the Peace dispensing justice. Then, on down to First Street to the new Ritz Theatre with Charles Gable and

his diamond rings and a powerful hoarse voice which we heard later in his famous nephew, Clark Gable. Across the street was Love Funeral Home, the Presbyterian Church and then Al Warren's store. Once again the indoor swing with two old people who held hands in between selling groceries.

Then there was Sam Sing the Chinese launderer. We all believed Sam had designs on us as we collected our fathers' collars. We never knew how or why, but fear is inherent and can play tricks on little boys and girls. Then there was J.R. Hum's Grocery Store and Mahaney's Clothing Store with Paul Buchanan, and Harry Pebley working there in the summer time. It might be said that Pebley put Sharpsville on the map athletically. He was a strong willed man, probably the best teacher I ever had. In football he could make you want to die to win. Those teams in the early 20s, in football and especially basketball, for the size of the school, were in my opinion, Sharpsville's greatest. If you had been a freshman in 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924—the total enrollment was 101, yet the athletic record was of real champs. During this period Dr. Bailey was a new kind of champ. He delivered the Welch triplets. Harry had come recently as high school principal, football coach, basketball coach, faculty manger, athletic director, teacher of physics and chemistry. He would get in the scrimmage himself to show how it should be done.

Around the corner from Mahaney's was Abrams the cobbler, Engles Bakery, J.V. Minehan's Dry Goods Store. Then the Racket Store and C.N. Oates for papers, magazines and confections with an outdoor popcorn machine. Then Lou Burckhart's Meat Market and O.B. Law's Grocery Store. I never saw Mr. Law smile. He had a son who was a lawyer but seemed to spend most of his time reading spicy novels over at Reichard's Drug Store. Now we are over to Norman Mertz restaurant where the railroaders ate. Then over to the ball park at Shenango and Walnut were the American Legion would hold carnivals to raise money for their home. Hear and see Ray Kane, Bill Hart, Joe Donohue, Ed Davies, Dr. Biggins, Pebley and Frank Callahan, the greatest barker of them all. Patriotism was strong and beautiful and inspiring and the Vets used to speak at the schools on Armistice Day, then there would be the parades. We all knew "Johnny Get your Gun", "Over There" and "How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm After They've Seen Patee", and of course met Marie. Incidentally, Marie as still there 20 years later selling a thousand delights.

Across the road from the ball park was Mike Nathan's coal and feed supply. Later it became Bill Lee's then Parker & Lee. And, on down Walnut street was Andy Bombeck the contractor.

The people of Sharpsville were good Church goers. Father Miller was at St. Bartholomew's, Rev. Spink at the Graced Reformed, Rev. Cousins at the Methodist Church, Rev. Gossell at the Baptist, Rev. Hills at the United Brethren and Rev. Woods at the Presbyterian Church.

Wade Mertz was doing some building and selling coal and feed, etc. Tim Holland had a new auto agency for a beautiful car called the Dixie Flyer. Stiglianos were baking delicious Italian bread. Ben Jackson running the Boiler Works making Sharmeters and the Menkes were running three blast furnaces at Shenango Furnace.

The best baseball was played at Joyce Field, near Leona and Hazen now. The street cars ran every 15 minutes to Sharon. Telephones had come to Sharpsville in the late 1880s and

connected the Sharpsville Furnace to the Pierce Coal Co. The first public telephone was at Skip Reichard's store. The first directory showed only eight subscribers in 1887 and 15 in 1890. But, when I look back I think our greatest loss is that we no longer are producing characters. Where are the old Skin Troutman and young Skin, Reptile High Tree, the Turkey Murphys, Blair Boys, Pete Lyden, Squaw Long, Mike Tobin. If I had only written down their stories.

Well, this is the Sharpsville that Dr. Bailey came into. Going as you did from Jamestown as the son of a doctor, to med school, to internship, then to Sharpsville. You brought with you a lovely, gracious, kind and patient wife, an ideal partner for a young doctor. You've lived on Locust Street, Ridge Avenue, corner of Line and Mercer, before settling where you are. Children came in God's good time and blest your union. I don't know whether to describe you as an old time doctor or a new time doctor. We all knew that at all times you were a wonderfully kind and generous man. During the Depression you suffered with the people, but you gave of yourself and to the Community. You were the Mercer County Medical Doctor, President of Buhl Hospital and the Mercer County Medical Society. You are a splendid father with a real dedication to the Hippocratic oath. Both your hands and your heart were involved in an act of love to heal—yet never was vanity on display. Your life revolved around your family, your profession and your golf. When you came here we had just dedicated a new High School. The Class of 1922 had 18 graduates, up ten students from 1918. You have witnessed many, many improvements in this town. Your profession has changed enormously, and our great country has discovered its social responsibility. It's a long time from Warren G. Harding and his "Return to Normalcy" to Jimmy Carter being "Born Again". "It's a helluva long time", is the way Dr. Bailey would say. You have witnessed two world wars, depression, the convulsion of the 60s, yet common sense prevailed.

The Sharpsville Service Club is proud of you Dr. Bailey. You are everything that a citizen and doctor should be. You are a credit to your community and we are all so happy that you adopted us 56 years ago. And, we wish you many more years of health and happiness.