

## The Rescue of the Perishing

Donna's reflection last Saturday "A Lesson from the River's Edge" took her thoughts to the families who lived and worked on that very river's edge in the early days of the community. She imagined the hands that last touched the milk bottles and canning jars that were tossed into the river as they broke.

As she mused about what their lives might have been like, it made me think of a Warwick River story of drama and rescue and community effort that took place right there at the Sam Powell farm which is now Pauline's lovely home place.

It was a freezing February night during World War II, probably 1944. The dairymen and farmers of Lucas Creek and Holloway Road were used to the noise of bombers coming and going from Langley Field. But on this particular dark morning around five o'clock, young Sam Powell was in the barn getting ready to milk the cows. His Pop came running, calling, "Come out here quick, something's gone wrong."

In Sam's words, "The airplane came right down behind the house, and we couldn't even see it and, BANG, we heard it hit. And right away we heard somebody hollering for help."

The first thing Sam did was call Langley Field, but it turned out it took the military about five hours to arrive at the scene of the crash. Everything that happened next to save the lives of the crew of the old Liberator B-24 was up to the brave men and women of the Colony.

They were certainly called to "rescue the perishing, care for the dying" in a way they hadn't prepared for even as they sang the hymn in the old white Warwick River Church.

Sam's words: "This man kept hollering and hollering out there for help....Pop and I went out in that little bateau and rowed out there...We didn't have no flashlights or anything but we found him in the dark. I said, "Now look, we're going to take you in but you're going to have to hang on to the back of the boat. If we try to get you in we'll all be in the water. But if you hang on the back, we'll tow you in."" By the time they rowed the man and his parachute all the way back to the shore, the women of the house had called Esther Brunk Shenk, who was a nurse. "When we hit the bank, she was there...and that helped us a whole lot. We took all that stuff off him and took him in the house and they couldn't even feed him coffee through a straw. He was so cold he'd just pinch a straw shut. They had a time with him. ....I think if Esther hadn't been there, it would have been a pretty close call for him probably..."

Myron Ross was part of this story, too. He had been on his way to work to help Sam with the milking. “I heard the thing, I heard the plane. And I told my dad, I said, ‘You know, a plane crashed somewhere.’ And when I got down to the barn, the milkers were all running, but there wasn’t nobody around. Here Pop and Sam was out in a boat getting that guy that was hollering for help. I can still hear that guy out there hollering for help.”

Later in the morning Alfred Brenneman rode down on his bicycle and along the way met up with Nathan Layman to go down there together. They had heard the plane circling very low that morning and had heard that the crew had bailed out before it crashed into the river.

“We went to the Powell place, borrowed a small boat and rowed out a short distance to the place and by that time there were investigating officers from Langley Field on the scene and it was cold enough that the salt water splashing up on that thing was freezing. So these guys were all huddled up over there on their boat and one of them said, ‘Hey, kid’ (I was up on the plane) ‘reach down in there and pull that life jacket out of there and see if there is anybody down in there.’ So I did but there wasn’t...I was a little squeamish about doing that. I didn’t really want to find a hand or an arm or something.”

Alfred said, “For a long time afterwards there was one blade of a propeller sticking up out of the water at low tide.”

Sam’s wry comment as he reflected on the life he saved: “You know we never heard from him. Never heard from him. He went out of there with my clothes on. That’s all right, but I was sure we’d hear from him a little later on, but we never did.”

The remains of the pilot were found months later when some oystermen got their anchor tangled with the submerged parachute. Other survivors were rescued and picked up by other community members all along the river’s edge from Ernie Millers down to Moyer Road and across on Mulberry Island—Zieglers and Hertzlers and Holloways and more.

There are many such stories to be told, but I am warmed by the example these men and women set for us there on that familiar river’s edge.

I am especially honored to mention Alfred, who with Delma is still close to our hearts here at Warwick River, though physically at their home in the Valley. Thank you, Alfred, for your boyish courage and for telling your part of this story for the record.

