

## Man on the Moon

When I was a kid, referring to a “man on the moon” was to demonstrate the absurdity of someone else’s remark. “You must be as crazy as the man on the moon.”

I was a faithful worshiper of President Kennedy, and I was in seventh grade Spanish class when I heard he had been shot and killed. My world was shattered. There was nothing more enjoyable to me than listening to the mellifluous flow of words that emanated from the young Senator who became President. Even my very Republican father voted for a Democratic Congressman in 1962 in order to provide support for President Kennedy. That was probably the first and last time he voted for a Democrat.

When President Kennedy promised us a man on the moon, there was no doubt that it was going to happen. Had the President promised us world peace and salvation from the scourge of disease, we would have believed that as well. I was fortunate enough, many years later in law school, to have as one of my professors for international law the man who helped negotiate the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty for President Kennedy. Ironically it was in that same law school that my criminal law professor, Samuel Dash, taught. Dash became famous in the Watergate Hearing which ultimately resulted in the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

The race to the moon for me was of ultimate excitement. It represented everything good, positive and unique about Camelot. Reaching the moon for many in my generation was not merely a pioneering achievement or scientific breakthrough but rather represented the triumph of the aspirations of my generation. Nothing was impossible and nothing would stand in our way of success.

I always felt that I had a personal investment in the race to the moon. One of my favorite uncles, Phillip, was a dashing, appealing man. Phil never married and, after serving in the Air Force in World War II, he took a mysterious job that family rumors said involved the CIA. All we knew was that we received postcards from Phil that were sent from distant capitols all over the world. The cards always said the same thing: “Hope you are well. Love Phil.” We never had any idea what Phil was doing, why he was in these exotic places or when he would return. It was “part of his work” said my mother.

These were the days of Sean Connery and James Bond. At 6 feet tall, blue eyes, blonde hair and handsome, Phil was the very image of a spy.

After Phil was done with the Air Force and government service he became affiliated with a company called Metrolab, which he eventually owned. Metrolab was a quality control engineering firm that calibrated instruments used in the aerospace industry. Metrolab was on the cutting edge of the space race.

As a child I would talk to Phil for hours about his exploits. He would explain to me complicated and diffuse issues pertaining to the sciences of all varieties, whether biology, chemistry or physics. Had it not been for Phil, there is absolutely no question that I would not have survived some heavy duty math and science courses through high school and college. I was always welcome in my uncle's office, where he would regale me with stories and exercise his great ability as a teacher. Who could have had a more enjoyable mentor?

As Phil grew older, he also became blind as a result of a rare genetic disease. Through it all I never heard Phil complain even a bit. He kept his darkened eyes skyward, worked in the interest of his nation and helped to realize Kennedy's noble dream.

The walls in my room were decorated with pictures of rockets, missiles and airplanes that Phil gave to me. I had schematic overlaid drawings of jet engines manufactured by Curtiss-Wright. My room was filled with books about machines and tools. Whatever Phil wanted to get rid of or had extras of became my personal possessions.

I remember when, on that remarkable July day in 1969, the men landed on the moon. I was at my parents' home for the weekend and I waited anxiously to hear the words Neil Armstrong spoke from the surface of the moon. "Tranquility base here, the Eagle had landed." The "One small step" soliloquy was almost too well orchestrated, but it has survived the test of time.

I equated my Uncle Phil with Neil Armstrong. Both men were the strong silent types. They represented the very best that America had to offer and they were not interested in the limelight. They worked hard to do a job which we took for granted and brought joy to others through their meticulous craft.

As a result of my experiences I have always had a soft spot in my heart for scientists, engineers, biologists, doctors and others who explore the frontiers of science. Thanks to my Uncle Phil I was never afraid to take

any kind of course at any level. When I took quantum mechanics in college, the professor said to me “What is a liberal arts major like you doing in my class? You should never have been permitted in here!” I managed to get through the final exam, which consisted of pages upon pages of mathematical equations. To this day, when I read a scientific article on the expanding universe I think about my privileged relationship with Uncle Phil which enabled me to tackle those difficult subjects.

I remember hearing about Uncle Phil’s death when I was a lawyer working in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. At the time I was sitting on a USAir flight on the tarmac in Pittsburgh. My mother had been trying to reach me, and the message eventually made its way to a stewardess who told me the news just as the plane was about to take off. Phil was only 59 years of age and he died in his sleep. I was crushed and I felt as though an era was over.

The untimely passing of Phil, however, enabled me to work in a business relationship with my mother along with her other brother who succeeded to the business. My Uncle Bill had no interest in the business; he was a professional bass player and music teacher. My mother owned and ran the business by herself and asked me to act as her financial controller. It was in that position that I recognized the tremendous business talents of my mother and came fully to understand the genius of Uncle Phil. Phil had devised many of the tolerances for high tech equipment that were accepted protocol for the United States Bureau of Standards. For awhile I considered buying out my mother’s interest and running Metrolab full-time, but after much thought I decided to stay in Williamsport and continue practicing law.

Phil Klein did not believe in products liability insurance. In spite of the enormous risks that the company took in being uninsured, Phil believed that the company’s fortune should rise or fall based upon its own merits. Fortunately there was never a successful claim against Metrolab, at least during my affiliation with the company.

When I heard about the death of Neil Armstrong, I could not help but think about my Uncle Phil and my own tangential relationship with the space program through Uncle Phil. An era has passed, never to be reclaimed. I would hope that one day my own children would reach for the stars and believe that the United States can accomplish anything that it sets its group mind to. Our next goal should be to establish a base for human occupation on the moon and Mars. There are many other pressing problems in our society including the need to get our budget deficit under control. Nevertheless, it is my view that when we stop dreaming and reaching beyond our capabilities we stop living and growing.

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