

AN INFLUENTIAL PERSON WHO CHANGED MY LIFE

By Mike Harris

The title this week presents a plethora of people starting with obviously parents. Since not all parents are equal, I am sure that whoever or whatever they may be, everyone is first influenced by parents. Then there are teachers, also good, bad, and indifferent. How about environment, schools, friends, occupations, events. What to choose?

It seems that the titles offered are either feast or famine. Incidentally I did not mean to leave out a life long partner, wife, or husband. So take some time to think and choose. O.K. Uncle Sam!!!

Uncle Sam intruded into my life when I was twenty six years old. He plain and simple said, "I WANT YOU!" I was at a peak of my physical development, at a peak of my earning power, and living alone in an unusual environment for those times. This disruption really influenced my life.

I and all America answered the call, "YOU CALLED, I AM HERE!!" Inducted into the army in three days, I found myself in Miami, Florida, sent there for basic training. Installed in a fancy hotel, looking out of a window at the army trying to make soldiers out of civilians, and in my opinion doing a very poor job of it. Marching men on hot streets, temperatures in the upper nineties, humidity way up there, and the recruits fainting, and dropping on the street, while in ranks, real stupid!!! was my thinking.

Across the street from my hotel was the "Sands" with a sign "Headquarters." Thinking that it would be a good idea to get to know the territory I went across the street, and asked a passing stranger in uniform "Where would I get a pass if wanted one?" "Right there," he replied. "The Officer of the Day issues passes." Innocent me, I strolled across the street, entered a lobby, and there was a sign "OFFICER OF THE DAY". I walked over, there was an empty desk, and beyond an open doorway over which was another sign "OFFICER OF THE DAY". I walked passed the empty desk through the open door. An officer in a uniform was there with his back to me. I walked up, put my hands on his desk. He turned around and I said, "Sir, I would like a three day pass." With a look of astonishment he said, "How did you get in here?" I replied, "Someone told me that you give out passes, so I just walked in. "Soldier, how long have you been in the army?" I replied, "Three days." "Who let you in?" "Nobody, the door was open, no one at the outside desk, so I just walked in. You do give out passes?" "Soldier, ATTENTION!" I looked around suddenly realizing something was radically wrong. "I said, Attention!" I straightened up. "Do you know how to execute an about face?" "Yes." "Yes, what?" I shook my shoulders, and he said, "Yes, Sir." I repeated, "Yes, Sir!" and about-faced and left the office.

In retrospect I realized that acting stupid was the smartest thing I could have done. As I left the office a soldier, with two stripes, grabbed my arm, "How did you get in there?" "I just walked in. The door was open." "Soldier come with me," and he walked me to a huge bulletin board. "Tomorrow look for your name right here," and he pointed to a heading, "DUTY ROSTER". Back at his desk he asked for my dog tag and wrote on a pad "Private Meyer K Harris," copied my number 324 00 559 and said, "You make sure that you look for your name. It will be there. Get out of here now."

Back in my hotel I realized that I was off on the wrong foot. I also realized that I was still very

much a civilian. I was also angry that I was going to be punished for my ignorance. I reached into my pocket, took out the address of a friend who was stationed at Miami Beach, patrolling the shores against submarine invasion. I found my way to his outfit and asked him if could stay with him? No questions asked, "Certainly, one of our men left on a two week furlough. You can bunk with us till he gets back." I got my gear and came back. I walked the beaches with my friend Harry, and every afternoon called into headquarters. "Is Meyer K Harris on shipping orders?" On the seventh day the answer was yes. I returned to my hotel, saw a man with stripes, told my name and said I was on shipping orders for tomorrow. "What do I do?" "Show up here at one o'clock with your gear." "Thanks!"

The next day I was on a train to Denver Colorado, assigned to photo school at Lowry Field with my orders in my hand. And so the influence of Uncle Sam started and lasted three and half years and on to the rest of my life.

But the story does not end here. If I change one letter in the title a "D" to an "S" another entity enters the picture. One makes the title past tense, the other makes it ongoing. The above offering is really past tense, but this is about someone who is with me all the time, not intruding visibly but a presence never the less. Always judgmental, critical, many times told to go take a hike, leave me alone! However no matter what I say or how abusive I get, he ignores all my efforts and still hangs around.

The first time that he was introduced to me was way, way back when as a child I admitted to being sorry for something I had done. Would you believe he has stuck around for about ninety years? One can't say that he isn't loyal, if not always friendly. This individual usually does not try to influence my life until I am about to make a decisive move or decision, then I get a nod of approval or a "Hey Stupid! What do you think you are doing?" Many actions die aborning regardless of their merit, mainly due to procrastination. At that point some nudging sometimes succeeds, but not always. Enough, let me introduce you to this individual, Mike's Conscience.