

In Remembrance of Leonard Dewey Phelps, Jr.

April 14, 1932—November 13, 2016

A collection of memories from his friends in the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club.
Compiled by Mal Higgins

[Editor's Note: All of us knew Dewey from so many times together. It seems fitting that we gather our stories and tell them to each other and preserve Dewey's memory as we knew him. This cannot be a complete account of Dewey's full life, of course, but is rather a collection of fond memories. I have kept the stories as submitted to me by their authors, retaining their voice and style, with only minor editing.]

Biographical information: Dewey was born in Pamlico County, NC. Growing up, he was a member of the Boy Scouts of America and an Eagle Scout. He served in the U.S. Coast Guard and was a veteran of the Korean War. He was a 25+ year member of the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club. He retired as a commercial printer from Norfolk Printing Company. He was survived by his loving wife of 51 years, Carol R. Phelps, and three children. He is buried at the Albert G. Horton Jr Memorial State Veterans Cemetery, Suffolk, Virginia.

PHYLLIS NEUMANN: I remember volunteering with TATC for Konnarock work on the relocation of our AT section above the Tye River Bridge. That was over 10 years ago I think and spanned years when I was Trail Supervisor and then President of the Club. I had a lot of apprehensions about my position with the Club being a relative newcomer. But there were certain members that offered constant encouragement and support. Dewey was one of those people. He volunteered for just about every trail trip we had—whether on the AT with Konnarock or locally when we were constructing the trails at New Quarter. He always showed up with a smile and an eager attitude. He seemed skilled in just about everything—whether building a trail or fixing a chainsaw that wouldn't start. He never tired, was always enthusiastic and never failed to have a kind word of encouragement. He was first to volunteer to wash dishes after any group meal and in the evenings we could always look forward to one of Dewey's stories about his childhood or being in the Coast Guard. He was a constant figure at all the False Cape trips and never missed an outing with the Tuesday group. And he loved dogs and they loved him. I'm going to miss him.

MARTI MALABAD: When I think of Dewey, I will always think of a kindhearted man who never spoke a negative word of anyone, willingly shared with others, worked hard at any task he took on, told delightful stories of his life, and loved his time with TATC and Tuesday group. We will miss his smile and the twinkle in his eye. One of the first maintenance trips I took with Dewey, he brought me a hooded rain jacket so I could be protected from the rain dripping on my head from a tarp as I served chili to the maintenance crew. He just showed up with it and put it on me, smiled and went to eat. He cared for his family and friends. We can all be inspired by knowing Dewey and the life he led.

BRUCE JULIAN: "Dewey the Man I Knew" Part One

Dewey was the man we all loved and wanted to see on a Tuesday outing or a Maintenance Weekend on the A.T. He would always have a smile for you each and every time you met. I started making the trips to False Cape State Park in 2004 twice a year and Dewey made every trip with us, up until a few years ago. He and Wes Ward were two of the people who came on the very first trip, and we three came in early one day before the other 12 volunteers came in.

Our first project was to build a Storm Shelter for the campers to go to there at False Cape Landing Campground, if bad weather should come up. The three of us were to cut 12 – 4x4 boards with notches for a 2x4 to fit into. The corner ones would be cut on two sides and it was very important to make sure our cuts were in the right place so not to waste any lumber. We would measure twice and sometimes three times and began to cut, and on about eight different times Dewey would say "STOP, I don't think that's right." Sure enough, we would check again and most of the time Dewey was right. He surely saved us from wasting lumber on that day. If there was a job to be done, Dewey would always be there to help in any way that he could, and you would know it would get done right. On the second day the others came in and we all finished the shelter in four days; it is still looking good today after almost 13 years of service.

"Dewey the Man I Knew" Part Two

It was a cool day one fall when Dewey asked me if I could cut down two white pine trees in his front yard. Well, you know me, put a chainsaw in my hand and I go crazy. Yes, I told him I would be over the next morning about 8:00 a.m. and we could have both of them down in a few hours. Well, we had only been working about one hour and Carol had already come out of the house three times, telling us to be careful and be sure not to get hurt with that chainsaw up on the ladder. I had only fallen down once or twice with the saw in my hand from the third step and wasn't sure what she was talking about. On about the sixth time she said something about praying for us and her knees were getting sore.

Well, just after she went back in we had tied a rope to one of the limbs that hung over the house and I knew Dewey, being a Coast Guardsman, could tie knots better than most men. His job was to pull on the rope with just a little pressure, but if you know Dewey you know he doesn't do anything "just a little". As I started cutting the limb that hung over the house he began pulling. As his knot got tighter it came loose, and Dewey went rolling backwards over and over until he stopped in the middle of the road with a neighbor's car coming to a screaming stop right before hitting him. As you can imagine Carol was out the front door in a heartbeat to save Dewey, but he was fine and jumped right up and started talking to the man in the truck just like nothing had happened.

After Carol had fixed us a lunch we headed back out and finished cutting the trees with no more mishaps. It must have been that prayer that Carol said over our meal before we began to eat. She kept saying something about "Oh Lord, please watch over these two hard working men for they know not what they are doing, AMEN!"

"Dewey the Man I Knew" Part Three

Back in 2008 Dewey and I decided to stay another week after a Maintenance Week was over. This was while the club was working on a relocation of the Appalachian Trail north of the

Tye River. He and I had driven up to the mountains in different trucks and were planning to stay there at the top of the Fitzgerald apple orchard with our trucks backed up to each other with a large tarp over both trucks. This was to help keep out the rain, which we had just about every night. He had his bed in the back of his truck and I had one in mind.

Everything was going great. We would rise in the morning and after breakfast pack a lunch and head out to where the Service Corps of America (SCA) kids had left off the day before. We would start digging out rocks and roots. The kids would soon come by from down below where their campground was located. They would marvel at Dewey each day and wonder how a man his age could be working there an hour before they started and most days be there working after they had started down to end their day. That was just Dewey's way of doing everyday things that I am sure he had done all his life. I only got to know Dewey for about 13 years and I know he made me a better person just knowing him for that short time.

We finally finished the trail relocation in 2008 with the help of those kids, who worked for 28 days, and with a lot of volunteers from TATC. Dewey didn't do it all by himself, but I can say for sure no one worked any harder than he did to finish this work. We will miss him each and every day as we go out and work on the Appalachian Trail; but don't worry, I am sure he is just up ahead watching you, so please do your best.

"Dewey the Man I Knew" Part Four

Dewey was always giving us a laugh or two each time we went out on a Tuesday Group outing or on the A.T. or even down at False Cape State Park, a place he surely loved. He had all kinds of jokes he would tell us, but the best one was about The Baby Bo Weasel. If I heard that one once, I know I heard it 15 times. What I would give today, just to hear Dewey tell it one more time.

One day we were at Merchant Mill Pond, North Carolina, on a paddle and on this day Dewey was sharing a canoe with Wes Ward. We had stopped for lunch and everyone was pulling their boats up onto the shore and Dewey's boat stopped on top of a stump. As Wes stepped out, the weight of Dewey sitting in the back seat made the canoe flip over, putting Dewey in the cool water. We all had a big laugh and jumped in and helped him get out. Luckily, Dewey had a few dry clothes to put on. Being the good man that he was, we never heard one bad word from Dewey, and he tried to always take the blame for what went wrong.

Another time was on a bike ride in Virginia Beach and we had to go down the Rudee Inlet Bridge and make a sharp right turn and then a sharp left. Dewey made the right turn OK, but on the left turn he was going a little too fast and ran off the road and flipped his bike between three small pine trees, missing them all. Don't worry! He popped right up and got back on his bike like nothing had ever happened.

A story he loved to tell was when he was in college, Dewey and another friend once put a cow on the third floor of the girl's dorm, by using an elevator. I won't tell what happened to them here, but you can ask me the next time you see me

Dewey was friends with a young girl at False Cape State Park, who he enjoyed talking to. Rebecca was from Jock-a-Wind, North Carolina, down where he was from and they had a lot to talk about. She lives at Bear Creek Lake State Park now, just west of Richmond and was so sad to hear about her friend Dewey.

MAL HIGGINS: Dewey Phelps touched many of our lives in so many ways. Dewey, as some may recall, printed our TATC newsletter for many years back in the day. He was an avid

Appalachian Trail maintainer. He contributed so much to False Cape State Park maintenance trips, and was a frequent participant in the Tuesday Group's paddles, hikes, and bike rides. He was especially kind to my son and daughter one campout trip back around 1990 or so at Maupin Field when they were young kids. We were all tenting out there. In the evening, sitting around the shelter, my son was selling Boy Scout candy bars as a fund raiser and had a box of them with him to sell for \$1.00 each. Dewey bought several and was delighted at my son's "entrepreneurship." My son was equally pleased he found a customer in the woods. For many years later, at our monthly club meetings Dewey would inquire about him.

Dewey enjoyed life and people. He was a frequent participant in TATC's spring and fall maintenance trips to work on the Appalachian Trail. He was a cheerful presence at the evening group meals, recounting stories and tales of other people and trips. Dewey provided the spark and good humor that made others want to be around him.

MARILYN HORVATH: The people from Dewey Phelps's generation, who formed our Club, were of an amazing, unselfish breed (perhaps the legacy of World War II) of whom Dewey was an example.

The good humor that surrounded him made every expedition notable and unforgettable. Even though his snoring led to his banishment from our lean-tos, and he'd set his tent up well away from us, we'd still hear him.

With either Dewey or Herb Coleman on a hike one could always feel included and safe. And if you were missing something, Dewey would always give of himself.

With Dewey along, things always seemed to go right. And that was his blessing.

NED KUHNS: When TATC was assigned (volunteered for?) the responsibility to design and provide 1,000+ of the hard-copy program for the 1999 ATC Biennial Conference held at Radford University, we immediately went to Dewey for his printing advice and assistance since he owned and operated a local printing company. We had a scheduled date for completion of the program but when ATC wanted some last minute changes made, the time to meet that date was significantly compressed. As you might expect from knowing Dewey, he was not flustered or disturbed by the change, simply saying that the program would be done on time. It was printed perfectly on attractive beige card stock and delivered on time for transportation to Radford University. Also, as expected, Dewey gave us a greatly discounted pricing for the printing. TATC received numerous compliments on the appearance of the program Dewey printed.

In June 2006, Ken Baker (from ODATC) and I planned to hike the Tuscarora Trail to Pennsylvania which started at the Hogback Parking Area where the A.T. crosses Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park. Bruce Julian volunteered to drive us very early in the morning to the starting point. As his close friend, Dewey volunteered to accompany him in Bruce's truck. They were scheduled to pick me up at home at 6:00 AM which meant that they had to begin about 5:00 AM or earlier. At 6:00 AM (on schedule), Dewey was knocking on my front door which woke me from a deep sleep. Deeply embarrassed, I quickly got up and grabbed my gear while they waited in Bruce's truck until I was ready. Needless to say, this was the type of story that I could have heard about for years to come but Dewey in his always kind and thoughtful manner never mentioned my delay again. BTW, neither did Bruce.

BOB ADKISSON: I don't remember when I first met Dewey-- it was probably back in the late 1980's, maybe on one of Marilyn Horvath's backpacking trips. I do remember always enjoying his gentle and personable company; Dewey was open and accepting, always helpful and interested in other people; he had a wonderful sense of humor, and he and I kidded around and ribbed each other often (especially years later, when I learned that his real first name was Leonard-- or, as I sometimes addressed him: Lenny-baby!).

Dewey lived not far from me, and many times, for several years, we rode together to the meet up spot for various Tuesday Group activities, or on weekend club trips. Several times he was my canoe partner, and with him in the boat I never had to worry about much of anything-- he was so agreeable, never one to complain or get bothered, plus he was experienced, could be counted on to know what needed to be done and how to do it.

I remember a weekend trip to Ocracoke Island-- Dewey and I took my car and left early on a Friday; stopping at the Nature Conservancy property in Nags Head Woods, we hiked a couple of miles, then went on south to meet up with Gordon Spence's group that night for dinner; on Saturday we all took the boat over to Portsmouth Island, where we visited the all but abandoned village, then went and camped overnight on the wide beach-- more walking and exploring, enjoying the great out-of-doors. Dewey seemed to be always up for anything!

The one trip I kidded Dewey about the most was the time he drove me and one of his young-adult nephews to the TATC cabin, the first weekend in January. When we arrived in the mountains on Friday we found the Parkway closed, covered with about 10 inches of dry, fluffy snow. Footing was not a problem, and the 3 of us easily walked the 3 miles to the cabin from the junction with county road 814. First thing at the cabin though, we discovered fairly fresh ATV tracks that came up the mountainside and stopped right at the side door. I dropped my pack, left Dewey in charge, and set out to track down the offenders, if they could be found (they couldn't).

The next day the two of them were willing and able, and gung ho, to follow me wherever I led—we bushwhacked up over the top of Entry Mountain (immediately above the cabin), crossed the Parkway, and then followed a ridge-line all the way down to the lower lake at Sherando. A nice walk thru the wild and snowy woods. We discovered that the lake was frozen, from the beach down to the dam at the far end. Dewey double dog dared me to walk out onto the ice—he promised to get a picture of me, for posterity. And so I did. He took one photo, but kept trying to get me to go farther out, where the water (if I broke thru) would be over my head. And so I didn't. All in good fun of course. As the sky clouded over, we followed the White Rock Gap Trail back up to the Parkway, then returned to the cabin as a light rain began to fall.

I don't remember all the particulars of what the weather did, but we knew from the forecasts that things were going to change, get much colder Saturday night, Sunday, and the start of the next week. The thing I long ribbed Dewey about was that, early Sunday morning, he and his nephew jumped up, packed, and were gone before I was hardly awake—they abandoned me there at the cabin, without a ride home! This was all as we'd planned it, of course-- I had a couple of extra days off of work and would find my own way home, in mid-week (by foot and thumb to Waynesboro, and by bus back to Norfolk), but for years afterwards I wouldn't let Dewey forget that he took me to the mountains and then left me there, with the snow freezing over that Sunday afternoon to a rock-hard surface that was like trying to walk on a slanted ice skating rink, with the temperatures dropping down into the teens. I had no micro-spikes, no tent and, worst of all (if I

fell and broke a leg), no cell phone! He thought that was so funny, and we'd have a good laugh together.

I will miss him.