

January 2, 1997

Midweek musings while wondering if the weather in south Florida could be nicer than ours this week....

Marilyn Branen must be one of the youngest looking grandmothers in all of Noble county, maybe even beyond. She could pass for a teenager, don't you agree?...Folks in the 1400 block of Locust street have revived an old neighborhood custom by building concrete sidewalks along the curb in front of their homes. They look so inviting, it makes you want to take a stroll on some of these pleasant days we've been enjoying. When did the tradition of sidewalks on every block become passe, anyway? Maybe it's time for a comeback.

Speaking of traditions, it's really disappointing to receive Christmas cards from old friends with only a printed name and no message inside. When the cards begin arriving, we always eagerly look forward to catching up on the news from people we see only rarely, but unfortunately many of them tell us little or nothing. We certainly do appreciate hearing from all those folks, but it's not like the joy that even a short note provides.

We're all too busy, I guess. You hear that complaint from just about everybody, so it must be so. Too bad. We all need to slow down and enjoy the little pleasures at hand. Letter writing itself is fast becoming a lost art. E-mail, fax, the telephone -- all these have taken their toll on that ancient form of communication.

One of the cards we always enjoy comes from a former Perryman, Dr. Charles Lamb, and his wife, Ruth, who have lived in Seattle since leaving here more than 40 years ago. Charles is an optometrist, as was his dad, D. A. C. Lamb. The elder Dr. Lamb had a jewelry store and his professional office in the building next to our family's City Drug Store on the north side of the square when I was growing up, and Charlie and I were fast friends all through high school (he was a member of that fabulous class of 1941) and we remain so today. Many of you remember the Lamb family. Ruth writes that Charlie retired in September and recently had a slight stroke. He will have heart surgery in January, so she's asking for prayers.

Charlie has a Puckish sense of humor and grew up with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye. He and Ruth have two daughters, two sons, 12 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. Their favorite line is: "Lambs reproduce like rabbits."

Oklahoma City selected the nickname "Cavalry" for its new entry in the Continental Basketball Association a few years ago. At the time, my bride sighed and predicted we soon would be plagued with mispronunciation of the name as "Calvary" on radio and TV. She was correct. Even with an official logo that exaggerates the size of the letter "V" to emphasize the right way to pronounce it, we still suffer through entire seasons hearing some of those young, electronic sportscasters tell us, with a straight face, how the "Calvary" fared in their latest contests. I suggest they just call 'em "the Cavs," like the print media do.

Years of disappointment over my inability to carry out the worthiest of New Year's resolutions has led me to the necessity of coming up with something a little different. For 1997, my No. 1 resolution is to break all my other resolutions. That should be a confidence builder, if not a character maker.



January 4, 1997

The recent announcement that Sugar Ray Leonard plans to resume his career as a professional prize fighter was of more than passing interest to Perry auto body shop operator Loyd Hughes. Some 16 years ago, Loyd and his wife made the acquaintance of Leonard and his family during a vacation in the Bahama Islands. They actually became fast friends and Sugar Ray subsequently came to Perry to visit the Leonards during the 1981 Cherokee Strip celebration. Among the Leonard entourage at that time were his wife, Juanita (the two are now divorced); his sister, Linda Leonard; and their friend, Schley Owens.

Leonard's name was very big in the world of sports (it still is) and his trip to visit non-celebrity friends in an obscure Oklahoma town received a lot of attention. Our annual September 16th parade that year, with Sugar Ray Leonard as a star attraction, was covered by Oklahoma City and Tulsa newspapers, wire services and television sports reporters. It was a sunny day and Sugar Ray smiled from the back seat of an open top convertible all the way around the square. He was a hero of epic proportions, and nothing has happened since then to diminish his stature.

Leonard was the first fighter to win world titles in five weight classes. His last fight was on February 9, 1991, when he was battered by Terry Norris while attempting to win the WBC super welterweight (154 pounds) title in New York's Madison Square Garden. After the loss, he retired for the third time. He blamed the weight, a rib injury and divorce proceedings for his poor performance.

His comeback attempt on February 28 at the Atlantic City, N.J., Convention Center will pit him against Hector "Macho" Camacho. It will be a 12-round middleweight (160 pounds) match, and it will be his first pro ring appearance in six years, 19 days. Sugar Ray will be 40 years old.

"I want to do this and I'm going to do it," Leonard told reporters in announcing the date of the fight. "If I can tarnish my legacy with one fight, than there never was a legacy. To say it's a one-shot deal -- I don't even want to talk about that. To say I'm going to lose, I don't want to discuss it."

Leonard's opponent, Camacho, regards the ex-champ as a technical fighter, full of strategy. The 34-year-old Camacho was at his peak as junior lightweight and lightweight champion in the mid-1980s. "It's the first time I'll be fighting a scientific fighter," he said, "but he's fighting the Macho Man. I'm not Ray-struck."

After the Leonard family visited Perry, Sugar Ray's sister, Linda, wrote to the Hughes family, telling how much they enjoyed their stay here. "We are residents of a city (Lanham, Maryland, in the Washington, D.C., area) where people are so busy fighting for survival daily that they are unable to practice their spiritual teachings, such as 'love thy neighbor as thyself,' and 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

"Our cities are so full of economical, financial, political and unemployment chaos that the simple life is merely something in the past. So, for each of us to be among individuals that were so earthly, full of love and compassion that it was very rejuvenating, relaxing and satisfying, we look forward to re-living these unforgettable days. Plus, we have found a new family away from home and this includes all of the wonderful people of Perry, Oklahoma. We pray that God will bless and keep each of you in His love and care."

Obviously the people of this community made an impression on Sugar Ray and his family, and it was mutual. As a memento of their visit here, Leonard sent autographed pictures to the late John Divine, who at that time was manager of the Chamber of Commerce; and to C. C. Vernon, Nancy Koch and Abbie Coldiron.

Most Perry area folks are only mildly interested in professional boxing, but it's safe to say many of us developed an interest in Sugar Ray Leonard back in 1981 when he brought his family to Perry to visit Loyd Hughes. You can bet we'll be

pulling for the former champ when he steps into the ring to fight Camacho in February. We'll have more on Sugar Ray's connection to Perry in the next Northwest Corner. Stay tuned.



January 7, 1997

Loyd Hughes was vacationing in the Bahamas one day in 1980 when he shared a car with another young man on holiday from the U.S. They introduced themselves and Loyd found himself shaking hands with Olympic boxing champion Sugar Ray Leonard, although the name meant nothing to him at first. "What do you do for a living?", Loyd asked. Sugar Ray replied that he was a prize fighter and said Loyd might remember him as the boxer who kept a photo of his wife taped to his ankle when he won the light heavyweight championship in the 1976 Olympic games at Montreal. That brought it all into focus. Loyd was not a serious prize fight fan, but he did remember the Olympic coverage.

The two men took an instant liking to each other and subsequently dined together several times with their wives while in the Bahamas. When Leonard, who lived in the Washington, D.C., area, asked "Where is Oklahoma?", Loyd told him he must come see the place for himself. Leonard responded with a similar invitation to Loyd and his wife, and the following year Mr. and Mrs. Hughes did spend part of their vacation with the Leonards at their home in Maryland. Loyd had no way of knowing if the Leonards would ever come to Perry, but as it happened they did make the trip here the following year and rode in the September 16th Cherokee Strip parade. They were the star attraction of the entire celebration."

After the 1976 Olympic games, Sugar Ray set sports history by winning professional world titles in five different weights. In the meantime, a friendship blossomed between the champ and his buddy from Perry, Oklahoma. Sugar Ray endeared himself to the public with his broad grin and the image he projected of a clean-cut All-American boy. He was one of America's most popular sports figures.

Leonard lost a classic battle for the World Boxing Council welterweight championship to Roberto Duran at Toronto in 1980, but a rematch was scheduled for the following year in New Orleans. It became one of the most hyped prize fights of the decade and Loyd attended it as Sugar Ray's guest. Several others from Perry, including Danny Hodge, Bob Kasper and Harvey Yost, also were there. Kasper still has his ticket stubs.

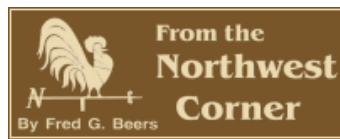
Loyd remembers he was in Row 1, Seat 2, and that it was priced at \$1,000. As Sugar Ray's guest, it cost him nothing. Next to him, in Row 1, Seat 1, was the British actor Richard Burton, frequent husband of Elizabeth Taylor and a major celebrity in his own right. Another nearby ringside seat was occupied by TV personality David Brenner. Loyd also remembers, with some embarrassment, that he introduced Hodge, Perry's illustrious NCAA champion wrestling, Olympic medalist and Golden Gloves heavyweight boxing champion, to the famed fight trainer Angelo Dundee in New Orleans, only to learn that Dundee and Hodge already were longtime acquaintances and on a first-name basis. Loyd was overwhelmed by the number of prominent people he met the week of the fight. The ABC television broadcaster Howard Cossell was one of them. That was before Mr. Cossell denounced prize fighting as a sham sport and divorced himself from it altogether. Mr. Cossell never had a bad word to say about Sugar Ray, however.

Leonard took Loyd along with his entourage for an appearance on the popular "Good Morning America" TV show on ABC. Standing around waiting for the lights to be adjusted before the show began, Loyd was asked by one of the young women, a production assistant, "Who are you?" Loyd gave the lady his name, but she asked, "No, who ARE you?" Loyd again politely

explained that he was just a guy from Oklahoma who happened to be a friend of Sugar Ray. The young woman found it hard to believe that someone from middle America, with no claim to Sugar Ray except friendship, would be allowed to move in that inner circle.

Sugar Ray won that rematch, and the badly battered Duran uttered an historic quote at the end by telling the world, "No mas, no mas," meaning he wanted no more beatings like that. Loyd said it was little wonder to him that Duran took such a punishing loss. "We saw him roaming the bars at 1:30 the morning of the fight," Loyd remembers. He didn't think that was the way a boxer prepared for such an important match.

Loyd hasn't heard from Sugar Ray recently, but he's planning to call his old friend before the February fight, and perhaps invite him back to Perry. He certainly would be welcome here at any time, and this community will be pulling for him the night of February 28 in Atlantic City.



January 9, 1997



This was the Fisherman's Sunday School class at the First Methodist church of Perry on their first anniversary in January 1950, as they posed for the camera on the front steps of the church. Attendance sometimes totaled around 100. Identities given for some in this photo may be flawed, and three are unidentified. Some of the rows are not well defined, but names are given as the individuals seem to appear in sequence.

Front row: from left: Dr. Delmar C. Hoot, John H. Mugler, Charles Kerr, L. B. Swearingen, Ralph Cooper, Rev. Jack Wilkes,

Dorrance Barnes, Ernest P. Moore and Dick Kraemer.

Second row: William H. Meier, C. A. Brant, C. I. Brant, Sam McGuire, Harold (Hump) Daniels, Jimmie Cain, Orlan Lemler, Myrl McCormick, O. E. Griesel, and Lloyd Lambert.

Third row: Ivan Lighty, Chester Brewster, L. E. States, Lee Purser, Jack Smith, Dale B. Ream and Dick Mayes.

Fourth row: Jimmy Henderson, L. E. Plumer, John Treeman, Paul Harding, John B. Terry, Harold Smith, W. T. Henry, E. J. Kemnitz and Buck Johnson.

Fifth row: Unidentified, Harold Scovill, John Johnson, C. E. McBride, Dennis Bolay, L. H. (Doc) Beasley, next man unidentified, Herbert O'Neil, Charles A. O'Neil, Lawrence Hirschman and Harry A. DeLashmutt.

Sixth row: Al Bollinger, Edgar Dixon, Dick Eby, Pete Cutsinger, J. A. (Spitz) Bluethman, Clarence Bolay and Faye McQuiston.

Seventh row: Olin Randall, Monte L. Jones, Curtis Tyler, Merrill R. Hamous, Everett Morrow, J. Val Connell, George Freeman and Buck Wyatt.

Back row: Charles L. Monroe Jr., Phillip Rhees, Art Coffey, unidentified partially hidden man and Bill Faris.

In the late 1940s, the Rev. Jack S. Wilkes was pastor of the First Methodist church in Perry. He was a handsome, young, dark-haired minister with a pleasant smile and a winning manner, and he had ideas for building a stronger faith among his congregation and within the community. One of his notions was a real-winner. On the first Sunday of 1949 he organized a Sunday morning men's Bible class which soon attracted an attendance of around 100 from many denominations throughout Perry.

At the time, many adult men stayed home on Sunday morning, at least until church began. Their general feeling was that Sunday school was a good idea for women and youngsters, but grown-up men were mostly put off by it. Jack Wilkes turned that attitude around in short order by providing men of all ages with a dynamic learning experience and practical ideas on Christian living. He called it the "Fishermen's Class," and the double meaning of that term drew some inquiring minds into its membership. Most of them loved to fish, but they found the story of the big fisherman, Peter, and the other apostles also had meaning in their lives. They became fishers of men, and the class grew in size very rapidly.

One of the innovations Mr. Wilkes introduced was coffee and doughnuts before class started. This is fairly common among adult classes today, but it was a new idea some 50 years ago. It created an atmosphere of fellowship where friendly, manly discussions took place before the lesson was begun. Mr. Wilkes chose topics that were Bible-centered but that also focused on matters of concern to adult males in a society undergoing radical changes in the aftermath of World War II. Many class members were veterans of that war.

Because the composition of the class was a mixture of many denominations, dismissal was always set early enough on Sunday morning that each of the men could go to his own church for morning worship. The class was not an attempt at proselytizing, but its appeal did lure some males into a new relationship with their own church, perhaps for the first time.

In due time, Jack Wilkes was assigned to another position by the presiding bishop, and the leadership role here fell to his successor, Howard Bush. After a few years, class attendance began dwindling. Many of the non-Methodist men became active in the Sunday school and Christian education programs at their own church, and a core of Methodist men continued the Fishermen's Class tradition.

There's more to the Jack Wilkes story than just his early ministry in Perry. He earned a doctorate degree and after leaving Perry he was named pastor of Crown Heights Methodist church in Oklahoma City. Later he was chosen to become president of the denomination's fine school, Oklahoma City University, during a time of its mushrooming enrollment. Dr. Wilkes was always interested in government at every level, and soon he was elected mayor of Oklahoma City. The church then severed his relationship with OCU, presumably feeling the mixture of careers was incompatible, and Dr. Wilkes moved on to a church-related university in Louisiana.

It was widely assumed that he was being groomed for the presidency of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, but while attending a football game at SMU one fall afternoon he became ill. He died of a heart ailment after leaving the stadium to get the medication he took for his coronary problem, and his passing took a toll on all the churches and institutions he had served during his relatively brief time on earth. His wife, Annette, still makes her home in Dallas.

Jack Wilkes brought a new zest for church activity and participation by men that reached beyond the walls of the First Methodist church of Perry, and his impact can still be seen today in some of the Sunday school classes now meeting here. He left his imprint here but it is also evident everywhere else his ministry called during a too-brief span of time.