

UNCLE SAM WAS A GOOD GUY
Second Thoughts
By J. B. Leftwich

Sam a.k.a. William Samuel Leftwich, was my favorite of three unmarried uncles.

He was born only 17 years before I was so he remembered better than the older uncles how it was to be early in his teens. He was a gentle tease, a prankster despite the years spanning our ages.

I didn't call him by his first name and still don't. Actually, he didn't call me by my first name either. He always called me "Gee" except on the rare occasions when he wanted to be stern.

Uncle Sam lived either with Aunt Etta or Aunt Ellen most of the time until they died. Then, Aunt Mary, a widow, moved in with him and they went to church and to other places together until she died. At age 72, he married.

We must have lived five or six miles from where Uncle Sam lived in a hollow on a farm he owned that had been in our family's possession for many years. It was inaccessible by automobile but that didn't matter since none of us owned cars anyway.

One day, after a visit with us, Uncle Sam persuaded Dad to let me go home with him for a few days under the use of needing someone to help plow his corn. It took two to plow corn the first time it was plowed because our fields were on hillsides and somebody had to walk beside the bulltongue plow and use a "paddle," a kind of shield attached to a hoe-handle, to keep the dirt from rushing down hill and covering the young plants.

Actually, Uncle Sam was in no hurry to plow. He had this idea that if you had something you wanted to do you shouldn't let plowing corn get in the way.

Well, you can bet he had something he wanted to do – squirrel hunt. And that's exactly what we did the first day we were supposed to be plowing.

The second day, it rained before we could get to the field.

Everybody knows you can't plow corn when the ground's wet so we mended some farm equipment and cooked up a big mess of squirrel. Late that afternoon we walked down to the road to get the mail. That was the day his Western Story magazine came.

I guess the ground was dry enough to plow the next day but we just sat around and read Western stories until we got tired of that and went out to grease the axles of the wagon. Then we made some sling-shots, set up a tin can as a target and practiced.

The fourth day we knew we had to get that corn plowed so he hitched up Old Doc and we went up the hill to the field. We plowed seriously for a while then looked for arrowheads, until time to go back to the house for lunch and a nap.

About 2:00 o'clock, paddling away and looking in the furrow for arrowheads, I had an idea.

"You know, if we'd let this corn grow taller before plowing, it wouldn't be necessary to paddle it" I said.

Uncle Sam didn't say anything but you could tell he was thinking. When we got to the end of the row nearest the barn, he stopped.

"We're taking out," he said.

I glanced at the sun. There were 3-4 more working hours left but I didn't say anything.

"We're going to let this corn grow some more, first," he announced.

We went by the spring, so Old Doc could drink, and sat on a big limestone rock with our bare feet in the little stream that trickled away from the spring.

Uncle Sam wasn't lazy, he could work your shirt off if he wanted to. He knew how to grow corn and raise cattle. He still does.

He also knew how to entertain a teen-age nephew.

(J.B. Leftwich is a veteran journalist and a columnist for *The Lebanon Democrat*.
Email: leftwichjb@charter.net)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>