

Uncle Paul

by Joe Barella

Uncle Paul Barella was actually my father's cousin, but was part of my life until we left Bakerville when I was ten. I often walked the path which started at Joe Douaihy's driveway through the woods (now Weingarts field) to his shanty just across Cedar Lane. It's still there on John Wesolowski's property.

Now it was just a one room shanty, but was very beautiful to me with its peach and plum trees and east side covered with morning glories. The inside had just a cot very neatly made with an Army blanket and white sheets. Although he had never been in the military his cot and the inside of his shanty would have passed any Army inspection. The only furniture was a nightstand with an always ticking alarm clock on it. His pots and pans were neatly hung on one wall reminding me of pictures of kitchens I've seen in Homes and Gardens magazines. There was also a pot-bellied stove that he used for both cooking and heat.

He always left some treat on his night stand like bananas or doughnuts. He let us know that we were always welcomed to take one when he was not there.

Paul worked for Mrs. Weingart as a woodchopper and called her his banker. I believe he sent most of his money to his family in Italy and lived very frugally except for his once a month toot in Torrington, although I only saw him tipsy a couple times. I often visited him in the woods when I heard him chopping. I used to watch in awe as the large chips flew with such apparent ease. Even at my young age I recognized it was like child's play for him. He turned chopping wood into an art form and I think he gave it a little bit extra for my admiring eyes. He often chopped shirtless, his well muscled chest covered with a curly grey mat. His hair almost white and always short and neat but not buzz cut, always long enough to lie-down but never long enough to interfere with his chopping.

I remember one day him showing me where he been bitten by a spider and had to go to the doctor after the area around the bite had swelled badly. Many years later when they coined the word Lyme disease, I suspected that the spider was a deer tick and his doctor luckily treated him with the new wonder drug Penicillin.

The path from our house through the woods to his shanty in the late spring and summer was one of my favorite places. In the warm months I would always see a half dozen rabbits, red squirrels, chipmunks, and an occasional predator like a hawk, owl, or fox. Paul eventually retired and moved back to Italy where he opened a shoe repair shop where his friends would come to sit and talk. My Aunt Emma who visited him said he didn't repair too many shoes but had a great time talking with his friends there.