

# ***My Friend Pete***

By Bob Lick, NJBBA Life Member

My friend Paul "Pete" McLain is gone, but won't be forgotten. This fine man left big footprints during his walk through life. His personality and boundless enthusiasm for all things outdoors, and especially Island Beach State Park, was infectious.

I first met Pete during my early years as President of the New Jersey Beach Buggy Association (NJBBA). At that time Pete was Deputy Director of New Jersey Division of Fish & Game. Each of us has probably met someone where there is an instant likeability. Well, Pete was such a person for me. The Endangered Species Act had been recently passed in Washington, and New Jersey was developing their version. Pete was chosen to head it up. Pete jumped in with his normal, for him, enthusiasm. The osprey and piping plover were the initial species to be targeted for population protection and expected numbers increase. Where better to do this work than the environment of Pete's beloved Island Beach? One day while I was in the Fish & Game Offices it took Pete only seconds to have me convinced NJBBA just had to get involved in "his" program. His enthusiasm would do that to you. In short order NJBBA had purchased and posted signage and roped areas on the beach to warn Park patrons to stay clear of nest-ing plovers, and assisted in erecting artificial osprey nesting towers. If I remember correctly, Maryland was where Pete went to obtain osprey eggs. He brought them to Island Beach and placed them in the nests to be incubated naturally by the resident ospreys. Pete's passion and leadership resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of several species in New Jersey.

It was January 1, 1979 when I phoned simply to wish Pete and Ann a Happy New Year. During our conversation I mentioned to Pete that I recently watched a TV show about tarpon and snook fishing in Costa Rica and how I'd love to do that someday. Without hesitation Pete exclaimed he was in the process of putting a trip together for the fall and invited me to join. Needless to say I went, and it was one of the most glorious and enjoyable weeks of my life. Again, Pete's endless enthusiasm for everything insured a successful trip. One morning I waded out to a sandbar and was casting to rolling tarpon when I heard someone hollering. I turned around to see Pete waving his arms which I thought was just his enthusiastic "good morning." But, as he continued, I waded back to the beach where he was still waving his arms. When I approached he hollered: "Didn't you see the shark?" Apparently a big shark was cruising the slough I waded through to get to and from the outer bar. We often retold that story.

Many people would call Pete an environmentalist. On several occasions Pete and I would sit on the beach in my camper discussing how and why some extremists in the environmental community would deny people recreational access to our public lands. That pushed Pete's "hot button" because he was a person that firmly believed people should be able to enjoy the outdoors and wildlife. Pete was a sports-man/conservationist from the old school and not one of today's elite anti-access environmentalists.

It wasn't until later in our friendship that I learned that Pete was a B-17 pilot during WWII. I discovered he flew 35 missions over Europe. We never had lengthy conversations about his experiences, as reluctance to speak about their service is typical of many WWII veterans. Suffice it to say that after learning of Pete's service I was no longer just happy to know him, but honored as well.

I thank Pete for making my life better being my friend, and for being such a great friend to NJBBA. I hope Pete has a wonderful dog with lots of flushing birds forever.