

Bark o' the Banshee

by Pat Robinson



Everyday

It has been 136 years since this earth beneath us has soaked with American blood spilled in a declared war. Some countries rise and fall in much shorter periods of time. Some countries have lived with war for so long that it has become a part of the everyday landscape, the everyday travel, the everyday shopping, the everyday conversation, the everyday thread of life. Not here.

The words did not come easy when I heard Alex Ogonowski answer the phone. He is one of those people I knew long ago. I worked with Alex Ogonowski at the Everett, Mass terminal for Exxon. His is not a common name.

John Ogonowski, 52 of Dracut Mass., was the pilot of Flight 11 originating in Boston.

I, along with virtually everyone near a radio, or television knew what had happened. On a beautiful Fall day, war came to us.

We have fought in the Middle East before, but that wasn't like this. We have been called upon before by allies and enemies alike; but that wasn't like this. What could I possibly say to the Ogonowski family that hadn't already been said by many, some famous, some not, some strangers, some not?

Alex is a Yankee farmer in the true sense of the word. A gentle man of enduring nature that let very little in the work place bother him. Try maneuvering a gasoline tanker through Boston safely for one 10 hour shift and keep smiling. When he picked up the phone, he barked "Hello!"

I identified myself to the voice. He repeated my name. I could almost see him moving his fingers over his chin as he dragged his memory for recollection of me. The voice became soft now, the gentleness overcame the irritation for yet another call.

"Alex, I am so sorry for your family's loss." I had all I could do to say that little line, and I had lost nothing. We exchanged a few more words, I am sure he meant it when he said, "Thank you for calling." I heard his breath, a terrible sadness had taken a toll on this retired truck driver. I hope Alex is okay.

When I was a kid, you saw war in newsreels at the movies, run before the cartoons. Black

and white, and always with a famous General or two. Dwight D. Eisenhower always looked the victor in his short drab jacket, stars and all. Korea never looked too appealing in those old films.

That little conflict called Vietnam tore at the roots of all things American, and all things not. Many heated discussions turned into long time divided families. Dinner would be served up with body counts, followed by Archie Bunker for dessert. Many of our able bodied young men signed up, and many were drafted. Remember the lottery of birth dates? A simple thing like that changed some lives in an instant, and for others, there was no cause for concern. Some young men went to college, did well and got deferments, some had no money for college. Others opted to pretend to be gay. I don't have any idea just how successful that was or wasn't. As a last resort, a lot of guys went to Canada. They still take grief about doing that so most rarely tell. A heavy price was paid by all involved in the Vietnam Conflict.

We came to the aid of our allies in the Middle East when Saddam Hussein was making his presence felt and scaring the wits out of all his Arab neighbors. Course, we did want the oil, too.

There have been other visits, Somalia, Bosnia, and the list goes on. But those military crisis all have one thing in common: none happened in these United States.

I have watched the events unfold, TV's have been on in every room, I don't want to miss anything.

I saw Palestinian kids dancing in the streets, overjoyed at the deaths of innocent people at work on a Tuesday. I saw fire and police men and women go back time and time again, even more determined after the collapses. I saw a wall of posters go up on a building. Men and women were telling their stories and falling victim before our very eyes to the overwhelming loss and sadness that has come lapping at our shores in an ordinary airplane in an extraordinary manner. The President said, "This is war."

His lower lip trembled, a pause in his sentence as he dug

for something that matched the obvious pain Mr. Bush felt when he spoke about "the kids" and I was moved. I thought of my own daughter, I figured safe in Louisiana, in the same state with what terrorists saw as an enemy of Allah, and the Muslim faith, our president.

My first call to anyone after the planes flew into the World Trade Centers was to my daughter. My cousin Joanne is married to a pilot, her house was next. Her husband Terri was seated right next to her. He knows all the men and women aboard the Boston flights. And I made other calls, the ones I needed to make.

World leaders have called Mr. Bush to express the deepest of sympathy. Some of these leaders and their populace are already our allies, some are jumping on board within the last few days.

Vigils of whole continents have brought millions together for remembrance, and prayer. Bells have pealed throughout in the blue but empty skies.

We, as a nation are bleeding. A few zealots with a twisted view on God's wishes have pushed holes into some bare spots and have caught us unaware. I watch in awe as those in charge get down and dirty, whether in suits of silk or rescue. I sit here typing as the announcements come from Arab nations that Osama bin Laden's deliverance should be done. I pray for that to happen before you read this.

I saw a Boy Scout leader standing in front of the local Wal-Mart. He was holding a container for people to make contributions. I asked him if he would throw out a gay kid. He shook his head firmly, saying, "No, not ever."

I then asked him if it was time that the only occupation in this country, the armed services, be like all others where we should work side by side? We could close that little loop hole.

We could serve our country based on the want, and able body to do so with, regardless of color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. I pointed out that if I was in a fox hole with some guy, who was more concerned about who I love, he was a bigger threat than an enemy ever will be.

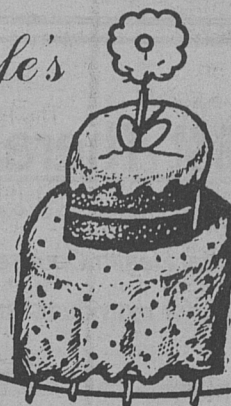


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All of us at Out & About Travel are deeply saddened by the events that took place on September 11th. We extend our deepest sympathy to those whose lives have been altered by this tragedy. For info on how you can help, please visit our website.

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