

Remembering Jim Gregg -- Danville High School, Class of 1958

If my memory is correct, four years this coming June is when Jim Gregg died in Florida. Since the late 1980's he had lived a few blocks from me along the same canal in Englewood, Florida.

Jim was retired from the US Postal Service where he was a supervisor at the large distribution center in Sarasota, FL. Prior to moving to Florida he held a similar position in Indianapolis.

We grew up and as neighbors a few miles apart east of Danville. He lived on Twin Bridges Road and I lived on Gale Road now 300 East. He was always self-sufficient and we traveled afar in his 49 Desoto. He always had a good set of wheels.

We hunted, fished, trapped, and did a lot of things together. In 1959 Jim, myself, and my brother joined the Marines in Indianapolis. We all survived recruit training together. In the late fifties boot camp was a very difficult physically and mentally demanding thirteen weeks in San Diego. After advanced infantry training at Camp Pendleton California, we both received orders for the Second Marine Division at Camp Le June NC. It was here that our paths changed. We both had the same Infantry MOS but Jim was assigned to the base post office and I was in the infantry. Not sure how it happened but it did. We had a lot of laughs about it later in life. We continued to fish together and often getting a new boat and motor from Marine Special Services and fished in New River. A lot of hard work for this little perk but we were thankful and it was all free..... even the gas.

Jim worked his whole four-year Marine tour career in the post office and the regular post office after discharge was a natural move for him. He knew the ropes and how to get things done. The postal units also deployed with combat units and Jim was placed on a unit that would eventually end up in South Africa. He met Collette Kruger a secretary there and later made another cruise to Cape Town South Africa to marry her. She came to the USA as a special passenger on a cargo ship. She took shorthand at the speed of light and could make a typewriter sing. I went to Federal Court with her when she received her US citizenship.

They lived in Danville for a short time while he was waiting to get hired at the Indianapolis post office. Later they moved to Riley Towers in Indianapolis and then later to the Garfield Park area where they bought a nice bungalow home adjacent to Garfield Park. Jim had two children a son and daughter. His love affair with cars continued and he owned several Corvettes. One was stolen from the Parking Garage in Riley Towers and never found.

He moved to Englewood, FL when an opening for a supervisor was posted for the new Sarasota distribution center. He purchases a home not far from me on the same canal and close to Lemon Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. He had been to the area visiting and liked the fishing opportunities and ability to eventually retire in Florida. He could walk out his back door and get into his boat and be in Gulf in a few minutes. He was happy living in Florida. He knew his work well and was a dependable no nonsense supervisor of a large number of employees. I remember he called tank tops "underwear tops" and enforced the dress code on his shift at the center. He did not accept excuses.

He was a natural born fisherman and really enjoyed the sport and guarded his special spots. In Florida we shot skeet or fished most weekends. He also fished the local and national Red Man Bass tournaments and always did well. One day we fished Lake Okeechobee when hurricane Andrew was bearing down on Florida. The fishing ahead of that front was good and I think we were the last boat off the lake and evacuations were in full swing as we fished. When we pulled out of the lake the surrounding areas looked like ghost towns and had been evacuated. When we got to the Interstate I-75 there were red taillights four lanes wide as far as we could see. Gas and food was in short supply or sold out in many areas so we drained the boat gas into our truck ate some sardines (boat food) that we had and continued home. Not much other than fish got him excited. Most of the time, we fished for Snook and Bass but also caught a good variety of everything.

He and his family were frequent visitors at our place when I was a Conservation Officer assigned to Vermillion County along the western Indiana/Illinois border. We fished and camped together in the Canadian boundary water canoe area and at the Chippewa Flowage in Wisconsin.

Cateract Lake was an old haunt of ours when we were in High School. We pooled our money and resources to purchase a small car top boat carrier, boats and motors when we were both in school. Harry Baldauf prevailed on us to take him fishing at the local railroad pond. We both had a good time and Harry, (Mr. Baldauf) was a good fisherman. After he retired he traveled and fished and we did not see too much of each other.

On 20 June 2005 a neighbor came to my house and said that EMS had taken Jim away in the ambulance. I found out from the hospital that he had died and that his wife had not been notified as she was out of town at the time. I kept checking for a local obituary notice in the paper and inquired with his neighbors. To this day this is all that I know of his death. His family has never contacted me.

He was a good dependable honest person, a veteran, and a good companion in the boat. We made several joint trips to Everglades Nat. Park and have fished and camped near the geographic center of this vast wilderness. He was at home there as much as anyone that I know. We cooked and camped often sleeping on the ground or in a small tent. Early in 1993 we had an engine problem forty miles by water N.E of Flamingo, really out in the middle of nowhere. We slept on the boat that night but got started the next day and limped into our camp. We eventually made it back to Flamingo. The motor ran so poorly that we had only a cupful of fuel left and Jim was holding the tank so we could get the last drop. No cell phone or radio coverage was available due to the remoteness of the area and due to hurricane Andrew a few months prior putting all the towers on the ground. I think if he were here he would list that trip in the "Interesting Event" section for the memory book. For us, at the time, rescue by the Coast Guard in few days after we were reported missing appeared to be the only way out.

Our future trips were with twin engines, a bigger boat and plenty of fuel. We learned a good lesson. We had good times and a lot of fun. The fish in the Everglades are resting a bit easier now. Our prayers are with him.

Semper Fidelis James D. Gregg.

Gary Hoffman, friend, neighbor, and fellow '58 classmate.

