

David Cadwell

By Brenda Underwood

"A Teddy Bear of a Man, with a thick beard and curly hair... an ever-present twinkle in his eyes and a corny joke always at the ready." Tom Brokaw



Dave with his children, Weston and Megan

In his Memorial Day speech in Cornwall on May 30, 2005, Dave Cadwell spoke of fellow Vietnam veterans living in our community:

"We became the guy who runs the lumber yard, who makes your Shaker furniture, the guy you call when you have a rabid raccoon ravaging your basement ... the guy you entrust with your town's money, that smiling face greeting you at the dump or some of the guys who show up at your house in the middle of the night to put out your chimney fire"

-- and continued by telling a story of one particular day while serving in Vietnam – a day he refers to as "the worst day of my life."

"Our captain was Johnny Newton Ward, Jr. of Sarasota FL. He was a man of 27 years, commanding a company of 18 to 22-year-old boys. He was intelligent, caring, and most importantly, ever mindful of the safety of Alpha Company. On January 16th, 1971, while we were engaged in a fire fight, we were accidentally hit by our own artillery, killing 4 and wounding 11 ... Capt. Ward was killed, along with three others that included the medic from the third platoon...."

“When you get through a day like that, it provides you with a lifetime standard to measure the true meaning of ‘I’m having a bad day.’ It made the rest of my life more of a downhill journey after surviving that day.”

David Cadwell was born at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Los Angeles, California on August 29, 1950 “which made for a lifetime of easy math in calculating my age”. He lived with his parents and five siblings in Altadena, although during his childhood his family moved frequently for his father’s work. Dave’s sister, Mary Ellen, the first of his siblings to be born, contracted cerebral palsy and died when she was two years old. Dave’s parents went on to have five other children, something for which Dave gives them credit. He has three older siblings – a brother Jim, a sister Cathy and a brother Mike – and one younger sibling, Chris. “My brother, Mike, passed away a couple of years ago of a heart attack” and his three other siblings still live on the west coast. Dave has also lost his parents, “my dad in 1981 and then my mom in 2000.”

Dave’s father was an executive for Allstate Insurance in Chicago where he met Dave’s mother. After his parents were married and his father had passed the bar examination, they were given the opportunity to live anywhere in the U.S. They chose Los Angeles because his father had a sister who was a secretary for the Fibber McGee and Molly Show in Los Angeles and liked it there. “From that point when my dad was promoted it meant moving. When I was in second grade we moved to Kansas for a few years and then on to Illinois and then it was back to California.” Although he was in a large number of schools while growing up, Dave speaks of his childhood as “the Ozzie & Harriet kind of life.”

He graduated from Pasadena High School in 1968. “At the end of 1968, I built floats for the Tournament of Roses Parade and drove a float in the ’69 Parade. The week between Christmas and New Year’s I worked 108 hours at \$1.75/hr,” which he regards as, “pretty cool stuff for an 18-year-old.” Less than two years later, he was drafted into the army and sent to Vietnam.

A conscientious objector, Dave refused to carry a gun and was trained as a medic for Vietnam. As a non-combatant he thought he would be working in a hospital but during training, “the official word came from President Nixon that we were in Cambodia, and I was sent to Vietnam in the First Cavalry Division of the Infantry.”

“Not once,” said Dave, “did anybody ever give me a hard time for not carrying a gun. The fact that I didn’t have to carry a gun and ammunition meant that I could carry more medical supplies,” something, he said, that you almost become obsessed with “because these guys are counting on you. When you’re out in the bush with 15 to 20 guys from your platoon and something happens medically, you’re the guy.”

“Vietnam was hours upon hours of absolute boredom punctuated by moments of absolute terror. When people start shooting at you it’s awful. Dave observed that in the book, *Catch 22*, the protagonist says, “Perfect strangers are shooting at me. I don’t even know them and they are shooting at me.” When looked at through this lens, the insanity of war hits home. “When you spend every day with a group of people in these circumstances you really do become a band of brothers.”

“And now we know from Mr. McNamara and the powers that be that everything on the Paris Peace table in 1969 is basically what they signed off on in 1973. But no one was man enough to stand up in 1969 and say, let’s just end this thing and end it now.”

“This would have excluded my entire experience and all the guys who are on that wall [since 1969]. So here we are today in Iraq. It’s going to end – we all know that – but who’s going to be the man now and go up and say ‘OK we’re getting out’. We all support our troops but let’s give them an honorable mission.”

”When we were in World War II,” said Dave, “our country was at war, everybody contributed and we’ve not done that since then. If you are going to commit yourself to go to war everybody needs to be involved.”

After returning to the United States in 1972, Dave attended Pasadena City College where he received an Associates Degree. In the interim, he met Alice Sarkissian who was studying at UCLA, and they were married.

At this time, “We got one of these very curious jobs as caretakers of an estate in Bel Aire, five minutes from UCLA. It was Burt Lancaster’s old house. It did allow us to live near UCLA in a neighborhood that we could not dream of living in otherwise,” said Dave, “but we were happy to get on with our own lives after two years.”

That entailed a sea change move. A friend of Dave’s was opening a coffee company called Bernie’s Coffee and Tea. “He invited me to join him. It was a parallel time when Starbucks was getting on the map,” so Dave and Alice moved east. “I went to work for him as his warehousing and purchasing guy when he was building his third store and I worked there five years. When I left there were 33 stores. I think they have over 100 now.”

Meanwhile, Dave and Alice’s twins, Megan and Weston, were born in 1985 in Orlando, something Dave regards “as a bit of a miracle. We had done everything known to medical science to conceive and, wouldn’t you know, we hit the jackpot and had twins after ten years of marriage.” Megan and Weston are now in college in Los Angeles – Megan studying school counseling and Weston film editing.

The Cadwells “never felt really connected to Florida” and on a trip up to visit friends in Warren, CT in 1986 fell in love with the area and “decided to look into the possibilities of working here”.

On a visit to Cornwall, Dave espied a building that once housed a restaurant on one side, known as The Corner (now the Wandering Moose) and a package store, River Valley Spirits, on the other. And the rest, shall we say, is history.

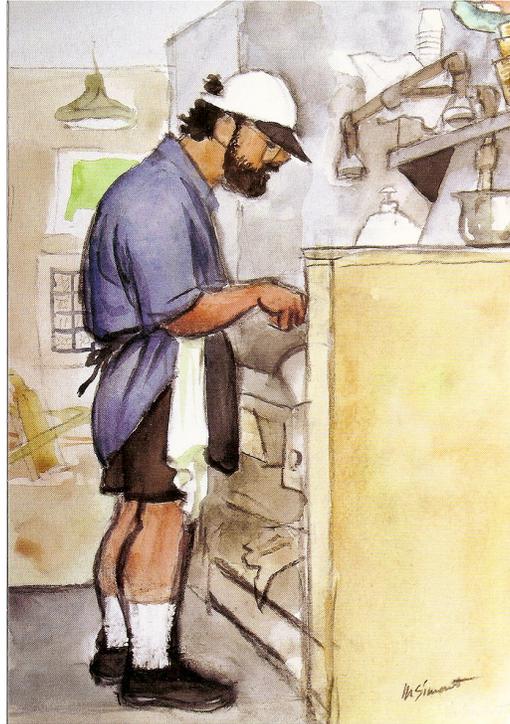
After the formalities of purchasing both the restaurant and the package store, Dave and Alice opened Cadwell’s Corner leaving the running of the package store “in the capable hands of Elizabeth Locke and Lydia Wolfe.”

“Neither one of us had ever run a restaurant before but Alice was one of those cooks who everybody said should run a restaurant. And the town welcomed us from day one. We served really good coffee and freshly baked bread and filled in around that. I kept a peanuts cartoon over the cash register that showed Charlie Brown bringing Snoopy his bowl of food. After he sets it down, he proceeds to describe all the French ingredients and Snoopy looks at it, walks away and says, ‘I don’t eat food that needs to be explained to me.’ So that sort of was our attitude. We just had food that didn’t need explanation. Meatloaf is meatloaf.”

“It was a great spot for people to meet their neighbors,” said Dave, adding that a number of well-known personalities would stop in including Tom Brokaw, a regular customer who became a friend. “It’s nice to have celebrated people who we recognize,” he said, “but when it gets down to it everybody is a star in something in their lives.”

When Dave was running Cadwell’s Corner there was an event held every summer called “Paint the Town” where artists were invited to spend a day in Cornwall painting, with the artwork eventually being auctioned for charity. “We’d get dozens of people who would show up and paint the covered bridge and

the house behind the post office – the typical places,” said Dave. “Well, one summer, it was a wicked hot day outside, in comes Mark Simont into the air-conditioned Cadwell’s Corner and sits in the corner and proceeds to create this painting of me.”



Dave Cadwell by Marc Simont

“And, needless to say, when it goes up for auction, I get lost in the bidding.” The painting was bought by Brian Ross of ABC News who, several years later, gave the painting to him, a gesture Dave found “immensely touching.” “To own this is an honor. When anybody sees it, they know it’s me right away and that’s the genius of Mark Simont; he knows how to capture that fleeting essence.”

After 10 years running the restaurant and the package store, Dave and Alice were experiencing both personal and business problems and closed Cadwell’s Corner.

On his own, Dave went to work for the restaurant at Mohawk Mountain for a several years followed by a time working for the company that supplied the coffee for Cadwell’s Corner in Pine Plains, N.Y. He then joined Skip Kosciusko in the landscaping business. “I’m one of a number of people Skip has taken under his arm.”

Dave now has his own regular customers and, “with lawnmowers, a chainsaw and a log splitter I’m prepared to do most chores. If I can’t, I probably know somebody who can.”

Dave also works 20 hours a week for the EMS Institute in Sharon overseeing the volunteer squads that report to Sharon Hospital (eight in Connecticut and eight in New York State) which includes teaching CPR and EMT classes to keep volunteers certified. “I really love this job,” said Dave, “it is so worthwhile -- and it saves lives.”

He has been a volunteer EMT with the Cornwall Fire Department since 1987 when he first moved to Cornwall and speaks about his volunteer work in the following way: “You know it’s an interesting thing to do, and you know it’s needed. It always tickles me when we respond to our neighbors how grateful

everyone is. We'll get up in the middle of the night and take a drunk we don't know off the highway, so you can only imagine how nice it is for us ... to care for people we know and like – it's very satisfying.”

Besides being an EMT for the Cornwall Fire Department, Dave is on the boards of Habitat for Humanity and the Cornwall Association and a participant in a reading program at a local school called Everyone Wins, where he reads to children. He has also been trained to act as a moderator at the elections. “I'm not really a big fan of meetings and prefer pitching in when things need to get done... bringing in and taking out the docks at the lake, putting up and taking down tents for a variety of events and standing behind the grill when cooking needs doing. I just show up and do the best job I can.”

Dave has recently been included in Tom Brokaw's new book, *Boom! Voices of the Sixties* (2007), in which Brokaw documents the personal reflections of mostly well-known people and celebrities in that decade of upheaval and division. “To have Tom Brokaw tap me on the shoulder and put my story in his book is hugely flattering,” he said, adding that “the only extraordinary thing about my life is how ordinary it is.” Dave was interviewed for the section entitled ‘The War without End’ and in it he recounts his experiences in Vietnam. Of the photograph below, taken at a publicity party for the book in November 2007 in New Haven, Dave says, “And, yes, my head really is that big these days!”



Dave Cadwell and Tom Brokaw

Along with his cat Atticus, the Catticus, who likes to sit on a bench by the window in the kitchen and watch the birds dive into the bird feeder scarcely a foot away, Dave has lived for the past two years as the 26th member of the Yelping Hill Association and, “I could not be prouder of the fact that I've been invited into this community.”

Around his home are cherished possessions including his grandfather's sword from WWI, a sampler his mother made in 1955 when Dave was just 5 years old, old family photographs and Mark Simont's watercolor painting of him at Cadwell's Corner. He enjoys cooking and makes a formidable oatmeal raisin cookie. And he crochets. His mother taught him how to crochet many years ago “and I've done it ever since. I'm sort of famous, or infamous, for going to meetings and crocheting. It's very relaxing and a great rationale for sitting in front of the boob tube.”

He also enjoys watching movies with friends, is a member of a Cornwall book group, a Cornwall men's group and the Town Hall Players, appearing in the productions of *Our Town* and *The Dining Room*. Dave also has an occasional game of poker with Hunt Williams, Marc Simont, Tim Prentice, Frank Oznowitz, Paul de Angelis and Jerry Doolittle. "I love the camaraderie, and the only prerequisite to play in my game is you have to be older than I am so I get the wisdom of the ages here."

Perhaps Dave had already imbibed some of that quality. "When I had my kids, I wanted them to live in one place and have a home. As a kid, I went here, there and everywhere and I always envied those kids who said, 'We've been friends since kindergarten' – I never had that. I'd like to think [Megan and Weston] are better off for it; I'm very proud of the fact that my kids had the stability that I think I was in search of."

"The huge regret I have in life is that my marriage didn't last. I was given a great role model by my parents and I failed in that," adding, "and so did every one of my siblings." Dave's brother Chris is getting remarried in May and Dave is crocheting an afghan for him as a wedding present.

Outside Dave's house is a string of colorful Tibetan prayer flags. "When the wind blows, the prayers are released into the world. I don't know what is written on them but I like the concept."

Maybe it is those prayers flying high above our town, through our woods and over our hills, skirting our waterfalls and looping across our pastureland to eventually funnel around and down our chimneys that bring the good karma to Cornwall – and the joyful presence of Dave Cadwell among us.



Dave and his reading buddy

Photo: Eveyln Tompkins

Dave Cadwell's Memorial Day speech can be viewed on www.YouTube.com, courtesy of his son, Wes, who organized it as a surprise Christmas present for his dad. Under Videos, type in "Dave Cadwell" or "Memorial Day" and it will come up.