

My Friend Mike

Written and delivered at the funeral of Mike “Doc” Mahan by Marty Everse, July 28, 2018

Round about Brierfield, for over fifty years, just a yawn and stretch past daybreak, the earth would rumble. Emerging through the mist along the creek that bears his family name, Mike Mahan roared and attacked the day with unbridled energy and enthusiasm armed with nothing more than a sausage biscuit and diet Coke.

To really understand this lion of Brierfield, to understand his tastes, his temper, his need to contribute, his sense of romance, you need to take a peek at his forebears. Mike enjoyed nothing more than a rousing tale, slightly embellished, highlighting the exploits of a swashbuckling Mahan ancestor. For 200 years, Mahan apples have never fallen far from the tree.

Down through the centuries the Mahan genes pooled, combined, evolved and reached their pinnacle in Mike. Whiskey and wanderlust were strong family traits. His appreciation for the amber liquid can be traced directly to his great-great-great-grandfather John who, when he died in 1820, among his possessions owned 24 individual gallons of fine whiskey along with two entire barrels of the distilled elixir. With that DNA, it is no wonder Mike had a fondness for a touch of Gentleman Jack with a splash of soda in a sterling julip cup.

That same John, when life became too comfortable, loaded the family up and wandered from Virginia to Tennessee and finally to Alabama. Mike was restless geographically and mentally. Though he always returned home to Montebrier, Mike spent a lifetime dashing about the western hemisphere, pulling Yucatecan teeth, shooting Yankees, plucking a bass fiddle, launching a kidney stone in Chile, sampling every morsel life had to offer. His spirit could not be corralled.

The Mahan temper was first

noted in 1830 when his great-great grandfather Edward got into a tussle with his neighbor Moses Gosa. Edward, according to official court records, and I quote, “assaulted Moses and with great force with a certain stick and with his fists struck a great many violent blows & strikes on and about his head, face, breast, shoulders, arms, legs and diverse other parts of his body. And also then and there with great force and violence shook and pulled about him and cast and threw him down to and upon the ground and struck him a great many other blows.” In true Mahan fashion, Edward pleaded not guilty.

I never saw Mike resort to “violent blows” but I did witness him single handedly back down six juiced motorcycle gang members one evening at a Brierfield music festival. He did it all without waving a stick though there were loud threats of violence and not from the gang.

Great grandfather Jesse was the lover in the line, the one who most appreciated the female form, that is until Mike appeared. After a whirlwind courtship, the widower Jesse convinced the well-proportioned widow Curtis to marry him in 1870. From Montgomery he wrote her that “If I get the handsomest lady that travels up the Selma, Rome and Dalton Railroad I should be a little proud of it and I am quite fond of nice things and especially pretty ladies. I have had the compliment paid me that Mrs. Mahan was the best looking lady that was in the country so you know I must be a judge of pretty ladies.”

Mike was a chip off the old block there. He admired feminine curves, the rounder the curve, the greater the admiration. It is a testament to his technical talents that comely Alabama College coeds were anxious to be the subject of his photographic artistry in daring poses along the

Little Cahaba River. Those images are now safely stored for the ages in the vaults of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery.

One of Mike’s many obsessions in life was history. The Brierfield Park exists today as a monument to his dogged determination to preserve that slice of Alabama’s heritage. Montebrier, his home for 50 years, is another example of his love for things old and precious. And he didn’t limit his affections to just Brierfield and Montevallo. As a member of the Alabama Historical Commission, he galloped across the entire state whipping up support for saving old buildings and sites, though he seldom let facts get in the way of a rousing historical narrative.

There are many here today who owe their place in this world to Mike. I know I do. He reveled in people’s uniqueness, cultivated their gifts, and promoted their talents. I am sure there are more than a few here today that learned the rhythm of a weed eater, the mysteries of the human mouth or how to fight a fire under his supervision.

Mike was cinematic. Everything he was involved in was a production. He loved a party and a parade especially if he was the director. He scripted and choreographed his own funeral. His co-stars were his family, his wife Linda, the smartest woman he ever knew, his successful daughters, Miki and Stann, and athletic, talented and musical grandsons Michael, Jacob and Jesse. They all bear the unmistakable mark of Mike.

We are all fortunate that the setting for his life was here. With his passing, with the closing of the curtain, everything will be a little less colorful, a sequel impossible. There was no hill too high for this stepper. And I will miss him.