

LANGHAM LEFT BROADCASTING FOR LIFE AT RAQUETTE LAKE 6/24/97

I, finally got to meet Don Langham. His name was bandied about by mutual acquaintances for some 37 years and I could stand it no longer.

It started years ago with friends from the Syracuse area who would ask if I ever ran into Don Langham.

Most of them were people in the media-radio, television or newspaper. The story was that he had worked in the business and left for life in the big woods.

Last Tuesday I had to be in Raquette Lake for a surprise birthday party, so decided it was time to put a face with the name. I arrived early, called Don and he invited me over. I suspected that we had much in common and found my suspicions confirmed in the first five minutes.

We both had lived in Cayuga County and the Syracuse area and I came to the Adirondacks in 1958. I bought a camp on Rondaxe Lake that had once been owned by Don and is now owned by his daughter, Nancy.

Both of us have been patients of the same Utica doctor for 17 years.

All of the above, of course, is coincidental, but our interests in the area and the outdoors is more than that.

Don was born March 9, 1909, and spent his early years in Auburn. He became interested in radio at its start and built his first set in 1926. It was all in code in the beginning and for awhile he had no one to talk to. He finally was able to reach someone in Skaneateles, seven miles away.

In 1930, his knowledge of radio landed him a job as engineer with station WMBO in Auburn. In 1935, he moved to Syracuse to work at WFBL in the Onondaga Hotel.

Like many of his generation in the 40s, Don was called upon to lend his expertise to the Army during World War II. Returning to work after the war, he was eventually drawn into the television field.

He soon found that it did not hold the fascination that radio once had and he began to look for alternatives. As he cast about, his heart and mind began to focus on Raquette Lake.

The Lanphear family in general and Jerry Lanphear in particular had a fondness for the area and its people particular had imbued a fond in Don that he could not shake. A 17-year-old Jerry guided Don to his first bear, quite an accomplishment in 1936. Subsequently, he began to spend more time in the Rondaxe and Raquette Lake areas.

It was the same spirit Don had come to expect from the people of the area that enabled him finally to begin to make a living there. Jerry and Jim Bird worked with Don in starting a cottage rental business and in buying the Antlers Hotel.

The move apparently agreed with Don, for he looks to his 89th birthday next March. He misses his brook trout stream fishing and traveling the woods as he once did, but he admits to few complaints otherwise.

We had a good visit on Tuesday, talking as old woods hicks do about everything from house cats to deer.

To make a long story short, I wish I had not waited so long to get to know him.