

THE LAST WORD

PARTING SHOTS FROM THE EDITOR



Eddie Albert and Dr. William A. Albrecht, 1971.

Eddie Albert — actor, activist, eco-gardener, a longtime friend and contributor to *Acres U.S.A.* — is dead at age 99. Most people remember Eddie as the Persian salesman in *Oklahoma*, the befuddled city slicker turned farmer in *Green Acres*, in a dozen roles that enshrined him among film and TV stars. But the fact is, Eddie Albert was a conservationist and eco-farmer long before I even thought of producing *Acres U.S.A.*

His interest can best be recalled by the fact that he journeyed to Kansas City to meet me after discovering one of the first issues of *Acres U.S.A.* I asked him, “What can I do for you?” and Eddie answered, “help me to meet Dr. Albrecht.”

Later on, I asked him to write an article on trees. The classic, “. . . to build the earth,” appeared in the January 1983 issue (see the reprint on page 20).

Eddie in fact turned his front yard at Pacific Palisades into an eco-garden. I recall eating some of the fresh produce from this garden at a picnic table while we discussed everything from farm parity to the health profile of the nation.

Eddie was quite literate on matters agricultural. With Secretary of Agriculture James McHale of Pennsylvania, he attended a World Food Conference in Rome, and with the miscellany of eco-farming he was often an expected — or unexpected — guest at rural meetings. He was a featured speaker at the Farm Congress staged by Jim Hightower and other leaders in St. Louis a few years back.

Eddie told me his real name was Edward Albert Heimberger. He dropped the last name as his career got underway. He ran a landing craft in World War II during invasions of the South Pacific and received a bronze star for action “above and beyond the call of duty.”

Eddie Albert acted to make a living, but his real love was the sea, the land, the growth of crops on the good green earth.

The 1962 Nobel Prize winner Melvin Calvin once calculated that if every family planted a tree when a child is born, then planted one each year for the first 21 years of that child’s life, the lifespan for people in North America could be length-

ened by almost a decade. No one has a count on the speeches Eddie Albert made telling people to plant trees.

Should a biographer step forth, he or she would find a rich vein never attributed to the actor. He was a man of vision. He surely felt the anger that troubles many of us about the machinations of government, but he always kept his cool. We cannot expect his tolerance, wisdom and fortitude to be gifted to those of us who are left behind. That burden could be too great.

Eddie Albert and I were both on Jim McHale’s program in Regina, Saskatchewan, one bitter winter night. Eddie told me of offers to emcee late-night TV programs that he didn’t think suited his image. “I’m useless to anyone if I don’t protect my image,” he said.

It was his image that enabled him to be a seriously considered spokesman for the environment, the family farm — yes, even parity!

Some of the boys from as far north as Colusa County, California traveled to Pacific Palisades now and then. These were the kind of contacts Eddie appreciated most of all.

Margo, Eddie’s wife of 40 years, was gone the last time I broke bread at Pacific Palisades. His daughter Maria came by, and his son was on the screen in a TV play that also featured his father. The home had more books than a small-town library. On Eddie’s working desk was a manuscript — not a movie script, but a paean to nature, the subject that consumed fully 90 percent of his attention.

It came to pass quite a few years back that Jack London’s cabin needed preservation. You guessed it — Eddie Albert was tapped to assist with the project.

I think we should all celebrate this man’s life. There is no need to mourn. Those 99 years were full years, this in spite of the McCarthy era.

During his early acting years in Hollywood, Eddie Albert was a colleague of Ronald Reagan. Ironically, the same aluminum-toxicity disorder called Alzheimer’s cut both men down, one an icon of the silver screen, the other a former President of the United States.

— Charles Walters

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