

Just a Nice Story

Antarctic Connections

by Elaine Hood, Communications

My phone rang the other day, and I had a delightful conversation with an old friend. This is his story.

Dr. Isaac Taylor was one of 93 men who spent the 1956 winter at McMurdo Station. Doc Taylor died in 1996, so I never got to meet him. But I have always heard nice stories about his gentility and father-figure status to the young Navy Seabees who spent that first (by Americans) winter in McMurdo as part of Deep Freeze I (DFI).

The main objective of DFI (1955-56) was to have the Navy Mobile Construction Battalion (Special), more commonly known as Seabees, construct two US bases for scientific research and logistical support. Little America V was built near where Adm. Byrd's previous Little America stations on the Ross Ice Shelf had been. McMurdo was to be a logistics base and airfield on Ross Island. During DFII (1956-57) the US added five more bases: Byrd, South Pole, Ellsworth, Wilkes and Hallett.

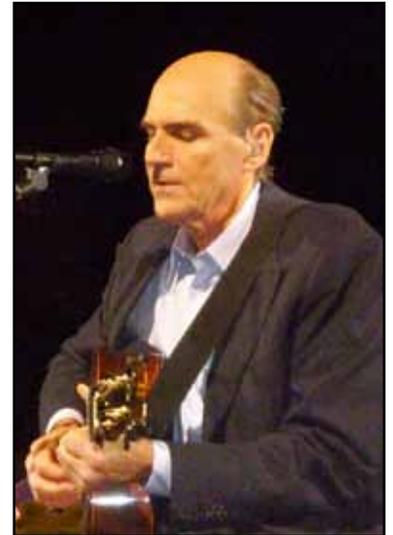
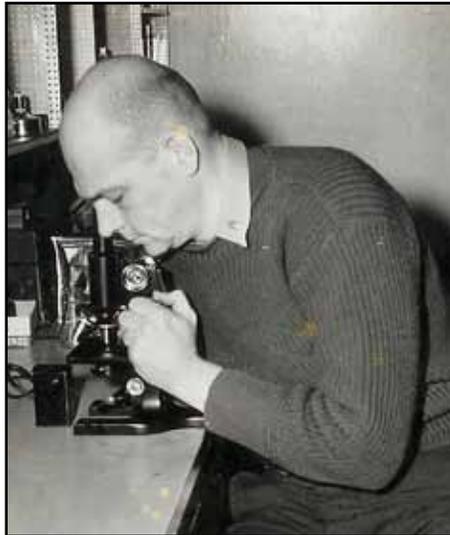
I have become acquainted with many of these DFI and DFII men over the years, most now in their 70s and 80s. There are two or three men who have always been held in highest esteem by the Seabees and spoken about with gentle kindness. No jokes about them. No tightened lips against speaking ill of someone who has passed away. Just quiet murmurs: "He was just the nicest man. So good." Doc Taylor was one of these revered men. He dispensed wisdom with medicine, and was truly very highly regarded by the young Navy men.

Doc Taylor had a wife and five children back home in North Carolina at the time of DFI. His second eldest son, who was 8 years old when his father went to Antarctica, grew up to become the famous singer-songwriter James Taylor.

Patrick "Rediron" McCormick is one of the retired Seabees who continues to speak so highly of Doc Taylor. Rediron arrived on Ross Island in December 1955, as a 20-year-old 3rd class builder who helped build McMurdo Station, spent the winter of 1956 there, and then helped build the first South Pole Station in December 1956. He left the Ice in the early months of 1957.

Now jump to 2010.

It was Rediron who called me the other day. He is now 75 years old, living in Rhode Island with his wife Betty.



the left photo by the U.S. Navy is available in the Antarctic Photo Library; right photo provided by Patrick McCormick

Dr. Isaac Taylor, top left, was McMurdo's first winter-over doctor, spending the winter of 1956 as the U.S. prepared for the International Geophysical Year. His son James Taylor, top right, became a famous singer-songwriter. You can see the physical similarities in the two men.

Their daughter Maureen lives in the San Francisco Bay area, and this is where the story gets good.

This past spring Maureen saw that musicians James Taylor and Carole King were going to be performing locally on their Troubadour Reunion Tour. When she went to the Web site to buy tickets to the concert, she had one of those sudden, "Oh, what the heck. Why not?" daring thoughts.

She sent an e-mail to James Taylor via the Web site, saying that she had grown up hearing stories about a man her father referred to as "Ole Doc Taylor." Maureen has always been an avid fan of James Taylor's music, and as she grew older she realized "Ole Doc Taylor" was James Taylor's father. That realization gave her a feeling of a special connection.

The next thing she knew, Taylor's personal assistant replied that James would like to meet her, and instructed Maureen where she could pick up free VIP tickets and back stage passes to the upcoming concert.

During the backstage visit, Maureen described her father's connection to James' father, inspiring James to suggest that maybe Rediron could attend one of the East Coast concerts on the Troubadour tour.

After several e-mail exchanges between Maureen and James' personal assistant, more VIP tickets were issued, and on June 28, 2010, Maureen flew home and drove her parents to Wilkes-Berra, Penn., where they enjoyed

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a private dinner and pleasant conversation with James Taylor before the evening's concert.

"He was the nicest, most congenial man you can imagine," exclaimed Rediron on the phone. "He is definitely his father's son. James looks like his father, has the same mannerisms. Everything. We were definitely treated like VIPs; he just could not have been nicer to us. Just like his father. I told him stories about his father and gave him a CD with photos and copies of documents from that winter in Antarctica I thought he would enjoy and could share with his siblings."

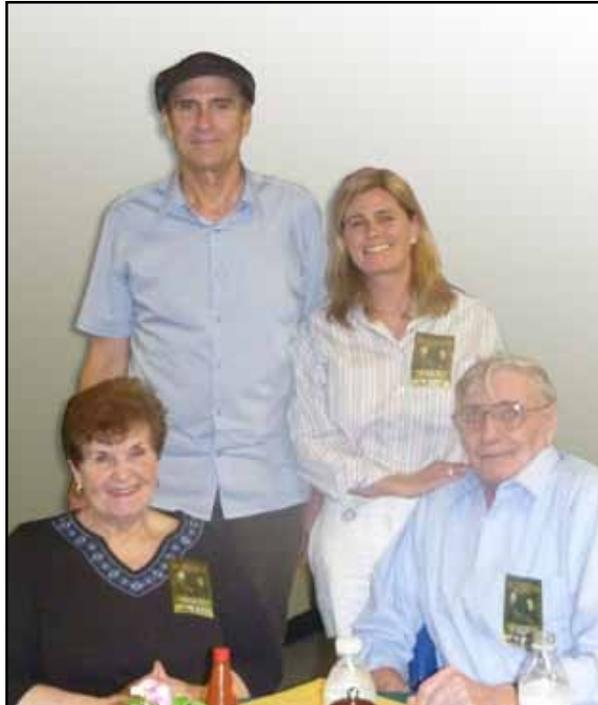
This was not the first incidence of James Taylor reaching out to his father's Antarctic friends. About five years ago, Dick Prescott, another DFI Seabee and lifelong friend of Rediron's, had a similar experience. James Taylor was performing in Rochester, NY, and when Taylor learned that Prescott had spent the winter of 1956 with his father in Antarctica, he called Prescott and invited him and his wife to visit with him before the concert ... resulting in a private meal and lengthy conversation.

There's more to this story. In late October James' brother Livingston, also a singer-songwriter, performed at a venue near Rediron's home. Learning of the event only two days before Livingston was to appear, Rediron called the promotion company and after several phone calls arrangements were made for an extended visit before, during intermission and after the concert.

"He, as is James, every bit his father's son in resemblance, mannerisms, sense of humor and congeniality.

That's it. Just a nice story I wanted to share about busy famous singers who are willing to take the time to reach out to men who once knew their father. Their only connection is Antarctica, a bond that ties so many of us together.

Editor's Note: You can read about the construction of McMurdo and South Pole stations in the July, August and September 2005 issues of PS News found in the PS News archives. The September 2005 issue has an article written by Rediron.



photos provided by Patrick McCormick

Top photo: Singer James Taylor, standing in the rear, with Betty and Patrick "Rediron" McCormick and their daughter Maureen. Bottom photo: Singer Livingston Taylor with Betty and Rediron.

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Top floor, northwest side,
by Elaine Hood's desk.

