

## 50 Years of Off-Road

Reflecting on lessons learned and our outdoor future

By Del Albright

The bikini clad Rock Zombie girls were all over my Jeep giving it the wash job of its life as I sat perched on my roof rack marveling at 50 years of off-roading. They were raising money for landuse, so I'm always in for a good cause. What really hurt, though was realizing the combined age of any two of the girls did not equal my number of years of trails and dirt roads!

I guess you could say I've seen it all. I've lived in 16 states and been shot at in 3 countries. I've logged 140,000 miles on my Jeep over the last 13 years of concentrated landuse wheeling; and it ain't over yet!

With the sun shining and the suds a'flying, I reflected on what I learned in those many years of backcountry adventures. From that, I'd like to offer you some tips that may help you prevent a stumble or misstep in your off-roading, and help us keep our outdoor sports healthy and alive.

Those five decades have included everything from dune buggies to dirt bikes to four-by-fours. I've used motors to do things like hunting, fishing, backpacking, exploring, geocaching, rock hounding, four-wheeling, and just plain relaxing. From those adventures over time, I have condensed those lessons into the 5 "M's."

1. **Manners:** My mamma taught me to be nice; do unto others, etc. And I must say it's about the best lesson I can impart to you. Whether you're dealing with bureaucrats, family, or other club members, there is nothing more powerful than being courteous and nice. Learn to stow the ego and control the strong urges of personalities. Give others credit when you can; share the trophy; and adopt outdoor ethics that put you on the high ground of being nice. Be inclusive of your fellow recreationist when you can. Share the trails.
2. **Maintenance:** Don't be the "drip." Don't be the break. Remember that our image comes from not only your behavior, but also your rig. Keep your gear in top shape. Be an example for others to follow.
3. **Mission:** Figure out your purpose in life and in outdoor sports, and set about making it happen. Be part of the solution even when you might be part of the problem. Make time to include others and especially kids. If you're a parent, be there for your kids in the great outdoors. Get them off the Nintendo and Xbox and into the wilds. My dad took me out when I was 12 in our "Lobster" dune buggy (read more about the "Wheels of Time" here <http://www.delalbright.com/articles/wheels.htm>). I still treasure those days. His mission was to make sure his family respected and enjoyed the great outdoors – even without much money.

4. Management: Whether you're in a leadership role, an event role, or a club position, learn to respect the time of other volunteers. Never waste their time; never take them for granted. Get some training if you need it? Heck, if you're just out leading some other folks on a trail ride, learn to make it productive and worthwhile. If you have to run meetings, learn to run good ones that get stuff done. Time is precious and we should not waste it. The best advice I can offer here is to learn to set "expectations" on whatever you are doing. If it makes you smile, write an expectation to achieve it. If it makes you frown, write an expectation to avoid it.
5. Membership: To affect change we must be part of the organized groups. Join those groups that make sense to what you believe in. If you want to keep your guns, join the NRA or other pro-gun groups. If you want to stay on the trails, join the BlueRibbon Coalition, your local club, and your regional and state associations. It's a mistake to think that someone else will do it for you (and your children). It's up to us; now.

Well, there you have it; the 5 "M's" of 50 years of being "out there." Sure, a guy could write a book about these simple "M's," but I think you get the message, albeit condensed. While we all might like to be the independent "cowboy" riding off into the sunset, "we" are really a collective community. We must be a team as well – working together to keep our trails open and our outdoor sports alive and well. I'll bet you a cold one around the campfire that if you apply my M's, you'll find more rewards in your outdoor pursuits, less hassles in your clubs and groups, and more fun on the trail. What have you got to lose?

For more on leadership training, visit: <http://www.rltc.biz>.

For more on BlueRibbon Coalition, visit: <http://www.sharetrails.org>.

For more on Del Albright, visit: <http://www.delalbright.com>

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