A respectful note about *Wind, Sand, and Stars*

Antoine de St. Exupéry wrote *Wind, Sand, and Stars,* in 1939. His stories of the early days of aviation captivated me as a 6th grade reader. Perhaps even more, it was the way he approached challenges with little expectation of help or miracles. He recounted resourceful...and sometimes lucky...solutions to easily lethal problems of both natural and mechanical nature. He flew blind over the Pyrenees, wrestled lacerating wind shear off the Argentine coast, and crashed in the North African desert...alone. There were no radios, locator beacons, radar towers, or even airports for most of his career. He flew nighttime reconnaissance for the French Free Air Force over occupied France, where he would have been summarily shot if he survived a crash. Yet he went back over and over again. He learned that Nazis, not surprisingly, but also jealous French politicians, cowardly bureaucrats, and literary snipers were all as dangerous as snapped cables, ruptured fuel lines, and Saharan heat. His plane plunged at night into the Mediterranean late in World War II, under murky circumstances. His voice was muted but his thoughts endured.

I loved his lyrical writing, his vision, his courage, and his humility. I realize that pushing my own limits, albeit on a vastly more diminutive scale, may have sprung from the seeds he planted in my preadolescent mind. I also believe that defying selfish and ignorant behavior, fully aware of the likely consequences, is a moral imperative for which "thanks" cannot be expected as part of the deal. That's the "moral" part of it. It's not a transaction, it's a conviction.

He wrote *The Little Prince* during the War, and countless parents have read this story to their children. A fair number of them did not realize the parable they were sharing with tender, absorbent minds, and that's fine.

I hope Antoine will accept my choice of these three magical words, Wind, Sand, and Stars, for this small article as homage to his desert endeavors.

–Wells Shoemaker, January, 2022

Not hard to track a photographer with prostate cancer and a bad knee in the desert