

When You Ride ALONE, You Ride With Hitler!

by Bill Edwards

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Introduction

Most authors are either workaholics (the successful ones) or terrible procrastinators (the unsuccessful ones). I fall somewhere in between. I always had the desire and some ability to write, but my passion was tempered by a need to support and take care of my family. Family always came first and that was a trait I inherited from the characters of the non-fiction book you are about to read.

While I was looking for some public domain material to place on my web site the other day, I accidentally came across a wonderful poster from World War II. It had a picture of a man driving a 1940's era car with a transparent figure of Adolf Hitler sitting in the passenger seat next to him. The caption beneath both of them read, "If you ride ALONE, you ride with Hitler!" The message was clear.

During World War II things like gas, meat and most vital commodities were rationed out to the public so that the Armed Forces of the USA could be properly supplied to fight what became war on a global scale. Gas rationing caused the government to encourage people to car pool or take public transit to work and school. Posters like the one I saw were very effective in getting the message out to people and a patriotic America responded by doing everything they could to keep our soldiers well supplied.

Now in my fifties, I am obviously far too young to have lived through World War Two. However, I was born late in the lives of my parents and that meant that most of my relatives tended to be older. Many of them lived through World War Two and some were as anxious to tell me about those days as I was to hear about them. Being an only child meant that by the time I was eleven years old my best friends were books, a set of encyclopedias that my parents bought for me and television. Those things ignited a spark of interest in me that has burned brightly all these years and resulted in the writing of this book.

The late 1960s was a time when veterans and people that lived through World War Two had experienced their fill of the social upheavals, anti-war protests and open rebellion that marked a good portion of that decade. They were hungry to recall the simpler days of their youth, despite the fact that it included a World War. Although terrible and costly in terms of human lives and the utter destruction it caused, that war became a rallying point, object of nostalgia and time of remembrance for people who lived through it. Recalling those days made those people feel they were more patriotic and American than those burning their draft cards, bras or even our beloved flag.

I was always a curious person. Once I started watching television shows which were built around historical events, I was hooked. Because I lived less than a block from the elementary school I

attended on Long Island, I came home for lunch almost every day. I made it a daily ritual to watch a program that aired on local television around that time which featured various true stories from American History. It was a rerun that had once been broadcast on national television, but I didn't care. I would have been too young to understand or appreciate it when it first ran anyway. That program really peaked my interest and made me look to books, my set of encyclopedias and people I knew for more.

Another ritual I created for myself was having daily conversations with my grandmother on my father's side. She lived with my father, mother and myself on the second floor of our home. Grandma was elderly and by the time I was an adolescent, she could do little more than play cards once a week with her ever-shrinking group of friends or go shopping with us once in a great while. My conversations with her were based on whatever historical event had been featured on my lunchtime TV show and always seemed to bring her to life. She loved talking about what my folks called 'the good old days.'

My grandmother's name was Lou and one of her pet peeves was the price of groceries. Whenever she felt well enough to go shopping with us, she would comment on the price of essentials like bread and meat. My father often lovingly mocked her by saying, "Go ahead Ma, tell us how you remember when bread was five cents a loaf and tasted like real bread, and steak was ten cents a pound and so fresh it moored when you tried to cut into it!"

My grandmother didn't mind the good natured criticism and was proudly nostalgic. She enjoyed our conversations and loved to tell me stories about the 'old times' and her many years with my grandfather, who died when I was still an infant. Most of my peers did not relate well to older folks. All of us had been somewhat indoctrinated with catch phrases of the 1960s rebellion like, "Don't trust anyone over thirty." That wasn't me. I appreciated the first hand accounts of life so many years ago that were shared with me by my immediate family and other relatives.

Like my grandmother, I really didn't have too many other people to talk with when my friends weren't around. I really enjoyed hearing about her take on history and what life was like living through it. She could remember going to school one day and having her teacher read a story out of a local New York newspaper about a guy who was robbing trains out west, a guy named Jesse James. She also remembered a time when horses, not motorcars, dominated the streets of New York City.

When Neal Armstrong set foot on the Moon, my grandmother was watching it live on television and commented to my father, "They think this is something, but people were a lot more excited when Lindberg landed safely (after flying over the Atlantic Ocean by himself in an airplane)." That was Grandma! Despite the fact that she was disinterested and unimpressed by most things modern and hopelessly dug into the days of time past, the historical value of the stories she told me did not go unappreciated and made me hunger for more.

My parents were equally chatty when it came to discussing their lives and what things were like when they were young. That, combined with the national nostalgia over all things World War Two that seemed to permeate the days of my adolescence, brought me to the point that I was ready to write this book and share the stories I heard with you. These are individual memories of

national events and are true.

Another inspiration for writing this book was the story of how another book was written. The story of Sea Biscuit, the famous race horse. It was written a few years ago by a woman who suffered from a debilitating form of fatigue. Despite her disability, she managed to write the book as her energy levels allowed. The book became a wonderful film which I thoroughly enjoyed. I am partially disabled and can relate to her situation because I often suffer from quite a bit of fatigue myself. However, now that my kids have grown and moved out, I have the time and no excuses for not writing down what I hope will be an educational and inspirational experience for you.

Bill Edwards, January of 2012

Dedication: I dedicate this book to all the Soldiers and Americans that caused our nation to make it through World War Two and helped free the world from evil. - Bill Edwards, 2012

Chapter One: The Time Before

My parents and I lived on the first floor of our home. Their names were Arthur and Liz. The second floor had a large bedroom where my Grandmother Lou lived, another area that served as a recreational and sewing room, and a huge walk-in storage closet loaded with mementos from the lives of my parents and other relatives. I loved to go into that closet and dig through everything. My parents were mildly annoyed by my curiosity-driven family history hunts into their stuff, but I always managed to talk my way out of trouble by asking questions about some of their favorite mementoes.

One day I was looking at a box of large, old photo albums and came across a smaller photo album that read like a story. It belonged to my mother. The story began with her and a couple of friends taking a scenic boat ride up the Hudson River to West Point. Each photo had a small caption hand written underneath it and I could see she and her friends were having a great time. When I asked Mom about it later, she said she was around fifteen at that time and on Spring Break. The year was 1941. Liz and her friends planned to stay for several days at the home of a friend of my grandparents. She had a really long and complicated Finnish name, so everyone in the family just called her Pat and she was fine with that.

A look at the photos taken after they were back on dry land revealed that Pat's house was a garden style home with a lot of history. She was married to a man who taught at the West Point Military Academy and the house might have been a perk of the job, my mother wasn't sure about that. Either way, the girls were having a terrific time. They visited the academy, went to see a movie in town, did some shopping, had a couple of picnics enjoying the amazing view of the Hudson River from the hills above, and met guys.

Liz took a shine to a boy named George. He was a cadet getting ready to graduate from West Point. Pat's husband introduced them while Liz was touring the academy and there was an instant attraction. He was a few years older than she was, but my mom was always mature for

her age. She was also smart. At fifteen she was preparing to graduate high school in less than a year and was already planning to attend New York University on a scholarship. George was also smart and ambitious. The two had much in common including the fact that both of their families came here from Scandinavia.

From that point on the photo book was filled with pictures of Liz and George at West Point and other places after he graduated. My mother's friends made a point of playing the part of chaperones and photographers and took great pleasure in teasing their friend about her guy. Several photos were taken during dances at a place known as Finn Hall in the Bronx. The hall was a popular meeting place and event center for people of Scandinavian heritage.

My mother grew up in the Bronx (a borough of New York City). During the days of her youth there were probably more farms in that city within a city than big apartment buildings. I recall seeing some photos of her roller skating up on the roof of an apartment building. When I asked about it, she told me that she lived there with her parents and her sister Helen. Her parents were the building Superintendents.

Like so many people of their time, my grandparents had come here from another country. They were Scandinavian and arrived at Ellis Island as a married couple from Finland. Within just a few years, most of their brothers, sisters and other relatives followed and all became U.S. Citizens. My grandfather Frank served in the Scandinavian Navy before coming to America. He was also a skilled Master Carpenter and that, along with the fact that my grandmother Amanda and her sisters were excellent professional cooks, helped them make it through the Great Depression of the early 1930s.

Frank and Amanda managed to keep working even in the darkest days of the depression. Their first break was the Building Superintendent's job which paid no money, but provided a free apartment with paid utilities. Though jobs for carpenters were scarce, my grandfather kept busy by tending to the apartment building and receiving some food or small tips in return for doing jobs that went beyond his Superintendent duties. He also scared up a couple of bucks here and there by painting rich people's apartments and homes, or making them some custom furniture. My grandmother and her sisters cooked for those same wealthy people that mostly lived in Manhattan or Long Island and had been fortunate enough to shun the stock market or get out of it before the bottom fell out.

Despite the daily gloom and doom economic news of those dark days that was delivered by the newspapers and radio reports, my mother and her family recalled that time with appreciation, thankfulness and a certain amount of satisfaction. They were working people, with a work ethic who thought it a shame not to be working. They loved America for being the kind of place that provided people like them with the opportunities they found here.

There were only two times that I saw my grandparent's faces grimace when talking about those days of my mother's youth. The first was when they spoke about a man I will call Swen. He lived in a part of Finland near the Russian border where many Swedish people had settled and was one of my grandfather's cousins. As a result, he spoke Finnish, Russian and Swedish. Swen grew up in a family that owned a farm. The work was hard and the days were long with little

financial gain to show for it all. He couldn't wait to leave and did so when an opportunity to enroll in a trade school presented itself.

The trade school he attended was located in Helsinki, Finland, but some of the students were Russian. They were not well liked because Russia had always been an oppressor of the Finnish People. While most of the Russians were glad to be free of Stalinist Rule and in a country with a more democratic style of government, some of the students were obviously Communists who regularly declared the glories of Mother Russia's Communist Utopia.

I'm sorry to say that Swen became enamored by the stories he heard about how everyone in Russia was equal and all were busy building the perfect society. Before he could act on his desire to actually go there and experience that great experiment in Socialism, he was forced to come to America. His parents came up against hard economic times and had to sell their farm. There was not enough money for Swen to remain in trade school or stay in Finland. Instead, my grandparents sponsored his family's entrance into America with the guarantee of a job working for a wealthy family for whom my grandmother cooked and often babysat.

Once he arrived, Swen found work at a factory in Long Island City while his folks worked at an estate on Long Island as caretakers. He learned enough of the basics from the trade school to become a fine journeyman tool and die maker. He always had a natural talent for working with machinery and metal. Swen was proficient as a sheet metal worker. He inherited and shared the good work ethic that was a trait of my family. What he did not share was a true appreciation for the opportunities America afforded him or the politics and love of democracy that my family had.

Swen reluctantly became an American citizen. Almost as soon as he did, he sought out meetings attended by Communists. Those meetings were plentiful back in a day when most people knew little about the way things really were in Russia. Even when the young Communist converts heard bad things about Communism and what it was doing to that nation, they did not believe the reports. They assumed that those kinds of stories were merely propaganda fed to the media and public by huge companies that made millions off of cheap labor and didn't want people to know the truth about the great Socialist Utopia that they believed existed in Russia.

Despite his insistence that workers in the U.S. were enslaved and exploited (and I am sure some were and still are just as they have always been in every nation), Swen made a decent wage. It was enough for him to afford his own roomy apartment in Jackson Heights. It was also enough for him to grow chubby on from all the food he was easily able to purchase at stores and restaurants within walking distance of his place. There was even enough left over for him to buy books and pamphlets sold at the Communist meetings he attended. Those were filled with wonderful stories of the equality of people and the many opportunities that existed in Russia as a result of having a Communist government.

After several years and a few promotions at work, Swen managed to put away a small stash of money that he hoped would fund a trip to Russia, the land of his utopian dreams. With cash in hand, he managed to secure a one way ticket to Soviet Russia after navigating whatever paperwork and permissions that were needed to get him there. Before anyone in his family could

react to his decision, he was gone.

Nearly a year went by before my grandparents mailbox was suddenly flooded with urgent letters from a friend of Swen who managed to get out of Russia and move to Finland. His friend told the tale of a man who had made the biggest mistake of his life. Instead of finding paradise, Swen landed himself in the middle of a time of purges and poverty. If he ate four times a week, it was a good week. He shared an apartment with two other families that had no heat most of the time and he was being worked nearly to death in a cold factory. He was starving, sick and desperately wanted to return to the USA.

My grandparents hated talking about Swen so I am not exactly sure how they did it, but Frank and Amanda somehow managed to get him back to America. I know that it cost them some money and that they had to sponsor him with the promise of a job. Whatever happened, it took another couple of months to get Sven home. When he arrived back in America, he was a broken man who looked at least ten years older than his actual age and many pounds lighter. Fortunately, his former employer took him back. Little is known about what happened to Swen overseas. My grandparents and my mother said that he no longer bragged up the great social experiment that was Soviet Russia and, as far as anyone knows, did not attend any more Communist meetings.

Swen never spoke much about anything after his almost fourteen months in Russia and rarely showed up at family events. By the time World War Two broke out, Swen was probably too old for the draft, but tried to enlist anyway. It was the damage to his health that occurred in Russia which kept him out of the U.S. Military. He did continue to work at the factory job which was considered essential employment for the war effort and that, I'm told, gave him a certain sense of satisfaction. Ironically, his factory made (among other things) parts for armaments used by the Soviets against the Nazis.

Sometime in October of 1941, my mother became extremely ill. This brings me to the second thing that made my grandparent's faces grimace whenever they talked about events that occurred during the days of her youth. The doctor diagnosed Liz with some new type of pneumonia or infection he could not pin down and her chances of surviving it were considered poor. Her condition was so bad that the doctor refused to move her out of their apartment and to the hospital for fear that the cold temperatures and bad weather conditions outside would kill her.

By the time her doctor made his fifth trip to their apartment, Frank and Amanda had given up on hoping that their youngest daughter would survive her illness and recover. However, they were in for some potentially good news. The doctor arrived with a colleague who was seeking permission to try a new thing called Penicillin as a treatment for her illness. Left with few options, they agreed to the request.

My mother remembers it like some kind of a miracle. One day she was so sick that words could not describe how she felt, and a few days later she was all better. Within less than a week my mother was up and around. She was more than ready to resume her romance with George. He was away at flight school during the time when she became ill and returned a few weeks after she recovered.

George became a part of the U.S. Army Air Force. He received his wings and was now a military pilot. Much to his disappointment, he would not be flying fighter planes, but was assigned to ferry bombers from place to place as they were needed for training and other duties. He had a couple of weeks of leave coming and used them to visit Liz after hearing about her illness. My mother gave strict instructions for her parents and friends to keep the news of her condition from George. She didn't want him to worry or be distracted from his pilot training by her sickness, but one of her friends decided he should know and sent him a note just after he completed his training.

The two weeks that Liz and George spent together were wonderful. His family lived just sixty miles away from hers and he took her to meet his folks over the Thanksgiving holiday. They were impressed by Liz and loved that she was Scandinavian just like them. After that trip, George spent a few days with his parents while Liz returned to the Bronx to go back to school. She turned sixteen that October and was in her Senior Year.

My mother's memories of her school days were sweet and sour. She entered school barely able to understand English and unable to properly speak it. That made Liz an object of ridicule among the other students who constantly referred to her as a 'dirty foreigner' during her first several years of classes. She was fluent in Finnish because that was the primary language spoken in her household, but had to learn English. She not only learned it, but worked hard at perfect pronunciation until she had no accent at all.

By the time she was in High School, my mother spoke and was fluent in English, Finnish, Swedish and French. She also was conversational in several other languages. Her intellect shone, but never as brightly as her sister's according to her teachers and parents. Liz was always being compared to her older sister Helen, who was a genius. Helen had perfect grades, perfect attendance and managed to win every academic award that her school offered. Despite her accomplishments, it was Helen who was the first to disappoint her parents.

Rocky was a rough character from the other side of the tracks. He was half German, half Scandinavian and all trouble. Known as a local wise guy who easily lost his temper and sometimes made a few extra bucks collecting for the neighborhood loan sharks, he was the kind of older teenager that everyone wanted their daughters to stay far away from. Fate, however, had another idea.

My mother often helped her parents with their Superintendent duties by scrubbing the lobby floor in their apartment building or taking out some of the trash. Helen also helped, but she was pudgy compared to her sister who was thin as a rail. Helen was a little too pudgy to get down and properly scrub floors, so she cleaned the many mirrors that lined the lobby of their building. On one particularly warm summer day in 1939, Liz was scrubbing the hallway floor and working up a real sweat in the process. Just as she was finishing, Rocky and another boy walked in. Liz gave them a disapproving look.

Rocky's friend was a young Italian hood named Sal. His father was rumored to be a member of the Mafia. Sal was considered to be a young Mafioso in training and took every opportunity that

reputation provided to him. He ran errands for the mob and was always dressed to the nines in the best clothes and most expensive shoes. Rocky headed for the stairs on a mission to collect some money owed to one of Sal's associates by someone on the third floor. Sal headed over to where Liz was scrubbing the floor and stepped on her hand.

Sal said something about teaching dirty, sweaty foreigners a lesson so that they knew their place in society while he kept his foot on her hand. Liz yellowed at him and that caught the attention of Helen who was cleaning mirrors on the other side of the lobby. She came running and rammed into Sal knocking him away from Liz. Sal was about to hit her when Rocky intervened and smashed him in the chest. Rocky's biggest pet peeve was that he hated men who hit women. He watched his father abuse his mother that way for years and when he got old enough to do something about it, split his dad's head open with a bat.

Sal looked shocked as he lay on the floor, but even he was afraid to take on his friend. Rocky was probably better thought of among the local mobsters than Sal or his father was, and had lots of friends that were as bad or worse than him. Sal mumbled an apology to the sisters and told Rocky he would wait outside. Liz and Helen had no interest in speaking with Rocky and immediately went up to their apartment to tell their parents what happened.

A short while later Helen came back down to put away the cleaning materials she and Liz were using in the lobby and was surprised to see Rocky sitting on one of the chairs placed there for residents. She was a bit chubby, but had a beautiful face. For Rocky, their earlier chance encounter had been love at first sight. Not so for Helen. She ignored him then and for several days afterward despite his attempts to get her attention with flowers, gifts and cards.

Rocky graduated high school the year before and had a job that kept him busy working at a local club and restaurant where he washed dishes and cleaned up whenever he wasn't running errands for the mob. He made decent money, but had no one to spend it on. Rocky was an only child whose mother passed away the previous summer from cancer. Just after that his father left the family for parts unknown. Rocky moved into a rooming house and saved his cash. For all his faults, he never drank very much except for a few beers and did not gamble.

It took awhile, but Helen finally responded to Rocky's attempts to get her attention and the two started dating. By November of 1940, Helen and Rocky had been together for a year and a half. Although she was scared to death of having sex, Helen eventually gave into Rocky's badgering about it and became pregnant. This was a real problem which was far more severe for a single girl in those days than it is today.

For one thing, Helen was going to a prestigious local college on a scholarship. If the staff found out she was pregnant, she would probably lose the scholarship and be kicked out of school. For another, her father would almost certainly try and kill Rocky. It was a NO WIN situation all around, so Rocky and Helen eloped and got married somewhere out of state. Helen placed her education on hold feigning illness to get a temporary leave from school.

Helen called her parents and told them what happened over the phone. After a lot of yelling and negotiating, she and Rocky returned to the neighborhood as husband and wife. They moved into

a modest apartment in her parent's building and she gave birth to her daughter Ingrid a few months later. Helen managed to get back into school while Rocky returned to his club job and shady side work.

Despite her situation with Rocky, Helen was still held up as the banner child of the family by her parents and all the teachers at Theodore Roosevelt High School. It was there that she struggled to live up to and beyond her sister's academic accomplishments. Not only did she eventually equal Helen's grades, but Liz signed up for every club or participated in every special event she could in order to get some award, certificate or notice in the school newspaper that would set her apart and above Helen.

One of the duties my mother had was as an usher for all of the activities that took place in the school's auditorium. It was an unusually large venue that not only served Roosevelt High School, but was used as a regional theater for most scholastic events like graduations or special programs sponsored by the local school board. One such event was very memorable and my mother had several photos taken by her sister on that special day.

Imagine my surprise when I was digging through the family photo box in the storage closet and found a photo of my mom and several other people escorting a very young and stick thin Frank Sinatra into her school auditorium. I am still unclear of exactly what the occasion was, but he came to her school to perform a few songs for the young people that attended Roosevelt and other nearby schools. Needless to say, the auditorium was filled and there was standing room only.

Although he probably was not as famous at that time as he became later, Frank Sinatra was still a powerful attraction for young people who enjoyed listening to his smooth voice and the songs he sang with soulful lyrics. My mother was not overly impressed with him, but was happy when she received a letter from the school thanking her for doing her duty as an usher so well and helping to make that special event such a smooth and successful one.

Another special event was on the horizon, one that was far more memorable and one which nobody expected or saw coming. The tragedies that took place on September 11, 2001 were often referred to as the Pearl Harbor of this generation. Likewise, I guess I could say that the events which took place on December 7, 1941 were the 9/11 attacks of that generation.

Chapter Two: Dad and the Gypsies

My grandparents on both sides were second generation Americans. My grandmother Lou's parents were born in the Jackson Heights section of Queens, New York City. Their parents came to America from Scotland. My grandfather Bill's parents were born in Brooklyn, a borough of New York City. Their parents were born in Manhattan and moved to Brooklyn where they owned a barber shop and a small grocery store. Their parents came here from Austria.

Bill was born in the late 1800s. He didn't attend school for very long because the lure of making money and the many jobs available in a city growing faster than the people that lived in it was just too great to ignore. He loved to read and did so during whatever free time he had. By the time

he was a young teenager, Bill probably knew more about American History and other subjects that interested him than most high school graduates of his day. He was tall, good looking and honest to a fault.

His parents sold the barber shop and grocery store that had been passed on to them by their parents while Bill was still a young teenager. They had to do this because both became quite ill by the time they were in their late forties. They were afraid that Bill was still too young to try and successfully run those stores and thought it best to sell them while they were still highly valued. Despite rough exteriors that gave the impression they were all made of steel, his grandparents and parents had all kinds of health problems that, I'm sorry to say, were passed on to him.

Although his parents stashed enough money away from both of their store's profits and the sale of those businesses to make it through the rest of their lives in a comfortable manner, their health conditions were starting to chip away at that nest egg. Bill saw this happening and knew that he needed to help support the family. By the time he was fifteen, he had several jobs including working in a stable where he repaired carriages. Bill also made a commission on tack that he rented or sold, but his real love was working on anything mechanical.

After cars started to replace horses, Bill found his niche. He had an almost unnatural grasp of everything that made an engine work and became an excellent mechanic. By the time he was in his late twenties, he owned his own car repair business. His reputation for honesty and his ability to solve difficult mechanical problems made his business a resounding success. His shop was located in Brooklyn and it was there that he met the love of his life.

Lou had three sisters and no brothers. She was the youngest child and sadly, was saddled with the duty of taking care of her parents as they grew older and became ill. She never really had a chance to get out and meet the right man. By the time she was in her late twenties, her family considered her an 'old maid' that would probably never marry. Fate had other ideas.

She managed to stay in school into her teens, but Lou finished the remainder of her education at home so she could care for her parents. They lived in a row house on a street where all the homes looked very much alike. It was a working class neighborhood and her father had worked hard as the manager of a dry goods store for many years. During that time he socked enough away to purchase a nice car which he used to make some extra money ferrying people around who couldn't drive, wouldn't drive or needed a quick ride somewhere at almost any hour of the day or night.

After he became ill, he loaned the car out to a neighbor who took over that small side business. He drove people around in his spare time and split whatever profits were made with Lou's father. One day the neighbor volunteered to drive Lou to a family wedding in Brooklyn. They were within blocks of arriving at the church when their vehicle broke down. A police officer told them about a repair shop that was just a block away. They went there and that is where Lou and Bill first met.

I wouldn't say it was love at first sight, but Bill was certainly attracted to the pretty young

freckle faced blond who came into his shop that day. He repaired their vehicle while the neighbor waited for the job to be done. Lou walked the short distance to the church and made it in time for the wedding. The neighbor didn't have enough cash on hand to pay for the repair, so Lou borrowed the money to pay the bill from a relative at the wedding.

During the time they waited for Lou to return from the wedding, Bill asked him about Lou. When he found out she was not married, he decided to ask her out. They were both in their late twenties and neither had been able to find enough time to met someone they really liked. Lou was used to being asked out because she was pretty, but most of the men who did the asking were not the kind she wanted to associate with. Bill was different. Something about him caught her attention, so she stepped out of character and agreed to go out with him.

The two started dating and were married within a year. Bill sold his car repair business in Brooklyn and opened a new shop in Jackson Heights. He moved into the home that Lou shared with her parents at her insistence. Both sets of grandparents lived long enough to see the birth of Edward, their first grandson. Two more children came along including my father Arthur who was their youngest.

All three of Bill and Lou's children did well in school, but none showed the interest and passion that Bill had for anything mechanical. They helped out in his shop from time to time, but all had different goals and wanted more out of life than their father's repair shop could offer. My father's brothers were interested in professional careers. One became a lawyer, the other an engineer. My father's passion was numbers. He was good at math and made any kind of accounting challenge look easy.

By the time my father graduated high school his neighborhood started to change. It remained very much of a working class enclave, but an area nearby started to go downhill fast. That area was once the home of small factories and other businesses. As the depression took hold, most of those closed and the buildings started to deteriorate. Before long, out of work men, toughs and gypsies squatted there much to the consternation of the local police precinct.

My grandfather Bill managed to keep the family's finances stable and his repair shop in Jackson Heights alive even during the depths of the depression. But things changed. He had to place steel gates on the windows and doors of his shop to protect it from robberies at night. Thieves knew that the car parts and tools Bill had inside were worth money and that made his business a target of any local hoods or thugs who felt that had the guts to try and rip him off.

My father was attending college in Manhattan. He goal was to become a CPA (Certified Public Accountant). He was already doing all the books for the repair shop and watching over the family finances. Those chores and school kept him busy. One night on his way home from college, Arthur was accosted by three toughs as had headed down the stairs from the subway platform. They were Gypsies who threatened him with a knife, demanding whatever cash he was carrying.

Arthur wasn't the kind of guy who looked for a fight, but he never turned away from one either. He took on the toughs, was badly beaten and went to the hospital with several knife wounds.

They also paid the price. Two of them needed stitches and the third had a broken arm. It was Arthur's good fortune that the police happened by and broke up the fight before he was mortally wounded. The cops knew all the neighborhood trouble makers, so it was easy to figure out who started the ruckus. The toughs were arrested after being treated for their injuries.

My father stayed in the hospital overnight. He was sent home the next day and recovered quickly, but from that point on he was troubled by the fact that he couldn't even walk home from the subway without being accosted by toughs. It made him worry about his parents. His brothers were married and living their own lives by this time. When he wasn't around, his folks were alone and as vulnerable as he was to being attacked or robbed.

Arthur talked about what happened and shared his thoughts with his parents, but they dismissed his concerns and said that it was just a random crime that would probably not be repeated. After all, they lived just blocks from the Police Precinct and the cops were starting to put a lot of pressure on the out of work men, toughs and gypsies that lived in the abandoned buildings nearby.

Less than a month later a woman was attacked as she walked home from the store around six in the evening. She made the mistake of taking a shortcut to her house through a small park that was adjacent to the area where the squatters lived. The woman, who was just nineteen years old, was robbed and beaten. She was about to be raped, but the attack suddenly stopped. Some athletes from the local high school came to the park to throw a football around on the grass. It was late summer and still very bright out at that time of day.

The football players saw the woman being attacked and ran to her rescue. Her attackers were toughs in their early twenties armed with knives, but they were still no match for the football players who were high school seniors and built like battleships. The athletes beat them mercilessly while the woman ran home and called the police.

By the time the cops arrived, the woman's attackers were laying motionless on the ground being kicked and punched by the football players. The cops pulled the athletes off of the toughs, but said nothing and let them go their way. They arrested the toughs, brought the woman in for a statement and kept them in the local precinct overnight.

The athletes told the tale of what happened to their parents and at school the following day. The incident set everyone in the neighborhood on edge. By the end of that day my father, his father and everyone in the repair shop knew about the attack on the woman the night before. By the end of the next day people who came into the repair shop had some new and very interesting information to share about the woman who was attacked.

It seems she was the daughter of a local politician who was the brother of a cop. That was very bad news for the gypsy toughs who were the attackers. Although no one really knows exactly what went on while they were held at the local police precinct, one thing was for sure. By the time they were transferred to a central booking point elsewhere in Queens, they were in worse shape than police found them in at the park.

The attack on the woman set off a firestorm in my dad's neighborhood. People were angry and no longer willing to put up with the shanty town filled with toughs and shady characters which came to exist in the abandoned buildings nearby. My dad and the woman were not the only ones that had been attacked. At least a dozen other neighborhood people had been recently mugged and many local businesses were experiencing break-ins and robberies that hardly ever occurred before the squatters showed up.

The end came quickly for the squatters in the abandoned buildings. Less than a week after the woman was attacked, a mysterious fire started which resulted in the complete destruction of most of the structures in the area of the abandoned buildings. The squatters disappeared overnight. My father said that he had it on good authority that police dressed in civilian clothes went in, cleaned out the squatters and drove them away in trucks. No one knows what happened to them, but no one cared either.

By the time dad completed his first year of college, my grandfather Bill began to get sick. It started with some fatigue and progressed to the point that he couldn't work on cars anymore. Doctors believed he had a heart problem. Since his side of the family tended to have weak hearts, this came as no surprise. Although the other mechanics that worked in Bill's shop took up the slack, they weren't as committed or talented as he was.

Instead of starting his second year of college, my father tried taking over the day to day operation of the repair shop. He did a great job managing everything and keeping the books, but dad knew very little about auto repairs and parts. Although the shop continued to turn a profit, Bill decided to sell it to a friend who already owned a shop in Astoria and wanted to open one closer to his home in Jackson Heights.

Bill's decision to sell his business tore his soul out. He loved being a mechanic and all the challenges that working in an industry where the technology was constantly changing brought his way. My father was left in the lurch by the sale of his father's shop. He planned to stay on and try to keep the shop running for as long as he could. Without that opportunity, he was left with the need to find work at a time when the nation was still trying to recover from the Great Depression.

Although the sale of the repair shop would allow the couple to live modestly for years to come, there wasn't enough left over for Arthur to go back to college. Lou knew that Arthur would never ask his brothers for the money or accept it even if they offered, so she came up with another idea. Ever the optimist, she was tired of watching Lou languish in boredom around the house and Arthur search for jobs that he was unlikely to get, so she made a suggestion.

Recalling how her father managed to make extra money driving people around in the car he bought for that purpose, she suggested that Bill purchase a limousine. That sounded crazy considering the economic hard times that everyone was going through, but her suggestion made some sense. Bill was well enough to drive, he just couldn't do all the physical work and heavy lifting that being a mechanic required. When Bill wasn't driving, Arthur could take over. But there was the still question of where to find customers? Lou also had an idea about that!

She remembered her dad driving into Manhattan on Friday nights and over weekends to a parking garage with a special chauffers waiting room inside. The room was heated and comfortable. It was a place where chauffers with limousines parked in the garage would wait for their employers to call and be picked up or dropped off where they needed to go. It was also a place where chauffers and drivers with cars and limos for hire would wait for assignments offered by a dispatcher who booked the work and took a portion of the fees charged for his commission.

Bill's eyes lit up as he saw that the opportunity that Lou suggested was a real one that might just work out for the family. The very next day he took some of the money from the sale of his shop and bought a brand new limousine. Arthur was with him and both of them were rightly impressed by the shiny new vehicle and the profit potential it represented. Their next stop was a store that sold formal wear and uniforms.

Many years later my dad's face still shown brightly every time he told me the story of seeing those Chesterfield jackets and caps that chauffers wore for the first time. When he tried on one of the jackets, it felt like a second skin and he knew that this was something that was for him. Armed with the limo and their uniforms, Bill and Arthur set out to find work. It didn't take long after registering with the dispatcher in Manhattan before Bill got his first gig.

Bill drove a wealthy couple around Manhattan for an entire day. Arthur took over his duties for the evening and Bill was back at the wheel again the following day. The couple was thrilled with the service they received, loved the brand new limo and word quickly spread among the well to do that a reliable limo service with a suitable vehicle was finally available to them at a decent cost.

Lou learned from her dad that it was wise to charge wealthy customers a bit less than other drivers charged and allow them to tip. Rich people didn't get that way by shelling out top dollar for something they could get for less. They did, however, tend to tip very well when they were satisfied with the service they received. Bill took her advice and, as a result, was busy most of the time.

The limo business kept Bill occupied and pulled him out of the depths of depression to which he sank after selling the repair shop. It also made money, good money, which allowed my dad the opportunity to save up for his ultimate return to college. Lou was also happy because she watched her husband and youngest child working together at something they enjoyed. Something she knew would keep the family financially sound for years to come.

Things really came together for Bill and Arthur. So much so that they later purchased a second limousine and kept busy constantly. Bill eventually had to slow down a bit, so he brought one of his brother's sons into the business to keep up with the demand. His name was Wayne, he was looking for steady work, and he had a great personality that the customers loved. Bill took him on full time after just two driving assignments.

Arthur began to worry about moving his role in the business to part-time as he prepared to go back to college. He knew that would leave Bill in the lurch and create a need to hire another

driver besides Wayne. After giving the whole thing much thought, he just couldn't do it. He stayed with the limo business and was content to make the money he made. He could always take night classes at some point in the future.

Besides all else, the possibility of a large scale war breaking out in Europe was almost certain and there was little doubt that America would eventually have to get involved in it. Arthur was still young enough to serve in the military in some capacity if he enlisted. This was something he wanted to do because he would be the first from his family to have the opportunity to serve the country that gave him and them so many opportunities.

Chapter Three: Americans Are Divided

My grandmother Amanda was a kind of Matriarch in her family. She sometimes bullied my grandfather Frank and was definitely in charge at home. She was also an advisor for many of her relatives, including her sisters. They came to her first before making any important decision. They wanted her advice, but more importantly, her blessing. I'm not sure how this all came about, but I am told that her mother was the same way and the transition of power from mother to daughter was seamless.

Letters arrived every month from Finland. Cousins and other relatives sought advice or provided news about what the Russians or Germans were up to in Scandinavia. Finns had no use for Russians or Germans, but would surely side with the Germans if they ever went up against Russia. They were considered the lesser of two evils after centuries of Russian oppression in that region.

The situation in Europe was creating big problems here in America. People were becoming divided based on their ethnic heritage. That divide always existed in terms of neighborhoods and other considerations, but was now becoming more pronounced. Many Americans traced their ethnicity back to Germany, but it was really just a minority of them that fully supported Hitler and were fine with anything he did. They held Bund meetings which were viewed with great suspicion by many Americans and, especially, by those in the U.S. Government.

My mother and her friends used to kid the girls at school whose parents attended those meetings by asking if the buns they ate there were the sticky kind and if they had been personally blessed by Hitler. Their ethnically German classmates whose parents supported Hitler ignored those kinds of questions and didn't bother responding to them. My mother and her friends believed that those girls had already been brainwashed into believing that all non-German Americans were merely mixed race trash that would be dealt with when the Third Reich invaded and took over the USA.

New York was the ultimate ethnic melting pot. For many who came to America, the Big Apple was their first stop and more than a few decided to stay. Nationalities split up into their own neighborhoods where they felt more comfortable with people that spoke their native language and shared a common ethnic and cultural heritage. This was fine until a war broke out and made people choose between their native and adopted nation. Such was the case when Hitler took power in Germany and began to have ambitions which extended far beyond his own borders.

Many ethnically German Americans that supported Hitler decided to return home. Others stayed hoping that everything would work out for the best for both nations. Some supported the isolationist movement which held huge rallies throughout New York City. These were designed to send a message to the President and Congress which said that Americans did not want to get involved in yet another European War that would cost lives and likely end up ruining our economy.

Neither of my parents or their families were very political. They were, however, very patriotic and felt that it was wrong to try and influence public opinion for or against war. Many Americans felt that these isolationist rallies were probably the work of Nazi sympathizers who felt that American involvement in any world war might bring victory to the wrong side. If America was attacked, most Americans believed that it only made sense for us to fight back and ally ourselves with the enemies of our enemies.

My father and his family lived in a very diverse and ethnically mixed neighborhood. Most of the people that lived there were second or third generation Americans who didn't feel all that much loyalty to the nations that represented their ethnic heritage. They were too busy trying to make a living and be Americans to worry about what was going on elsewhere. If war came it came and Americans would be ready to fight just as they always had been. That was the sentiment of most of the people that lived in his neighborhood.

My mother and her family lived in a neighborhood that was also mixed, but tended to be more Italian than anything else. The Italians living in that area had no use for Hitler. My grandmother Amanda and my mother recalled that many of the Italian women in the neighborhood referred to him as 'the little German with the big mouth' when they spoke of Hitler in English.

Apart from all the jokes, labeling and comments about Hitler and Germany, there was a real fear that America would have to go to war very soon. The Germans were stirring up trouble in Europe and the Japanese were stirring up trouble in Asia. It was a situation that would eventually explode into worldwide war and everyone in the USA knew that, one way or another, America would end up being someone's target.

Hope springs eternal and every so often there was news of some great diplomatic effort that might bring peace to part of the world and help keep America out of the war. By the autumn of 1941, these efforts had lulled America into a false sense of security. Despite the news of events in Europe and Asia which was printed in newspapers or broadcast over the radio each day, people formed their own opinions. My parents told me that no one they knew believed that things were as bad as they were really were outside of the USA.

Americans were in denial, but were about to get a very deadly wake up call...

Chapter Four: The Cat Jumps

It was Billy Mitchell, an officer in the Army Air Corps, who warned the U.S. Military that the next war would be fought with air power; not oversized, slow moving, water-based battle

wagons. He pleaded with members of then U.S. Congress and military commanders to invest in fighters, bombers and air craft carriers pointing out the vulnerability of warships and ground targets to air attacks.

Long before the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor it was Mitchell who noted Japan's keen interest in the military domination of Asia. He pointed out how they were developing warplanes and aircraft carriers. In a very prophetic remark that was offered over ten years before the surprise attack on Pearl, Mitchell told military leaders and the press that if we did not take the threat of Japanese air power seriously, they might just attack Pearl Harbor on some fine Sunday morning when we least expected it.

It was Sunday, December 7, 1941. The past week had been like a dream for Liz. George came back from his parent's house and the two spent several days together, dating and making plans for the future. Her friends took photos of the happy couple at the Bronx Zoo and other locations near Liz's apartment building. Those photos were carefully glued into the small album that started out as a memento of her trip to West Point and ended up as a visual diary about their time together.

George was set to report for duty somewhere down south, so it was certain that their relationship would have to be a long distance one with lots of letters and maybe a few calls as finances and phone lines permitted. With that in mind, George reluctantly took a train out of Manhattan which headed south on Friday, December 5th. The couple had already said their goodbyes the evening before and knew it would be too painful for both of them to say farewell at the train station.

Liz stared at the beautiful friendship ring purchased for her by George. It was the best she could hope for and more than she expected. Being sixteen years of age, still in school and with plans for college, any sort of official engagement would have been out of the question. She hoped to be a doctor one day. If Liz married George before finishing college, that dream would never come true. It was frowned upon for married women to become doctors in those days, although I have no idea why and my mother could never really explain that to me.

Amanda spoke to Liz in Finnish telling her to get her head out of the clouds and get her mind back on her job, and school work. Liz managed to get hired by a department store in Manhattan. She worked in sales, part time on weekends and a few evenings during the week. It was the busy holiday shopping season and stores needed as much help as they could get. Liz was still thinking about George as she headed out the door that Sunday to catch the subway train to Manhattan.

Her experiences seemed like a haze to her many years later when she gave me her account of the events that occurred on that Sunday, but my mother was certain that she heard the news of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor while on her way to work from people talking about it on the train. Not knowing exactly what to do, she stayed on board until the stop that brought her within a few blocks of her job at the department store.

Thinking it wise to call home, she tried to find a pay phone to use once she got back above ground from the subway station. It was no use, every phone for blocks was in use and there was a line behind everyone using those phones. She continued to the store and went in through the

employee entrance. Her manager was happy to see her because very few of those scheduled to work that day actually showed up. Despite the terrible news from Pearl Harbor, the store remained open for business and with good reason.

People in the store were in a state of controlled chaos. The radio was on for any news flashes that might suddenly be read, but Christmas music played most of the time. The news gathering services were trying desperately to get updates about the attack, but information was sketchy and hard to come by. The best they could do was have reporters and announcers repeat the same basic information they had over and over again every few minutes.

The department store remained open because many people were afraid to go home. Shoppers felt that being at a store with other people might get them more information about the attack faster than they could receive it elsewhere. Every time someone walked in the store they were quizzed to see if they heard anything new about the attack. Shoppers shopped and workers worked in fear. Everyone tried to go on with life as usual hoping that, perhaps, it was all some sort of tragic mistake. That wasn't the case.

Liz left work after her shift and finally managed to get her hands on a pay phone. She called home and discovered that Amanda had been on the phone all day as close relatives and friends checked in with her to discuss their frustration with the lack of news about the events at Pearl and to find out what she thought everyone should do next. Amanda remained calm, but was happy that Liz finally got through to her.

After she arrived home, everyone sat down to eat dinner. There were two things that never happened at a Finnish dinner table: beverages were never served until after the meal was eaten and the radio was never played during it. Those rules were suspended on that special Sunday. Because Amanda was on the phone almost all day with barely a break, she had dry mouth. Frank and Liz were also thirsty because of the preoccupied state they were in. Constantly waiting for more news about the attack seemed more important than drinking anything. The radio played all day without ever being turned off, remained on during dinner and continued to stay on late into the night.

Relatives and friends of the family started coming over after dinner. They looked to Amanda for solace and advice. They wondered how the events of that day would affect their lives, the war in Europe and their relatives and friends back in Finland and other parts of Scandinavia. While all this was going on, Liz suddenly thought of George. She wondered what he must be thinking and hoped that he might somehow get in touch with her sometime soon.

Even if he wanted to call Liz, long distance and local phone lines were jammed with calls from coast to coast. Even Amanda's phone stopped working several times that day. While her house was jammed with people, Liz cleaned up the dinner dishes and served more than a few cups of coffee and tea that night. After all their visitors went home and things finally settled down, Liz went to her bedroom and wrote a long letter to George. She mailed that letter the next morning to a military address that he provided to her.

Chapter Five: Off To War

By December 7, 1941, my father had finally been able to leave the limousine business. Bill stopped driving and took on the role of dispatcher having procured enough clients to book his own work. A few relatives and a couple of the neighbor's boys drove the fleet of limos that was eventually expanded to five. Arthur attended classes a few nights a week still trying to become a C.P.A. and worked during the day as a bookkeeper for a photo processing company.

News of the attack on Pearl Harbor hit Bill and Lou hard. They knew that their only child would soon be headed off to war no matter what they said to him. They were right. As soon as Arthur heard the news about the attack, he began making plans to enlist in the military. As a courtesy and because he was a company bookkeeper that could not immediately be replaced, he gave two weeks notice to his job and signed out of his classes.

Surprisingly enough, schools were open on Monday, December 8, 1941. Liz arrived at Theodore Roosevelt High School just as she had many times before and, on the surface, everything seemed normal. The morning light shown in through the windows of her classrooms during the first several periods of the day just like it always did reminding everyone that the world was still turning and that nature took little notice of the affairs of people.

Sometime during science class a voice came over the school's speaker system announcing that the President of the United States was about to address the U.S. Congress and the nation. The radio broadcast was patched into the school's public address system and before anyone could give the announcement a second thought, the voice of Franklin Roosevelt was heard. "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy..." It wasn't a long speech, but it was a powerful one.

After just a few more sentences, the people of the United States heard the President ask, or more correctly order, Congress to declare war on the Empire of Japan. Even before the president finished his speech, there was a ruckus in the room. Almost all the male seniors in that class quickly got up and headed out the door. That same scene was repeated throughout the school and, probably, in many other places that day.

Young men, and more than a few older ones, went to sign up for military duty. Recruiting offices were overwhelmed with lines of men three deep. Many began to arrive at those offices early on Monday morning well before the president's speech in anticipation of what everyone knew was coming. The madness that the rest of the world was experiencing had finally arrived at our shores.

That December was crazy. Newspapers were being printed at a furious rate, but still sold out almost as soon as they hit the streets. Everyone had a radio on. Many small businesses placed their own radios near the doorway or even outside so that passers by could hear the latest news or war bulletins. A public eager to know what was happening jumped at any chance to read, hear or even see the news. Theaters that finally received updated news reels were often packed with people.

Things happened so fast. First we were at war with Japan, then Germany, and no one hesitated to

try and do their part for a war effort that was still being organized. Before my mother knew it she was taking part in scrap metal collections, red cross classes and all kinds of civilian wartime activities. Her classes at school were half empty because so many of her male classmates left to volunteer for military service. Life was been put on hold for the war effort, but Liz still had no word from George.

Finally, in early January, she received a small stack of letters from George. Like her, he wrote his first one on that doleful Sunday and many more since. It just took time for them to arrive. He was involved in pilot training somewhere down south, but was certain he would eventually end up in the South Pacific. Although he longed to see Liz, it just wasn't possible at that time and probably would not be for the foreseeable future.

Liz tried hard to keep her mind off of George, burying herself in her school work and volunteer activities for the war effort. She was asked to stay on at her part-time department store job after Christmas and did so. She recalls that time as being one of busy frustration. Adding to her woe was the steady stream of bad news coming from the South Pacific. We couldn't get our act together there and Washington, D.C., seemed far more worried about Hitler than Hirohito.

Finally free from his night classes and having been given the go ahead to leave his job at the photo processing company after a replacement was found, Arthur signed up for military duty. His best bet was the Army and they gladly took him. Boot camp was fast and furious and time flew by faster than he ever imagined it might. Before he knew it, he was back in Jackson Heights for a brief leave before reporting for duty.

After spending time with family members and friends, Arthur visited with a few of the neighbors, then headed to New Jersey for his first assignment. He was disappointed to learn that he would be stateside for a while. His talent for math betrayed him. Arthur served under a Supply Sergeant responsible for handing out and keeping track of military gear and supplies. My father impressed the Sergeant and officers in charge with his accounting and organizational skills. Before he knew it, he was a Supply Sergeant himself and, much to his relief, was finally on his way to war.

Arthur's first stop was Australia. It was terrific duty because he had little to do and lots of free time. As a Supply Sergeant preparing to go into the war zone, it was his job to organize a mobile operation that could move fast, keep good records and get supplies in and out as fast as possible. He personally picked and trained a small staff to accomplish these tasks and assembled what was needed to carry out his orders. This didn't take long.

One of the things that Arthur really wanted to do in his free time was go deep sea fishing while he was in Australia. He and two other soldiers found a boat to charter with a friendly and helpful captain and first mate. They were father and son. The group went out and had a terrific day of fishing. My dad caught a sailfish which fought with him for hours. He recalled it as one of the best experiences of his life.

After the boat returned to the dock, my father went to pay the captain and tip his son. They refused to take a dime explaining how grateful they were that the soldiers were in their country.

My dad was touched by their appreciation and never forgot it. After he returned to his barracks, he made sure the captain received an extra ration of gas for his boat the next day. That was the last good time and found memory Arthur would have for several years.

My father's wartime experiences were not turning out the way he thought they would after Australia. Arthur was bogged down in miserable conditions on one Pacific island after another. He spent most of his time far behind the front lines in drab tents or makeshift buildings making sure that food and supplies got to where they needed to go. He knew his work was important, but still wanted a chance to see some real action.

At one point Arthur's mobile supply operation was moved up to within just a few miles of where American soldiers were fighting the Japs. His attitude about being more directly involved with the fighting was changing fast. He watched as hundreds of men came back from the front lines with horrifying wounds and injuries. He walked past the area where hundreds more lay dead as they awaited identification or burial.

Despite the morbid scenes that surrounded them, Arthur and the few men that worked with and under him still longed to take their turn at the enemy. Despite their enthusiasm, the reality that they might not ever see their family or friends again once they did get into battle was becoming more real each day as the number of dead and injured men rose experientially. However, as the unhealthy conditions they lived with also began to claim lives, all thought they would rather die in battle than due to disease.

Conditions in their camp kept deteriorating. Food was never fresh anymore and barely edible. It rained all the time and even a trip to the latrine meant trudging through foul smelling mud that was ready, willing and able to cause an infection in even the smallest cut or bruise. Although Arthur and his men went the extra mile to get out any fresh food and other necessities as soon as they arrived, everyone complained that desperately needed supplies were just not reaching them.

Chapter Five: Back In Finland

Hitler moved through Scandinavia as quickly as he had through Europe. Finland was forced to cooperate with Germany. Hardly a willing ally, the nation was left with no choice and much was done behind the scenes during the war to derail Nazi attempts to use Finnish food or resources for the German War Effort. A perfect example of this was the actions taken by one of Amanda's cousins whom I will call Marie.

At some time in 1944 a couple of German soldiers arrived on her farm. Her husband was away. It was just her, her two young teenage sons (they were twins) and the Germans. They arrived at the farm to assess the family's ability to provide food for the Nazi war effort. Marie was a beautiful girl with long blond hair, blue eyes and a shapely figure. In short, she was probably what every Aryan male dreamed of.

After looking around her farm, the German soldiers sat in Marie's kitchen writing down what they thought she needed to provide for the war effort. It didn't take long to see that the Germans wanted more than just food. They told the twins to go to their room and started to make lurid

comments and advances toward Marie. Expecting that something like this might happen, she and her boys had a plan already worked out in case it did. The twins kept a rifle in their room which was always loaded and ready for action.

Before the German soldiers knew what happened, one of the twins came back into the kitchen and shot at them. He kept shooting until one of the soldiers was laying dead on the floor. While he did this, Marie stabbed the other soldier repeatedly with a kitchen knife. In less than two minutes, the Germans were dead. Marie and the boys buried them somewhere in an isolated area of their property.

As luck would have it, no one ever came looking for the Germans. By the time of this incident the war was starting to look like a lost cause for Germany, so those in charge of the dead soldiers probably figured that they went AWOL. Marie and many other Finns took these kinds of actions during the war in the hope that they would survive it and preserve their national heritage.

Chapter Six: Everything Changes

George was an excellent pilot who wanted to fly a fighter or bomber, but the powers that be destined him to deliver supplies from point A to point B throughout the South Pacific theater for the duration of the war. He excelled at getting things to where they needed to be as quickly and efficiently as possible and that may have been what doomed him to duty he felt was drudge work.

Turnaround time speeded up as the war in the Pacific progressed. The day that would change his life and the lives of others he knew started out as a typical one for George. He landed his empty plane on some South Pacific island in the late morning. He barely had enough time to shave, shower and grab a hot meal before it was loaded and ready for take again less than two hours later.

The year was 1943. George and Liz continued to exchange letters, writing about their hopes and plans for the future. It was those letters that made George's seemingly routine wartime experiences tolerable. He was shot at a few times while ferrying supplies, but the shots probably came from some bored Jap soldier hidden in the jungle of one of the many islands he flew over. Either way, the closest he came to being injured up to that point was when he tripped and sprained his ankle while walking on the surface of a damaged airstrip.

As he prepared for yet another dreary flight, George was concerned. His concerns grew daily as commanders, desperate to supply their troops on the front lines, regularly overloaded older and poorly maintained aircrafts. Regardless of the size of the load or condition of the plane, they expected him to fly his cargo to its destination without incident. The best planes were sent to Europe. Whatever was left or could be spared was sent to the Pacific. Most of these aircrafts were in terrible shape and there were simply not enough parts or people to correctly repair them.

As he started taking off, George could feel his aircraft straining under the weight of the overloaded supplies. The engines were spitting and shuttering, but he was used to that. After making a few adjustments, the engines evened out and began to lift the plane into the air. Just when everything seemed fine, the engines acted up again and the aircraft began to lose altitude

rapidly. Before he could do anything else to try and solve the problem, George's plane rammed into a hillside.

George and Liz were not married nor even officially engaged, so word of his death took some time to reach her. After his parents were informed, they wrote to Liz to give her the tragic news because they didn't have her phone number. She called them after receiving the letter and they invited her to attend a memorial service for their son that took place in a church near their home. Neither Liz nor George's parents knew exactly how he died. That changed after Liz and his parents received letters from Robert, a friend of George who was also a military pilot ferrying supplies around the Pacific.

Robert witnessed the horrendous crash of George's aircraft from the runway as he prepared to take off in his own plane. He wrote to Liz and George's parents at the first opportunity he had to do so and explained what happened. He felt that they had the right to know how he died. Robert and George made a pact before his death and exchanged the names and addresses of their parents and girl friends. They both agreed that if one of them died, the other would write to those that survived them and, if possible, explain how they met their end.

Although I am not sure how it was arranged and my mother never elaborated on the matter, but George's body was eventually shipped home and he was buried with honors in a church yard somewhere near his parent's house. My mother was unable to witness the burial when it occurred, but later traveled to his grave site and took a photo of the gravestone. That photo is the final photo on the last page of that small album that told the story of Liz and George.

Liz hid the pain she felt after George's death well. She cried for many nights after he died, but during the day she was all about moving forward. She graduated high school in June of 1942 and started college at New York University the following fall. Her grades were excellent and she found full time employment as a secretary and typist in Manhattan. That meant a lot of subway rides, but it also meant more money than she could earn in the Bronx or Queens. She did all of this and still hadn't yet turned eighteen.

Between gas rationing and food rationing, my mother was thankful for subways and the abundance of restaurants that surrounded her workplace. Those establishments never seemed to be short of food as long as you had the money to pay for it. She did, and often brought home take out for her parents when the food rationing stamps made getting things like meat a bit difficult. Of course they did live in the Bronx, which meant they could get the things they wanted if they were willing to deal with black marketeers.

An entire closet industry and black market of fake and real rationing stamps and much-desired food items like meat quickly materialized in the Italian neighborhood that surrounded their building. If you had the cash, you could get just about anything you wanted. It was all about supply and demand, and the world war certainly created opportunities and a market for all kinds of things that people needed, but couldn't easily obtain.

That statement is not a moral judgment about Italian Americans, because the vast majority of them played by the rules. It was just a fact of life in my mom's Bronx neighborhood, just as the

Irish and Jewish mobs did business and had their own black market in their neighborhoods. New York was always like that. It was a place where if there was a shortage of something, or a demand for illegal or semi-illegal products, some mobster was willing to risk jail for the chance to get people what they wanted if the money was right.

Liz and her sister Helen treated themselves to regular trips to the Paramount Theater in Manhattan where many of the nation's best big bands, singers and musical acts performed. It was something special for them to see the acts that they heard on the radio like Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, the Andrews Sisters and so many others. It was uniquely American music that Americans couldn't get enough of during the war.

More than a few guys asked Liz out during the war, but she couldn't get George out of her mind. She didn't date, but occasionally danced with military men at USO events. Most of them were either stationed stateside or in New York on leave, or for a few days stopover. She liked to dance and knew that spending a couple of minutes on the dance floor with a lonely or homesick military guy could make their day, or even their week.

My father's daily existence in the Pacific was no less frustrating than George's had been. Always being pressed for fresh food and supplies, he couldn't provide to others what was not being given to him. To make matters worse, most of the islands he ended setting up shop on had already been picked clean by the Japs. The local people barely had enough to eat and almost nothing to share. His salvation was the deals he was able to make with sailors and officers from the Navy.

The Navy was better supplied than the Army or Marines. The food was fresher and more plentiful, though still not really enough to be shared. However, my father excelled at getting Red Cross packages and lots of things from pilots and people on the home front. Those deliveries contained all kinds of stuff that could be traded including cartons of cigarettes, lighters, records, record players, radios, candy, gum and all kinds of things including the occasional case of booze. Once he had a sufficient stash of tradable goods, he cut deals with Navy guys for fresh food and other staples.

Mail call was always a big thing for military personnel in the days before email and cell phones. It was their only real link with home. Arthur received letters from his parents and close relatives. When the other guys got letters from their girlfriends or wives, he wondered why he hadn't taken the time to find a gal before he left for war. When they received 'Dear John' letters, he remembered why. Arthur didn't want to start a romance that he might not be able to finish. He certainly didn't want to be dropped like a hot potato for some stateside Romeo that wooed his girl while he was languishing in the Pacific.

Arthur was busy filling out forms and doing paperwork while the short wave radio in his makeshift warehouse played a station that broadcast American music and news. His men were moving supplies in and out when the broadcast was interrupted with the sad news that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. Everyone stopped what they doing and listened intently. FDR was not just any President, but had been the man who led America out of the Great Depression. Whether you agreed with his politics or not, he gave people the hope they needed to survive some of the darkest days our nation had ever seen.

FDR had not been well for some time and no one was really shocked by his death. At the same time, no one was ready for it either. Even as Vice President Harry Truman took the oath of office, he did so in a state of disbelief remarking in a very homespun and Missouri way that he felt like a huge bale of hay had just fallen on him. From what my parents have told me, I think that just about everyone in the military and on the home front felt the same way.

My father noted that many battle-hardened men broke out into tears as they listened to the radio broadcasters describe President Roosevelt's funeral. The same was true of men that had no access to radio, but saw news reels of it or read about it later in the newspapers. Despite the grief that America felt, there was little time for mourning. There was still a war to fight and a world torn apart by global conflict to rebuild.

Liz and her family listened to FDR's funeral over the radio. By the time he died grief had already hit their family and the families of so many other people that it became a part of everyday life. Flags were at half mast more often than not and many families had special stars or other emblems on their doors or windows indicating that they had made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. We had become a nation of people that lived their lives around war and wondered when, if ever, we would learn to live with and appreciate peace again.

Chapter Seven: The Japanese Surrender

The war in Europe ended and left a good portion of the continent in ruins. It probably took the USA and its Allies as much effort to help the nations of Europe get back on their feet as it did to defeat Hitler. While all this was going on, the Japanese were still fighting for what they had to know was a lost cause in the Pacific. For them it was all about honor and they were more than willing to fight to the last man.

General Douglas MacArthur was the Supreme Commander of all the Allied Forces in the Pacific. He estimated that if the Japanese home islands had to be taken by force, that could mean between five hundred thousand and one million Allied casualties. Fortunately, the President and Chiefs of Staff had another option.

The story goes that a letter written by Albert Einstein and sent to President Roosevelt at the beginning of the war warned him about the possibility that the Germans might try and build an Atomic Bomb. If they succeeded, they would have a weapon of mass destruction that we would not be easily able to defend against. As it turned out, the Germans were not as far along with their A-bomb research as we thought, but FDR made it a priority for the U.S. to develop their own A-Bombs just to be on the safe side.

The Atomic bombs were not ready in time to be used to help end the war in Europe, but were ready to be used against the Japanese by the summer of 1945. In what is still a very controversial decision, President Truman decided that using the A-Bombs against Japan that were provided to him by the ultra-secret Manhattan Project was a necessary action that would ultimately save far more lives than would be lost in the blasts.

Prior to the dropping of the bombs, the Japanese were offered the option of unconditional surrender. They were not told about the bombs, but indications were given to them that if they did not cease all hostilities and agree to the unconditional surrender, something very bad was coming. They refused to surrender under the terms that were offered to them.

The first A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Despite the death and destruction, the Japanese refused to surrender. After the second A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the Emperor and his government finally came together politically enough to agree that it was time to bring the nightmare of the last few years to an end before more lives and property were lost.

For the first time ever, the Japanese people heard their Emperor's voice as he spoke to them over the radio. He talked about the need for them to 'endure the unendurable' in terms of surrendering. It wasn't just about surrender. American and Allied forces would occupy Japan and attempt to reform it from a nation ruled by a war mongering expansionist elite, to a democracy in one form or another with the Emperor as a mere figurehead.

Arthur joined the Army, but was assigned to and was technically a member of the Army Air Corps. He had such little involvement with pilots or aircraft that his association with the Air Corps rarely crossed his mind or anyone else's. It did, however, mean that he wore their insignia on his uniform and took orders from their command structure. One of the orders he was given came just after the surrender of Japan and changed things for him in short order.

In what seemed like just a day or two after the Japanese surrendered, Arthur was ordered to fly into a forward base where he was carefully briefed and trained for duty as one of the men who would serve in the occupation force that was about to enter Japan. He knew this meant he would not be going home for some time, but welcomed the unique opportunities this special duty presented.

The occupation training took a couple of weeks. He and others with him watched films and listened to lectures about Japan. It didn't take long for him to realize that he was entering a nation with an entirely different culture. While it was a culture that certainly predated his own, it was also one that needed to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twentieth century. If democracy was going to succeed, much had to change and that meant that a certain amount of Westernization simply had to occur.

Many Japanese considered what the Americans did during the Japanese occupation to be a kind of cultural assassination, but that really is not true. Many of the old ways were left intact and most of what changed were things that would probably have changed over time anyway. Women, for example, needed to be treated like citizens and given the right to vote. Such was the case in most modern societies and those societies did not far apart as a result of viewing women as equals and giving them the same rights that men had.

Arthur felt fortunate when he found that he would be working with General MacArthur's staff. He was to head up part of a larger group of men whose job it was to portray and preserve the idea that the General was a powerful man who was to be given the same respect as a world leader or even as the Emperor himself. Many odd things had to be done to accomplish this. One

was the poop squad.

It wasn't unusual for some Japanese people to stop whatever they were doing and poop in the street. It was unwise and unsanitary, but that was the way things were. The job of the poop squad wasn't to stop them from doing that. It was to stop them from doing that any time that MacArthur's vehicle or those of his staff came driving by. No one would be allowed to disrespect the General or his staff in such a way whether it was done on purpose or not.

Everything in Japan was different. The people, the food, the music and even the baths and restroom facilities. None of the Americans felt comfortable using Japanese facilities and quickly set up as many of their own as they could. They ate American food, danced to American music, listened to American radio stations and brought their culture to Japan. Surprisingly, many of the younger Japanese didn't mind.

It wasn't long before the Japanese adopted American music, dances and even baseball into their own culture. Young Japanese men and women began to yearn for American fashions and products. Likewise, many in the American occupation force grabbed up as many ceremonial Japanese items as they could to collect and send home. These included the many shortened Samurai swords that were collected from former Japanese soldiers as part of the surrender agreement.

Chapter Eight: A New Life

Arthur stayed in Japan for three years. When he was finally offered the option to leave the military and return home, he took it. Despite his success in completing his military service in an honorable and fulfilling way, he knew that a military career wasn't for him. He did his patriotic duty and it was time to go home to his family, and the civilian life he hoped to build for himself. He had one advantage in that he was not forced to go home with the many hundreds of thousands of soldiers that were released from the military shortly after the war ended.

The soldiers that returned home in 1945-46 found that things had changed and discovered an America that was anything but ready to accommodate them. There was a shortage of everything, including jobs and housing. Soldiers that had gotten used to living away from their folks were now forced to move back in with them because they couldn't find a good job or place to live. It took time for America to provide for the needs of their returning veterans. Most of those issues were water under the bridge by the time Arthur arrived home.

Arthur's parents still had their home in Jackson Heights and welcomed him back with open arms. He didn't mind living with them because their home was roomy and he needed time to figure out what he would do next. He was not looking forward to working in Manhattan again, fighting for a seat on crowded subways and clawing his way to some restaurant or deli through massive crowds of people at lunch time. He longed for open spaces and the nearest ones were on Long Island.

He wanted to go back to the night classes he was taking to become a C.P.A., but those were already filled up. Instead, he opted to take a book keeping job at a company that sold whipped cream in pressurized cans. The company had the original patents for their product and was

growing by leaps and bounds. The best part of the deal was that it was located in Mineola, Nassau County, on Long Island.

The job had a future. If he did go back to school, he could work there as a C.P.A. If not, he still made good money and the work environment was a pleasant one. People that worked there were not in the same hurry as people working in Manhattan. They were a little more courteous and a lot less stressed out. The job created the need for Arthur to purchase his own car. He did this and proudly drove his late model Oldsmobile back and forth to work every day.

Liz received a Bachelor of Science degree from New York University graduating as one of the top five in her class, but stopped there. She was torn between the desire to become a doctor and the lure of becoming a nurse. There were also other career possibilities tugging at her which she wanted to take the time to think about. In reality, the death of George still weighed heavy on her heart and mind. She kept trying to move on and everyone around her assumed she had, but that really wasn't the case.

One of her friends started working for a company that sold whipped cream in pressurized cans in Mineola, on Long Island. The work environment was wonderful and the money was good. She convinced Liz to come out and apply for an administrative assistant job that was available. She applied for the job and, with her college degree, was hired on the spot.

It was 1952 and Liz was tired of driving around her father's old 1936 Ford sedan. Frank and Amanda had socked money away for years and could easily afford a new car, but they were old school people that could not see the point of replacing one that still ran so well. With that in mind, Liz purchased a used Volkswagen for herself that someone had shipped to the U.S. from Germany sometime in the late 1940s. She took a lot of good natured teasing for driving around in that thing, but it was reliable most of the time and she got it at for a cheap price.

Arthur and Liz met at work. They were both cautiously interested in one another. Arthur had dated for the last few years, but none of the girls he went out with were serious enough about anything to keep his interest. Liz dated a couple of guys, but never seriously. George cast a long shadow in her life and lived on in her memory. He was a special guy and one not easily replaced.

By the standards of their day, Liz and Arthur were late bloomers in no hurry to get married or leave their parents. However, their hesitation to jump into marriage or move out on their own had many advantages and gave them a certain maturity that others living fast lives and moving through multiple relationships did not have. Both knew what they were looking for and would know when they found it.

The business they worked for became enormously successful and the company picnic held in the early summer of 1952 was a celebration of that success. There was food everywhere, a live band played and bonuses were handed out to all the employees. Liz and Arthur attended the picnic as a couple and began to get serious about each other.

By the following summer, Liz and Arthur were living on their own in separate apartments near their job. Their relationship grew and they decided to get engaged. This was a huge step for both

of them and one not openly welcomed by either of their parents. Frank and Amanda wanted Liz to marry a Finnish boy. Bill and Lou wanted Arthur to marry a girl from their neighborhood or one with more Americanized parents.

Despite the quiet objections of their folks, the couple married in 1953 and I was born three years later. They lived in a large apartment near their work and remained with that company for several more years. Arthur never did become a C.P.A., but ended up as the Vice President of a Construction Equipment Company located in Long Island City. That company supplied all the construction equipment (trucks, cranes, etc) used to build projects like many of the exhibits in the New York World's Fair of the early 1960s and the now infamous World Trade Center buildings.

Liz finally went back to school and became a registered nurse. She graduated from the Queens College nursing program in the early 1960s. The college was located in Flushing and remains there today, but I do not believe they offer a nursing program anymore. Her graduation was an unusual event. That's because she was first in her class, but that's not how things turned out. A few days before graduation, the dean of the nursing school asked her to come into his office.

There was no doubt that Liz was first in her class, but the dean asked her for a favor. The person who was set to graduate second in her class was part of a racial minority. She had gone through much to achieve what she had at Queens College and the dean and her professors felt that based on her struggles, they would like to see her graduate first in her class.

Liz didn't really know how to react to what was being asked of her, but I knew my mother to be a compassionate woman who would do anything for her friends and family. Being asked to give up the honor of graduating first in her class to help a stranger was a test of her moral fiber, and she passed that test. For better or worse, whether it was right or wrong, she agreed to the dean's request.

My mother had always been a brilliant woman who probably could have done much more with her life if George hadn't died in the war. That event turned the applecart that was her destiny on its side and nothing would ever really be the same afterward. Nursing was something she fell in love with and the profession was more important to her than the procession of the graduation ceremony at Queens College.

After graduation, Liz took some additional training at Long Island Jewish Hospital. It was during that time that she met a lifelong girl friend named Teddy, a naturalized American citizen from Germany. Teddy was a short version of a very long German name that her friend used to make things easier for her American born friends and co-workers. Teddy lived in Germany during World War II and had many interesting stories to tell about her experiences.

Her family became split by the Third Reich and the war. Half of them worshiped the ground that Adolf Hitler walked on. The other half despised him and viewed the Nazi party with great disdain and distrust. They felt the Nazis were nothing more than a rowdy mob of former criminals and sexually active perverts that would ultimately destroy their nation. Teddy said that she had always opposed the Nazis, and her reasons for doing so convinced my mother that she

was being honest about that her feelings towards them.

Teddy's aunt worked as a maid for one of the high-ranking officers of the Nazi Party in Berlin. He frequently held parties that were attended by the likes of Goering, Himmler and Adolf Hitler himself. When they didn't attend, their associates or other high-ranking party members did. It was during these affairs that many of the Nazis showed their true colors.

Most were alcoholics or drug addicts that lost control as the evening wore on. They had flunkies bring them young girls and boys to have sex with. More than a few male and female members of the various Hitler youth organizations and clubs lost their innocence to foul smelling, pedophile party members with long criminal records at those and other parties throughout Germany.

It was not just the lack of character that existed in the Nazi Party that greatly disturbed Teddy and some of her relatives, it was their intolerance of religion and other races. Teddy grew up with German Jews that were her close friends until the Nazis took them away, and there was nothing she could do about it. She attended church until the Nazis closed the church doors for the duration of the war, and there was nothing she could do about that.

Not only did the Nazis take away many things that were important to Teddy, but they lied to keep her and the rest of the German people under their control. A relative of Teddy's escaped to America before the war, became a citizen and served honorably in the U.S. Military during World War Two. Thanks to him, Teddy was able to come here just months after the end of World War II. Her first big surprise was the landscape.

After she arrived in New York City by boat, Teddy was amazed at how quickly the Americans had been able to rebuild all the structures that the Nazis destroyed with their bombing raids and super weapons during the war. She also wondered why there were no bomb craters. Based on the propaganda put out by the Nazis, the craters should have been everywhere. Imagine her surprise when she discovered that the information she was given during the war was nothing more than a devious string of outright lies.

After my parents purchased a newly built home in East Meadow, Liz went to work at Meadowbrook Hospital (which was later expanded and became the Nassau County Medical Center). She worked as a baby nurse, in the emergency room and as a surgical nurse during her time there. Liz considered these opportunities to explore so many aspects of nursing invaluable in shaping her abilities and knowledge of that profession.

By the mid-1960s, Liz had been invited to come and work at a private doctor's hospital called Hempstead General by one of the founding physicians. He was impressed by her abilities when he met her at Meadowbrook. The money and benefits were better there, and it was a state of the art facility with as much modern technology as was available in those days. It was at that hospital that she met another lifelong girl friend named Helen.

Helen was married with twin daughters. She was my mother's age, but got married younger. She and her husband, like my mother, were first generation Americans whose parents came here from Scandinavia. The two worked together during the evening shift at the hospital. Both loved their

job, profession and became fast friends. I was around nine years old then and recall the first time we visited Helen's family.

Helen, her husband and twin daughters lived in a cookie cutter house in Levittown, just minutes by car from where we lived in East Meadow. Levittown was built to offer hundreds of what some might call 'Cape Cod' style, inexpensive, quickly built homes to returning veterans and their families. There was also a Levittown complex in Pennsylvania. The homes weren't anything fancy, but they were nice and very affordable.

Like most people of Scandinavian extraction that I met, they were friendly and open. I'm not sure why, but Helen's twin fifteen year old daughters took an instant liking to me. Before I knew it, I became the little brother they never had. During the first summer break from school after I met them, they invited me to go just about everywhere with them.

We went roller skating, to the beach, the movies and out to eat. They made a ton of money babysitting because they were reliable and good at it. My folks always gave me the money to pay my own way when they took me out, but they wouldn't hear of it. They always treated me to everything. I returned the favor by regularly purchasing them little horse statues for their collection. They loved horses and were very proud of their collection of tiny statues.

Those were the good times for me and my introduction to adolescence. I learned much from those beautiful blond twins and one of the things I learned was how to have fun. It wasn't easy to have parents that lived through the Great Depression and World War II. They were all about work, turning off lights when you weren't using them and even saving used aluminum foil and Christmas Tree tinsel in case there was ever a shortage. Fun was always an afterthought.

The first time I realized that I was no longer just a child was when the twins took me to Jones Beach a year after I first met them. We were all on summer break from school and what better place to spend part of it than at the beach. It was a hot day and they both wore bikinis. Although Bikinis were not as skimpy in those days as the string ones are today, they still did not leave a lot to the imagination. I wasn't sure why, but I couldn't keep my eyes off of them. Things got even stranger when we went to the movies.

The twins loved horror flicks. I was a science fiction and horror fan. I read H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury and Jules Verne books from cover to cover as fast as I could get them. One of my favorite stories was the Tell Tale Heart by Edgar Allen Poe. When the twins took me to see Dr Terror's House Of Horrors at the Meadowbrook Theater, we had the time of our lives. It was a gross horror exploitation movie and we ended up in each other's laps a lot.

I was freaked out by the feelings I started to have when I made that kind of body contact with the twins. I would describe those feelings as a kind of confused satisfaction. I felt good, bad, guilty and embarrassed all at the same time. Sadly, that was the beginning of the end for me and the twins. For the rest of that year my feelings for them changed and I knew my relationship with them would also change very soon.

Puppy love struck and I feel head over heels for the twins, both of them! They were individuals,

but not by much. They were the closest twins I had ever met to this day and did just about everything together. They were more like one person than two and I guess that was one of the things I liked about them. I thought of them as sisters, but I also knew and felt there was something deeper welling up inside me.

The twins had me come to their house for occasional sleep-over pizza parties when both sets of our parents went out for the night or took getaway trips for the weekend. They were my babysitters and surrogate sisters. Now that I was eleven years old and they were seventeen, things were just not simple anymore. We started playing games like Twister and Spin the Bottle. There was a kind of unspoken pact among us that dictated these things were something we would not speak about to our parents or other friends.

Please understand that the Twins never did anything wrong with me, nor I with them. It wasn't like that, and even when we played spin the bottle the most anyone got was a peck on the cheek. It was more about the incredible attraction that I felt for them, a closeness that I still find hard to describe today. Watching them walk around in pajamas and night gowns made those feelings even more real for me.

Helen hated the idea that her daughters would eventually start dating and forbade them from doing so until they were seventeen. When they did start dating, it tore my heart out. Although I viewed them as sisters, they were mine! I had no interest in sharing them with anyone. As an only child, I probably grew closer to them than someone with brothers or sisters might.

The situation resolved itself after I started Junior High School in 1968. I was attending what was once described as the best public school system in the world and that meant a tough curriculum. I stayed in touch with the Twins because our parents remained friends all their lives, but the days of spending time alone with them came to an end. It was just too painful for me. I still think of them as my first girl friends and those memories are sweet ones.

While she was working at Hempstead General Hospital, my mother had an interesting experience (one of many that occurred throughout the years). She came into work one evening to find a couple of guys in suits standing outside one of the hospital rooms on her floor. Visiting hours were over and she wondered why they were there. She approached them and asked what they were up to, only to be waved into the room. There was an older man laying on the bed in expensive pajamas instead of the usual, one piece and always embarrassing hospital gown. It didn't take her long to realize it was a guy nicknamed Joe Bananas, the head of one of the organized crime families in New York City.

My mother had little use for hoods of any kind and explained that his 'associates' needed to leave. If they didn't, she would call the State Police and she doubted he had any friends among their ranks. He called her a 'tough broad' and dismissed his men to the lobby area of the hospital. He had a heart condition, but that was not why he was there. Joe was in the hospital because he knew one of the doctors on the board there and needed a place to hide out from Feds trying to hunt him down to serve him with a summons to appear in court.

As time moved on, Hempstead General Hospital began to change. My mother felt that Hospital

politics were beginning to affect patient care in a negative way. With that in mind, she decided to accept a job that had been offered to her several times at Holly Patterson, a retirement and elderly care center. She wanted to try her hand at Geriatric care and this was the perfect opportunity to do so. While she worked there, Liz met an amazing man named Ben.

Like my father, Ben was a World War Two veteran. He was in the Army and served in various parts of Europe throughout the conflict. Like my grandfather Bill, his father was a gifted mechanic who passed his skills and passion for the job on to his son. After returning from the war, Ben worked with his father who opened one of the first modern vehicle repair gas stations in the middle island area of Long Island.

After the death of his father, Ben took over the business and it grew with the area surrounding it. He opened two more gas and vehicle repair stations, and he had three very profitable businesses going by the mid-1960s. Then tragedy struck. While trying to remove an engine from a car, the engine became loose from the chains around it. Part of the bulk of the engine fell on Ben.

At first doctors thought his neck was broken, but it was a spinal injury. Ben became a paraplegic who lost his businesses and much of what he had. After leaving the hospital, he was moved into Holly Patterson by his elderly mother who was ill herself and unable to care for him. Ben was a bachelor who never married. I remember meeting him when I decided to do some volunteer work at Holly Patterson.

After my mother started working there, I discovered that Holly Patterson had opportunities for students to come there and work as volunteers. Mostly, it was just taking the time to talk or play cards and board games with the patients. When I met Ben, I realized that talk was all he had. He could manage to move his arms slightly, and move a couple of the fingers on both hands, but that was it. He lived in a wheelchair and was constantly connected to a breathing machine.

I liked to read and asked Ben what kind of books he enjoyed the most. He preferred science fiction, so we became instant buddies. I loved reading science fiction stories to him and spent many hours a month doing so. I managed to get permission to take him to the movies to see Planet of the Apes and a couple of other science fiction films. We went with a group of patients from Holly Patterson and everyone had a terrific time.

When I wasn't reading, we talked. He was a fascinating guy because near the end of the war he became a member of an elite squad of American soldiers with a special mission. Ben and his team were part of a larger group of soldiers that tried to locate and acquire German scientists at the end of World War Two. Our government was especially interested in any scientists that had worked on the Nazi rocket programs and managed to survive the many allied bombing raids that occurred as they tried to end the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks on England.

I sat astounded as he recalled meeting the likes of Werner Von Braun and finding plans that the Nazi scientists had drawn up for a three stage rocket that could eventually carry men to the moon. Being mechanically inclined, he was especially interested in and impressed by the navigation systems designed for the rockets. These worked well enough to reek havoc on Britain during the heart of the second world war. Except for the success of the bombing raids, these

same ballistic missiles could have easily derailed the D-Day invasion had many of the launching sites not been destroyed.

My mother and father both visited with Ben from time to time and he became a family friend. I recall how excited he was when my parents arranged for him to come over to our house for a couple of barbecues that summer. Grateful for our efforts, he painted us a beautiful landscape picture that must have taken him weeks to complete, given his disability.

Ben had a commitment to life, but life had other ideas. I came in for my shift as a volunteer one weekend and found he had been taken to Nassau County Medical Center with a serious infection. By the time I arrived, Ben was gone. I felt horrible and could not believe he had passed away. It was my first lesson about loss and I guess I learned it well.

I tried to continue my volunteer work at Holly Patterson and did so for a few more weeks, but the heart had been ripped out of me. I could see that dealing with loss and the grief that followed would never be one of my strengths. I still spent time talking with older people in my community and helping out when I could with family members that were shut-ins, but I never allowed myself to get that close to anyone who I knew would probably not live very long again.

Loss became a regular part of family life for us during those days as one relative after another passed away within a short period of time. It started with my Aunt Helen who passed away suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack in 1969. She was only in her forties and was survived by her husband Rocky and four children. During the funeral her children cried and screamed and draped themselves over her closed coffin because they had treated her so badly during the short time they had with her.

I learned a lesson from that experience. I always tried to respect and treat my parents well, but after that scene I made a concerted effort to do everything I could for them while they were alive. Guilt is a terrible thing and I wanted no part of it. When my parents passed away, I had a clear conscience knowing that I did all I could to help them as much as I could during their time with me.

Within just five years of the death of Aunt Helen, my mother's parents both passed away. My grandmother Lou died a short time after that. Sadly, many of these deaths occurred during the Christmas Holiday season. That made it hard for our family to enjoy the holidays for many years to come. I took it all in stride and often spent Christmas and New Years by myself, or with my own wife and family after I married in 1984.

During the last twenty years of her nursing career, my mother decided to try something different and accepted a position offered to her by the State of New York to work at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens, New York City. It was a fascinating job, but my mother liked working hands-on with patients. Most of her time at Creedmoor was spent doing paperwork and keeping charts up to date. The job did have its moments.

Her psychiatric patients included everything from drug addicts and alcoholics, to serial killers and people who threatened the President of the United States. All the patients at Creedmoor were

there for evaluation, treatment or both. It wasn't unusual for her patients to be criminals whose name had been on the front pages of the New York newspapers before being sent to her unit. Because her job sometimes included the transportation of patients from one hospital or facility to another, she even briefly met the man who became known as the .44 caliber killer or the Son of Sam.

When the World Trade Centers were attacked in 2001, several floors of her building were set aside to care for trauma patients in case large numbers of severely injured people were found in the wreckage. Sadly, most of those in the buildings died. The main building at Creedmoor was considered a possible terrorist target itself for several days after 9/11/01 because of its height and location. It stood alone as one of the tallest buildings in Queens and would have made an easy target for terrorists with large or small aircrafts at their disposal.

Liz worked in the nursing profession for forty years and it provided her with challenges, opportunities, friendships and even a few good stories. Arthur passed away in 1981 and Liz in 2006. They were a happy couple whose lives were shaped, interrupted and perhaps enhanced a bit by the world war they lived through. Their eclectic interests, fascination with history and love of many different forms of literature and music were passed on to me.

I grew up listening to all types of music, reading a wide variety of books and had a hunger to learn more about history that remains with me today. I treasure the conversations I had with my parents, grandparents, their friends and my other relatives. I have passed the stories down to my wife and children, and now to you. I hope that you found them as informative, entertaining, provocative and heart-tugging as I did.

END

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