

War Era Story Project 2012

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I was fourteen years old in 1941 and living in a small town in North Carolina with my parents. It was Sunday, we had been to church and I was just finished doing the dishes. I remember walking into the living room and seeing my dad leaning toward the radio. My mom was sitting on the arm of the chair, holding his hand, and he had tears running down his cheeks. That was such a surprise that I started to go to him but my mother motioned for me to sit down and listen. It was President Roosevelt, on the radio, telling the nation that Japan had just attacked Pearl Harbor, leaving mass destruction and many casualties. It was December 7, 1941 and we were going to war.

Our world changed overnight. Suddenly, we had gas rationing and soon we all had our own ration books. We had ration stamps for gas, food and clothes. We all learned to walk instead of riding where we needed to go, as each family only had three or four gallons of "pleasure gas." Since I was a child, it didn't bother me too much, but my mother had arthritis in her legs and walking was painful for her.

I graduated high school in 1944, the last class that only had eleven grades. Almost all the boys in my class went into the service. I went off to college. When I left for college, I had to take my ration book to the school. That left my parents with fewer stamps. However, my dad had a lot of customers that did not use all their stamps, so he was able to barter for sugar, shoes and other things. Somehow, my mother always managed to have a cake on the table and stamps for clothes when I came home from school. I remember that my mom said what she missed the most was fresh fruit.

While I was in school at Meredith in Raleigh, North Carolina, my roommate and I sang in the choir. We made a couple of trips a year to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, to sing for the troops and have dinner with them in the mess hall. My roommate met a paratrooper and they fell in love. They dated every weekend he could get leave until he shipped out. Sadly, he did not survive the war and my roommate never got married. He was her one and only love.

When I went home for Christmas break during my sophomore year, I saw an old childhood sweetheart that I hadn't seen since we played together as children. We were having Christmas dinner at my grandparent's house and two of my cousins were home on leave from the Navy. They had invited two friends from up the street who were also on leave, one was in the Air Force and one was my old friend who was in the Navy. My aunt had also invited two soldiers from one of the bases in Greensboro, North Carolina, because everyone had been asked to share their Christmas dinner with service men that couldn't go home. After dinner, we had to take the two soldiers back to Greensboro and my friend asked if I would ride with them since we were so happy to see each other after such a long time. When he took me home that night, after dropping off the soldiers, he asked me to marry him and, thinking it was a big joke, I said "yes" and promised to write him when he went back to his ship. He was stationed on the U.S.S. Dixie.

The two friends of my cousin also had two older brothers in the service. I can still see the Gold Star Mothers' banner that hung in their front window with four gold stars on it. The older brothers were twins, one in the Army and one in the Navy. The twin in the Army was killed at the Battle of the Bulge in the spring of 1945. At about the same time, the plane with one of the younger brothers was shot down in enemy territory and the crew was captured by the Japanese. And at the same time my friend, the youngest brother, was reported "missing in action" in a typhoon off Okinawa. Because of all this the Navy sent the other twin home on a compassionate leave and discharged him so he could stay home and help his parents.

We learned after the war that the crew in the plane were marched to the P.O.W. camp, lined up and forced to watch a Japanese officer shoot their pilot. When the typhoon was over, the youngest brother, my sweetheart, was found on the island. It seems he was on a PT boat delivering orders to other ships and when the storm hit, the ships had to pull back out, which left the crew stranded on the island. They stayed with the Red Cross for about a month before their ship came back for them.

I did marry my childhood sweetheart after the war was over. We raised five children, two of which were twins, and as history usually repeats itself, in 1968 we watched our son join the Army and go to Vietnam to fight another war. My childhood sweetheart died in 2006 at age 80.

December 7th, 1941 changed all our lives.