

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 74

War Heroes

The great depression began in 1929 and ended in 1942, after the war began. My oldest brother was born in 1918. I was the youngest of nine children and was born in 1938. My dad and grandpa were farmers and worked very hard to supply family needs, as did all the family members. Everything we ate came from the family farm. Beef was butchered and taken to nearby cities to sell, along with potatoes and other vegetables and fruits. Flower bulbs were also raised and gladiolus and dahlias were shown at area fairs and orders taken for the bulbs.

In 1939, the family barn burned along with all hay and grain that was harvested that year. There was no insurance, so Dad had to go to work doing whatever he could find to do. During the depression, he worked for the Works Progress Administration. His job was pounding large stones into the old dirt roads to make them more passable. Later, he hauled milk, picking up five- and ten-gallon milk cans at farms and taking them to milk factories. He sometimes helped make cheese and powdered milk at the processing plant and drove a truck to Holland, Michigan, delivering cream to a cheese factory there and bringing cheese back home to Minerva, Ohio. This was before roads were good and vehicles were not the best on ice and snow.

Meanwhile, World War II had broken out and our two brothers went to serve their country, and also Margaret's husband. Joe trained as electrician's mate and went to Okinawa, where he was on a thirteen-man LCT boat that took supplies ashore from the large ships. This was in 1944-45, so he was about 21 years old. He grew up quickly and served his country well. I remember him talking about the water being full of "yellow heads"--the Japanese that had been shot. He saw the bombs explode at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and narrowly escaped a piece of shrapnel that fell at his feet. He told of being on K.P. (Kitchen Police) while there. He fried mincemeat and baked a cake during a typhoon. A cook, he was NOT!

We had a strong religious upbringing in our little Methodist Church. Joe led Bible study and prayer during this tremulous time. He said he knew the folks at home were praying for him. Letters were frequent and, though the budget was tight, "care" packages were often sent also. During this time, Dad was in poor health and grandpa was also ill. The family farm was nearly lost. Joe sent money home from his service pay to keep things going on the farm. Now, his children live on the farm where eight generations have celebrated life.

Foster, who was about 27 at this time, with a wife and three baby girls, trained as a mechanic and the war found him in Germany and France. He repaired army trucks and helped build bridges across the Rhine River. He told of watching the French farmers go to the fields with a set of white oxen, which we now have here and know them as charlois beef cattle. He said they went out with two but often came

back to their barn with one--the other having been shot by enemy (American) soldiers. He told another story of an old French couple befriending the American soldiers (or so they thought--for a while). The Americans were in the process of building bridges, which they did at night so they would not be as visible to the enemy. The French were on an upper level of the house and offered them food, etc. American soldiers would go out from the lower level to work on the bridges and at intervals would be fired upon. Finally, they realized the French family was signaling their soldiers with a light from upstairs when the Americans went out so they knew when to fire. Foster's gunbelt was shot into two pieces and fell off him but he was not injured during this skirmish. He also had the habit of Bible study and prayer, and had the folks at home behind him and God with him.

On September 2, 1945, my older sisters, Mary Ellen, Margaret and Hazel, my mother and I were at home when we heard bells ringing in the distance. Everyone started jumping up and down, and the younger girls ran to the top of a hill near our home. I was seven and didn't know what was happening. When I asked, they said "THE WAR IS OVER!" I said, "What does that mean?" They replied, "It means the boys are coming home!" We were blessed that my brothers did come home. One army uniform came home empty--my sister's husband was killed in a car crash (in Ohio) on his way home after serving in the army in France in 1945.

All this and more happened from 1939 to 1945. In 1940, my maternal grandfather died. In 1944, my sister Margaret's one year old child died (the same sister who lost her husband). Our paternal grandfather died in 1944 and his wife in 1945.

At my brother's funeral, in 1995, his children all spoke of his meaningful life. The older ones, who were four and three, when he returned from the service, mentioned how happy they were to see him and that was their first memory of him. A younger one called him her "hero." I think not only of my brothers who served their country as heroes but also my grandparents and parents who taught us true values, especially in adversity, and my other brothers and sisters, who were and are men and women of faith. Even when some of them suffered from Alzheimer's in their later years, they kept a sweet spirit and spoke of their faith. They are all heroes to me.