

## War Era Story Project 2012

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### A Day to Remember

I was leaving the Grand Theater after a matinee movie. When I got on the street, everyone was yelling “the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.” I was twelve years old by less than a month. I couldn't comprehend what changes there would be and how people's lives would change.

It didn't take long before men had to register for the service. As I remember, if you were over 40 years old, you were exempt. If you were healthy and 18 years old and still in school, you might be exempt until school was out. We had a neighbor boy who was 18 years old but not out of school. He enlisted. Some boys lied about their age and enlisted. If you enlisted, you could choose Army (the Air Force at that time was still Army), Navy or Marines. Many fathers were drafted if they were healthy enough to pass the physical. I'm not sure my numbers are correct but I think 16,000,000 men served in the Armed Forces. The population at that time was about 150,000,000.

A few months after the war started, fearing we might be bombed, air raid wardens were picked by the city officials. My dad was chosen for part of our street; of course he needed an assistant. He let me go with him. The street lights were all out, people had to have blinds or blankets over their windows so no light showed on the outside. Our area was Walnut St. from North St. to Deerfield Rd. Also, Johnson St. had no houses at that time, nor did Lower St., and Caroline went halfway to Stateline and Sycamore St.

The sirens would go off and that was our signal to hit the street. We each had an arm-band and flashlight that we couldn't use unless it was necessary. You can't believe how dark it was. Thank goodness these were all practice and we were never bombed. I don't remember anyone ever complaining when you went to their door and told them a little light was shining from a certain window. We all know our service men and women had it much tougher than we did, but our lives did change. I just want you to know we did what we had to.

Some of the boys in my neighborhood would go to the city dump and gather clean tin cans. At that point in time the lids were soldered on. The recycler would use heat to remove 2 or 3 drops of solder from each. The solder would be used on wiring for trucks, planes, ships or anything that had electrical wires in it. The can would be recycled also, but the solder was most important. We also sorted out clean white glass, which we put in a cardboard box with a good strong bottom. We broke the cans or bottles into small pieces for two reasons: One, you could get more glass in the box, and two, the man that bought it wanted it that way. If you could find a piece of iron, copper or a car battery, that was good, because glass and tin cans didn't pay much.

Ralph Bailey had a big barn across the alley behind Wright's Service Station; it still stands. He bought our junk sometimes. We made 25 cents, other times if we worked longer or found something better than glass or cans, we could earn 2 or 3 dollars. The important thing was we felt like we were helping support the war effort. People were very patriotic. My mother saved all her used lard and bacon grease. She would take it to the grocery or meat market when the can was full. I don't know how it was used, but most people did it.

In the spring of 1942, the Food Rationing Program was set in motion. Rationing would deeply affect the American way of life for most. In 1943, sugar rationing took effect with Sugar Rationing Buying Cards. One member of each family was asked to register for the whole family. You received stamps in relation to the size of the family. The stamps allowed you to buy sugar, but didn't guarantee that it would be available.

Red stamps rationing covered meat, butter, fat and oils. Blue stamps covered canned, bottled and frozen fruits and vegetables. Every family had to check their stamps against their needs. There was also gas rationing; for this A, B & C stamps were used depending on how far you were from your work. Farmers got a T stamp; usually they got enough to plant and harvest their crops. Tires were rationed also. In school, we were urged to bring 25 cents a week to buy a saving stamp, which we pasted in a little book. When it was full, we took it to the bank and they would give you a war bond. You paid in \$18.75, the bond was worth \$25.00 in 7 or 8 years. Signs were put up many places encouraging people to buy bonds, to help conserve, and to help with scrap drives.

They came to our school and told us about a farmer whose tomato crop was ready to pick and he had no help. It was not too far out Route 47 so lots of us kids went to pick after school; we were paid 5 cents per crate. If you worked hard you could pick 5 or 6 crates before we went home, but it was to help the war effort.

Oh, I forgot leather shoes and coffee were also rationed. Speed limit on the highways was 35 mph. Rationing ended in 1946 and life returned to near normal.