

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

As a young child of both the depression and WW II, I lived in a time when the average American citizen was accustomed to “doing without.” All of us “on the home front” embraced the buying of war bonds to help fund the war, as well as saving tin cans for the war along with doing without many things so that the military could have them. This list included meat and some dairy products. We had meatless Tuesdays and many families substituted spam for meat not only on Tuesday but on other days as well, as meat was somewhat scarce (though it could be purchased on the black market). The government issued everyone stamps for the purchase of such items as coffee, sugar, meat, gas and shoes. As there were four children in my family by war’s end, my mother sometimes traded her gas stamps for shoe stamps, as we did not have a car. Since sugar was scarce, candy was somewhat limited, especially chocolate, which went to the military. There was very little complaining as these were small sacrifices compared to what our fighting forces were enduring.

As previously mentioned, gas was rationed and new tires rarely available, so many civilians put their cars up on blocks and either, walked, rode bicycles, took the bus or joined a car pool to get to work. With Wright Field (as it was known at the time) in our backyard, many of our families rented out rooms to house the many workers who came to work there as part of the defense effort.

My father had volunteered for service in the Army Air Corps two days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Eventually, two of my uncles also entered the military, leaving a total of six children for my mother and two aunts to care for. As the war went forward, you would see blue stars in windows indicating a family member in service and also gold stars which symbolized the loss of a family member to the war. My dad became an aide to General Curtis Le May and spent some time stateside in Penn. and Washington DC. We rented out our home (no problem as housing was scarce) and lived in Penn. for a year prior to his going overseas to India and later Tinian Island. While in Washington, he worked periodically at the Pentagon and one evening took me with him to pick up or deliver some paper work. To my five year old eyes, the narrow corridors were very scary and I recall staying close to dad lest I get lost in the maze.

My dad wrote regularly to us while overseas and decorated his letters with pictures of animals for the benefit of us kids. My youngest brother was born during this time and my parents corresponded back and forth about his name to the extent that my dad was asked to explain whether he and mom were using some kind of code. These war babies as they were called were so great in number that they led to overcrowding in school classrooms a few years later. I have heard as an adult that during and after a war that it is common for there to be a large numbers of male babies produced. All I know is that my baby brother was supposed to be my baby sister.

When FDR died, the country grieved and I recall listening to the broadcast of his funeral on our radio. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. dropped the first of two atom bombs over Japan effectively ending the war. In the months following, the men and women returned home to pick up their lives. I can recall how my middle brother had trouble associating the picture of the dad that he had kissed every night with the live dad and for several nights after dad was home he still kissed the picture goodnight.

Sixty seven years later we still have American men and women representing the rest of us in far off lands. All three of my brothers grew up to serve in the military and they too returned home after their tours of duty and continued with their lives. I became a teacher like my dad and make sure to hang our American flag outside on good days. I guess I am getting old because I still get tears in my eyes whenever the Star Spangled Banner is played.