

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Eileen Burns

Current home town: McKinny, Texas

Age: Not given

“Beyond the Shores” - A Romance Blooms

I was 17 years old and lived in a picture-book village in Somerset, Southwest England, called Hatch Beauchamp, a village of thatched roofs, a tiny post office, the village blacksmith, country houses and a beautiful old church built in the 14th century. The village was just my war-time home, however. I was an evacuee from London, who at age 11 years, along with my 9-year-old sister and 5-year-old twin brothers, as well as thousands of other school children, was evacuated to the English countryside from London in September, 1939, to relative safety from the German bombing.

We lived a quiet country life in the village until one day in November, 1942; a company of United States soldiers came to the village and made their camp in one of the Parklands. What excitement, although by that time England was overflowing with U.S. troops. We never dreamed they would arrive at this little “out of the way” place. What were they like, these strangers? How would we treat them and how would they treat us?

The village “Women’s Volunteer Service,” along with the men, decided we should have a dance in the Village Hall and see how we reacted to each other. There was much discussion among the young girls. “Well, we’ll just go to see what they are like” we said. The big night came and we went to the dance. As was the English custom in those days, the girls sat on chairs and waited for the men to walk over and, as Englishmen did, stand in front and say, “May I have the pleasure of this dance?” Well, the Yanks came; we girls sat with much trepidation, waiting. Lo and behold, from across the hall, this young, handsome soldier came up to me took my hand and said, “Hi, let’s dance!” My reaction was “who are these people?”

I soon learned my handsome soldier was from Ohio, a place called “Steubenville.” Born in 1920, he was one of seven children by Patrick and Edith Burns. By the time the evening was over, he was teaching me to jitterbug and I was teaching him the lambeth walk, the palais glide and the hokey pokey. We all had a grand evening. The villagers made the Yanks most welcome with cups of tea and sandwiches, which of course was different from coffee and donuts. The soldier told me his name was Robert Burns. I laughed and said, “Really?” I didn’t believe him that he could have such a name, as every Yank seemed to call each other “Joe.”

This was the beginning of many evenings starting with music by Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and a lot of dancing with this handsome Ohioan. We enjoyed dancing, long walks, bicycle rides and each other’s company, and laughed at our differences. Although we both knew the day would come when the soldiers would leave us, as the build-up was almost complete and D-Day was quickly approaching.

The following June, on a sunny day, the village was empty. The Yanks had left for France and there were no good-byes. How quiet the village seemed. We missed the tall guard on the camp gate singing, "Beyond the Hills in Idaho," as well as their generosity toward the children, especially to my little brothers.

I was so sad that I would never see my handsome Ohioan again, especially when I realized I had fallen in love with him. What a surprise to receive a letter from him and be told he loved me too! Bob came back to England from France on seven days leave in September, 1945, and we were married.

1st Sergeant Robert Burns was honorably discharged December 18, 1945, from the U.S. Army and went back home to Steubenville. I joined him in Ohio that spring. We lived in Steubenville for seven years, where he worked for Weirton Steel and we had two sons, Keith and Michael. We then moved to Cleveland for four years, where he was a manager at Butler's Department Store. Bob then had a long career with Top Value Stamps and moved to seven different states before retiring. He passed away at the age of 84 in Waco, Texas, and is buried at the Dallas Ft. Worth National Cemetery. I, at age 86, currently live with my son Michael and his wife in McKinney, Texas.

After 60 years, sometimes when I'm day dreaming, I can still see that handsome young soldier from Ohio walking across that village hall to say to a young English girl, "Hi, let's dance," and when I close my eyes, we begin to dance again "Beyond the Shores."



