

War Era Story Project 2012

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My Childhood Memories of World War II

The most vivid memory that I have of World War II, is that of the frequent air raid drills. I suppose the reason for that is because the drills were so scary and always at night. As a two year old, I didn't really understand what was going on and what war was but my family always talked about it and tried to explain the drills and the reasons for them. It was not until I was a little older that I understood that they were necessary because of the huge steel mills in our area, which could be targets for the enemies.

First the sirens would go off at night (at no particular time) and they were very loud. As soon as we heard them, all the lights would be turned off and the shades pulled down. Eventually, I lost my fear of just standing in our pitch black house. But what was even stranger was that no one said a word. We just stood huddled close to each other in the darkness. The blackness was not just in all the houses, but all the stores and businesses went dark, the trolleys stopped running, the street lights would be turned off and no one could be seen or heard outdoors. The only light that couldn't be extinguished was the flames from the chimneys of the steel mills' blast furnaces. We didn't see this during the raids, but at other times, the steel mills lit up the skies at night. Also, since my father worked different shifts in the steel mill, he would tell us about it. When the all-clear siren sounded, it seemed like we could breathe again and resumed normal activities.

My sister who was 14 years older than me would try to explain the war .It got easier to understand as I got a little older. Also, we went to the local movie theater at least twice a week. We had no television back then and just listened to the radio, so going to the movies was a real treat. Besides, the admission was only 10 cents back then, In between the feature films and cartoons, the current news was filmed and shown on the movie screen. Of course, they would be outdated by a few days, but the news reporting and footage of the various battles and war activities was vivid and excellent. The news narrators were so compelling.

It's funny how we sometimes remember some things more than others. To this day, I am a huge fan of stars and celebrities. One of my favorite newsreels that was shown repeatedly was on Hollywood stars traveling all over the world to entertain the troops. My sister used to buy "Photoplay" and "Silver Screen" magazines and I would look through them incessantly. Most of the topics had to do with the war.

I remember one film clip in particular of a pilot inside his plane with a picture of Betty Grable on the side of his plane, looking as beautiful as ever with her beautiful legs. Not only did the stars entertain the troops, but they helped finance and pay for the war by selling war bonds. To this day, I can't understand

why our government doesn't do the same thing now to help pay for the cost of the wars. Even poor immigrants like my father would buy these bonds. The general patriotism among all the people was huge. I came to understand later on that we were all united in spirit to try to help our country in so many ways: from the war bonds to the paper drives, to helping the Red Cross.

We lived in a predominantly Greek community where most people were immigrants with family and relatives back in Greece. This was another war memory: worried friends and neighbors getting together to discuss what was going on in the homeland, which was occupied by the Germans and the Fascists. It was very difficult for mail to get through and communication was practically nil.

When the war finally ended, it seemed like there was a huge sigh of relief – as if everyone could stop holding their breath – and life didn't center around the war and fear of it. I was a little older then and could understand a lot more. Even back then, our government tried to help the returning veterans. Nearby, the defense department built a large group of barrack -type homes for the veterans and their families. It was like a miniature army base with all these green metal, basement-less homes. Little by little, they disappeared because they were temporary and not strong enough to last for years.

The field where these houses were built now holds our local police and fire departments and a senior citizen complex. The name of that street is Roosevelt Drive.

By far the most important thing I remember about World War II is the framed picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt that hung on our living room wall. He was my father's hero. My father was so patriotic and had so much love for our president and our country. He was so proud to become a naturalized citizen. This love and respect for America was his legacy to me. I love this country so much and I pride myself on being a concerned, active citizen doing whatever I can to help my country.