

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 77

I was almost seven years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941. I was 10 on VJ day – the day in August, 1945 when victory in Japan was declared. I am now 77 and my recollection is through the eyes of child – memories that have survived this long.

I was born and raised in Buffalo, N.Y., at that time, the home of Curtis-Wright, a defense factory that assembled and produced the P-47 fighter airplane. Shortly after the war started, my mother went to work for Curtis-Wright as many women did, leaving my dad home at night to care for my brothers and me. Family day at Curtis-Wright was exciting. It was thrilling to see these airplanes up close. Of course, I didn't know then, but I do know now the very small, but so very important role my mother and many women played in helping to build America's war planes.

Air raid drills were frequent; at the sound of the siren, all lights had to go off. My dad was never too happy if he was getting us ready for bed and the siren went off. All the lights had to go out. We had a special blanket we used to cover the radio so the light from the tubes couldn't be seen. Some people had black-out curtains. I don't know if we did. Probably not.

As time went on, my dad became an air raid "warden." When the siren blared, he had to grab his flashlight, put on his helmet and patrol the street knocking on doors and windows if a light could be seen. Even a lit cigarette could be seen from the air and so had to be extinguished. It wasn't a job he particularly liked, and he liked it even less if he was already in bed and had to get up. No one ever knew when the siren would sound. I chuckle as I think of it, but I guess it wasn't funny then. Every evening I remember him picking up the newspaper and shaking his head. I never understood why. I was seven, maybe eight.

On Saturdays, I was at the movies – War movies; I saw them all. "Guadalcanal Diary." "Corregidor Baton." I remember the Japanese being depicted as cruel, barbaric and inhumane. By all accounts, I guess they were. I especially recall a scene from the movie "Gung Ho" when a Japanese officer bayonets an American soldier who was lying on the ground wounded and asking for water. I was eight, maybe nine.

I wrote letters to my two big cousins, one serving in Europe and the other in the South Pacific. They actually answered my letters on some special kind of mylar paper. How I wished I had saved them.

We saved most everything for the war effort: scraps of rubber, metal, tin foil from cigarette packages. I saved my money to buy stamps, and when I got enough stamps I could turn them in for a war bond.

Everything was rationed: shoes, butter, sugar, gasoline. There was allowed only so much per family.

I remember the flags with gold stars hanging in so many windows, signifying someone who lived here was killed in the war. A silver star meant someone was wounded. There were so many “Gold Star Mothers”.

My brother turned 17 in January, 1945, and joined the Navy. He was assigned to the *USS Adirondack*. The war ended soon after, and he came home safe. I was so proud that a sailor was my big brother. I remember the Sullivan’s (movie) true story – the five brothers who went down with their ship. When their mother asked the officer at the door “which one”? He answered “all of them”. I was eight, maybe nine.

The war ended. Traffic was jammed and people clanging on anything and everything. People were crying, church bells ringing, people running – it was chaos. I was 10. What was it all about? No one ever talked about it – not to me anyway. As I look back, I see what patriotism was. One nation united in a cause, indivisible. It was a sad time – a great time. It was a sad country but oh, what a great country!