

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 76

I was a six-year-old and in the first grade. The news that we had been attacked by Japan came on Sunday morning, and on Monday morning, our lessons were forgotten. We practiced taking our little red reading chairs to the basement of Central School where we were lined up against the walls. We weren't allowed to say a word and we listened to what our teachers had to say. We were scared, but were told by our teachers that we would be okay. At the end of the first grade, our teacher, Miss Barton, quit teaching and joined the WACS. She faithfully wrote back to us each month until the end of the war. We were asked by the principal, Miss Cronin, to start bringing newspapers, magazines, etc. to the school, as these were needed for the war effort, and all three floors of the school had halls that were covered with piles of them. Each week, the janitor and others trucked these to the place where newspapers, tires, metal, etc. were to be taken. Our school usually got the award each year for being the best of the three elementary schools for aiding the war effort, and we each got pins to proudly wear on our coats.

On the home front, everyone was required to buy blackout blinds so that any lights that were used at night would not be seen in case an enemy plane got through. My father, John A. Kenz, volunteered to be a watchman for the six blocks in our neighborhood. He would walk the streets at night and if he saw any light at all, he would knock on the door and warn the residents to be more careful. He also, after working 9 hours a day at the library, volunteered to be a firefighter between the hours of 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. Then, he would do the security walk until midnight.

One night, mom and I took his supper to him at Fire House #1. I wanted to slide down the brass pole as the firemen did. So, dad took me upstairs and had a friend wait for me at the bottom. When I was half-way down, the fire bell rang. The friend picked me up and just sat me on the huge hook-and-ladder truck while he and dad and the 3rd man put on their helmets and coats. Mom was in the car outside. The guys got in the firetruck and took off with me yelling and mom running down the street. They stopped, lifted me down and took off again. So, I told my school mates that I had been a fireman for a couple of minutes.

I was scared that the enemy would get to Chillicothe and kill us. Dad said that they would have to come through the city park and the daddies would be there with the WWI cannons and would keep them from getting us. I don't know what they would have used for ammo, ha ha, but that made me feel better.

Those gasoline, food, and clothing stamps were something else. Dad's mom was very ill and had a nurse at home. Dad would have to go there every noon to see grandma and take her medicines etc. He only had a C stamp for gasoline, and I think that was two gallons a week. With all the help he gave with the war effort and his job, he needed more. So, the board gave him a B stamp which gave him four gallons a week. Many times, if mom hadn't canned everything she grew in our five-acre garden at grandma's house, we wouldn't have had much to eat. Dad would get two helpings of meat a day and I would get

one, and if there was anything left over, mom would eat it. But, we didn't starve and even gave food from the garden to others.

Our neighbor lady worked in the bomb factory along Route 50 east. She worked in the chemicals which were used to make the bombs. Every day, depending on which chemicals she was working with, she would come home with different-colored hair. She had even worn a scarf, but the chemicals went through the scarf, which was also washed each day along with her hair. She died an early death in the late 1970s with a bad heart, which doctors said was the result of the chemicals.

My dad's nephew was an orderly with a high-ranking general in Europe. He said that the plane they rode in had a fogger which would make the plane look like a cloud going over. This general was the head of the troops in Holland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and also in Italy. The first ballpoint pen that came into Chillicothe was purchased by dad and sent to his nephew so he could write. He'd send one to him every six months.

After the Germans and Japanese gave up, Chillicothe had the biggest, best and quickest parade we'd ever had. We got the news at noon and by six p.m. we had a parade organized. Flags were everywhere. Soon after, when I was in the seventh grade, some of us in the Girl Scouts were given names of girls in Japan to write to in order to establish friendship. This would have been in 1947. We sent each other letters and gifts and it taught me to be more tolerant of others. It helped me as a teacher, also. I guess the American soldiers taught the children over there some English and helped them write letters.

My husband and I brought a young lady from Turkey to Chillicothe and helped her attain a Bachelor's degree, paid for her wedding. We have "adopted" her and her American family now. She works as a computer engineer in Dublin and has a nineteen-month-old son. She is also an American citizen and loved being able to vote last year. She also is paying for her sister's education in college here in Columbus. She and her sister will be great citizens. So, my writing to a former enemy has changed the lives of many people which I have come in contact with. God bless us all.