

Other Memories of World War II

By

Joan Momsen

Having just read Gordon Russ' article about his father's jobs during World War II, I find myself in that same situation. I was born during World War II but have very few memories of what I did during the war. Probably a lot of crawling, crying and burping as all infants and toddlers do. Most of what I remember is because of the home movies my father took. As film was disappearing and video was coming in to more common usage, I video-taped all of dad's old 16mm film and put it on VHS tape. I had looked at those photos for over 50 years and they gave me insight into to what I had seen, but for the most part did not have actually memories about...or they jogged those deeply embedded memories.

I was born on Easter Sunday, 1942 so mom was expecting me when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941 for those of you that have not committed that date to memory. My father was a Greyhound bus driver and just a smidgen under the draft age that at that time was 45. He got a deferment because he had an important civilian job. Transporting soldiers by Greyhound to their embarkation points or bases in the USA was considered as important as serving in the military.

What I remember was that dad was home almost every other night because his "run" driving the bus to Redding, California from Medford, Oregon was too long for a turn-around run in one day and still meet ICC regulation. He would drive to Redding, stay overnight and return to Medford the next day. As the roads got better, but not until after the war was over, it became a one-day turn around "run."

I was the lucky to have both parents in the picture most of the time during World War II. Some children my age spent their infancy and toddler years with only their mother in the house.

I have three very distinct memories of about World War II. I remember dad, mom and I used to go to Petaluma, California, once a year to visit dad's parents. Dad would take a motion picture of Grandpa and Grandma, each holding my hand, with me in the middle, walking down the sidewalk along the side their house. I also remember looking at the giant guns under the camouflage nets as we drove across the Oakland Bay bridge. The big green and grey nets covered the guns so they could not be seen from the air, but the highway on the bridge went right across the island and the guns. I also remember playing with toys, and I cannot remember what toys, on the living room floor on the day President Roosevelt died. It was a sunny April day and the door was open, but the screen was closed. The postman delivered the

mail and mom when to the door to get it and told the mailman that she had just heard on the radio that the President had died.

Other things I remember are fragmented, after all I was just three-years, one-week old when FDR died. Many of the things I sort of remember or were told about were recorded via 16mm film. The main topic of most of the pictures was me. It was the second marriage for both mom and dad and they were told mom could not have children. So when she was 33 and dad was 43 the advent of a birth of a child was a surprise but well received. Dad already had a Bell and Howell 16 mm camera and color film was available. When he first bought the camera, the film was black and white but colored film came to home movies about the same time they came available commercially around 1939. I also caught Whooping Cough when I was about 18 months old and coughed for three years. To this very day when I get a cold, I have a whooping-type of cough. I survived, many children did not. Dad took motion picture of me coughing because I coughed so often and so long.

As a side line, when I was teaching history at Grants Pass High School, many of the teachers referred to World War II as "the war" often thinking of the conflict in Korea and Vietnam as lesser wars. I remember calling WWII "the war" and totally confusing some students who had no memory of any war except what was happening in Vietnam. I soon became more specific when discussing a war.

Meanwhile back to the 1940s and war and post-war memories. As soon as World War II ended, many of the military bases were decommissioned. Everything was sold off to anyone who had the cash to buy excess material. My dad and mom bought a barracks. I still say barracks although it was a singular building...a very big building. Dad and mom tore it down slowly and systematically. For several months, each day dad did not have to work at being a Greyhound bus driver, we would go to what is now White City and work on the building.

I remember wandering around the buildings in various stages of deconstruction as mom and dad worked every moment, prying apart a giant wooden building. Camp White was built on what dad called the Agate Dessert and dry grass and dirt between the buildings had lots of pretty rocks and other things to look for and pick up. Mom and dad would systematically load the old Dodge pickup and trailer with boards, windows, toilets, sinks, etc. I would wander in and out of other buildings looking for treasures. There were others working on buildings, but none really close to ours, so I could go into a big theater building and wander through the debris. There were lots of goodies for a five-year old to collect and carry back to the pickup. For years I had copies of songbooks with Army olive drab or khaki covers and newsprint pages. I gave many away to friends.

One of the old theatres is still standing in Grants Pass. They evidently did not dismantle it board by board but must have cut it up in pieces and moved each piece to Grants Pass and nailed it back in its original shape because when it was reconstructed it looked like the old theatre building. It still does. For years it was the Rollerdrome, the skating rink on the Miracle

Mile, old Highway 99 south. If you want to see the size of a barracks, the grange hall in Gold Hill is an old barracks building. These are my short memories of World War II.