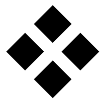
Meadowood Anthology



A publication by and for the residents
of Meadowood Retirement Community

Vol. IV, No. 3 ❖ Spring 2009

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The *Meadowood Anthology* is a quarterly publication by and for the residents of Meadowood Retirement Community in Bloomington, Indiana, and is made possible by the Meadowood Memorial Fund.

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From the Editor

I have the pleasure of introducing you to new members of our Editorial Board. Miriam Rosenzweig and RuthAnn Schneider have recently joined and together we salute our new Project Manager, Barbara Restle. We appreciate the wealth of talent and experience on our Editorial Board.

In the same breath I must say a heartfelt thanks to our newly retired members: *Meadowood Anthology* founder and tireless advocate– Ledford Carter; Board secretary and a lively writer, Ginny Gest; and Edward DeJean, wise counselor and fine writer.

As with anything in life, it's good to stir things up a bit now and again. New ideas and approaches keep us fresh.

Note that we are continuing our series: "Memories of War." Many Meadowood residents were shaped by their wartime experiences, and even after so many decades, these memories remain strong.

See you in the *Anthology*.

Sandy Lynch

Gladiola

By Nancy Seward Taylor

Her name was Gladys Manese but we later called her "Gladiola."

She came by bus to our house from a place in Bloomington called Pigeon Hill, which was where all of the then-called "colored" folks lived. She was a young woman of sixteen, and I was about eight years old, and my sister Marilyn was ten. My mother had what was called a "nervous breakdown" and was confined to her bedroom, mostly in bed. Gladys would come very early in the morning to cook a large breakfast for my father before he went to the Seward and Company Foundry. She gave my sister and me our favorite cereal before we left for school. She then took care of my mother's needs and cleaned the house and fixed lunch when needed. My sister and I often ate at school or at a nearby café, and my father at the Kiwanis club or a pancake house.

For dinner, Gladiola always made a salad. My favorites were sliced bananas topped with mayonnaise and peanuts, or tomato aspic topped with mayonnaise or the hearts of lettuce topped with my beloved mayonnaise. My father's favorite meal was fried pork chops with brown pork chop gravy, while my sister and I preferred fried chicken with mashed potatoes and white gravy. Gladys used a very large iron skillet with Crisco, turned on rather high; she had to be careful turning the floured chicken pieces for almost an hour. We often had ice cream or custard for dessert and sometimes her special ginger snaps.

When my mother was out of bed and stronger, she entertained or had out-of-town guests. Then Gladys would wear a white uniform dress, put on peach nail polish and matching lipstick, and have her hair marcelled. I would gleefully help her with the relish dish and watch her make roses out of the radishes.

In the summer, when cooking, she and my mother perspired in the hot kitchen, and made pitcher after pitcher of iced tea, which I helped carry to our screened porch for our guests. Often the guests were father's sisters and families from Santa Monica, California, and Casa Grande, Arizona.

For my sister's birthday, Gladys made lemon meringue pie, and for mine she made a rich butterscotch meringue pie. I also got hearts of lettuce with mayonnaise and hearts of celery ("rabbit food" my father called it).

When we came in from sledding on a cold, snowy day, Gladys made us hot chocolate with marshmallows on top and cookies. Then she would help us pull taffy.

When I was sad about something, I would run to Gladys and she would hug me to her ample bosom and say it will be all right, "Dontcha know." Later I wrote postcards to her and signed them "Dontcha know."

She would have made a wonderful mother, but she was denied that. During World War II, her fiancé was in Italy and got involved

with a woman who had twins by him. Gladys never showed me her reaction, but my mother was enraged. Much later in life, Gladys married a man named Don Barnette. When I was in high school, Gladys came only three days a week and later went to work for my cousin Janet Seward Dunn, who was widowed at age thirty-eight with four young sons. However, she came back to help my mother for special occasions, and when my three sons visited, she made a special butterscotch pie, and on Christmas special iced cookies.

She did not want me to leave Bloomington, and so she refused to come to my wedding, but she did assist at my reception.

Although she did not smoke or drink, Gladiola died of lung cancer. The only photograph left in her house was one of me in my wedding dress. ❖

Bees Do It. Birds Do It. Blue-footed Boobies and Whales Do It.

By Barbara Restle

I have always wished to see whales up close. To do this I joined fifteen serious nature lovers from Europe and boarded a ninety-foot ship in San Diego, a ship with cabins the size of our Meadowood bathrooms. A galley for socializing and meals provided benches and tables nailed to the floor. Our seven cheerful sea-hardened crew members and Captain Art made every effort to keep us safe and as comfortable as was possible in what was termed the "rolling seas" of the Pacific: seas that rolled our ship into thirty-five degree lists. After boarding, I was led down a steep narrow staircase to my cabin by a welcoming and broadly smiling crew member. His tanned face deeply lined after many years at sea, he introduced himself as Lambchop, the dishwasher. On this ship, crewed by seven American men and Captain Art, every man had multiple jobs.

Lambchop opened my cabin door and, with a muffled grunt, lifted my large suitcase to the upper bunk. In a low voice he said, "Brought your own cabin mate on board, I see." Before I could respond, as he left he said, "Close quarters, but you'll only be in your cabin to sleep." With my cabin door closed, there was only enough space to duck my head and slide into my bunk. I could not sit on my bunk. I did have a private miniature sink with a cold water tap and two shelves overhead.

For two weeks, fifteen nature enthusiasts gratefully, without the comforts of the 21st century, lived out their dreams, to visit the animals only seen on TV nature programs. We had also been requested not to bring any electronic devices for communicating with the outside world. We were encouraged to go back in time and to experience a world not touched by modern technology.

During daylight hours, we had a crew member who climbed up to the crow's nest to spot the blowing, spouting whales. Often the whales were in a pod swimming toward feeding areas.
When we sailed around San Benito Island, we were about halfway between San Diego and Cabo San Lucas (a city that Meadowood residents visited in 2008). San Benito Island is well known as the calving area for whales and we were fortunate in seeing several finback whales and their calves. The finback whales are the second largest whales and feed primarily on small fish.

The most memorable sighting was the largest of all whales, a blue whale with her new-born calf, which appeared to intentionally bring her calf alongside our ship for a fifteen minute visit. I was leaning over the deck rail when she spouted out of her huge blow holes and I felt the mist on my face. Somehow, as ridiculous as this sounds, I felt blessed. This modern whale's ancestor lived in our oceans more than fifty million years ago. This blue whale was longer than our ninety-foot ship and the calf, only a few weeks old, was between twenty-three and twenty-five feet long. We were told that to see a blue whale and her calf this close was rare. On another day we also saw five blue whales in a pod without calves. The birthing of all whale calves is in February, and the ocean around the Baja Peninsula is where Pacific Ocean whales come for birthing. Within a few months, the mothers guide their calves to the Arctic regions, where the mothers are able to feed again.

Late one afternoon, our captain dropped anchor close to a pyramid-shaped mountain. On a stone ledge several hundred feet above the rolling sea, a pair of blue footed booby sea birds danced, their long pointed bills clicking together, their necks intertwined: all symptoms of bonded love. Their blue webbed feet, as large as our own hands, quick-stepped to an ancestral rhythm. The nesting site of this bonded pair was halfway up a mountainous rock in the Sea of Cortez that separates the mainland of Mexico from the Baja Peninsula. This mountain had no vegetation to adorn it and was hardly a romantic scene. Hundreds of sea birds with loud ear-piercing laments challenged each other over nesting sites or perching areas.

A booby is a fish-eating bird, found in tropical and sub-tropical waters. Its nesting sites are barren rock, and how they keep their eggs from falling into the ocean is a marvel of Darwin's theory of natural selection. The chicken always lays her eggs in a carefully planned nest that protects an egg from rolling out. The booby egg is laid on a mountain ledge. However, due to its design, the booby egg only turns in circles and never rolls. There is little danger of this egg falling into the sea even when laid on a sloping rocky ledge.

On this late afternoon, the mountain was surrounded by flying yellow-footed gulls, white and brown pelicans, frigate birds, various species of herons, albatrosses and egrets. There was a good reason this mountain was white: it was covered with guano. The next hurricane would likely scour its surface clean, if only temporarily,

returning phosphates and nitrogen to the sea.

Do I recommend sailing for two weeks on the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez in a small ship? I hesitate to do so. There were too many times I needed to dash to my bunk when the captain announced, "Heading for rolling seas!" Early in the trip, when I neglected to respond, the bruises to my face and various parts of my body turned an embarrassing purple. Would I do it again? Yes, of course, in my sixties but not in my ____. ❖

Tales of the South

By Bill Baldwin

Late in the 1960s, five optometry students and I discovered that racial prejudice was still very much alive in the South. We were driving to a professional meeting in Florida. A half hour after one of the students relieved me at the wheel, my new car became impaled under the rear end of a truck stalled on an ice-encumbered highway in Tennessee. The students were first introduced to racial bigotry after we accepted rides back to the nearest town from two black families who were traveling together back home to Michigan and stopped to ask if they could help. They made room by crowding three of us into each of two cars. Trouble developed when I invited our benefactors to be our guests at breakfast. When we insisted on being seated with them in the room reserved for blacks, we were showered with mumbled taunts and stony stares. Later, on the bus we boarded to complete our trip south, when we insisted on sitting in the rear, we met more of the same. This encouraged us to go out of our way to offend Southern mores until we left the Southland.

The following anecdote demonstrates that even in outposts where the Ku Klux Klan survives, they may not be welcome. It also demonstrates that the Klan and others up to no good are the first to whimper for the security blanket of legal protection when it serves their purpose.

In the late 1990s, a local Ku Klux Klan unit, keen to polish its dimly-viewed image, decided to engage in an act of good citizenship – cleaning litter from a bit of roadway. Cynics might conclude they were not prompted by a spirit of public service, but by the prospect of salient publicity. A sign along the tended stretch conspicuously identified the helpful group, symbolizing their salutary citizenship. Local authorities rejected what they cynically viewed as an attempt for undeserved approval.

The Klan had the law on its side. Justice requires that if one entity is allowed to conduct an activity generally recognized as good citizenship, all other entities not legally prohibited must be allowed the same privilege. The dictum is not limited to good deeds. It applies to burning the flag and other legalized skullduggery. Having lost fairly in the courts, the persistent local officials patiently waited for the Klan's

public service to begin and for it to be given due notice. After that, they renamed the thoroughfare Rosa Parks Highway. That's more justice than the Klan bargained for.

Memoir of my Father

For my five children

By Marjorie Dogan

Because he was a unique, intelligent, remarkable individual, I thought I'd pass on my memories of your maternal grandfather to you so he won't be forgotten.

My father, Percy A. Sylvester, known as P.A. or the nickname pronounced "purse," was born on May 23, 1878 in Chicago, Illinois. He was the son of another Chicago native, Henry Sylvester, whose family had been in America since the early 1700s. They were a family to be proud of, with patriotic young men who fought in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. His mother was a sweet little lady, Katie Darling Corrigan, whose ancestors, four generations earlier, had come from Ireland to New York City.

In spite of his notable background, Henry appears to have been a rather unstable worker as far as employment was concerned. Early on, however, he had one job which offered a noteworthy opportunity. When Percy was a teenager, his father was in the moving business with Percy Brinks as his partner. They had the job of transporting the Liberty Bell from the train station to the site of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. We have a picture of 15-year-old Percy hanging out with the movers of the platform on which the Liberty Bell stood. (Incidentally, my father was named after his father's partner, Percy Brinks. Mr. Brinks later decided to leave the heavy moving business and go into small packages. At the time his contemporaries thought he was making a big mistake, but Brinks Express was successful and the name carries on, even today.)

Such luck was not shared by Henry Sylvester. After he left the moving business, he went on to work in a variety of jobs, including a police beat. Percy told stories about being beat up by neighborhood thugs just because his father was a policeman. I think he got into fights because the family moved around a lot, and the gangs in his new neighborhoods always sought to protect their territory and picked on the newcomer. It was a tough life and Percy had to shift for himself. He learned many lessons, one of which was that you had to be self-reliant.

When Percy was seventeen, his father, Henry, deserted his family leaving his wife and four children, all under the age of eighteen. The older children worked to support the family.

I heard none of this when I was a child, but long after I had grown up, my father once told me a story with a chuckle and a smile. He said when he was twenty, he, along with a couple of his buddies, hopped a freight train to take them to the southwest. The Spanish-American War was going on and he wanted to enlist in the army. He was rejected because, as he said to me, "my front teeth were gone and I was too skinny."

After this adventure was over, he went back to Chicago to his family. He was a very courageous young man. Percy persevered and learned to do many things. He was a jack of all trades. Indeed, later in life this ability came in handy. During the Great Depression when others were out of work, he became "Mr. Fixit" for the neighborhood.

I doubt that Percy ever completed schooling above the fourth grade, yet he was always curious, anxious to learn new things. Reading and education were high on his list of things to accomplish.
When he was twenty-seven years of age, he married a girl of Dutch descent, Kathryn (Kate) Van Weston. Theirs was a stable relationship, which lasted sixty-five years, until the death of Kate at age eighty-seven.

Their first child, Irene, was a survivor and lived to be ninety-two years of age. The next two were not as fortunate. The girl died of diphtheria, during a nationwide epidemic, and the boy, who was my father's favorite, died of small pox on the day their fourth child was born. These were painful experiences for Percy.

Irene was the first one of the family to attend college. She started out with two years at a teachers college. Finally she earned a Master's degree at Northwestern University. She was an inspiration and example for her younger siblings, two of whom also earned college degrees.

I recall that education was always stressed in our family, as well as music appreciation. Although Percy never learned to play a musical instrument, I recall hearing him sing old Irish melodies, while he shaved at night using the leather strap to sharpen his blade. We listened to classical music waking up in the morning and always heard the Metropolitan Opera broadcast from New York on Saturday. My family members were all readers, and several were good at creative writing, even poetry. There was always a piano in our house. My father was pleased and encouraged this. He also found the money in the darkest days of the Depression to take me to the second Chicago World's Fair called "A Century of Progress."

We always sat down at the table together for dinner in the evening. Homework had to be done before anyone could go out in the evening.

My father was fifty years of age when he moved his family to Gary, Indiana. He bought a small bungalow in Glen Park, a residential section of the city. He was able to

get work in several plants before he was laid off because of the Depression.

Before the Depression shut down the economy, my father worked for the railroad for a number of years. During this time, he invented a special wrench to get under a railway car (or engine) to repair it. Because he did it while working for the railroad, all he received for his invention was a note of appreciation and twenty-five dollars. Percy was never a complainer.

Gardens were very popular during the Depression. We had a garden with a few "greens" in our yard, but my father's big garden was one-and-a-half miles away at my brother and sister-in-law's home. He would walk the distance, relax and have a cup of tea with my sister-in-law, then spend whatever time was necessary working the garden. I remember potatoes, tomatoes, green beans, peas, Swiss chard, and pumpkins, but there was more. It was a nutritionist's delight. In fact, thirty years before the nutritionists were telling people to eat lots of veggies, eliminate fat and eat whole grain cereal, my father was advocating the same. He also believed in exercise.

When the U.S. entered World War II, Percy was called back to work in the mills. Because he was familiar with all the machine parts and tools, his unofficial title was "boss of the scrap pile." After a few years, the war was over and my dad retired again. Of course, he always had odd jobs to do around the house. He was never idle.

When my mother died, my father was ninety-two and still feeling well, but he began having a number of minor strokes. Determination, along with physical therapy, got him well again every time.

In the meantime, daughter Irene, who had been living with our parents for the last ten to twenty years, reached retirement age and stopped teaching. Many of her friends were living in Florida during the winter months, so it wasn't long before Irene and our dad joined them in a mobile home park near St. Petersburg. After appraising the situation, Percy commented that the only thing wrong with "this place" is that "there are too many old people." He confided to a grandson that "the old ladies" had fun fussing over him. He was in good spirits and enjoyed life.

When they came back from Florida in the spring of 1978, Percy was nearing his 100th birthday. Because he wasn't feeling well, Irene took him to the hospital. This was the first time he had been to a health facility. He was diagnosed as having leukemia and died, one week short of his 100th birthday.

Percy was many things in his long life. I am very proud he was my father. ❖

Memories of War:
A Series

Culture Shock in India

By Ella Fox

Culture Shock? In July of 1944, more than 6,000 Americans debarking from their troop ship onto the docks of Bombay reacted with more than "culture shock." It was disbelief – awe – disgust…! The sights and smells were certainly foreign to anything we had ever experienced. Coolies, both men and women, worked unloading ships in the harbor. They carried unbelievable loads, always on their heads! People were asleep (or dying) on the streets and sidewalks. And the beggars were everywhere, mostly children. "Bahkshees, Sahib. No momma, no poppa. Bahkshees, Sahib!"

Calcutta. Here were the Grand and Great Eastern Hotels with their fine dining and Firpos, a favorite restaurant for Americans, and the Calcutta Swimming Club with both indoor and outdoor pools and lots of bearers to bring you a sandwich or drink as you basked in the sun. These were a great contrast to the extreme poverty that existed outside these walls. The streets were a "movie set." You could see everything. White sacred cows roamed the streets, into the train station, the market place. Again, coolies trotted through the streets carrying all sorts of things: six men trotted in unison carrying a piano on their heads; another foursome carried a bedstead with a body *enroute* to the burning *ghats* (funeral pyres); one man bore a big basket of live white chickens; another a basket of beautiful flowers – always on their heads, no hands! People washed themselves at a water spigot in the street, brushed their teeth, shaved. Lots of rickshaws, gharries (horse-drawn carriages), and taxis of 1920 vintage driven by fierce-looking Sikhs.
I guess the most startling sight was seeing the women (the untouchables) who walked the streets scooping up the droppings of the ever-present cows. They filled their baskets, again carried on their heads. Returning to their mud huts, they made the contents of the baskets into "patties" which they plastered on the outside walls of their huts. When the patties dried, the women peeled them off and used them as fuel for their household fires. This was a common custom as firewood was scarce.

Off to my first assignment as a staff member of the Red Cross Club. It was at Ondal, about 120 miles up into Bengal. Living quarters were very primitive, to put it mildly. We girls, like the officers, lived in a basha. This meant we had rooms rather than a barracks like the enlisted men. My roommate was a girl who had come over on the same ship with me and we were good friends. Like the officers, we had a bearer since there were no accommodations on base for female servants. Our bearer took care of our clothes, dusted our room, and made our beds – pretty luxurious!

The basha was a long cement building with a thatched roof. It was divided into about six rooms, with two girls living in each. There was a burlap ceiling in the room to keep the thatch dust from falling down on us. That space between the burlap and the roof was a favorite nesting place for rats. At night they would descend, looking for any morsels of food. One night I heard my perfume bottles being knocked over on my dressing table. I shined my flashlight around to determine the source of the noise. A huge rat was chewing on my leather manicure case. It made me glad to have the "security" of my mosquito netting tucked tightly around my bed.

There was a long aisle down the length of the basha and across from each room was a bathroom. No real plumbing. We brushed our teeth with water from our canteen. There was a huge tank on top of the basha and that provided water for our showers. In winter the water was frigid and in the summer, heated by the sun, it was so hot we could barely stand under it.

The bearer always took our laundry to the dhobi (a man belonging to a caste of launderers) who pounded the clothes on rocks to clean them and then, during the monsoon season, had to dry them indoors in his own large basha. The dhobi had no electricity. His iron was filled with coals, yet his perfect ironing was impressive. His fire was made from (you guessed it) the same fuel we saw being collected in Calcutta. It was cow dung. We girls tried doing our own bit of laundry whenever possible.

We kept very busy in our Red Cross Club, located near the enlisted men's barracks. This was a couple of miles from our basha. Boredom was a hazard for men at Ondal. This was the largest service base for planes before flying "the Hump," the treacherous Himalayas. After working on the planes, there was no recreation for the men except for activities in our Club. We had a canteen where they could come for coffee, etc., a small library where they could read or write letters, a large living room with a stage at the end for visiting entertainment (some of which the men themselves provided), a large room with a ping pong table and a dance floor where I taught everything from jitterbug to tap! We had tours of the local Maharajah's palace and sometimes he would bring out his elephant and offer rides. We visited the local Tata Steel Mill and tried to find other spots of interest.

Occasionally we were able to gather enough women for a dance. They were usually Anglo-Indian girls who came well-chaperoned by many family members. And we would recruit girls from other Red Cross Clubs. The dances were the activity the men enjoyed most.

Came the night of the Big Dance. The G.I.s would arrive, all crisply starched in their fresh khakis, looking very handsome. And the dancing began. As the night wore on, the jitterbugging in the Indian heat and humidity had everyone's khakis melting. A faint aroma arose. It was the dhobi's fire fuel. Ah yes, shades of the "sacred cow's" contribution. But nobody cared. The party went on. We girls tried to name the "fragrance." Certainly not Chanel #5. Perhaps Sewer #6….?? ❖

Memories of War: A Series

From

My Story

By Ardis Jerden

As I was finishing high school in Mt. Morris, Michigan, in 1940, war clouds were hovering over England and Europe. I entered General Motors Institute (GMI) in Flint, Michigan, in September of 1940, pursuing a business course. At GMI, engineering students would alternate two months of academic study with two months at a General Motors plant somewhere in the United States. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed our naval facility at Pearl Harbor, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress declared the United States was at war with Japan. Soon we would be at war with Italy and Germany too. Immediately, all automotive and aircraft plants geared up for defense manufacturing. After graduating from GMI, I was employed by Buick Motor Division – first in a secretarial pool typing defense contracts, then as a secretary in personnel, and finally as a secretary to five executives in the aluminum foundry. I worked at Buick until I was married.

I met my husband-to-be (Charles Cleatis Jerden – known as "Cleat") when I was a junior in high school. We attended our high school prom and marched together at Commencement. We were also in several plays and musicals together.

All men between the ages of 18 and 30 had to register with the draft board to see if they were eligible to serve in the military, and if they qualified physically and mentally, they could choose to enlist in the various branches of service – Naval Air Force, Army Air Force, Marine Air Force and Army Intelligence – hoping to become an officer. Cleat qualified for the Army Air Force and left in January, 1942. He took various stages of pilot training in Kentucky, Florida and Georgia, where he received his pilot's wings and became a lieutenant in the Army Air Force. He trained to fly B-25 bombers with a five-man crew.

Cleat and I married in August, 1944. After our ten-day honeymoon in Northern Michigan, he was assigned to Columbia, South Carolina, for further training and to get a crew assignment. I joined him there for five months. Fort Jackson Artillery base was also located in Columbia, so housing was at a premium. We rented a bedroom, shared a bathroom with three other military couples, and had to go to restaurants for all our meals. At this time, my husband was enduring night flying training, so I would have dinner with other military wives. Mr. and Mrs. Pennell, our landlords, were lovely people whose only son was lost at sea on an aircraft carrier.

My husband and I went back to Michigan in December, where he said goodbye at my parent's home and left on a train, then embarked for overseas to the 5th Air Force stationed in the Philippines. Before returning home in January, 1946, he

completed 41 missions and survived a mid-air collision with another plane. The tail of his B-25 was sheared off and the crew dumped everything out of the plane in flight. After successfully landing at the American base, the plane was scrapped. Cleat and crew were sent to Australia for rest and rehabilitation for one month. I didn't know any of this until he returned, as all military letters were censored so that the enemy would not learn information from them.

All of America was filled with patriotism – we wanted to win the war and have our sons and husbands return home. Many women went to work in factories as there was a shortage of men. There was a song written at the time called "Rosie the Riveter" about women working in defense jobs. Families who had sons in service would display cards in their windows with silver stars – or gold stars if their sons had died in the war. We had many forms of rationing – we were issued food stamps to purchase meat, gasoline, and shoes. There was no extra gasoline for pleasure trips – only for mileage to work. We were issued two shoe stamps a year. I wrote to my mother when I was in South Carolina, begging her to find an extra shoe stamp from someone, as my shoes were about to fall off my feet.

When I returned to Michigan, I discovered I was pregnant, so I stayed with my parents while my husband was gone. Charles Alan Jerden was born on August 10, 1945. The war ended while I was in the hospital, and all the nurses and doctors were celebrating. I wasn't sure my husband was alive. My mother sent him a telegram informing him that he was the father of a son.

When the war was over, all the military who were overseas had to wait for transportation home. Cleat was on Okinawa at the time and decided not to fly, but came home on a Navy ship. It took five months! I met him in Detroit on January 11, 1946, and barely recognized my husband: he was so thin and tanned. Since he served in the South Pacific, he was taking Atabrine tablets as a deterrent to malaria.

Building of houses had stopped during the war, so it was difficult to find a place to live. We bought a small house in Mt. Morris, and Cleat worked as a manager of a local bank. A daughter, Susan Elaine Jerden, was born October 1, 1947.

The GI Bill was passed and signed by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945, enabling all servicemen to enroll in college and have tuition, books, etc. subsidized by the government, along with $125 for monthly subsistence allowance.

We sold our home in September 1948 and moved to Ann Arbor where Cleat enrolled at the University of Michigan in the Liberal Arts program. We lived at Portage Lake until we could move to an apartment near campus. The University apartments were filled with returning servicemen and their families, and we had many potluck dinners shared among residents. Our apartment rent was $85 out of our $125. I worked for a year as secretary to the Dean of Pharmacy before becoming a stay-at-home mom. ❖

Memories of War: A Series

A Glimpse of the Past

By Gene Merrill

When I parked in my driveway that cold day in February 1953, I had no idea I would soon be making a decision that would change my life forever. My wife, Colleen, nearly eight months pregnant, met me at the door with a letter from the U.S. Air Force offering me an opportunity to return to active duty in a voluntary status. We discussed our options and both agreed that this was our opportunity to return to the life we liked best. Two weeks after the birth of our son, I was *enroute* to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, for processing.

Things did not turn out quite as expected. Instead of an assignment to a flying unit in Korea, I was assigned to Carswell AFB where I would become the third pilot on the crew of a huge B-36 bomber. When I reported for duty it was obvious that I had too much rank and too much flying time to fill that position. Fortunately, and to the relief of the squadron commander, there was an opening for me as Adjutant of the 7th Field Maintenance Squadron.

Although I did not realize it at the time, that assignment was the best thing that could have happened to me. It put me on a career path that led to some very interesting staff assignments in the Administrative, Education, Operations and Personnel career fields. Still, I regretted that my opportunity for combat experiences would be limited. My chances of becoming a hero were pretty slim. Individually, my accomplishments seemed unimportant, yet when I added them together, my opinion changed.

During the first ten years, I held routine administrative positions and flew missions while based in Korea, the Philippine Islands and the United States.

When the rapid expansion of the airlift capability caused a shortage of C-130 pilots, I returned to the cockpit on a full time basis. When I completed combat crew training, I was transferred to the 772nd Troop Carrier Squadron as an Aircraft Commander and given a crew. The copilot and navigator were young and just out of school. The Flight Mechanic and Loadmaster were experienced. We had to be trained to fly in all known environments. We had to become proficient at flying dangerously low over the target area and using a tail hook or parachute to pull the cargo from the rear of the aircraft. We had to learn how to take off from unimproved runways as short as 2500 feet. We took our training seriously and were among the first new crews to become "Combat Ready." I have landed on tundra and a frozen lake in Alaska, in the deserts of California and scores of other places in North and South America, including the airport at La Paz, Bolivia,

elevation 13,000 feet. The C-130 was the best airplane that I have ever flown.

All too soon, I was transferred to headquarters where I became the Wing Mobility Officer. My first priority became that of developing a Mobility Plan for the rapid deployment of up to 75 aircraft including the equipment and supplies necessary to support 30 days of operations. A few months after the plan was published, I was given ten days notice to report to Travis AFB for transportation to Vietnam.

My tour in Vietnam was a busy one. Shortly before my tour was over, my name appeared on a list of officers who were to submit an application for an AFROTC assignment. I objected and was overruled. I wanted back into Tactical Airlift. Weeks later I found out that I would be going to Indiana University.

Three days after leaving Saigon, I joined my family at Langley AFB, Virginia. We were soon on our way to Bloomington, Indiana, to make a courtesy call and look for a house. I found the detachment commander at the old stadium on 10th Street where they were holding the annual President's Parade. It was there I met I.U. President Elvis Stahr and learned that I was to become the Professor of Aerospace Studies. After we had located a place to live, we spent the rest of my leave getting reacquainted. Our quality time ended the morning the North American van containing our household goods arrived as I was leaving for Maxwell AFB to attend the Air Force Academic Instructors Course at the Air University.

The sixties and early seventies were difficult times for those in the ROTC program. The cadets and officers became targets for those faculty members and students who were against the war in Vietnam. The activists were busy. Abusive and non-violent confrontations were a daily occurrence. There were no serious incidents, but the cadets and officers were verbally abused. It was known that I had recently returned from Vietnam.

In spite of this, the ROTC instructors took their jobs seriously. They were more than teachers; they were counselors, confidants, task masters, and a second father to each and every student. One of their objectives was to increase the image of the cadet corps to a level that was above criticism. Both the instructors and cadets achieved almost 100 percent participation in the campus blood drives, ushering at games and conducting successful clothing and toy drives for needy children. More importantly, they generally were good students and their conduct reflected favorably upon themselves and the University. Fortunately, President Stahr, Chancellor Wells, and most of the senior members of the faculty and staff recognized the value of educating tomorrow's military leaders and blocked the many efforts that were made to bar the detachment from the campus. While there, I received the Bronze Star and Air Medal for service in Vietnam and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. My departure for a special assignment at Andrews AFB was without fanfare or regret. ❖

Contributors

Dr. William Baldwin secured his undergraduate education from Indiana University and Butler University and his Optometry degree from Pacific University. He has been in private practice, served on the IU Optometric School Faculty and as Dean of two other Optometric faculties. He was active in professional consulting on river blindness in Africa. He has served in multiple volunteer capacities in Bloomington.

Marjorie Dogan worked first as a social worker in Lake County, Indiana. Later while raising five children, she volunteered for many years in the Mental Health Association of Porter County, Psi Iota Xi, and AAUW. She returned to Bloomington for 35 of the 39 sessions of Mini-University.

Ella Wade Fox is a native of Howe, Indiana, and a graduate of the University of Michigan. For Ella and other Red Cross workers in India in 1944, the enemy was disease. But it was there she met John, her future husband. They had once lived 50 miles apart in Indiana. John's career took them to Chicago, Washington, DC, and Beaufort, South Carolina, before they came to Bloomington in 2006.

Ardis Jerden is a native of Michigan and has lived in the Midwest during most of her life. After her husband's death in 1969, she began working for the Indianapolis Museum of Art, first as a volunteer, then as a staff member for more than twenty years. She has four children, eleven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Music is her therapy.

Eugene A. Merrell retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1978 after six years in the Reserves and 30 years on active duty. He was a Command Pilot on flying status for 31 years. He served four tours in the Philippines, Korea, and Vietnam where he was awarded the Bronze Star and Air Medal. After Vietnam, he was assigned to Indiana University as Professor of Aerospace Studies, then to the "elite" 1st Air Transport Squadron at Andrews Air Force Base. He retired at Kincheloe AFB, Michigan, and settled in Bloomington.

Barbara Restle is committed to a healthy environment supported by her interest in science and her experience raising cattle. She has lived in Vienna and among the people of Fiji. She is a graduate of Indiana University in Journalism. She loved piloting single-engine Cessnas.

Nancy Seward Taylor, a Bloomington native whose great, great grandfather constructed the fish above the Monroe County Court House, returned recently with her professor and author husband of 30 years to continue their retirement. Nancy, whose youthful portrait adorns a wall of the Brown County Playhouse, later pursued a professional stage career. She now reads weekly to residents of the Meadowood Health Pavilion.