

JIM'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My first recollection was when I was about 4 years old. I was sitting on a curb, watching cars go by. In those days there weren't that many cars to watch. We lived in Wilmette Illinois at the time. I spent the first three grades at a school about 3 blocks from home and walked to school. We owned a nice house in a nice residential neighborhood.

My dad had a plumbing business but he was an alcoholic. He had young apprentices working for him and he would let them do the work and spend most of his time in taverns. As a result they would mess up the job and he had to straighten it out. My mother would rant and rave at him for his drinking. On occasion he would take me along with him, to the taverns, and buy me a soda with the warning that I shouldn't tell mom. Of course I would tell her anyhow.

In those days, a lot of people would brew their own beer so my dad did too. He also went even further and made his own whiskey. The ingredients were apricots and prunes. We had what was called a Blind Pig. People, including the local police, would come to our house and buy the whiskey and beer.

My job was to bottle the beer and watch the still. I had to put a teaspoon of sugar into the beer bottle and then hand cap it. When the whiskey was being distilled, since the alcohol boiled at a lower temperature, I would keep testing the liquid that condensed out of the still by collecting it on a spoon and light a match to it. When it no longer burned, I knew that the alcohol was all distilled. This was done in the basement. In those days the utility meters were in the basement and one day I was watching the still and let the meter reader in to read the meter. My dad almost killed me that night. I don't know why it upset him because the police were some of his best customers.

The machine that dug ditches, in those days, was like a Ferris wheel with buckets instead of seats. As these buckets rotated they would dig the ditch. One of these machines was working close by. My dad was a taskmaster at the use of fowl language and I can recall climbing up on the wheel one evening and very accurately repeating most of that special vocabulary for a cute little girl that lived nearby. I guess she thought that I was the next thing to an adult to have acquired that ability.

I had a bicycle and would decorate it up with red white and blue paper ribbons, put cards on the frame so the spokes could strike it, (it made the sound of a motor) and ride in the fourth of July parade. One year another friend and I decided to take a little trip, after the parade, way up north of Willmette. I don't know how long we were gone but my folks weren't too happy when I came home. It seems that they had planned on a trip up to Round Lake. Incidentally, that was our favorite place to go on weekends. I remember a local guy would take me fishing. Another thing we did on the Fourth was we would go over to the local Stadium, in Evanston, to watch the fireworks. We never went into the stadium but sat in the grass outside of the building and watched the aerial stuff.

There was a cute girl that lived in the next block. Her street had a pretty steep hill and I would coast down the hill, on my bike, and make motor sounds with my mouth. I wanted her to think I had a motorbike.

We would visit my mother's brothers once in awhile and we really enjoyed that. I sort of had a crush on one of my cousins and she liked me too. We were going to be married some day. Most of the Steffens clan inherited lots on Willmette Ave. That was the next block over from where we lived. As a result I had a flock of cousins that lived there. We played hide and seek and had lots of fun together. My dad had a Model T and for some reason it wouldn't run, so all of my friends would push it up and down the alley while I "drove" it.

About the time I was ready for fourth grade, my dad went bankrupt and lost everything. From that time on we were like nomads and moved every few years. Our next house was a rental in Evanston Illinois. It was located across the street from a predominately black school. I attended fourth grade there and there was only one other white kid in the class. He and I became buddies and had no problems as the minority. We tried a little experiment one time. I stole a pack of my dad's cigarettes and we went over to a local park, climbed a tree, and lit up. I can't remember how HE made out but I got deathly sick. I finally went home only to find that my mom said that my little sister had gone to the store and I should go help her bring home the groceries. I never touched a cigarette again until I was over twenty years old. I have a vague recollection of having smoked corn silk at some time or other though.

Sometime later we moved to another apartment and I made new friends. One of the games we played was hide and seek. The apartment had a porch and we used to hide under it. One time I was running under the porch and ran into a crossbeam. I split my head open and my mom had to take me to the doctor. I can remember how he had to shave around the cut but I don't know if I had stitches or not. I figured that I would be scarred for life.

I don't know why we had to move again but we did about the time I was in sixth grade. I received my first taste of religion then because I attended a Catholic school. All the teachers were nuns and I can still remember sister Rosalima. She made a tremendous impression on me and I will always be grateful to her.

I got mixed up with a rich kid and he got me in trouble. He gave me a toy steam engine if I would draw some pictures. The pictures were of someone emptying their bowels and bladder (my version of porno). Somehow sister got to see that picture and called me on the carpet. She told me to stay away from that kid and, for punishment, she sent me over to the church to ask Jesus for forgiveness. I can still remember how I cried because I felt so bad. One of the things we had was singing lessons. I had a very proud moment when sister pointed me out to other nuns because I had such a large range and could reach such high notes.

At that time I showed signs of being inventive. I made a snow plow, shaped like a boat and would go up and down the local sidewalks clearing a path. I'm sure everybody appreciated having the walks cleared.

I did something else with the snow that wasn't very smart. I was on my way home from school and threw a snowball at a car. I then ran down a side street and just as I got to the next block I saw the car turning at the next corner and heading toward me. I ducked behind a wall but they spotted me. I don't recall what they said to me but I sure was frightened. I didn't throw snowballs at cars after that.

About a week before Christmas was St Nick's night. St. Nick would bring candy, nuts and other goodies. The doorbell would ring and we kids would run to the door and retrieve all the loot. We lived on the second floor and there was a long stair well with a window at the top landing. As we dashed to the door I saw St Nick (my dad) running passed the window. Somehow he convinced us that he didn't leave the gifts. We always had a Christmas tree. After we kids went to bed my mom and dad would decorate it and tell us that Santa did it. One year the tree was just outside of my bedroom and I opened the door while they were decorating it. That was the final straw and from then on I knew that there was no Santa. We usually got maybe two or three gifts and I remember two of my favorites. One was an Erector set and the other was a Sandy Andy. I played for days with those toys and built a lot of things with the Erector set. These were perfect for me because I had a very fertile imagination.

Our next move was to Glenview, Illinois during my seventh grade. We moved into a house that did not have a bathroom and we had to use an outhouse. I attended the local public school and, coming from the big city, I proceeded to call the local kids hicks. Needless to say they didn't agree with me, nicknamed me "Archie" and I ended up in a big fight at the school.

The next year we moved to a house a block away, with indoor plumbing but still stove heat. I built a getaway house in the wood shed. That's also when I started to earn my own keep. I caddied in the summer and set up pins, in a bowling alley, in the winter. I turned in all my earnings and was given a 25 cents a week allowance. I had my first "sex" lessons at the caddy shack. All the older caddies would try to impress us little kids and gave us distorted ideas as to what sex was all about.

In between times, at the bowling alley, I would devour books about the First World War airplanes. There was a Naval air base in Glenview and I would ride my bike over to watch the planes land and take off. I built a model and destroyed it by flying it into a clothesline. I also took some of our picture negatives and cut them up to make pontoons for my plane. I don't recall my parent's reaction but I'm sure they weren't overjoyed.

There was a cute girl that lived in back of all my cousins in Willmette. I wanted to go to see her but had no way to get there. I begged my dad to take me but no luck. I finally hitch hiked a ride and was picked up by some young guys with a convertible. There was no room in the car so I stood on the running board and one of the guys hung on to me. The road had a lot of curves and they really drove fast. I was petrified.

At this time, the local Catholic Church opened up a four- room school. My parents decided to send me there during my eighth grade. The nun had to teach several lower grades at the same time and there were only five kids in the first graduation class. Years later I gave that

priceless first ring to a girl and never got it back. I had my first taste of the theatre by being a “clock” in the school play.

My Dad found a beautiful German shepherd and brought it home. We named it Braun, after a popular movie called “Braun of The North”. He was a wonderful dog and really protected us kids. One day he was sleeping on a platform, at the foot of the back stairs. I snuck up on him and jumped on the platform. It scared the life out of him. That was a cruel thing to do but he just came up to me to be petted.

There was a bakery about a block away. It was my job to go there, once in awhile, and buy donuts for breakfast. . That was one job I never minded doing. We didn’t have a lot of money for food so it was a real treat to have a luxury item.

We always looked forward to Halloween. There wasn’t such a thing as “tricks or treats”. It was just tricks and we had a bunch of them. We would go to the local church and ring the church bells. One time, as we ran off, I tripped over a wire and it was lucky that I didn’t really get hurt. Another favorite trick was pushing over outhouses. My dad told a story about how they did the same thing. One of the kids knew that his dad was going to wait in the outhouse, to catch them, so they dumped it on the door so he couldn’t get out.

The river ran through town in Glenview and it would freeze over in winter. We could skate for miles on it. One year it was only about half frozen along the edge but we couldn’t wait for it to freeze over so we skated on the thin ice real close to shore. Typical dumb kids!

That same river had a lot of Crawdads in it and my dad and I would tie a chunk of raw liver on a string, toss it in the river, they would clamp their claw on it and we would drag it in. Then we would go down to the harbor on Lake Michigan, break off the tail and use it for bait. We caught a lot of Perch that way. I’m sure that must have been very painful to the Crawdads however.

I became very active in the daily masses, that we had to attend, and led all the prayers. The priest tried to talk my parents into letting me go to a seminary but my mom said I was too frail and probably wouldn’t be able to cut it. I wonder what kind of a priest I would have made.

The designated High School for Glenview students was a school in Winnetka named New Tier. All the towns on the North Shore (north of Evanston) were assigned to that school so it had a lot of very wealthy kids as students. I had no concept of going from room to room for each type of study. When I received my class assignment list I saw “lunch” listed. I asked one of the kids if that is where they taught you how to eat. I was petrified of girls and I can remember a girl asking me if I had a brother. I said no, even though I had a perfectly good brother at home.

My parents hired a couple older students for me to get a ride to school (there were no free busses in those days). I still caddied in the summer and set pins in the winter. One of my classes was “Wood Shop”. I really enjoyed it and made a full sized cedar chest (my sister still has it) and a night table. I have the night table. This training was very helpful in my later occupation

because it got me a job, during my Junior year, after school, in a Music school. It was about three miles and I walked there every day. It was a new idea where kids would make their own instruments and learn to play them. My job was to prepare the various parts and teach the kids how to assemble them. They made simple violins, flutes, recorders, and drums. I really enjoyed working there because he had a very capable full time man there and he took me under his wing. It sure made studying hard though.

During my senior year my boss started manufacturing a wind instrument called a Recorder. It dated back to the middle-ages. He told me that I had to give him more time so I just went to school a half day all through my senior year. The following year he gave me an ultimatum. Work full time or lose my job. I quit school.

My dad was a great guy, when sober. But drink turned him into an animal. He would beat up on mom and when I defended her, he would beat me up too and sometimes throw me out of the house. During my sophomore year, my mom kicked him out and he went to live with his mother.

This was during the depression and my mom did day work to support her three kids. They had a charity program at the school for those that were really poor. We fell in that capacity so my room advisor arranged for us to get a few groceries and some coal to tie us over. I carried my lunch and my mom gave me a little change to buy something warm to go with it. They even questioned why, while we were receiving charity, I was spending money for food at the cafeteria.

Not only was TV not invented, but even radio was a luxury in those days. I put together a Crystal set, attached it to an old Gramophone speaker, and it amplified it enough to play through a register on the upstairs floor. The register was above the living room so we could listen to it down there.

Our next move was to a real nice bungalow about a mile out of town. I remember that there was a bunch of plants in the front of the house. Ants sort of took over the area so I decided to get rid of them. I got some kerosene and dumped it on the anthill. It got rid of the ants but also killed all the plants. Between my earnings and my mom's we were getting by pretty well.

A couple of guys lived a few doors down and we became great friends. Their dad had a pickup truck and we would tear around the countryside in it. One time we trespassed on a private beach and were caught by the police. They took us to jail and threatened to lock us up. Boy were we scared! Charley was a crazy driver and broke every law there was. One time we drove to the south side of Chicago, going thru thirteen red lights. I don't know how we kept from getting killed, let alone getting a ticket. All this time a bunch of us were bouncing around in the back of the truck.

In the next block was my first real love. She would join us on these crazy things that we did and was just like one of the guys. I finally got up enough nerve to put my arm around her but never kissed her. They would dare me to kiss her but I was too shy. It was a few years later that a girl finally "taught" me how to kiss.

I played the piano by ear (no concept of chord structure so I would put a bunch of notes together with my right hand and just bang whatever my left hand hit for the base). It must have sounded awful but I was having fun. I would sing along with the piano and that's how I learned to sing with a vibrato.

Mom had to go to the hospital for an hysterectomy and I went to stay with my dad in Willmette. I would ride my bike to New Trier and on the way would pass a group of girls. One of those girls was Loretta. She had the most unimaginably beautiful blond hair. I thought she was gorgeous but too shy to talk to her. Later she and my buddy Harry started to date. While staying there I joined the young peoples club at the Catholic Church and believe it or not they had me bang away at the piano so they could dance.

Our next move was back to Evanston. Moving made it a lot easier for me to get to the music school because I could take the steam train. My sister and I joined the church choir and we had one of the best choirs around. I found a C melody saxophone for sale for \$10. I paid a dollar a week to buy it. I self taught myself to the point that I was able to join with an accordion guy and get a job in a tavern. In those days all the taverns had some kind of live music for dancing. In the meantime I took a few lessons and bought a Tenor sax and clarinet. The top band around was Red Peters band. Their sax man wanted to quit so they asked me to join them. That was the beginning of one of the most enjoyable things I ever did. I had a pretty good voice and sang, using a megaphone, until we finally bought a PA system.

We eventually started to play four nights a week at a new tavern called the Bungalow. I even wrote a song, called "When You're At The Bungalow." In the meantime, I was working full time at the school. We played for a young crowd that loved to dance and the Bungalow was the biggest place around. The kids would come out, with a date, have a few beers and dance all night for about a buck. A lot of the people came out as singles and everybody knew each other. It was a great way to have a good time for very little money. We packed the place every night.

Each one of us had a nickname. I was always horning in on everybody's date, between sets, so I acquired the name "The Wedge". I dated lots of girls but mostly only one time. A lot of the time I would date a girl and find that she was a third cousin because the Steffens were related to a lot of folks in Wilmette. Some of the time I would just go single with my buddy Harry and Loretta. I even dated my sister a few times.

One evening I spotted this gorgeous blonde. I couldn't take my eyes off her. I don't know if she noticed me but I found out later that she loved Tommy Dorsey's "Marie" and that was one of my best vocals. I didn't know her date so I couldn't horn in. She came out another time and her sister was with her. There was my opening. I cornered her sister and got an introduction. Her name was Rigmor Mogensen. I asked her for a date and she accepted. We went to a movie and she told me later that I talked all thru the movie. I guess I was trying to impress her.

She was dating a guy, who was a terrific dancer, and they came out with a group. From that time on she was there very often and, since I didn't have a lot of free time she would have

her date take her home and we would meet after I finished my gig. This went on for some time until her friend got suspicious and decided to check on her. That was the last time he brought her out to the Bungalow. I must have made some kind of impression on her because she then came out with her sister Gerda. Red thought Gerda was pretty fun too, so the four of us would go out after we quit for the night. America was at war then and Roosevelt put a cabaret tax on all the taverns with live music. That was the death toll for musicians.

About this time, I met a guy that had a fledging Motion Display business. He needed someone to build the displays and offered me a chance to get in on the ground floor. I thought it was a golden opportunity and joined him. In the meantime, I was fired from my job at the school. A cousin of mine hired me to run Automatic Screw Machines, twelve hours a night, seven days a week. I still found time to date Re, on weekends, and also put in some time at the business.

Because the Screw Machines were making parts for the war effort, I escaped the draft for a while. Finally I was classified as 1A and told to report to the draft board. My brother Ken, was in Army Ordinance in England, so I tried to get into the same classification. There had been heavy losses in the Naval service so I was told I could only join one of the branches of the Navy. Re had also told me that she didn't want me to be dressed in bell bottom trousers. Since my buddy Harry had joined the Marines two weeks earlier, I decided to do the same thing. A lot of the guys were getting married, when they entered the service, but I was afraid that I might be crippled and didn't want to be a burden to any wife after the war. I wasn't very happy to go because I didn't want to leave the display business. (While I was overseas, my partner sent me a "dear John" letter saying that he wouldn't need me anymore) Nice guy!!!

I was signed up at Great Lakes Training Center and was sent to San Diego for Boot Camp. On the way the train stopped in the middle of nowhere and we got off to stretch our legs. For some reason, some of the guys didn't make it back to the train. I often wondered whatever happened to them. I hated Boots with a passion. All the stories about tough sergeants were true. We got up before dawn and went thru a series of exercises with our rifles. After a time he would tell us we needed a rest so we had to hold our rifles out at arms length until our arms were ready to fall off. If anybody failed to keep holding up the rifle, they would have to run around the parade ground for punishment. You learned that you found stamina or were punished. At any time of the day or night the sergeant would drag us out and make us stand at attention. The drill sergeants would bet on who's platoon did it the fastest. One time one of the guys ran into a post and was knocked out. That put an end to that little game they played. I wanted to write letters home and the only time we could do it was at night. We were forced to go to movies at night so that took care of the little free time we had.

We all had to qualify on the M1 rifle. The first thing they had us do was practice the various positions. For some reason I couldn't lie properly in the prone position. Harry came over to help me overcome that problem but I never was comfortable. I just barely qualified but Harry made Expert.

When we finished boot camp, we were interrogated and, depending on what you did in civilian life, you were transferred. They were just forming a PR program at the San Diego Base,

called "The Hall's of Montezuma" and one of the things was a choir. Since I had sung in the church choir I was interviewed for the base band. I had to take a test on the clarinet and did a lousy job but they wanted singers so I was assigned to the band. Besides singing, I also played in the marching band for the many parades. It was great duty because we worked a regular day shift and had the evenings free.

On the weekends "The Hall's of Montezuma" band and choir would broadcast live over national radio. I helped the instrument repair guy keep the instruments in perfect condition too. I would have liked to stay there for the duration. I would go along with the band, at dances, and help with the equipment. I wanted to sing with the band but another guy already had the job. One time the bandleader asked me if I knew "Paper Moon". He decided to let me sing it without ever having rehearsed it with the band. There were about 1500 people at this dance and I had to sing it cold. I couldn't use notes, even though the regular guy did, and half way thru I froze and forgot the words. He never gave me another chance to prove that I was actually better than the regular guy.

After Harry finished boot camp he was stationed temporally in San Diego. Loretta came out and stayed with a cousin. Her husband was bed ridden so she took care of him while his wife worked nights. This was great because we were able to do liberty together. At the time I was 28 years old and Harry was about 23. The bartenders would usually ask me how old I was but never Harry. That used to gripe him.

In the meantime, I missed Re and decided that we should get married anyhow. She had to take a crash course on getting married to a Catholic. I borrowed a few dollars from my mom and sent it to Re to buy her own wedding ring and to pay for a roundtrip train fare from Chicago to our base in Southern California. Re had to go thru Los Angeles and transfer to a San Diego train. For some reason she expected me to meet her in Los Angeles. Confused, she barely caught the train to San Diego when she realized her mistake. I don't know what we would have done if she wasn't on the San Diego train. We would have missed each other completely. Back then cell phones didn't exist.

The night before Re arrived the three of us walked up and down San Diego streets to find a place for her to stay. We finally found a room but I had to use my last ten dollars for a week's rent. We were married the next day in the base chapel by the Catholic Chaplain. The wedding party consisted of just the four of us, and the Chaplain. One of the bandsmen, who also played the violin, wanted to play at the wedding but I refused his offer. Harry gave us a wedding present of \$2.50 and we used it to celebrate with a Chicken a la King dinner.

Shortly after Re came out, Harry shipped over seas and Re took over Loretta's job. I would go to the base in the morning and stay with Re at night. We had a two month honeymoon and we really enjoyed that period. Re had a two month round trip ticket and my shipping orders came just before the time ran out. She would have had to go home regardless. I set up a code to tell her where we were. Each letter would have the first letter of the second paragraph as a letter of the name of the place I would be. I think that, by the time I spelled Guadalcanal were ready to ship out to Guam.

About 1,500 Marines, myself included, boarded on a very small ship. We were sent to New Calendonia, a staging area. Our ship was all alone and we zigzagged all over the ocean to avoid submarines. When we crossed the equator we pollywogs had to go thru the hazing before "King Neptune's Court". They then shipped us to Guadalcanal, where the Third Marine Division was stationed. The first greeting we got was from a Sergeant. He was what they called an "Old Salt". He informed us that we were going into combat very shortly. Obviously that didn't excite us too much. One of the guys was so scared that he put his rifle to his mouth and pulled the trigger. Our first casualty!

The bandsmen were used as litter bearers in combat. We were attached to the navy medics. It was our job to go out and bring the wounded back to the aid station. We went thru some more training there so we stayed there for a few weeks. Every night a twin engine Jap plane would fly over and the motors were always out of sync.

When it was time to go, I was attached to the third battalion- third Marines, placed on a ship called an LST (landing ship tank). It was a very low draft type and could sail right up to the beach and the tanks could disembark. Our ship was used primarily as a troop transport however. Because it got very hot below deck, I decided to sleep on top deck. There were a couple oil drums on a rack and I rigged up my poncho, under the drums, and had me a very nice tent. I spent 52 days in that tent.

We didn't know it but our division was headed for Guam while another division was trying to secure Tinian. Until they were sure of victory there, they kept us in reserve and that's why we were on board ship so long. After a few weeks they put us ashore on an island called Enewitok for recreation. We cleared the brush for what was to be a ball field and ended up having parades instead. So much for R and R. While there, I caught a lizard and took it back on board for a pet. I pinched the wings off flies and fed them to my pet. It stayed with me for quite awhile but one day it disappeared. At one point a Jap plane attacked us and blew the bow off the ship in front of us. We never saw another enemy plane after that but some American planes would haul targets for our aircraft gunners. One time the gunners got too close to the plane and were read the riot act. At another time a destroyer pulled along side and sent over some fresh food. That was a real treat, after all the rations we had been eating.

Once they had Tinian under control, we headed for our destination. When we arrived, the Navy was already shelling and bombing Guam. As we watched the explosions, it seemed as though the whole island was on fire. It would seem that nothing could live thru that barrage. The following morning we were told to prepare to land. All the infantry had M1 rifles but they were too cumbersome for us litter bearers so we were issued light weight Carbines. It couldn't hit the side of a barrel at twenty paces but we weren't supposed to need them. We still had full packs however.

The ships anchored out of shore battery range. We climbed down rope ladders to waiting Higgins boats and Amtracks. The boats were very shallow and could run up to the beach, drop the bow and the troops would clamber up the beach. The Amtracks were able to climb onto the beach and the men would climb over the sides. All the time this was happening the mortars poured down on us and a lot of the boats were hit. I was in the fifth wave of boats and didn't get

hit. As soon as we got out of the boats we “moved out” to get away from the beach. Our group moved in quite a ways and secured a perimeter.

We were just below a hill and all these young kids (I was the old man) were having a ball tossing grenades down the hill on the Japanese. One of them stood up and was shot in the stomach. Another one of the guys and I helped him back to the beach for evacuation and by that time it was getting dark. We found out later that he died. We had no choice but to dig foxholes and spend the night there. I was never so scared in my life because the shells kept falling all around us all night. I still don't know how we found our outfit the next morning, but we did.

From that time combat was a blur. We would move out early each day as the battle line advanced, and dig two men fox holes at night. My partner had gone thru combat on Boganville, so I was glad to be with him. One time we found a nice gully to bed down in so we didn't have to dig a hole. That night it poured rain and the gully became a stream. Live and learn! One night I woke up to see a light in front of my eyes. It turned out to be some kind of luminous plant. Another time we were making our way, single file, thru a cane field. All of a sudden we broke out and there was a Jeep, loaded with hot chow. We had no idea where we were but they did. Boy, was a hot meal welcomed after days of K-rations!

At night, we would set up a perimeter around the command post. One night we were alerted to a Bonzai attack. We were bivouacked in a hollow and everybody left their foxholes and set up on the hill surrounding us. We were pinned down until that afternoon, when the ninth Marines came to our rescue. There were dead Japanese all over the place.

Once, I went back to my foxhole to get more ammunition and found a Major sitting in it and pointing a 45 at me. I had to quick tell him the password or he would have let me have it. After the battle, I was in a state of shock and the corpsman gave me something to calm me down. He was an old petty officer and nothing seemed to upset him. Later, as the campaign rolled on, the corpsman saw I was exhausted and allowed me to ride in the jeep. The only injury I ever received was when I fell down a hill and got tangled up in barbed wire. However, my injury didn't rate a purple heart.

When the island was secured, the Third Marine Division set up it's base there. At first we just would sleep on the ground next to our partners. One night there was a small earthquake and it woke me up. In my sleepy mind I thought that George was sure a restless sleeper. After a time we were issued tents and slept four guys to a tent. We once again became musicians and played for a lot of parades. We lost about 30 percent of our men, during the campaign, so a flock of recruits joined us. The band was divided into 3 sections consisting of a dance band and marching band. Each one was used for separate occasions and we did a lot of concerts at the Naval base and surrounding islands. We used twin engine C47's for transport. The seats were just a long bench on each side of the plane.

I wanted to play in the dance band and didn't make it. I wrote to Re and told her how disappointed I was and, when the Lieutenant checked my letter, he arranged for me to join the dance band. We would play for all the drunken officers' and nurses' dances. Another good side effect was that the officers would see to it that the band got their share of drinks. One time a

loaded guy came up to me and said, "Madame can you play such and such a piece?" The guys heard him and I acquired another nickname. I hated it and the more I resented it the more the guys used it. About this time, I advanced to corporal.

The CB's set up a long sink, with running water so we could wash our clothes. We would then place the uniforms under our mattress and it would do a good job of pressing them. A lot of the guys were too lazy to wash their clothes so I started a laundry. I don't remember how much I charged but I did ok. We would be issued beer and coke. I didn't care for the warm beer so I would trade my beer for cokes. It was nice to eat in a mess hall and have good chow. That's when I was introduced to SOS. It was chipped beef on toast and was called, *Shit on a Shingle*. It was one of my favorite meals. The USO set up a tent, next to our unit, and we were able to make records to send home. One of the guys played guitar and accompanied me singing, "I'll be home for Christmas." I sent it home to Re. They had games and refreshments too, so we used the place quite a bit.

Harry was stationed on Guam for a while, so we got to see each other a few times. Even though the island was secure, there were still a few Japanese hiding in the jungle and caves. Harry tells a story about him. He was in paymasters, so he never saw combat. One night, while on Guam, he fell asleep on his arm and it became numb. He woke up, felt his arm with the other hand and yelled, "Nips". He never admitted to his buddies that he was the one that woke everybody up.

We had a couple guys that were sharp operators. Somehow they confiscated a huge tent and wooden flooring to go with it. Prior to the tent, the bands rehearsed in the open. This got us out of the elements and was great. Someone came up with the idea that we should invite the local girls and have a dance. They all looked like natives but the guys were starved for female company so they began to look pretty good. I was on the committee, so I tried to make the "Gooks" feel welcome. I walked up to a fat gal and suggested that she get up and dance. She misunderstood and said, "I would love to". It must have been quite a site. I weighed about 130 and she was all of 200 pounds. I was very careful after that.

One time a few of us were wandering around and found a cluster of bananas. They were still very small but that didn't bother us. We took them and buried them until they got ripe. In retrospect I have realized that we had stolen some of the native's food.

We had a First Lieutenant replace the bandmaster and I don't know how much he knew about music. When we gave concerts all band sections played together. We had an invitation to play for the Naval Base and he started to have us rehearse a pretty difficult piece of classical music. After a short time, he said that we knew the music so we didn't need to rehearse. In the middle of the concert everybody lost their place or something, while only one lonely clarinet knew where we were and kept playing. After a bit the rest of the band joined in and finished the piece. It was a disaster.

After the Third Marine Division replaced all it's casualties, they prepared for combat again. Since we lost thirty percent of the band members, the General was upset because it wreaked havoc with his parades, so he decided that being a litter bearer was too dangerous a job

for band members and were re-assigned as Command Post Guards. The end result was we were off the battle lines and obviously safer.

This time we boarded a large transport ship and headed out to sea. We docked in the harbor at Iwo Jima. The casualties were so great that they used us as medics to help in the operations of the wounded. The Japanese built caves. Each cave had at least two others to protect it. The casualties were enormous. We stayed on board ship for twelve days tending to the wounded. I couldn't take the sight of some of the mangled guys so they just used me to tend to them after their operations. We would watch the dive bombers peel-off and head straight down to drop their bombs. The Japanese didn't use fighters against our planes, but used Kamikazes instead to dive the ships. It was frightening because a lot of them got past our fighters and aerial gunners. Every so often you would see a ship get hit. We were still aboard ship when they raised the flag on Mt Suribachi. The whole harbor let out a yell when that took place.

When the lines had moved inland enough, the Command Post went ashore and we were assigned as guards. We dug in and took turns on watch at night. When we landed, we couldn't see how they ever got past the defenses. It was no wonder that the casualties were so great. By this time, they started to serve us ten-in-one rations. These were complete dinners and served ten guys. We would heat them up. They sure beat the K-rations. The air force was able to use one of the airfields and would fly right over our heads. They sure were a beautiful sight. CP guard duty was very uneventful, but a lot easier than being a litter bearer. We didn't lose a single man on Iwo.

When the island was secured, we shipped back to Guam and back to parades and concerts. It was great duty. Once they had secured Okinawa, our next assignment was the islands of Japan. Fortunately for us, they dropped the bombs and Japan surrendered.

They used a point system to ship us back to the states. I had earned 50 points so I was sent back in the first part of December. We were placed aboard a lumbering liberty ship and it took forever to get back. I was a sergeant by then and was assigned "sergeant of the guard" for one of the nights. Other than combat, I had never been on guard duty. We disembarked at San Diego and there to greet us was the Salvation Army, with fresh milk and goodies. After drinking powdered milk for all those months, it was like Nectar from heaven. Another food I really missed was fresh lettuce. I always will have a warm spot in my heart for them rather than the Red Cross. I was then sent to Great Lakes Naval station for discharge.

While I was in the service my mother used my '39 Pontiac, so when I came out I repossessed it. Re was sharing an apartment and I can't remember who she shared it with, but we took over. It had a living room, a bedroom and a tiny kitchenette and was located on the Northeast side of Chicago. My former company had to re-hire me and they were, by now, way out on the Southside of Chicago. I worked there for a short time but was not happy with the long trip to work. My cousin was now foreman at a place called Dukes Co. and they were located on the north side of Chicago. They had screw machines so he hired me to work there. In the meantime, Red Peters Band reformed and we played for weddings and such.

I never felt that a wife should have to work so three months after I returned, Re quit work and never took another job. Like most GI's that came back, we had Sharon immediately. The apartment was like an oven all summer and we suffered. Sharon would lie in a pool of sweat but never complained. One of the guys, named Dick, worked at Dukes and lived in an old mansion, converted to apartments. The top floor became available so we moved there. It had two small bedrooms, one larger one, a kitchen, living room, and a sunroom. An artist had lived there and hand painted all the walls so it was very unique.

The owners were two old ladies and lived on the first floor. Dick had a daughter about Sharon's age and lived on the second floor. It was rough on Re because they found all kinds of reasons to complain about the kids. In the winter the place was usually very cold and in the summer very hot. They heated the hot water with wood so we had to fight for hot water. Housing was very scarce after the war, so we had to take whatever they dished out. Starting out we had to buy furniture and my car gave out so we were living from one paycheck to the next. There was a little grocery store in the neighborhood and I would charge all our groceries all week and pay up on payday. Our vacations were spent at the Petersen farm. I would help out by working in the fields at harvest time. I would sit on the Binder and bind the shocks of grain. In the evenings we would all go to the local taverns and have a few drinks. Everybody knew each other so it was a lot of fun. Poor Jim and Agnes had to get up at 4:00a.m. to milk the cows while we slept in.

The guy that sent me the "dear John" letter died and the business was for sale. I thought it had tremendous potential so I talked my cousin Howard into helping me buy it. We used his house as collateral, took out a loan, and bought it for \$1,500. We used his basement as a shop. From that time on, in my spare time I worked the business seven days a week. We found a young art student that would paint the pictures on blank panels and I would design and build the motion part of the display. It was fascinating work and I had high hopes for its future. In retrospect, I realize it made Re's life very lonely. I would come home from work, eat supper, go over to Howard's house and finally come home about 11:00 p.m.

In 1952, I realized that I had no future in Dukes Co., so I answered a couple ads and accepted a job at Alloy Manufacturing Company. Located on the south side of Chicago, it was a long way to travel. I was assured they planned to move north. They never did. I took over the screw machine department and it was fun because they had some very sophisticated machines. I enjoyed running those machines so much that I couldn't wait until my vacations were over to get back on the machines. I made more money too, so things got a lot easier. One week after I took the job, Gary was born. We would have the relatives over for holidays and Re would fix wonderful dinners. During this period, however, Re almost had a nervous breakdown because of the pressures and living conditions there.

We finally found an apartment in a two flat building. It had three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, living room and large kitchen. Re was in her glory because the owners lived on the first floor and were young people. We bought a used piano, put it in the basement and I sprayed it white. Sharon could now take piano lessons. Sharon went to a Catholic school too, which Re graciously accepted. It was only a couple blocks from the house so she could walk to school. We lived there until I was able to save a few dollars toward buying our own home.

We shopped around until we found a Georgia-style house on Melvina Street. It had a finished basement, including a bar, and a half bath. The first floor had an eat-in kitchen, living room, dining room and sunroom. The second floor had two bedrooms, a third one off the middle bedroom, and a full bath. It had a separate two-car garage. We fell in love with it and got a 30 year mortgage at 5 ½ percent. We finally had it made.

By now, both kids were going to St Ferdinand's School, Re became involved in school activities, and we joined a newly formed young married couples club. They would have dances and Red Peters' band played for them. It was a happier time for Re because she got to know a few of the mothers and she would get together with them to shop and visit.

On occasion we would have friends over for barbecues and family gatherings too. The kids always enjoyed these times because there would be other kids to play with. Once in a while, we would get together with Red and his wife and play cards. Re really enjoyed those times.

By this time, I became a bit disillusioned with the future of the motion display business and just spent enough time to keep it going, but did not build any more units. We eventually sold it for one dollar because it took us a long time to even find a buyer. This made it possible to spend more time with the family.

When Gary was in high school I gave him a line control model airplane. He would fly it in the neighborhood park and got pretty good at it. Later, he bought a radio control plane and learned to fly it too. When he went to college, he decided to quit and gave the plane to me. That got me started and I flew RC planes for years.

My mother decided to increase her social life so she wanted to join the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion. She talked me into becoming a member so she could join. I joined, became active and after a short time she quit. It was a very active post, with a lot of young veterans, so we made a lot of new friends. They too had dances and Red Peters played for all of them. I joined the color guard and we would perform a ceremony for any deceased members, plus march in parades. I eventually became Sergeant-at-Arms and led the various activities. They tried to get me to go up for Commander, but Re would have killed me if I did. That was a very demanding, time consuming job so I begged off. I also did a lot of flying.

About this time the son of the owner of Alloy graduated from college, and became very active in running the business. Up to that time we were not unionized. Most of the employees worked on piecework. They would be paid so much for each part they completed. The plant superintendent had a good relationship with them and they were quite happy with their earnings. When Avrum, the son, joined the company, he decided that the rates were too high and proceeded to lower all of them. Six months later, we were unionized.

The superintendent was very unhappy with the new setup and decided to leave the company and form a small machine shop of his own. I had gradually stopped running screw machines by this time and was doing a lot of engineering. I devoured all the technical books I

could find and I developed a lot of short cuts and automatic equipment that made operations more efficient.

The bosses decided that I should take over the superintendent's job, but I still continued to do a lot of engineering too. I prepared time-studies on all the new jobs and acted as go between Avrum and the employees. It wasn't easy because he constantly tried to do things that would upset the employees. I had to sit in on the union negotiations and it would infuriate me at some of the demands. One of the biggest things that they would press for, besides more money, was more paid time-off. I was salaried and never had to ask for a raise. We in management were paid a bonus and received it at the Christmas parties.

I never told the kids that they should go to college. It was taken for granted. Sharon decided to go to Northern Illinois. That's where she met Jim. It was nice because she was such a short distance from Chicago. Gary was interested in Astronomy and decided to go to The University of Arizona. We would drive all the way down there to deliver him and pick him up. That's where he met Cathy.

After the kids were in college, our Friday night ritual was to do our grocery shopping and I would sit in the car and go over the efficiency reports, of the previous week, while Re shopped. We then would take the groceries home and go to dinner some place. One of the meals we enjoyed, since it was Friday, was Lobster Tail. At another time, we went to a pizza place. We always had a cocktail too. It was a fun time.

After Sharon and Jim graduated from college, they decided to get married, even though Jim planned to go on to graduate school. On the night before the wedding, Jim's parents took us to a restaurant for the bridal party dinner. While there, we had a cloudburst and it flooded our basement. Somehow we survived that mess and the rest of the wedding went off beautifully. For their dance, they turned off all the lights and turned on ultra violet lights. The effect was breathtaking.

Red got bursitis in his arms and had to quit playing. I found another concertina player and we formed another group. We played a lot of weddings, anniversaries, and used different kinds of instrumentations. One day, Les brought in some gal that he was messing around with and she became our female vocalist. Les let her sing whatever she wanted and she started singing some of my songs. She didn't have that great a voice either. At best, the band never was as good as Red's. So after 40 years, I decided to quit. I gave the PA system to the Legion Post and that was the end of my professional musical career.

For our 40th Anniversary, Sharon wanted to give us a cruise. I was all for it, but Re would have no part of it. She asked what we would like in place of it. We decided that an organ would be fine, so I picked out a used one. It had the real organ sound and lots of automatic features. I learned to play it and enjoyed it for years. After many years it started to have a lot of things wrong with it and parts were impossible to find, so we gave it to Habitat for Humanity. I really loved that organ and it broke my heart to part with it. I had never learned to coordinate my left and right hands on the piano but the organ was a different technique and I had no trouble.

While Jim was getting his undergraduate degrees, they were introduced to Amway. They showed it to us and I thought it looked like a perfect way to have a business after I retired. Re wasn't happy with my decision, but went along with it. She did the bookwork and I did the presentations, attended meetings and delivered the products. We never really got it off the ground and I spent a great deal of time trying to build it up. Re didn't like to be with people and Amway was a people business, so we had a lot of bad discussions over it. Finally after a number of years, I decided to give it up. I was never destined to have a thriving business of my own. There were a lot of tax breaks and it paid for an all expense trip to California to "show" my sister the business.

While Gary was still at The University of Arizona, he and Cathy decided to get married. They had a very simple but beautiful wedding and rented an apartment in Tucson. When he graduated, Gary was disillusioned about making Astronomy his career and they moved to Madison, Wisconsin to do post grad work in computers. They stayed at Cathy's mother's house until he got his Masters in computers. It was nice because we could run up and visit them. After that they moved back to Tucson and Gary got a job with IBM.

After I had been with Alloy twenty years, they decided to give me a trip as a gift. Avrum knew that Re had always wanted to go to Hawaii, so he told me to pick out what we wanted and we selected a two week trip.

We really enjoyed it and did a lot of things over there. Re didn't try it, but I loved snorkeling. When we visited the volcano, the wind blew off Re's scarf and it floated down into the cauldron. The volcano Goddess was called Madame Peli, so everybody said she offered a sacrifice to Madame Peli. We went out on a Catamaran. Re and I picked two seats at the front of the boat. When we got out into the ocean, we got soaked by the big waves. That gave the rest of the people a good laugh. One evening we had a banquet with all the drinks we wanted and anything on a fantastic menu. I had two Martinis and got loaded. I ordered a whole lobster and couldn't eat it. The next morning the guide had another thing scheduled, but I was too sick to leave the room.

There was a young couple in the group and they had two girls. They enjoyed our company and we did a lot of things together. After we returned to the states, they invited us over to their house.

Avrum wasn't happy with the bottom line, so he decided to bring in a hot shot from one of the big automotive companies. I became Vice President in charge of engineering. I was able to do the thing I enjoyed the most and designed a lot of very sophisticated equipment. I really enjoyed it a lot more than having all the headaches of supervision. The hot shot was the kind of guy that took credit for stuff that others did, so he and I didn't have any lost love for each other. He managed the reports to look like we had suddenly become very efficient. For some reason he snowed Avrum and it took several years before Avrum woke up and fired him.

When I reached my 62nd birthday, I decided to retire. VCR's were just becoming popular so I received one from the company. I also received a plaque with a gold plated universal joint

on it. The shop people gave me a gold necklace with the image of Christ on it. I appreciated that necklace more than the much more expensive VCR.

My retirement didn't last too long. They asked me if I would like to work part-time as an engineering consultant. It turned out to be great because I could work as much or little as I wanted. A new control system, using fluidics became available. Using air valves, instead of electrical components, I was able to do everything by air valves instead of electrical relays. It was a fascinating concept. I built a lot of fancy machines, using this concept and loved it.

Alloy bought a competitor in Davenport, Iowa and they asked me to go there to check it out. I stayed at an apartment with a couple of their employees during the week, and came home on weekends. After a couple weeks, Re came along. The other guys moved out and we set up housekeeping there. It was a fun thing that lasted for a number of weeks. I checked how they operated and did some efficiency changes. When the purchase was final, I came back to Alloy and supervised the move of their equipment. The new company needed a lot of improvements and I even had to completely redesign the electrical system on one of the machines. Not only did all this give me some additional earnings, but gradually prepared me for full-time retirement.

Chicago winters were nasty. We would get snow in November and it wouldn't leave until March. The local streets were not cleared so driving was a mess. Our garage was on the alley and we were the second house from the side street. That meant shoveling, not only in front of the garage, but also all the way to the side street. Because the lot size was small, there was no place to put the snow.

Shortly after I finally quit working, we decided to move. We considered Arizona or New Mexico, but didn't like the lack of green landscapes. We had made a number of trips to visit Sharon in North Carolina and liked it. We read a book telling the best places for retirement and Hendersonville, North Carolina was on top of the list. That was all we needed. We rented a house there and looked to see what was available. Nothing appealed to us so we found a nice lot, with a wooded section, and decided to build our new home. It was located on a rise with a view of a valley and a mountain. I drew up eight different plans until Re was finally satisfied. The property owner was a builder and was able to use my drawing to build our dream house. It took him two months from ground breaking to completion of the house. He and four other men did nothing but work on our place. We had perfect weather and that allowed them to work every day.

I spent everyday at the site and made sure everything was built the way I wanted. It had a large living and dining room combination, a large master bedroom, with a walk in closet, two smaller bedrooms, an eat-in kitchen, two baths, and full basement with space for a two-car garage. It also had a deck on two sides. I later finished enclosing the garage and built a recreation room in the basement. The location was high enough that we never had to worry about flooding. It was on a dead end road so there was no traffic and was only three miles out of town. It was not in the city, so taxes were at a minimum. Being at an elevation of 2,000 feet made the weather constantly ten degrees cooler than the surrounding area. I loved living in the mountains, but Re missed the big city.

Re and I usually walked about 45 minutes every morning and most of the time we would go someplace for breakfast afterwards. That was Re's favorite meal out. The weather was mild enough, even in the winter, and we had very little snow. This meant that we could walk just about every day and I also was able to fly my airplanes several times a week. We bought a treadmill for inclement weather. We also had a rowing machine, exercise bike, and stepper for additional exercise.

One time, when Sharon and Jim came to visit, she got the idea that the deck would be great for using a telescope. She found one in a store and bought it for me. Unfortunately, it was not well made and did not work too well. Gary came to visit and said that he would buy me a top quality one. He sent an Orion 4 ½ reflector type. It was a beautiful scope and I had a lot of fun using it. A couple years later he decided that I should have a better one and sent me a Meade eight inch. The larger Meade opened a whole new set of universe images that the smaller scope couldn't do, making it possible to now see "deep sky" stuff. The deck was unstable, so I set up my scope on the driveway. I joined a newly formed Astronomy club and we would have "star parties" away from the city lights. They would always have something interesting at the meetings and I learned a lot about our universe.

Unfortunately, Gary's marriage didn't last and he and Cathy were divorced. It was very traumatic for him. Lani stayed with her mother and Brad stayed with Gary. Gary bought another house and Cathy stayed at their old home. He became very active in his church and finally met a wonderful girl there. They dated for a while and realized the Lord had brought them together and decided to get married. Re, Sharon, and I flew out together to Tucson to attend the wedding..

It almost turned out to be a disaster. At the airport, while loading our baggage into the rental car, I passed out. The Lord watched over me and a woman rushed over, found no pulse and proceeded to administer CPR. She saved my life. Later the ambulance arrived. They rushed me to the hospital and I was placed in intensive care. They determined that I had experienced a cardiac arrest. My chest was sore as a boil for weeks from the CPR. I finally was released from the hospital in time to attend the wedding. It was a beautiful affair and they had a lot of friends and family in attendance.

When we got back to our hotel room, Re had a very bad nose bleed. Sharon rushed her to emergency and the hospital emergency staff were able to stop the bleeding. We went back to the resort. A couple hours later, Re's nose started to bleed again and we rushed back to the hospital. We had to stay in Tucson an extra night because Re had a third attack. All the way home on the plane, she kept having more nose bleeds and the stewardess helped her keep it under control. All in all, we sure messed up Gary and Laurie's wedding.

My heart was very weak and I had intestinal problems all the next summer. The doctors finally found the right combination of medication and I started to feel better. I lost about twenty pounds and it took quite a while for me to gain it back. I was not able to do any strenuous work, so I hired our neighbor Eddie to cut the lawn. I wasn't happy with the way he did it, but had no choice. Eddie's lawn mowing cost me \$1,000. Re also started experiencing shortness of breath and began taking heart medication.

Sharon and Gary decided that we couldn't stay in Hendersonville any longer. The choice was to either move to Raleigh or a nursing home. I was violently opposed to moving because my roots were in Hendersonville. I had my flying friends, my Legion friends and the Astronomy club. The thought of starting over at 89 years old didn't appeal to me.

In any case, we put the house on the market and made a trip to Raleigh to begin house hunting. Once again, we didn't like what we saw, but finally we spotted a new house in a new subdivision. We fell in love with it, and even though it had a second floor, we put in a bid for \$2,000 less than the asking price. We went back to Hendersonville and applied pressure on the real estate agency to sell our house.

The builder rejected our bid and sold it for the asking price. He had a lot across the street, so we decided to pay the full price and have him build one just like it on that lot. After about two months, we found out that there was a lien on the property that would prevent construction. After a period of time we decided that we had better find something positive, so we got our deposit back. We decided to keep looking. If our house sold, we would store our furniture and stay at Sharon's beach house temporarily, until we found something else. In the meantime, we were showings our house a lot and received some bids. Bidders were all trying to buy the house for a lot less than what we were asking. Since we hadn't found a place, I rejected them.

We went back to Raleigh and finally found a new subdivision, only ten minutes from Sharon. They had a number of different styles to choose from. We considered a nice model but realized it had all the bedrooms upstairs and it would have been a lot of house to keep clean. We paid down on another model, which had one bedroom downstairs and two upstairs. In the meantime, the doctor said that Re shouldn't climb stairs. A ranch became available and it was almost finished. It was the answer to our dilemma. Since it was the same builder, he applied the down payment to the new model and we finally had a home. Now we owned two houses.

After a few more showings on the old house, a couple from New Hampshire offered full price for it and we accepted. Another advantage was that they weren't too anxious to take possession. That fit right into our plans because the new house wouldn't be finished for another two months. When they finally took possession, we stored our furniture in Hendersonville and set up temporary housekeeping in the beach house. On all these trips to Raleigh, we had been bringing carloads of stuff and storing it in Sharon's playroom.

While all this was taking place, Re's health got steadily worse so it was a very difficult time for her to be packing our things and getting ready to move. As a result we were still working on it the day the movers came. Sharon came to Hendersonville on the last day and helped us get finished. We loaded both cars and headed for Raleigh. We only had to stay in the beach house for a couple weeks before closing on the new house. In retrospect, I am convinced that all the confusion of finding the right house and selling our old house was completely arranged by the Lord. Everything fell into place at the right time. If our house had sold right away we would have had no place to go. The sale of the house waited until we had found a place. We actually picked out four houses but something kept us from closing the deal until we found the right one,

Re felt rotten and had no desire to do anything after we moved in. It took days to get all the boxes unpacked and the house arranged. She started to take on fluid and looked nine months pregnant. She had no appetite and the doctor finally put her in the hospital and tapped her. They wanted to do some tests, but she refused. During this period Savanna was born, so Re got a chance to see and hold her.

After a few days Re's health seemed to rally and the hospital sent her home. Her appetite picked up and we thought that she was getting better. The swelling came back and the doctor tapped her in his office a second time. The medical professionals wanted to do a colonoscopy, but Re refused. Her condition got worse and they finally decided that she had colon cancer. Even though we had left instructions that we wanted to be present when they told her, the PA came in and told Re they had found cancer. When we arrived, Re had a pile of Kleenex on the table next to her indicating she had been crying. Her first words were that she wouldn't be here for Jimmy's wedding. Sadly, she was right..

The doctor's office arranged for home care and after two weeks put Re under Hospice care. I had to give her medication every six hours, around the clock. After the first sign of pain, they put her on Morphine and she never had any more pain. She slept most of the time but was very alert when she was awake. She lost her appetite and the only thing she would eat was a little chicken broth. When I would take her to the bathroom she would just sit there half asleep for over a half hour. Sharon was a jewel all this time and neglected her family to help take care of Re. She would prepare meals and the whole family would come over and eat at our house. Gary came out and spent a few days which made Re happy.

Gradually, as time grew short, everybody, including Agnes and all the grandchildren came to visit. Even our old Hendersonville neighbors came, so she saw everybody that she wanted to see. She even waited until Laurie was able to come. When it became obvious that Re was dying, Sharon made all the arrangements for the cemetery crypt, urn and undertaker.

In the end, Re began to hallucinate during the last two weeks and finally went into a coma. The hospice nurse inserted a catheter so that wasn't a problem. Gary stayed on because it appeared that the end was near. Her breathing became very irregular and she would stop breathing for over a minute at times. This is one of the last things that occurs and each time she would hold her breath, we thought it was the end. We called the nurse because she was moaning as if in pain. She came and told us that she would not last more than 24 hours. The following morning I was holding her hand when she gave a couple short breaths and stopped breathing. It was God's plan to have Gary here because I became a basket case. Gary called Sharon and she came right over. They called the nurse and she came very quickly. Because she was under hospice care, the home health care worker was able to check Re's vital signs, eliminating the need for coroner's verification. The nurse called the undertaker and she and Sharon prepared Re for pick-up. When they took her away, Gary, Sharon and I stayed in the small bedroom until they had left. They left a red silk rose behind on Re's pillow. I will cherish it always.

Re was raised a Lutheran, but never practiced her faith. I prayed for years that she would find God. A couple days before she died Sharon, Gary and I asked the Lord to help her find the

way. The next day we prayed with her and she accepted Christ. She also forgave me for not being the best husband. I can't believe how the Lord has guided us through this most difficult period in our lives.

Another coincidence was that our Raleigh neighbor is an ordained Lutheran minister. He conducted a beautiful memorial for Re at the cemetery chapel. The cemetery is only five minutes from the church so I visit her every Sunday after mass. I asked the Lord for a sign that she had made it to His kingdom and that night I felt a tapping on the back of my neck. I had never had that sensation happen before so I knew it was my sign that she made it.

I can't praise the hospice enough for Re's care and helping us bear the inevitable. They were at our beck and call at any hour of the day or night. When she needed special equipment, it was there the same day. Afterwards, they sent me letters to help, offering sessions for bereaved families to attend for therapy.

As I write, it is now four months since Re died. I still miss her terribly, and have bad moments, but I'm learning how to carry on. I have Sharon and all the grandkids close by and they are a tremendous help. I also have that adorable new great grandchild too. I only wish Re could be here to watch her grow-up.

I don't know what the Lord has in store for me. I'm sure He has something in mind and that is why He has kept me on this earth for ninety years. But I look forward some day to being with Re again in paradise.

Wake Forest Reporter, David Leone, did a nice piece on Jim.