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It is said that everyone now over the age of 60 or so remembers where he or she was when the news of two events was announced: the assassination of John Kennedy and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It is true. At the time of the latter, I was a 9th grade student at Otis Central School and was spending an up to that moment a pleasant Sunday afternoon at my brother's home. It was nearly dusk when the phone rang and the caller asked if we had the radio on; when we replied that we didn't, he told us the Japanese had bombed the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. While my family had followed closely the progress of the war in Europe and disagreed among themselves about the possibility of American involvement, this announcement came as a great shock. The next day, our Social Studies teacher, Miss Trimmingham, brought a radio to class and we heard President Roosevelt call December 7 a "day which will live in infamy" and ask Congress for a Declaration of War against

Japan and Germany. (2)

Did we look around our class that day and wonder if some of our friends would be leaving to fight in that war? Did we believe it would last until most of us were in the service or in college? That I don't remember. But did we have a feeling that our lives would be dramatically affected by this? Yes, I do remember that!

Before long we learned that William Merithew of Otego had been killed at Pearl Harbor, thus becoming the first casualty of WWII from Otego. The draft was in effect and young men were being called to service. Also many volunteered - some finishing high school first and others leaving before graduation, completing their education when they returned. Two of our teachers, James Sears and Julian Ferris enlisted as well as Eleanor Aske our school nurse. Our principal, Orlo Nichols was unable to serve because of poor eyesight but he became very involved in the war effort through the National Guard, Red Cross, and Civil Defense. He formed a drill team at school and kept with it even after there were only girls left for the

squad. I remember marching around ⁽³⁾ the gym with a wooden rifle. I have no idea what our purpose was but I guess we felt we were doing something.

High school kids did help in a variety of ways. When rationing (gas, shoes, sugar) started, we helped when people had to sign up for their coupon books and tokens. We sold war bonds and helped collect items to pack in boxes to send to servicemen. Later on, several of us signed up to be airplane spotters. We took turns spending a few hours at night in the cupule of the Lewis Mansion which was a large, unoccupied home on the present site of the post office. We kept a ~~long~~ log of every plane which went over. And, of course, it became our patriotic duty to write to every young man we knew and to hope that we would see them when they came home on leave.

Our school life was affected by the war in several ways. Current Events became the Number One class and we followed eagerly the campaigns of the armies as they fought in Africa, Italy and the Pacific area. We were in despair over the early reversals they suffered.

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The courses of study reflected the interest in world events - for example, Trigonometry which was hard enough for me to begin with, turned into "spherical trig" with "great circle routes" and this remained a complete mystery. Because of gas rationing, inter-school sports were cancelled but by the time I was a senior, there were only two boys in our class (originally about thirty) so there wasn't much of a sports program. In preparing this piece, I looked up old yearbooks which for a few years were called War Scrapbooks and were little more than mimeographed copies due to restrictions on printing during the war. They had a decidedly military theme.

Outside of school, there were the war related activities I mentioned but things I had looked forward to - going to movies & dances, dates - just didn't happen very much. Everything was geared around who was getting ready to leave or was home for a little while and time always seemed so short!

It was ironic that for the first time in their lives perhaps, some people were achieving financial security. Farm prices rose and with a defense plant in the

area, many were "making good money"⁽⁵⁾
However, most would have exchanged
~~their~~ ^{this} relative prosperity for assurance
that the war would soon be over
and their acquaintances and loved
ones would be home safely.

I remembered black outs, meatless
meals, sugarless cookies, pictures of
enlistees and draftees in the papers.
I remembered blue service stars in
windows - sometimes exchanged for
gold ones, signifying the death of the
service person. I remembered radio broadcasts
from London and hearing Big Ben striking
mid-night. I remembered listening to
H.V. Kaltenborn and Edward R. Murrow
and Lowell Thomas, President Roosevelt and
Winston Churchill. I remembered reading
announcements ~~accounts~~ of movie stars and sports
heroes as they left for active duty -
Clark Gable, Jimmy Stewart, Phil Rizzuto,
Joe Di Maggio. I remembered singing "White
Cliffs of Dover", "God Bless America", "Right
in the Yank's Face", "White Christmas",
"Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone
Else But Me", "When the Lights Go On Again
All over the World".

I remember the letters from my friends

and my brother from Camp Dix, Camp Pendleton, Camp Lejeune and so on. I remember how handsome they looked in their uniforms when they came home on furlough. I remember writing to one young man who answered politely but obviously didn't remember who I was. We became better acquainted after the war and were married in 1949.

After my brother went overseas, I remember the funny V mail letters we received and I remember the dreadful day my sister-in-law appeared at our door with the telegram in her hand announcing the severe injuries he had received in the Battle of the Bulge.

I remember the siege of Stalingrad and when the Russians finally turned back the Germans. I remember D Day and the assembly program we had celebrating the opening of the second front. I remember the letter received from my friend telling of the raising of the colors at Iwo Jima - how I wish I still had that letter. I remember VE Day in May 1945 and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima followed

by V J Day in August and how the
church bells rang - and I can cry
again today, just thinking of it.

Helen Groves
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