

November 21, 1993

Dear Cassie,

When World War II began, I was fifteen and a sophomore in high school. The bombing of Pearl Harbor was a profound shock to all of us, and the entry of the United States in the war changed the lives of all Americans. Two years later when I graduated from high school, both of my older brothers were in the armed services; and almost all of the young men I grew up with were also.

That is my most vivid memory - the young men enlisted or were drafted as soon as they became eighteen. Some, in fact many, quit school to enlist, feeling that to do so was their duty. In my graduating class in 1944, only two young men were left; all the rest had enlisted. This made life lonely with letter writing the only means of communication. We did not know where our young men were once they left the United States after their training, except either the European or the Pacific theater of war. Some were gone from home for most of the war. My two brothers were in Europe; one with the 8th Air wing in Italy, the other with Patton's forces. I remember my father crying the first Christmas that my brothers were in the service - the only time in my life I saw my father cry.

In high school, we joined the Victory Corps. One of our duties was spotting planes. Where the fire house is now was a large mansion called the Kellogg house. We were excused to go to the top of that building and watch for planes and identify them. The P-38 was the easiest to identify. We had studied the shape of the planes—both ours and our enemy's—so we would know what we were seeing. Because of the air attack of Pearl Harbor, we thought it possible for bombing raids to take place. This was the reason for plane spotting and for blackouts. Air raid wardens patrolled the streets during blackouts to notice if any light could be seen through gaps in the blackout curtains. The fire siren announced the beginning and end of each blackout drill.

Another effect of the war was gas rationing. Because of the gas shortage, non-curricular sports took place. Our class had no Junior prom; the seniors went to New York City on their class trip instead of to Washington, D.C. as classes used to. And they went by railroad instead of by bus.

Because of the war, I completed my senior year in one semester so I could join the Cadet Nurse Corps. The Cadet Nurse Corps was founded to supply nurses for the service and for civilian hospitals. In return for a promise to

serve as a nurse for the duration of the war, the U.S. government paid tuition, room and board, a stipend of fifteen dollars a month, and provided uniforms for young women who met the requirements. Because of this, I received a full scholarship to the Syracuse University School of Nursing and became a member of the third class in the new school along with forty-nine other young women. I completed high school in January and one week later was a freshman in college in ~~June~~ 1944. We went to school all year long with two weeks vacation at the end of each semester. We carried twenty-four hours of classes, and were required to maintain at least a B average. We managed, in spite of long hours of studying, to have fun attending S.U. football games, going to house parties on campus and dancing at the U.S.O. downtown.

The war and its threat of death for any young man involved in it was one of the reasons I married the young marine who was my high school boyfriend when I was almost nineteen. I continued my studies at S.U. until after V-Day in the Pacific area. By then my husband was stationed in Hawaii.

Other vivid memories of that time were President F.D. Roosevelt's death, the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, D-Day in Europe, and of course V-Day in Europe and V-Day in Japan. Engraved forever

on my heart and mind are the newsreels of our soldiers arriving at concentration camps and finding the dead and the survivors - living dead - of the Nazi Holocaust. Even our joy at the end of the war could not wipe out that horror.

My husband came home, and my my brothers came home, but many did not.

Cassie, these are some of my memories of World War II and of growing up during the war. Times were hard; there was much sadness; but there were times of joy also. We all thought we were doing our part to support our "boys" in uniform and that we were fighting for a good cause. Not a bad way to grow up!

Sincerely yours,  
Alice Leonard

P.S.

I would be glad to be interviewed on tape for your records.

A.L.L.