

At Home and At War in WWII

I became interested in World War Two through my love of reading history books. My parents told me that all four of my great-grandfathers served in WWII, but it never became real to me until the day I visited the Silent Wings Museum in Lubbock, Texas. I learned that my last living great-grandfather, Clarence Smith, had helped to build the gliders displayed there. Two days after I went to the museum, he passed away. He and my other great-grandfathers risked their lives in WWII. My great-grandmothers sent their sweethearts to war and rationed food at home. Through my great-grandparents, I am connected to the story of WWII. All of my great-grandfathers left memoirs, but I wish I could talk to them face to face. If I could travel back in time, I would gather my great-grandparents together and ask them to tell me about their life at war and at home during WWII.

All my great-grandfathers volunteered willingly in various branches of the military when WWII began. My great-grandpa, Harold Stonestreet, wrote, "I was tired of waiting on them [the recruiting office], so when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, I packed a suitcase and went..." He did not explain the reason why he went, he just went without question. I wish I could ask him and all my other great-grandfathers, what was it like to fight, to risk your life for an idea? What was it like to leave family at home cheering you on, knowing you might never return?

My great-grandmothers were some of the women left behind when the men went to war. My great-granny, Juanita Cavender Stonestreet, lost her fiancé in the war. My great-grandma, Lois Beall Fisher, lost her brother in the war. What was it like to have someone you love never come home? My Meme, Mary Johnson Smith, remembers that when her brothers went to war her family was so poor that they lived in a boxcar. Coal was their only source of heat. They did not

have enough beds, so they had to fit three people to a bed. What was it like to live in a boxcar, to be cold, hungry, and to be piled up in a bed with two other people?

My great-grandparents made many sacrifices at home and on the battlefield. Did they know that the sacrifices they made for the war would make a difference for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren? Did they think their sacrifices were as difficult as I think them now? Or did it just seem just like normal life? How did my family handle rationing, death, and uncertainty? I know that my ancestors were men and women of faith. How did God help them through those horrible situations? How did they handle their actions, and their struggles? Were the hardships hard to bear? Was it really worth it?

My great-grandparents and other veterans through their suffering and hardships did make a difference. If I could talk with them, I think they would say that freedom was worth it. When I think about their sacrifice, I ask myself, "How should I live my life because of the freedom that they bought for me?" Eleanor Roosevelt prayed this prayer in response to that same question,

"Dear Lord, Lest I continue in my complacent way, help me to remember, that somewhere, somehow out there a man died for me today. As long as there be wear, I must ask and answer am I worth dying for?"¹

I want to learn from them, and I want to live a grateful life because of what they did for me. This is why I wish I could speak with my great-grandparents, to ask them about their part in the history of World War II.

¹ "Eleanor Roosevelt's Wartime Prayer," the Department of History of The George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/q-and-a/q21-prayer.cfm> (accessed October 29, 2016)