

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Celina, Ohio

Age: 89

My purpose for gathering this information was when as a young person I never gave a lot of thought as to the life history and experiences of my father, grandfather and great grandfather. In the last few years, I have often wondered what their lifestyle was like, their occupation, personality, family health problems and if they had a sense of humor.

All I know about my father's youth was that he came to America at the age of 17 with his father and a cousin in 1910 on the *S.S. Thenistoles*, which sailed from Piralus to New York. During his stay in New York, he asked a fellow Greek how to write "Helentjaris" in English, which doesn't look at all like it does on the ships manifest, so I believe the name Helenijaris originated with him after he arrived here in the United States. Checking the Internet, I found the only Helentjaris name is my current family.

After leaving N.Y., they traveled to Moline, Illinois and worked at building railroads. Later, his father and cousin returned to Greece and Dad traveled to Dayton, Ohio, where he met and married my mother Lillian Bailey in 1916. Dad was employed by the City of Dayton for 44 years. He was a hard worker and a good husband and father, but I remember him most for the long hours he spent reading his bible. Dad died May 30, 1974, at the age of 83.

In no way am I boasting of my past for I firmly believe in Matthew 6:1-2, "for if you seek the acceptance of man you have already received your reward." But it also says in Matthew 5:16, "in the same way, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

I have already received so many blessings during my lifetime: A long and healthy life, a loving wife who is dedicated to the Lord and her family, wonderful children and grandchildren, and good relatives and many cherished friends. Plus, I am grateful of being born in the greatest country in the world and being a part of St. John, a church of my choice. The greatest blessing of all is having a God who suffered and died for me that I may have eternal life.

I started employment at Huffman Mfg. (Huffy Corp.) in October 1941, making 45 cents per hour for 40 hours a week (\$18 a week). I went into the Navy in March, 1943 and the highest rank I held was Gunners Mate 2nd. Class. My first ship was the *U.S.S. Meredith* DD 726 (Destroyer), which was sunk during the Normandy invasion off the coast of France, at Utah Beach (D-Day plus 2). Survivors were taken back to Plymouth, England and then on the 15th of June we were transferred to Roseneath, Scotland, where we spent six weeks prior to boarding the *Queen Elizabeth* for our return trip back to New York and on to Dayton and a 30 day survivors leave. (Deaths: 35; Hospitalized: 26; Survivors: 296)

My second ship was the *U.S.S. Lake Champlain* C.V. 39, the largest aircraft carrier built during WWII (27,100 tons, 888 feet long, 147.6 feet wide, crew complement of 3,448).

I was discharged in March 1946 and returned to Dayton and the Huffman bicycle plant. Henrietta and I were married in August 1947 and moved into a two-room house that we bought from my uncle, Albert Bailey, for \$1,500. Henrietta's father loaned us the \$1,500.00 plus interest. We had electricity, but no water or inside plumbing. Heating was accomplished with an oil floor furnace. The house came with an extra-large lot on which we later built a new, three-bedroom home.

Friends of ours, Charlie and Irene Bedwell, were living in a converted garage on his fathers' property. Charlie had recently been discharged from the Marines. Not having any knowledge of home construction, the four of us would go out on Sundays and check out new homes being built. We would find a house just starting to be built. We would then measure how far down the footer had to be, how wide, and how thick. I would then spend the next few weeks digging, installing forms and pouring the cement, This continued on through framing, plumbing, electrical and drywalling. Learning this helped a great deal as I and Henrietta's brother, Bob White, later built two brick homes in Dayton for resale. I later built the new home next to our first one on Flesher Ave, then later in Celina I did a lot of work on the three homes we eventually built there

I continued to work on the assembly line in Dayton. My rate of pay was \$ 1.21 per hour. About a year later, a job was posted on the department bid board for a decorator trainee .The training period would be for six months and pay was 78 cents per hour, amounting to a loss of \$447.00 for the six months period. We decided to make the change, and upon completion of the training period ,I would earn the sum of \$1.89 per hour, thus making up the loss in four months. Two years later, I was promoted to group leader of the paint department, which paid 20 cents per hour more than the highest paying job in the department