

War Era Story Project 2012

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Memories of an Elementary Student of World War II

I have vivid memories of a peaceful Sunday afternoon in Dec. of 1941. We lived in the small village of Fayetteville, Ohio (Brown County). My family consisted of my mother (Hilda), dad (Joe), my older brother Donald and my younger sister Agnes. Our routine was as usual that day: we attended mass at St. Patrick Church at 10:00 a.m. and Mother had prepared a Sunday dinner. After dinner, we were relaxing by reading. A neighbor, Mrs. Robinson came over and we played checkers and cards with her. Dad went over to his parents (a couple of blocks away) to do some chores for them. He came back later in the afternoon and was quite shaken. He immediately turned on the radio and said Pearl Harbor had been hit. "We are in War." How life changed!

Even though we lived in a village, most families had a garden, chickens, a cow or two for milk, had access to home butchered pork and ate and lived like the people in the farming area. We had electricity, but many of my farming classmates did not get it until the after the war had started. Our contacts to the outside world were radio, mail, newspapers, books and 3-4 party telephones in a few households. We were issued ration stamps to buy limited sugar, shoes and gasoline. We traveled very little; only when necessary. The people that drove to work in a factory were allowed more stamps for their work for the "War Effort." Tires were scarce and few cars were made during the war years. Most graduating senior boys went to the service immediately, with the exception of a few hardship cases in the farm area. Soap was scarce and I remember my mother and grandmother making soap from bacon grease, lard and lye etc.

The tradition in our area was to have the annual Christmas Pageant at the High School Auditorium in Fayetteville the Sunday before Christmas. The 5th and 6th grade students were chosen for special parts, and the younger classes presented special Christmas songs. How we looked forward to getting to the 5th and 6th grade. This year, Sister Aloysius wrote a special play entitled "The Christ Child's 12th Birthday Party." Students were selected to represent various countries and bring gifts to present to the Christ child. (It was many years later, when I became an elementary teacher, that I realized how much we had learned from the 1941 Christmas play.) There were to be Japanese, American, Spanish, Irish and Chinese.

Some volunteers had made costumes for each group and I was a little Spanish girl. I thought the kimonos and fans were so pretty that the ladies were making for the Japanese. On Dec. 8, the 5th and 6th grades were assembled. We sang "God Bless America," we prayed for our Servicemen and we were told there would be no Japanese in our program. Feelings were so strong about Japan. The Japanese were mixed in with the rest of us and we had our Christmas program under the clouds of the war.

A couple of years later, a Japanese family moved from the West Coast to live and work for a family in our school district. They were a wonderful family. Jane Fugikawa was a very intelligent girl and proved to be a good friend. It was a great lesson to all of us that we needed to respect individuals and not the whole country that caused us so much pain.

During my 6th grade year, we were taught to knit. We made afghans for the Red Cross. Even some of the boys were quite good with knitting needles. We also saved tin foil wrappers and put them into balls. They were sent somewhere for the war effort. Another memory is letter writing. We would write to relatives and friends in the service. Route 50 went through Fayetteville and occasionally trucks carrying troops from Camp Atterbury in Indiana would travel East. We would wave to them and they often would throw their address to anyone along the side of the road. You always wondered where they were going and if they would come home.

We all felt proud to see Gold Stars in the window in our town and the surrounding countryside, but sad to see the heartbreak when a family received notice of a death or injury. I would walk to the Post Office and deliver mail to several neighbors. Mrs. Ella Gavey was always so happy to receive a letter from her son Frank. He was in some of the worst places, but at the time she didn't know where he was. We will never forget the day she received word that he was wounded. He did get back to the states, but remained in the hospital most of the time. Many years later he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

We had a severe teacher shortage because of the War. When the servicemen began arriving home, the G.I. Bill helped many go to college. We began to see young men attending college in the evening, summer school and teaching on a "Cadet Certificate." The United States had lived and worked through a very bleak area in American History.

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Picture of the afghan made by 6th grade students of Fayetteville Elementary School in St. Martin, Ohio in 1942-43. It was donated to the Red Cross. L. to R.: John Gauche, Bernadine Niehoff, ???, Viola Holden, Marjorie Stephens, Mary Rhoda Jordan, Anita Johnson, Loretta Carlier, LaVerne Ryan, Dolores Houk, Mary Rose Sherman, Michael Louiso



A ration stamp used to purchase gasoline.