

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Westerville, Ohio

Age: Not given

### A Moment I Will Always Remember

It was a sweltering hot Cincinnati evening in July of 1943. Just like every other evening after dinner, Grandpa retired to his overstuffed chair in the living room and, still wearing his grey workpants and shirt with "Henry" on the pocket, he lit his pipe. After getting a good light in his pipe, he tilted his stiff, rigid body a little to the right so he could position his "good ear" close to the Zenith radio console.

The piercing voice of H.G. Kaltenborn penetrated the room as he reported news of our American soldiers who were fighting in the World War II Pacific Theater. For Grandpa, during this broadcast the world stood still. He was intent and he listened with a heavy heart. The rest of the household knew this was silent time. "Quiet!" he would cry out if anyone of his grandchildren would run down the stairs or through the hallway.

Grandpa had good reason to be anxious and deeply concerned. His youngest son, Louis was serving in the Army Air Corps stationed in Guam; his physician son-in-law, Al Huesman, was a naval officer in Okinawa; and his daughter Coletta's fiancée, Charlie Giebel was in the army serving in the state of Washington at the present time. Soon dad came to the room to sit on the sofa across from his pop and together they listened. Surely this was the after dinner scene in many American households as families lived through this time of great upheaval during the World War II years.

Meanwhile, the ladies tidied the kitchen after supper. It was my job to clear the table, wipe the oilcloth covering and place the fruit bowl back in the center while mother and grandma washed and dried the dishes in the little kitchen. Judy, my two year old little sister, played on the floor, trying to place clothespins in a milk bottle. Finally the word came, "You can go out to play now!" The door banged behind us as we ran out, but the noise was all right now because grandpa's program was over.

Our new neighborhood friends were lazily dawdling on the curb of the dead-end street deciding what to play. We were new friends with these children as our family just moved in with grandma and grandpa Schuckman a few weeks earlier. Dad's employer, the National Biscuit Company, requested that our family move to New York from Cleveland. This seemed like too many moves for mother and dad, so they decided it was time to resign from this work and move back to Cincinnati. Grandma and grandpa welcomed us, I think, until dad found new work and we got settled.

On this hot summer evening, we rode our tricycles, played hide and go seek and when darkness crept into the evening light, we caught lightening bugs and placed them in a jar with a little grass until we set them free at bedtime. Some mothers blew a whistle to call their children home and some just loudly called their names when it was time for sleep. My bed was next to a large window in the upstairs

bedroom and at night in the dark I could watch the stars appear. Dark tree limbs moved in a gentle breeze and sometimes the moon would say goodnight to me as I fell asleep. One by one, the family retired on this hot, sultry, summer night, and those who listened could hear the restful humming of fans all night long.

Knock...knock...knock...

I was awakened by a gentle knocking on the front door. Looking out my window, I could see that it was still dark, but the birds were singing. After another series of knocks, I heard the front bedroom door open. Sliding quickly off my bed and cracking my door open, I saw my grandma enter the hallway reaching around to tie the belt to her robe. "Those beggars," she mumbled and grumbled. "It's just too early for them to come to the door." She made her way to the first landing and I tagged along behind still listening to her moaning about the beggar.

The early 1940's were still post-depression years. It wasn't unusual for men out of work to knock on doors and ask for something to eat or drink. As a little girl I can remember men coming one or two times a week to ask for food. These beggars, as they were called, were invited to the kitchen table and were given coffee, several pieces of toast, cheese, homemade jam and the company of someone in the family. Meat was a scarcity for everyone during these years.

Grandma, her hair mussed from sleeping and still most unhappy, descended the long stairway. When she approached the door, I put my arm around the stair post and looked on. Through the leaded glass door I could see a vague reflection of a person on the porch. Grandma opened the door quickly then stood like a frozen statue. There he was! My Uncle Louis was standing in the doorway looking so handsome in his army uniform! He looked at grandma and wiped the tears from his eyes. Grandma began crying loudly and then mother and son hugged and cried together. My heart stood still for quite some time. At the age of five years, holding on to that stair post, I was an eyewitness to a mother's love for her son and a son's love for his mother. This moment has been recalled to mind so often during the years to follow. I am so grateful to have been the little girl looking on during this beautiful moment.

Hearing grandma's loud crying, the rest of the family awoke and quickly came down the stairs to join in the celebration. And what a joyous day it was! The entire family gathered at the kitchen table at 5:03 a.m. to share stories, eat lots of bread and homemade jam, and welcome Uncle Louis home on his furlough.

The following spring, April 1944, Dad found new work and Mother, Dad, Judy and I moved to our new house ... the one I would call my childhood home for years to come.

**(More)**



Louis Schuckman, PFC, U.S. Army Air Corps (left) with friend on Furlough, 1943