

Who Will Fight for Us?

The Story of Heather and George

By Jack Olivieri



Dedicated to Heather and George, Who Deserved Better



Chapter 1

Introduction

As I write this story, I am reminded of what my mother used to tell me when I was growing up: “You were born under a star”. She told me this on several occasions when I got into some minor trouble or scrape as most kids do. She thought I always seemed “lucky” because somehow everything usually came out ok. Although I never drank, smoked or gave them any trouble as a teenager, whenever things were teetering on the edge, I did manage to come down on the right side of things. I never thought I was privileged, but just a bit lucky. That is until 2017. And then my luck and the luck of my entire family ran out. So this is our story. I am writing this narrative primarily for George so when he is old enough, he will better understand what happened to our family and why we cannot be with him as much as we would like.

Our Family History

To understand this story, it is necessary to understand our family. The values and priorities that families have relied on play an important role in the events and conflicts that occur over time. This imprint stays with us. My sister, Maureen and I grew up in a working-class family, as did both my parents. There was no privilege. We were not rich. There were no servants. We were an average middle-class family. We grew up in simpler times (in the 60’s and 70’s) in a suburb of Boston.

Dad

My father and his four siblings were raised in a single parent family for a while after his father left home. He was a child of the depression and the experience of hard work and not wasting anything stayed with him for his entire life. He never liked to throw anything away. He was close

to being a pack rat. When World War II broke out (after Pearl Harbor), he was itching to get into the fight. He tried to join the Marines like his brother, Jim. He did not pass the physical. He then tried the Navy, but also failed the physical. Back then many men were rejected for flat feet, poor eyesight, or poor health due to the depression. Finally, he joined the Merchant Marines and at 17 years old went to radio school on Gallops Island in Boston Harbor and became a radio operator on two liberty ships (the SS Davy Crockett and the SS Charles Sumner). His nephew once asked him "What would you have done if the Merchant Marines didn't take you"? His reply was "become an ambulance driver". He held the rank of Ensign and his ship would cross the Atlantic ferrying supplies to US allies and went to Normandy, Russia, Iran and many other ports. His ship delivered troops, but usually there was also fuel and ammunition on board. Yet liberty ships only had two small guns to defend themselves, one at the bow and the other at the stern. I obtained the log book of the SS Charles Sumner. It says "There were numerous (air) raids during the period between 7 June and departure on 10 June 1944". The ship was strafed by enemy aircraft while carrying 562 troops near Omaha beach. One of the planes dropped bombs but missed the ship. The planes were thought to be German Junkers 88s. The ship fired their guns but missed the planes.

When the war ended, he was drafted by the Army because the Army did not consider his service in the Merchant Marine to be sufficient to fulfill his military obligation. He spent a few years in the Army, was promoted to technical sergeant and was then transferred to the Army Air Corps which later became the US Air Force in 1947. When I was 5 years old my mother took me to Wisconsin, so we could be with him during the Korean conflict. He was teaching radio and radar fundamentals. When he finally left the service, he got two jobs to support us and went to night school to get his associates, bachelors and eventually his master's degree in Business

Administration from Northeastern University. Like most kids growing up, I really did not appreciate the struggles and sacrifices he made to give us a better life.

He was a disciplinarian, but fair. While he was frugal, he was not with us. He believed in education and giving his children all the advantages that he didn't have growing up. If there was any way he could afford something for us, he would get it. I remember when we moved into our new house in 1956 in Dedham, Massachusetts (a suburb of Boston), one of the first things he did was buy us a set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. This was the "Internet" of the 1950's. He would support us whenever he could. I remember always asking me and my sister "Do you need any money" and when we said no, he said "Are you sure". At one point I was trying to build a home for my family (I was the general contractor). We had sold our current home where we lived for 10 years and were under the gun to move out. The local building inspector would not give us an occupancy permit for some minor issues. My father went down to the building dept. and told the inspector to "smarten up". He was a sergeant in the Army and he expected people to follow his "suggestions". We got the occupancy permit.

Mom

My mother first worked at an ice cream shop in Boston when she was a teenager. Then during WWII she got a job at the MIT Radiation Laboratory, where she met my father before he was drafted into the Army after the war. She learned to assemble and solder radar components for the war effort. When my sister and I were toddlers, she stayed home with us until we were older. She then worked in retail for over 30 years. Once she entered a contest at a clothing store and won 1 million Green Stamps. It was the only time she won anything. We all got stuff we wanted. I got a guitar amplifier and movie projector. My father got a small aluminum fishing boat. The family

got one of the first color TVs in the neighborhood and we had people over to watch Bonanza on Sunday nights, since it was one of the first shows in color.

Mom cooked, cleaned and kept house while working at her retail job. If you could not get Dad to agree to something you went to mom. Sometimes it even worked. Mom would often pick me up from elementary school because it was a good half mile from my house and we had to walk (OMG!). My friends loved that because she would take them home too. I remember having 12-15 kids in the car one time. We were always trying to break the record because there were no bucket seats or seat belts back then. Mom also liked when I had my friends over either during the day or at night to watch science fiction movies. She said if I were at our house with my friends, she always knew where I was and didn't worry. As I got older, she told me to respect girls, be a gentleman and always be polite. She cried when a girlfriend broke up with me, even when I didn't really care. I graduated from Boston College (where I joined ROTC) with a degree in Mathematics in 1970 and a master's degree in Systems Engineering in 1973 from UMASS.

