

King of Hollywood, AWON mother share bond of loss

Mother's night out with Clark Gable

by Laurence L. Smelser



Lt. Clark Gable, left (Associated Press), and Mary Smelser, right, at Felts Field, near Spokane, September 1942 (Larry Smelser).

My father, Maj. Harold C. Smelser, had gone missing in action off the coast of France in late November 1942. His plane had been shot down off the coast of Brittany during a raid on the submarine pens of St. Nazaire. He was commander of a B-17 squadron, the 324th from the 91st Bombardment Group, based at Bassingbourn, England.

Two days after Thanksgiving, as dinner was being prepared, my mother, Mary Laraway Smelser, answered the door to be handed a telegram with the news that my father was missing.

In early 1943, Lt. Clark Gable was briefly posted to Fort Wright, west of Spokane, for additional training before deployment to England. After the death of his wife, Carole Lombard, he had volunteered for duty and trained in Florida. In Spokane, Gable had a suite at the Davenport Hotel, going every day straight to the gunnery range to avoid local fans and invitations. Rumor had it that every woman in town wanted to meet him.

My father had been stationed through the fall of 1941 at Fort Wright and had known the base commander, Gen. Robert Olds (whose wife incidentally was Gore Vidal's mother). It was thought that Mother might be cheered up if Gable could escort her out for an evening at the Officers' Club.

...continued on page 12

Inside:

Features

Road to Rennes	3
Conference Evaluations	9
Love and Growing Old	12
MIAs Identified	14

Departments

New Members	7
AWON Connections	11
AWON Board News	17

Chiodo AWON database back-up

AWON is pleased to welcome Amy Chiodo as its new AWON Backup Database Manager. Amy is the granddaughter of 2LT Godfrey "Fred" Savard, and the daughter of AWONer Bill Chiodo, who for many years was AWON's tax preparer and is a former board director.

Amy is very familiar with Filemaker, the database software that AWON uses, and expressed a desire to help AWON and Database Manager Gerry Morenski.

"To say I was thrilled doesn't quite cover it," exclaims Gerry. "My sincere thanks to Sharon Connor who stepped in to help me out as a "temporary" backup five years ago. I don't know what I would have done without her."

There are many jobs that are being done in AWON by one person, and all jobs except one (tax preparer) are on a volunteer basis. The responsibilities of each of these jobs are great, and having a back-up goes a long way to ease the load and ensure that if a personal crisis arises AWON business can continue smoothly. Please think about stepping up to help out as Amy has done. Some of the AWON jobs that could use a back-up are treasurer, newsletter editor and webmaster. If you'd like to help with only an area within these tasks that would be welcome, too. Please contact the people in charge of these activities (their names and emails are on the back page in the *AWON Directory*), or a board director.

REMINDERS

- **Please make all checks payable to AWON**
While the treasurer appreciates your generosity, checks made out to him cause some hassle and delay.

- **Please tell AWON when you move/change email**
Your newsletter will be delayed or not delivered at all if we don't know where you are, and we can't notify you if we don't have a current email address or phone number.

- **Please tell AWON when you head to/from your winter home**
Returned newsletters are costly.



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Honored by village on liberation anniversary **Bachant Triplets Finish Father's Story**

by Nancy Bachant

When I received a call from my triplet sister, Karen, in London, saying that we three were invited to France to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Rennes, I was amazed that anyone there even knew about our father's sacrifice on the outskirts of town 70 years ago on the first day of August 1944.

After the years of research I had done, with the help and guidance of AWON siblings, it was my mother's obituary published in February 2013 in *The Bergen Record* in New Jersey which led an intrepid amateur French historian to find us, the daughters of Pfc. Herbert R. Bachant, and to invite us to see what lay at the end of the road to Rennes.

We last saw an arrow pointing to the "road to Rennes" in Avranches when we three visited France in 2003 with our families. It was at the General Patton Monument in the center of town, and there were arrows pointing in all directions indicating how Patton directed units who had just liberated Avranches to deploy rapidly in all directions in order to facilitate the breakout of Normandy.

In 2003, we ran out of time to follow that road southwest to Rennes, the capital of Brittany, and all we knew was that somewhere on that road our father died. We didn't know if there was a marker. We didn't know the circumstances of how he and the men in his half-track died. We did know that his halftrack was blown up by a German 88 and that all the men in it were lost. And we knew that there was a battle there, that some 50 soldiers died that day with our father in Saint-Grégoire on the outskirts of Rennes, and that the people of Saint-Grégoire and Rennes have never forgotten their sacrifice, even 70 years later.



Battle of Maison Blanche eyewitness M. Jean Chasle, center, with Nancy Bachant and Etienne Maignen.

After spending one of the most moving and emotional weeks of my life in Saint-Grégoire and the city of Rennes, I can attest to the circle being completed - in French, *boucle est bouclée* - and that the search for the end of the road to Rennes and the exact place our father died has been found. Here is what we found out.

The First Battle of Maison Blanche

Renaissance historian and author Etienne Maignen was our gentle guide on the road to discover the history of that week in August 1944. Etienne greeted us at the train station and asked us to meet him for a radio interview at the local station. After a moving radio interview with France Bleu, Etienne shepherded us around Rennes to show us information posts depicting the World War II events in the city. He asked us if we would like to discuss what happened during the first days of August with a 93-year-old eyewitness to the day our father died.

...continued on page 4

Monsieur Jean Chasle was living in the farm house occupied by German SS units that had complete control of the road into Rennes with a battery of machine guns, launchers, and, of course, the dreaded German 88 anti-aircraft guns. The emplacements were on the outskirts of Rennes, in a section of the village of Saint-Grégoire called Maison Blanche. Here, amidst rolling fields and farm houses, the Germans could see what U.S. Army columns were coming to liberate the capital of Brittany. At the time, the liberation of Rennes would be the largest city to be “released” since the landings at Normandy.

On August 1, the 4th Armored Division, on orders from Gen. George S. Patton and led by Maj. General John S. Wood, rapidly advanced to the southwest from Avranches in 24 hours until they were stopped by German emplacements at Maison Blanche. The column of tanks and artillery must have been exhausted.

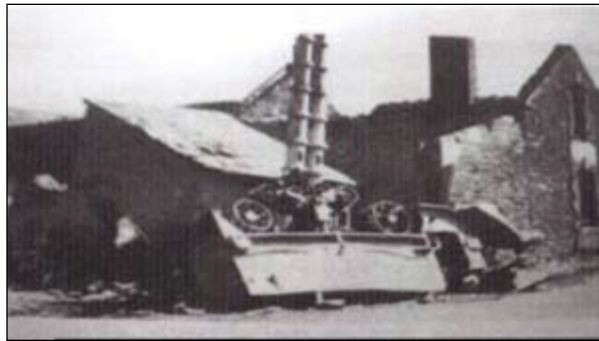
M. Jean took us to the site of the Battle of Maison Blanche. He walked here and there, pointed and spoke in rapid emotional French as to what happened, what he did, and how the battle proceeded. Etienne was our interpreter. He told us how M. Jean saw some strange vehicles coming down the road, about three in the afternoon August 1, with a big white star painted on them. He was 23 years old at the time. He related how the U.S. Army captain leading the column of tanks and half-tracks stopped him on his bicycle, and asked him if he knew where the Germans were. M. Jean replied, “Of course. They are occupying my farm house, right over that field.”

Amazingly, the American asked M. Jean to lead him to the house so that he could talk

to the Germans there. This he did, but not without a warning. M. Jean told the Americans that they should go into town “like butter” the other way around, or else they would be shot down “like ducks.”

The American column leader met with the Germans, and then, before he could get back to his column, the Germans turned their anti-aircraft guns horizontally and started firing at the column. After M. Jean led the column commander to the Germans, he gathered his family and fled the area.

Our father and his buddies in his half-track were called up to support the tanks under fire from the 88s. Their half-track became a big target to the 88s across the road, 350 yards away, and the occupants of the vehicle, our father included, were hit directly by German 88 fire.



Half-track Belly Button of Pfc. Herbert R. Bachant, destroyed at Maison Blanche

Later, at the Saint-Grégoire Exposition, Etienne gently broke more news to us. He asked if we noticed the small picture of the half-track in the exposition. He asked if we understood that it was our father's. The shock of realizing we were seeing a picture of Pfc. Herbert Bachant's actual ve-

hicle made me think of my mother, and how I was glad she never got to see that picture. It is hard to overstate how sad it made us feel to see exactly where our father died. M. Jean took us to the cross that he and his neighbors had erected on the exact spot. He and his neighbors have maintained it for 70 years.

M. Jean related that for 70 years he felt guilty that he did not do more to dissuade the Americans from going down the road to Rennes. M. Jean was also very emotional and we comforted him by telling him that to us he was a hero who tried to save the soldiers and saved his family at only age 23.

What followed this day of discovery were days of commemoration and celebration.

We were invited to the village of Saint-Grégoire's exposition and commentary where we gave a speech thanking the hundreds of people attending for remembering our father and his soldiers in arms. Janet read our comments in French, saying, in part:

...For us this journey completes the circle of a journey we began 20 years ago... a journey to discover all we could about our father and how he died. In the 1600s, a young soldier named Nicolas Bachan from Bachant, France, came to Quebec to fight for France. He married 14-year-old Anne Lamoureux, and their descendants came to the United States. Now the circle is complete because in 1944, many generations later, our father came back to his ancestral land as a soldier and he and his brothers in arms helped to liberate the people of Brittany from the tyranny of Hitler. It is a comfort to know that his sacrifice was not in vain, that he will be remembered here for a long time. It is also a comfort to know that the people of Saint-Grégoire and Rennes continue to live a free life without tyranny because of the sacrifice of our father and his brothers in arms.

Then Janet added a heartfelt final sentence: "All our lives we have been searching for our father, and now we have found him here in Saint-Grégoire." The audience received the speech with great emotion and a standing ovation. We were so moved.

Mass, Pigeons, Parades, Flags, Parties

We proceeded to be feted with a Mass for the soldiers who died there, several champagne toasts, cocktail parties, and luncheons. Pierre Breteau, mayor of Saint-Grégoire, presented us with a medal for our

father from the village, and a very moving tribute at the memorial where the battle took place.

We were asked to place three white roses on the stone memorial, where to our surprise and shock there were pictures of our father and our father and mother amidst the flowers and flags. The school children placed an individual rose for each named soldier who died there, and when each man's name was announced M. Marcel Baron, winner of French awards for keeping alive the memories of those who died in wars, intoned in French, "he died for your liberty."

The American Consul Representative then gave a speech, as well as the mayor and a U.S. Army representative - all referencing our father and the others who gave their lives in the little village. The *La Marseillaise* was played, pigeons were released, and flags came down from parachutists representing Saint-Grégoire, the United States and France. We even had our own personal flag bearer, who followed us around with the 48-star flag that had flown at the cemetery of St. James where our fa-



Bachant sisters ride into Rennes in a half-track.

...continued on page 6

ther had first been buried. There were many new friends and wonderful memories of the people of Saint-Grégoire. But there was more to come!

Rennes Celebrates Its Liberation

After the three days of emotional discovery and commemorations, it was the city of Rennes' turn to celebrate their liberation from the Nazi horror. There were ceremonies at the Parlement building and parades into town that included the French Minister of Defense. Also there for the celebrations was the grandson of Maj. General Wood, the Mayor of Rennes, American Consul Representative Eric Beaty, and many others.

Etienne thought that we should complete the journey that our father was not able to finish. He arranged for us to ride into Rennes in a vintage military parade, following the same route as 70 years before, in a half-track like our father's. We waved to people lining the street as we went by, and were amazed they were applauding us! That moment was hard to top but there would be an even more touching moment to come.

They honored a still-living French member of the Resistance. There were more cocktail parties, luncheons and gifts, including one we will always treasure. They presented us with the original drawings for the new stamp created for the 70th Anniversary of

the Rennes liberation. And as if that wasn't enough, they gave us a newly-reproduced V-Mail with the new stamp and cancellation, and inside the V-mail were the following words, in French and in English:

*Dear Janet Lee,
dear Nancy Sue,
dear Karen Ann,*

On behalf of the citizens of Rennes, on behalf of those who have experienced the tragedies of war, On behalf of those who were born and now live in a country at peace, we send you, from the bottom of our heart, our eternal gratitude. Your father, Herbert Bachant, died as a hero during the battles for the liberation of Rennes on August 1, 1944, without ever meet-

ing his daughters who were born on the other side of the Atlantic. His sacrifice on French soil makes you our sisters in remembrance. You will be forever, for all the people of Rennes, the three daughters of Liberty. With our dedicated and fraternal affection.



Top, Pfc. Herbert R. Bachant in England with photo of his triplets before the invasion, circa April/May 1944. Below, the Bachant sisters in Rennes, August 2014.



Welcome New Members

Michael Brumley, CA, nephew of ISGT Aubrey A. Brumley, Army
Betty Birdwell, GA, niece of SSGT Sidney S. Beck, Army
Jane Black, PA, niece of FO Max L. Hunt, Air Corps
James E. Lyons, PA, son of ILT James O. Lyons, Army
John Forgy, VA, grandson of LTCOL Percy O. Forgy, Army
Arthur Chotin, MD, son of SSGT Max Chotin, Army

(new members since the October issue of *The Star*)

Lives committed to serving others

Cancer claims three AWONers

David A. Stanek, 69, of Appleton, Wisconsin, passed away October 29, 2014, after a long battle with cancer. Dave was born February 10, 1945, in East Chicago, Indiana, the son of Pfc. Aloysius "Al" and Josephine "Jo" Arrigo Stanek. He was raised by his mother and step-father, Jerry Stanek, his father's brother. Dave had a life-long career in sales and was passionate and dedicated in all his pursuits, especially within his community and AWON, which he joined in 1994. He established an AWON fund in his mother's memory to help orphans attend their first AWON conference. Survivors include his beloved cats, Lilly and Freddie; many cousins; and several close friends.



Stanek

Patricia Finn Thornton, 69, passed away August 17, 2014, at home in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, after a five-month battle with cancer. She was the daughter of Capt. Frederick and Herlinda Finn. Patricia was very active in the 10th Mountain Division Association, starting in 1986. In 1992 she co-founded the 10th Mountain Descendants Inc., serving as president from 2001-2006. In her and her

father's memory the 10th Mountain Division Descendant Scholarship has been renamed the Finn-Thornton Scholarship. She is survived by her husband, Francis J. Thornton; son, Michael (Susan) Thornton; daughter, Christine (Michael) Corrigan; three grandchildren; one sister; one brother; and four half-brothers.



Thornton



Henry

Barbara J. Halverson Mehrer Henry, 70, passed away September 27, 2014, in Branson, Missouri, after a long fight against cancer. She was born September 11, 1944, in Centralia, Illinois, to 1Lt. Kenneth V. and Betty Jean Phelps Halverson. Barbara was a counselor and entrepreneur, and served on many non-profit boards. She is survived by sons, Douglas Mehrer and Ronald Mehrer; three grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Initially Mother hesitated, saying she did not want to be criticized, but she was finally persuaded to go ahead. Mother said she wore a black dress with high heels, a red turban, and a mink coat loaned to her by her cousin, Aileen Lindsay, with whom we were staying while her husband, a doctor in the army, was stationed in Alaska.

After a friend of Mother and her date, a colonel, arrived, they drove across the Spokane River out to Fort Wright which lay on a low bluff along the river. First they stopped for cocktails at the current general's quarters, a large red brick house on *Officers' Row*. When Gable arrived, he and Mother were introduced and drinks were served. After several drinks and some chatting, the general said they should go on over to the club for dinner. As Gable helped Mother on with her coat, he asked, "May I look after you tonight, Mrs. Smelser?"

The group walked along snow-shoveled sidewalks to the Officers' Club which had been newly constructed out of logs and overlooked the icy river. The club was packed, full of officers, local non-military members and guests. When Gable entered, like a cliché, all heads turned to get a look. The general led them to a table by a big rock fireplace in the main room near the orchestra. Before ordering their meals, Gable volunteered to get the drinks.

At the bar, he had to wait and wait just like all the other officers. When he returned, he asked Mother to dance. She said she could feel women watching with envy. When they sat down, he offered Mother a cigarette, pulling out a case engraved from Carole Lombard.

During dinner Gable asked Mother more about my father's status. He said he'd also be going over to the war soon. From time

to time, Gable was introduced to other officers. Then a lady came rushing up to the table. With great excitement she said she worked at the Red Cross where she loudly said, "We are making itty-bitty bandages for your big chest," poking him hard there. "Oh shit," Gable said under his breath to Mother. "Let's get out of here."

Mother suggested coming back to where we were staying for scrambled eggs, an idea that appealed to him. So Mother, Gable, and Mother's friends bid goodbye to the general and his wife and drove back through the snow to the house on the South Hill.

Once there, the four of them talked quietly as Mother's cousin was in bed. After scrambled eggs and coffee, and time to hold me up from my crib, Gable said he needed to go back to the Davenport Hotel but would take a taxi. Saying goodbye, he encouraged mother not to lose hope, saying, "When your old man comes back, you're welcome at my place anytime."

The next morning, when Mother's cousin found out that Clark Gable had been in the house while she slept, she was furious! Quickly word got around town and the phone rang off the hook. "Who are you...?" women asked.

But they did not know that my father was missing in action.

In years to come, Mother would say that Gable was a gentleman but that he sure had a salty vocabulary!

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Maj. Harold C. Smelser

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Seattle conference gets high marks

by Barry Barr-Finch

The 2014 Conference in Seattle was, from just about every angle, a resounding success.

According to the 28 evaluations completed, the speakers were very popular. All the speakers were well received, beginning with Vamik Volkan's panel about mothers, followed by AWONer Walt Carter's tremendous presentation on the meaning of World War II for AWONers, new member Kathy Williams' very touching personal story, and ending with AWONer Joe Lippi's and World War II veteran Art Mahler's story of how they met and their trip to Europe together. Many people were thrilled to have a veteran with us. Two people listed the Lippe/Mahler presentation as the highlight of the conference, while two said the same about Carter's presentation. Many people mentioned the wonderful hotel as a highlight and all of the great things to see and to do nearby.

Unfortunately, since we handed out the evaluation forms at the banquet Saturday night, no comments were made about the memorial service Sunday. But verbal comments to us said it was outstanding. The Missing Man theme and poem read by AWONer Norma Nichol Hamilton was extremely moving. The color guard, the Navy band, the grandchildren's reading of our fathers' names followed with AWONer Sam Tannenbaum ringing a bell, and of course the traditional reading of *High Flight* by AWONer Walt Linne, all added color and depth to the very memorable morning.

Walt told us that we pulled off a significant precedent since we were able to have a representative from the Governor's office, the Mayor's office, and a member of the King

County Council, all welcome us to Washington, Seattle, and King County. This was all preceded by Israel and Sue Shotridge performing three Tlinget welcome dances. We will be adding the official welcome letters to the AWON archive collection.

Many people shared that the banquet meals were excellent. However, behind the scenes was a very hard-working crew of hotel workers, many of whom conference co-chair Judi Hollis Kramer and I got to know and appreciate for all their fine attention to details. Our hotel liaison, Connie Mueller, was superb, and was one of the big reasons the conference was a smooth-running operation.

When we started this process two years ago, we knew that we had a difficult act to follow. We knew from the comments at the Indianapolis conference that the Embassy Suites was a very fine hotel and that they offered many amenities which almost everyone loved. Know-

ing that there was not an Embassy Suites in a convenient location to downtown Seattle, we were going to be hard pressed to "measure up." We did our best to offer accommodations comparable to Indianapolis.

Judi and I want everyone to know that it was our extreme pleasure and honor to be the co-chairs of this conference. From the beginning, when AWONer Penny LeGrand joined us for the hotel search right through to the Sunday cruises, every minute was so enjoyable even if it was challenging at times.

Of course it could not have happened without a fine supporting cast of which there are too many to name. We had a wonderful local group who helped with planning for the past year. They came up with some

A copy of Walter Carter's presentation at the Seattle Conference, *The Meaning of World War II for AWONers*, is available by contacting Walter at walterfcarter@aol.com

...continued on page 10

great ideas. However, one name cannot go without mentioning here: kudos to AWON-er Kathie Hobbs who was in the breakfast room every single morning helping to be sure that things ran smoothly.

Some of the little touches that just seemed like “gifts” to us were the Mountlake Terrace High School Jazz Combo with a great-grandson playing, the Shotridge performance, and the hand bell presented to Sam (aka MC Hammer) to help him keep things

Star of The Star

A volunteer who makes AWON work

Penny Hopkins LeGrand

AWON Travel Specialist

***Thanks for your expertise
with hotels, airlines
and tours.***

There are more than 115 AWON volunteers who donate their time and money to activities like updating the AWON website, coordinating overseas wreaths, arranging regional gatherings, mailing AWON materials and much more. Many members have been doing these jobs for years and would be happy for some help or for someone else to take over.

Contact a board member to volunteer.



on schedule and in order. That gave us an idea to ring the bell as each name was read at the Memorial Service. Now the bell will be available for future conferences.

The Walter Kilgor Seattle Fire Fighters Honor Guard and the Navy Band Northwest are two more examples of how things just “came together.” Kathy's story had a connection to our own local member, Mary Kenny. And who could not get goose bumps when Art told the story of how he met Joe Lippi, the son of his best friend?

A big thanks also goes to all who donated gifts for the raffle and bought tickets. The raffle made \$760. Several people said they were unaware that tickets were for sale. That was one little oversight by the co-chairs. We apologize that we failed to plan to have the tickets on sale earlier and to advertise the raffle better.

We again thank all of you who helped make this a wonderful and memorable conference. All of those behind the scenes as well as all the conference attendees went to make the best possible supporting cast for this conference. We look forward to seeing everyone at the next conference in Florida in two years.

Film features rare *Spitfire* footage

A 15-minute documentary on Youtube tells the story about the last mission of a British *Spitfire* that crash landed in England in September 1944.

The 16-mm films were shot by the producer's grand uncle, who was a flight doctor. After the doctor died in 2005 the producer set out to find the unknown people in the film and to share it with them. The amazing story that unfolds will interest anyone who likes mysteries, World War II, and especially, British *Spitfires*.

The film, *Spitfire 944*, won an honorable mention for short filmmaking at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. It can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/embed/ie3SrjLI-cUY>

AWON Connections

Pictures and Stories of Members
Gathering Around the Country



Annual Pennsylvania gathering set for April 25

It's that time again!

The 2015 York, Pennsylvania AWON Gathering will be Saturday, April 25.

Members and their spouses or friends will gather, as usual, at Hoss's Steak and Sea House on White Street in York, beginning about 11:30. For the next several hours they will socialize, remember their fathers and, of course, have lunch.

Organizer Lynne Lecrone will send information in February with directions to the restaurant; what is available for lunch; suggest hotels, if needed; and answer any questions. If you do not get an email or note from Lynne, contact her. Her new address is below but her phone numbers and email are the same.

The York gathering is one of the biggest and longest-running AWON gatherings. In 2012, 23 orphans attended, and up to six states have been represented at one gathering. Every year there are a few newcomers, so the group is very welcoming. Whether two or 20 attend, the York Gathering is a great AWON tradition.

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Eight AWON members had lunch at the Bryant Park Grill in Manhattan in late October. Seated, from left, are Carol Messeri, Maggie Malone, Joan Marlowe, Millie Cavanaugh and Gloria Layne. Standing are Renee Cooley, Nancy Meyer and Betsy Harris. Millie, Gloria and Joan are AWON founders, having attended the 1991 *No Greater Love* event in Washington, D.C., where AWON was created. Nancy and Carol joined AWON only this year. Renee Cooley is sister to AWON-er Sharon Crowley Connor and an AWON member in her own right. The group talked for hours about such things as AWON's history, our fathers, our mothers, the Seattle conference, how to research a father's military experience, and more regional get-togethers. Then we returned to our respective homes in New Jersey, Staten Island, Long Island, Brooklyn and Manhattan. Next time we hope someone from upstate New York and Connecticut can make it but, all in all, it was a terrific lunch that we hope to repeat early in the new year! *Maggie*

Song my mother sadly sang

Editor's note: This piece was written for a blog. Richard was only 18 months old and remembers the crying all around him when his family received a telegram. He, his mother and older sister were at the airport getting ready to fly to the Philippines to meet his father when the telegram caught up with them at the Alameda, California naval air station. His father died at 26, and his father's mother at 26. Richard's mother died at 56. Richard says at age 69 (with a sister age 71), "there are times when we kind of feel like we are way past our sell-by dates for our family."

by Richard Adams

Today is the first day of autumn and we've gotten our first rain. So specific and timely!

I remember in high school writing an answer to an essay question in my honors English class. The topic was to "discuss the autumnal nature of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*." I got a good grade on it, but it was hard at first, as a high school senior, to really think about "autumnal nature." Oh, I could have assumed that the theater would have attached yellow and orange leaves to trees on the stage, or thought about some theme of American Thanksgiving in a British play, but what got me through the test was the thoughts of old age, with autumn being the metaphor for the winding down of a life before "winter" comes.

What possibly could a 17-year-old have known about old age? I knew my paternal grandparents were certainly old, and my mother's parents seemed even older. They both had white hair. I didn't find out until later that my maternal grandfather's hair had turned snow white when he was 18. I don't think it had anything to do with the only job he could get at that age, when he'd

just arrived in America, sailing from Scotland in steerage on the ship *HMS Lusitania* in 1910.

The job he could get? He picked up deceased persons from the streets of New York City each night to bring back to the funeral parlor. And they let him sleep in one of the coffins in lieu of much pay. It saved my thrifty grandfather from Edinburgh the cost of roominghouse rent. But his hair did turn snow white.

The images that came to mind, however, in writing my essay came not from any experience with old age in my immediate family, but from a song my mother used to sing, a song she heard from her Scottish father. The lyrics came from a poem by Robert Burns but the tune is in a minor key, a plaintive, haunting melody that alone will bring one to thoughts of quiet winter contemplation.

The song is called *John Anderson my jo, John*. After reading this you might want to listen to a version of it on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef93XIIMtv4>. The singer is very good, but the words are in a Scots dialect. For example, "jo" means "love" as in "my jo" is "my love." It is a woman singing about the aging of two people still in love. The song begins with -

*John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint (acquainted)
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonie brow was brent (beautiful brow
was unwrinkled)
But now your brow is beld, John (bald)
Your locks are like the snaw (snow)
But blessings on your frosty pow (head)
John Anderson my jo!*

The second verse relates to how they clamb (climbed) the hill together (together) and had many a happy day, and they've had one anither (another), but now "we maun

totter down" to the bottom of the hill, hand in hand, and sleep together at the foot (of the mountain).

The Greeks, who had six words for love, used "pragma" for the everyday, long-lasting love of long-married couples, the love that consists of giving of yourself and not expecting return, but fully knowing that the other person is doing the same. An older couple knows each other completely and still loves the other dearly.

My mother sang in the church choir and had a strong voice, but when she sang that song it was done very quietly, and many times was followed by tears and a hug for my sister and me.

Her husband had gone off to World War II and survived that, but an air-rescue mission near a rugged mountain in the Philippines with a typhoon in the area meant that he and his entire crew died that day, 100 yards from the crash site of the plane they were looking for. She became a widow at age 26 with two small children. She sang that Robert Burns song with the wistful voice of someone who would never know that "pragma" love of growing old together. My father was a picture on the wall, a handsome young man with dark brown hair and smooth brow, forever 26. My mother died 30 years later, at only age 56.

I'm one of those long-married persons, with the Love of my Life still with me. I have grown children and a grandchild. The "autumnal" love of this age is like a fine fall day, a day of wine-like brisk air, stirring the golden leaves on the trees preparing for winter. It warms the heart with memories of sum-

mer, but also a bit of foreshadowing of rainy, cooler times with very occasionally the soft soundless snowflakes adding contrast and peace to the world.

If you are reading this *Trivia*, most likely you are perhaps in your late 30s, early 40s or maybe older. For those of you lucky enough to be married and looking at your IRA account to see if you'll have enough to be at least somewhat comfortable in your time in retirement, remember that the best part will be growing into your senior years with the person you've loved for so long.

Your children will have the model of parents who love them and each other, and they will know that it can be done. And, giving a look into the future, they will see that what really matters when it all comes down to a life is whom you have loved, who has loved you, and how you've allowed yourself to be happy with what's really important.

Toys and the latest electronics get broken or outdated. Riches

can disappear in Wall Street shenanigans. Promised retirement plans can disappear with a vote of Congress, legislature, or the company board of directors. But the enduring parts of life are ones which calm and soothe the soul.

I wish you a quiet, contemplative autumn day, as you see the rain arrive in the late afternoon, and think of the golden days of cool rains and the snow that may happen this year. Or not.

But how you react to the autumnal times of life will determine your happiness in the long run. May your run be long.



Claude and Jeanne Adams, 1942

Unaccounted for still tops 73,000

WWII MIAs from Europe, Pacific Identified

Eight missing World War II servicemen have been accounted for since September 2014, according to the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office. Here are the stories of five of them:

On June 5, 1944, Maj. Peyton S. Mathis Jr., 28, of Montgomery, Alabama, was the pilot of a P-38J *Lightning* on a bombing mission in the northern Solomons Islands. En route, Mathis lost power in his right engine and crashed while attempting to land at Kukum Air Field on Guadalcanal Island. A rescue team located the crash site that day, but was unable to recover Mathis because the aircraft was submerged in water in a dense jungle swamp.

In 1949, an Army Graves Registration Company searched for Mathis' plane but was unable to locate it. In 2012, while surveying another crash site, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) was led to another crash site. JPAC surveyed the area and in 2013 excavated the site. While there the team took possession of additional remains that were in the custody of the local police department. These additional remains were reported as being found by local villagers prior to the team's arrival to excavate the site.

Mathis' remains were identified through circumstantial evidence, dental comparisons and mitochondrial DNA that

matched Mathis' maternal-line cousin. He was buried in January 2015 in his hometown.

On June 15, 1944, elements of the 105th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division, sustained heavy losses from an enemy "banzai" attack on Saipan. More than 900 soldiers were wounded or killed during the month of intense fighting, including Army Pfc. Richard N. Bean, 24, of Manassas, Virginia, who was reported missing in action on July 7.

On July 8, 1945, with no new information concerning Bean or 21 other service members of the 105th IR, investigators issued a presumptive finding of death. In November 1948, the American Graves Registration Services reviewed the circumstances of Bean's loss and concluded his remains were non-recoverable.

In September 2013, several Japanese non-governmental organizations recovered human remains and personal effects belonging to American servicemen from an unmarked burial and turned them over to JPAC.

Scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory identified Bean's remains through circumstantial evidence, dental comparisons and mitochondrial DNA that matched Bean's nephew. He was buried in Quantico, Virginia in October.

Three airmen from a B-26G *Marauder* that took off from Saint Quentin, France, on December

23, 1944, for a bombing mission on Eller, Germany, have been identified.

The remains of 1st Lt. William P. Cook, 27, and Sgt. Eric M. Honeyman, 21, both of Alameda, California; and Staff Sgt. Maurice J. Fevold, 21, of Chicago, were recovered after a group of aviation researchers located the wreckage of a B-26G near Allmuthen, Belgium, in 2006, and notified the U.S. Army Mortuary Affairs Activity - Europe. In 2007, a JPAC team investigated the site and recommended it for excavation. In 2012 and 2013, JPAC teams excavated the crash site and recovered human remains and non-biological material evidence.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died during the war. At the end of the war, there were approximately 79,000 Americans unaccounted for. Today, more than 73,000 Americans remain unaccounted for from World War II.

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Price List / Order Form



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AWON Board Business

6 September 2014

*The September meeting was held at the
AWON National Conference in Seattle*

Financial Report: Treasurer **Jerry Pinkerton** reported that through August 31, 2014, AWON has approximately \$15,000 in actual income. AWON has received 82% of the budgeted operating income and spent 32% of the budgeted expenses. As of August 31, total cash was \$84,000, of which \$13,400 is restricted for Memorial Day wreaths and Margraten use. In reserve is \$5,300 of the \$6,000 budgeted for website/database upgrade. That leaves \$65,300 in unrestricted operating funds.

Paid Help: The board discussed the possible future need to hire outside help for jobs now done by AWON volunteers. Jerry recognized **Bill Chiodo** who has prepared AWON taxes for the past 13 years. Now that Bill has retired from his tax practice, he no longer will be able to prepare AWON's taxes. Jerry's nephew is a CPA and has offered to prepare AWON's taxes for \$600 per year. Other volunteer functions may become paid positions out of necessity.

AWON Database: **Gerry Morenski** reported that as of August 31, 2014, AWON had 4,078 orphans, 874 family members, 131 associates, 58 guests and 247 complimentary newsletter subscribers in the AWON database. Of the records of AWON fathers, 2,228 are buried overseas and 721 are MIA. The report also compares membership numbers for June 2013, June 2014 and August 2014. The report lists activities completed monthly by the database manager. Gerry asked members to report any address or e-mail address changes. AWON granddaughter **Amy Chiodo** has agreed to act as a backup for Gerry on the database.

The Star: **Kathy Le Comte** expressed appreciation for all who have submitted content to *The Star*. She will ask the board to upgrade the InDesign software used to produce *The Star* from a version used since 2007 to one issued in 2012. The newer version includes InDesign, Photoshop, Dreamweaver, and other programs and e-Star • January 2015

would cost about \$300. Several questions were taken from the floor. The electronic version of *The Star* dates back to September 2007 and is available only in the Members Only section of the AWON website. **Walt Linne** has hard copies of every issue. He offered to scan and digitize them. He will check with the American Legion in Indianapolis about cost. The American Legion provides AWON office space and office equipment use at no charge. AWON has donated \$500 per year to the American Legion. Anyone can view and read the current issue of the newsletter, however, older issues have been restricted as one of the benefits of membership. Discussion followed on the relative merits of electronic versus printed/mailed versions.

Database Project: Kathy explained that AWON's recently streamlined database has the ability to drive or feed content on a website. Also, when information is added or updated in the database it can automatically be fed to a website. In order to do this, the board has contracted with The Support Group, which currently performs tech support for the database, to develop PHP coding for the AWON database. There were numerous questions from the floor regarding how PHP and CSS, another technical upgrade the board has approved, work together. PHP deals with content while CSS deals with website design and is the "foundation" for PHP. Amy Chiodo will attempt to learn and develop CSS to save money. Extensive discussion followed and included several suggestions from the floor.

Regional Coordinators: **Barry Barr-Finch** noted that there are approximately 40 regional coordinators. He would like to encourage them to become more diligent in reaching out to AWON members who are not active.

Roundtable Discussion: Gerry, Kathy and **Norma Nicol Hamilton** compiled an extensive list of the suggestions shared at the conference roundtable discussion. Gerry shared a number of the more prevalent suggestions. All suggestions will appear in *The Star* (editor's note: see *October 2014 issue*).

...continued on page 18

Guidelines for Submitting Material for Publication

- Topics considered for publication in *The Star* include, but are not limited to, unit reunions, visiting battle or crash sites, cemeteries, ceremonies, seeking or finding families and veterans, poetry, etc.
- Email copy-ready articles and photos to the editor in Word, WordPerfect, RTE, formats, or in the body of an email. High resolution jpeg, bitmap, gif or tiff images are preferred. Text and photos also can be mailed. Photos returned upon request.
- Please keep text to one page (500 to 1,000 words),
- Preference is given to material written by and about AWON members.
- Authors retain copyright to published original writing. Permission to reprint should be obtained from the author by contacting the editor.

Kathy Le Comte, Editor
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johnkath5@comcast.net

**Deadline for the
April Issue
is March 1**

...Minutes, from page 17

Ballot Committee: **Judy Hathaway** read the ballot committee report, submitted by chair **Patty Temte**. A total of 246 ballots postmarked on or before August 1, 2014 were counted. Current board members Jerry Pinkerton and **Bonnie Oates** were re-elected; **Billie Meeks, Mike Forgy** and **Diane Pollard** were newly elected. It was moved and seconded to accept the report of the ballot committee.

New Board: The board meeting was adjourned. After ten minutes the new board took their seats and opened the meeting. Interim President **Ed Peters** recognized those members leaving the board: Kathy Le Comte, 12 years; **Judy Hoffman**, 12 years; and Judy Hathaway, 4 years; for a total of 28 years of service.

Officer Nominations: The following nominations for officers for 2014-2015 were made and approved: president, **Norm Burkey** (not present); vice-president, Gerry Morenski; secretary, Bonnie Oates; and treasurer, Jerry Pinkerton. The rest of the board of directors consists of Norma Nicol Hamilton, Ed Peters and Diane Pollard, all present; and Mike Forgy and Billie Meeks, not present. Gerry Morenski presided over the rest of the meeting in the absence of Norm Burkey.

AWON Archives Advocacy: Norma reported on the Society of American Archivist (SAA) conference she attended in Washington, D.C., in August, where she gave a presentation about AWON and its archives. Ed, **Phyllis Epstein Louis** and Norm also attended.

AWON Margraten Trip: Gerry reported on the AWON Memorial Day 2015 trip to Margraten. She discussed funding for the trip and how the Margraten grave adoption program works.

Friends, ABMC and AWON Database: Ed and Gerry gave a report on their recent meetings with the Friends of the National World War II Memorial and the American Battle Monuments Commission, in Washington, D.C. Both organizations are interested in possibly integrating the information from the AWON database with their own for historical reference.

2016 Conference: **Paul Bremer** proposed hosting the 2016 AWON National Conference in Florida. He said he would work with **Sam Tannenbaum, Jamie McCollum** and **Billy Winters** on the proposal. They are investigating a possible cruise the first week in December at the lowest cost.

Bonnie Oates, Secretary

This is a condensed version of the minutes. For the complete minutes, visit awon.org.

American WWII Orphans Network

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(please print clearly)

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Be as complete as possible. If you do not have some information, leave it blank and we may be able to find it. Do not delay mailing application for lack of information.

Name _____

Last First M.I.

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Date of Death _____

Place of Death _____

Where Buried _____

Military Unit _____

Service Number _____

Additional details about serviceman's death or service: (rank, medals, etc. Add additional sheet, if necessary.)

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Names and addresses of your siblings with same father, and/or additional family members:

(Please include information on another sheet, if necessary.)

Membership Levels

Any child of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Coast Guard or Merchant Marine, who was killed, remains missing in action, or who died in the line of duty or later died of wounds or injuries sustained during World War II, is eligible to join as an **Orphan Member**. Any direct relative is eligible to join as a **Family Member**. Any individual, including friends of those killed in World War II, those who wish to participate in AWON activities, or organizations with an interest in and compatible with AWON's purposes and goals, are eligible to join as an **Associate Member**.

Check Your Membership Category:

____ Orphan ____ Family ____ Associate

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Basic annual membership dues are \$25. Sponsor, Gold Star and Multi-year memberships also are available:

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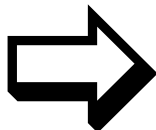
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AWON Mission

To locate and bring together sons and daughters of those who died or are missing as a result of American involvement in World War II, honor the service and sacrifice of our fathers and provide information and support to these people who were orphaned by the war.

AWON Directory

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