

Chapter Four :

Growing Into Adulthood

It was early in the morning when the Greyhound bus left the Mid Town Tunnel located on First Avenue between Thirty Forth and Thirty Fifth Street, Manhattan N.Y. and the dawn was just breaking through lighting up the road. To get to Baltimore, Maryland we had to go through the states of Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Most of the roads were good but they only had two lanes, one lane in each direction and they passed through all the towns. The most you could average for the entire trip was thirty-five miles an hour even with the speed limit at this time being fifty miles per hour. You lost a lot of time when you approached the cities and towns and had to reduce your speed. In some areas the highway had three lanes. The middle lane was for passing the slower moving cars or trucks. Traffic going in either direction had access to this lane. This was dangerous and you had to be very careful when you passed another car. For a city kid who never went more than a couple of miles from home it was exciting to say the least. We crossed over many bridges and passed by many farms with cows and horses grazing on the beautiful hills of Maryland. As soon as it got dark, I closed my eyes and went to sleep.

When we arrived at the Baltimore station, one of the passengers woke me up. I looked at my watch, it was nine o'clock in the evening. With the road conditions as they were and the frequent pit stops, we were on the road ten hours. I left the bus station and walked the streets of Baltimore to look for shelter for the night. There I was with a suitcase in one hand and a toolbox in the other hand. It was late at night and not knowing my way around I picked the first place I came to and rented a room for the night. It was clean room. It had a double bed, a end table, bureau on one side of the room, a toilet with a shower and close to the bed it had a chair. Before I went to bed I wedged the chair up against the door and made sure that all the locks on the door were taken latched. I was scared! This was my first experience sleeping in a hotel. There was so much noise at the hotel that it kept me awake all night.



Fig 19. Entrance to Glen L. Martin Plant

It was early Sunday morning when I got up. I had only one day to locate the plant and find a room to rent close to the plant. I was scheduled to report for work the following Monday at four thirty in the afternoon I showered got dressed and left the hotel room. Leaving my suitcase and toolbox with the manager of the hotel. I was a little concerned about leaving my possessions at the hotel, so I went to the nearest fire station and asked the firemen on duty if my possessions would be safe at the hotel? They assured me that my belongings would be safe at the hotel and if I should have a problem let them know about it. They then advised me the best way to get to the town of Middle River where the Glenn L Martin Plant was located. They also assured me that I would not have any problem in getting room and board within walking distance of the plant. I thanked the fireman and left for Middle River.

After I left the fire station I went to breakfast and attended the local church. I then continued on my journey to Middle River. I had to take a trackless trolley to the plant. This was first time I ever saw a trackless trolley. It was built similar to a gasoline engine driven bus but instead of the gasoline engine it was driven by an electric motor. The source of power required for the electric motor was supplied by a overhead cable located in the middle of the street running the full length of the trolley route. The trolley was equipped with rubber tires requiring no tracks. It also was equipped with a steering mechanism similar to a bus making it maneuverable within the length of the control arm from the trolley to the cable. The

length of the cable allowed the trolley to get to the street curbing to pick up and exit passengers.



Fig 20. Baltimore Trolley Bus around 1939

The trip from the city of Baltimore to Middle River took one hour. We passed Highland Town which was half way between Baltimore and Middle River. When I got off the trolley in Middle River it reminded me of our neighborhood. It was a very small town with unpaved streets. To get to the town you had to cross an old quaint wooden bridge spanning a river bearing the same name as the town. The bridge could not support the weight of the trolley therefore the trolley route ended at the foot of the bridge. The bridge didn't even support the weight of car. At the edge of the river was a Marina with a large sign "ROWBOATS FOR RENT". This River emptied into the Chesapeake Bay. After crossing the bridge I proceeded to go into the town and noticed a sign directing me to a boarding house. I followed the directions and the next thing I knew I was face to face with a attractive middle age women. She introduced herself as being Mrs. Anna Masson She advised me that she had a vacancy.



Fig 20. Apartment in Middle River (Baltimore Area)

The room was in the back of the main house attached to the garage. There were two rooms and each room

had two twin beds. In addition to the beds it had two dressers, a washbasin, and a old fashion radio. The radio was in two sections comprised of a cabinet which had the dials and electronic equipment and on top of the cabinet was the separate speaker. Each room was rented to two tenants and each tenant was responsible for half of the rent. The rent money included the cost of heating the place and also providing us with electricity. A shower was available to all the tenants and it was located in the garage. The sheets, pillowcases and towels would be changed every week. The rental fee to each tenant was four dollars a week and would have to be paid the first day of the week. The place was clean and not having to much time to look further, I advised Mrs. Masson I would take the room for a couple of weeks and let her know after that time if I would stay longer.



Fig 21. Inside of the Apartment in Middle River



Fig 22. Entry to the Apartment in Middle River

I was introduced to the man that was occupying one half of the room. He was middle age

and was from the state of Pennsylvania. We got along very well. He showed me around and introduced me to Mrs. Mohr who ran a boarding house down the street from our room. So at this point I was well established, I had a place to sleep and a place to eat. Mrs. Mohr provided me with breakfast, dinner and packed a lunch for the five days Monday thru Friday. On Saturday and Sunday she served two meals breakfast and dinner. For all of these meals she charged six dollars a week. Mrs. Mohr was a middle aged, married to one of the nicest men you could ever meet. They had four children, two girls, Mary 19 years, Betty 12 years and two boys, Robert 18 years, and Donald eight years old. Mary and Robert were employed outside the home. Betty went to school and helped out in the kitchen when the boarders came in to eat. We averaged about six at each meal.

With all the kind people I met I was still homesick and not ashamed to admit that their was many a night that I cried myself to sleep. I was always a loner and didn't like to mingle with too many friends. I was very fussy in my selection of friends. Therefore it was difficult for me to be away from home. My work was my salvation.

I started as a "Apprentice Sheet Metal Layout Man" and I reported to work at 4:00 PM and was dismissed at 12:00 Midnight. I was assigned to a experienced layout man. He was also from New York and he took a liking to me and taught me all that was required to become a layout man. When he left the company to return back home, he recommended me to our supervisor to take over his job. That was my first promotion. We were at the time making fixture templates for the B-26 Bomber fuselage. It was strange at the time to see that we were preparing mass production of a warplane whereas President Roosevelt was continually telling the people "I hate war! Eleanor hates war and we will not go to war!". This was December 1939.

During the early days at Middle River I spent my mornings packing a lunch Mrs. Mohr prepared for me and walked to the local marina, rented a row boat and rowed up and down the river enjoying the scenery. This all changed a little after I brought my car to Middle River. Having the car was great. During my visit at home I advised my Mom that I would be sending money home weekly. After expenses were paid I sent the remaining money to Mom for safekeeping. This I did faithfully each week. As time went by my roommate went back home and I got a new roommate His name was Henry Lezak and his home was in Camden, NJ. My next-door tenant was John Barbey and his hometown was Utica, NY. John did not have his meals at Mrs. Mohr's he boarded at a house down the street from Mrs. Mohr's.

Henry had his meals with me at Mrs. Mohr's. He was sweet on Mrs. Mohr's daughter Mary. Henry was in his late twenties when he decided to leave the merchant marines and come to work at Glenn L Martin. I don't know what he did at work. He was tight mouth and never talked too much about himself. He was very high tempered and flew off the handle at the smallest irritation. On one occasion he got so irritated when I was about to go to sleep and I turned off my radio, he throw the alarm clock at me. Luckily it just missed hitting me.

Henry had the midnight shift whereas I had the afternoon shift so we had to tolerate each other when it came to our sleeping habits. On one occasion I thought that he would beat me up to a pulp. Since I was the only one with a car at the time Henry and John relayed on me to do all the errands. When Henry got home from work he washed up and started to dress up to go out. He then turned to me and asked where his shirts were. I replied that they were at the cleaners. He got so upset he came after me with such a vengeance it scared me half to death. From that date on Henry and John did their own errands.

For the first six months, having the car I drove home for the weekends. It wasn't hard to get riders because many of the employees of Glenn L Martin resided in New York City. To keep the expenses down we all chipped in for the gas and tolls. We left early Saturday morning about 12:30 AM right after the late shift. We drove all morning getting into New York by 8:00 AM. I generally dropped the boys off at the nearest subway and I headed home.



Fig 23. Gene with Friend Jimmy

When I got home I would get together with my friend Sal and Jim and do the town. The first thing we would do was to look up Marge, Jim's girlfriend. Marge would have a date waiting for me. Of all the dates Marge made for me The only one that I liked to be with was Mildred H. She had the prettiest red hair

I ever saw and sparkling green eyes. So when ever possible she would be my date when I came home for the weekend. Most of the time all our weekend activities were planned ahead of time by Marge.



Fig 24. Friend from Baltimore (Unknown)

We did the normal things kids did in those days. In the summer months we enjoyed the beach in the morning and afternoons and at night we enjoyed the activities at Coney Island. In the winter months we spent most of our time at the movies. Neither Jim, Sal or my self drank hard-liquor. Once in awhile we would visit the local Pizza parlor and have a pizza and wash it down with a beer. That was the as far it we went. We never drank the hard stuff except when we where home. Pop always had wine and liquors. These were always available to us. It was a Italian custom to drink wine at all the meals and the liquor was served on special occasions with the Italian pastries. All of us preferred ice cream and we spent a lot of evenings at the ice cream parlors. That German homemade ice cream was excellent.

On my sister Lena's 16th birthday, I took her and a few of her girlfriends to the ice cream parlor to celebrate. It was the same night that Orson Wells was broadcasting the radio drama "The War of the Worlds". The radio in the parlor was broadcasting this drama, we paid no mind. I guess we were too engrossed celebrating Lena's birthday. The highlight of the evening occured when Lena with great pride shouts "I still have my cherry!". She was right. We all had eaten our cherries.

It wasn't until we read the paper the next day that we found out the havoc Orson Well's radio program caused. The people in New Jersey believed it to be true and ran out of their houses into the streets screaming " Its the end of the world. God save us!" Orson Wells play was so realistic it had a lot of people believing it to be true. To avoid a recurrence in the future the government made strict rules that listeners are to be warned at the beginning of the broadcast, before and after every commercial that the broadcast warning they are listening to is part of a radio drama.

It was a few months after I arrived in Middle River, that my brother-law Ray came to review the employment possibilities at Glen L. Martins. They offered him a position but when he reviewed his salary against his expenses, he decided it would not be profitable for him to accept the position offered.

My brother Tony came down also. I covered all his expenses while he was at Middle River. He didn't do much to get himself a job but he was having a good time with all the girls in the neighborhood. After Two weeks of this I sent him back home. I never did find out why he didn't get the job.

That same year Mom, Pop, Lena and Frank visited me on their way to Washington. It was a complete surprise to me. I was very upset. It was early in the morning and they did not make any reservations for bedding. My friends were very understanding and we arranged our rooms so that my family had a place to sleep for the night. What was to be a happy re-union turned out to a Gene (temper) tongue lashing. After the family rested I made up for my earlier behavior by settling them in a nice hotel in Baltimore. They stayed with me for two days and then left for Washington.

Months passed and I became acquainted with more of the people in Middle River. After dinner I would help Betty with the dishes. She was only 12 years old but stacked up beyond her years. She had long blonde hair extending just below her shoulder with the prettiest blue eyes. She wasn't beautiful but she was very attractive. One night after Betty and I finished the dishes she turned to me and asked me if I would take her to the movies. She said it was all right with her mother. One Saturday night I asked Betty's mother and she approved. From that Saturday on Betty and I went to the movies frequently. When we went to the movies I treated her as my younger sister. Right after the movie I took her to the local ice cream parlor for a soda and then I took her home.

With the car and the friends I was making, there were a lot of weekends that I didn't go home. Instead the boys and I took in the sights within the state of Maryland. One weekend we went to

Washington, D.C. and Annapolis. Our trips came to stop after my accident totaling the car.



Fig 25. Gene's visit to Washington D.C

It occurred one night after work when I met John at his girl friend's house. They had a blind date for me and we toured the local bars. After touring the bars we drove John and his girlfriend home. My date and I stayed in the car while John escorted his date to her apartment. It wasn't too long after John left that a man approached the car and swore at me and my date, and then proceeded to pound on the car door. My date advised me to start the car and drive away. I did so without questioning her on the matter. That did not stop the man and he starting chasing me all over Middle River. I had the faster car if I we were on a main highway we would have a better chance to lose him. So I did the best I could with the roads we were traveling. At one point I wanted to stop but she warned me that he was a jealous lover and carried a knife. I don't know how long we were riding but it seemed like a million years. At one point I saw my opportunity to lose him. I turned into a driveway at high speed, backed the car in the street after he passed me and sped away in the opposite direction. I was successful in accomplishing this feat because I had the heavy car whereas as he had the light car he had to drive on. This maneuver put me ahead of him and gave me a chance to lose him. I did lose him but I was driving so fast to get away from him that I couldn't make a sharp curve that was rapidly approaching. I ended up in a drain ditch along side of the road. The car was totaled and my date hit the windshield with her head and was bleeding all over the place. Luckily I was spared. Thank God we were in the big car. At the point of contact the horn was

shorted and it was blasting away. It attracted a lot of attention. It wasn't too long before the man chasing us caught up with us. He approached us took my date by the arm, and put her in his car. He said he was going to get her to the hospital and he warned me not to tell anyone that his girl was involved.

It wasn't long after the accident that a police car and wrecker were at the site. Of course the first thing the officer asked me was I alone. I answered I was. As we walked to the patrol car we heard very clearly on the radio that the police were notified that a injured girl was admitted at the local hospital. All police cars were alerted to be on a lookout for a car accident. The police officer turned to me and said are you ready to talk. I told him the whole story and he put me in the patrol car and we proceeded to go to the hospital. On our way to the hospital, I saw John walking on the side of the road heading for home. On my request the officer stopped the car and I informed John of all that had occurred within the time I left him at his girlfriends house. He was shocked and asked if I needed any help. I saw no need for John to get involved so I said I didn't need any help at this time. John then continued his journey home. Dawn was just breaking through. When we got to the hospital I stayed in the car with one of the officers and the other went into the hospital to question the injured girl. While we were in the car the officer was checking my drivers license and my car registration. The car was registered in Maryland and at the time I only had a NY drivers license. By Maryland's law the NY drivers license was not valid. The car I was driving was registered in my name. The state of Maryland requires that if you register your car in Maryland, you must also apply for a Maryland license to drive the car. It seems the charges were being built up against me. They had me down for damaging government property, passing a stop sign, injuring a passenger, driving without a valid license and having no liability insurance.

It wasn't too long before the officer returned and advised me that the girl wasn't going to press charges. In addition the girl also testified that no rape or sexual harassment occurred. The officer told me that when the girl finished her testimony he told her that she wasn't too considerate in not having sex with me due to the fact that it cost me the loss of my car. She replied it wasn't my fault and no one can say I didn't try.

After the visit to the hospital we went to headquarters and my case was reviewed and it was agreed that all charges would be dropped when and if I would get my Maryland drivers license. It meant that I would need to pass the written exam and drivers test. A date was set up and they released me without

bail. It was strange that I was getting off so easy. After further review it came to me. Middle River was being over populated with eighteen-year-old boys being hired by Glenn L. Martin. The State Law required that a person had to be twenty-one to be served hard liquor. Money was flowing and they had many bars and nightclubs. Every one was on the take. The bartenders with the approval of the owner would serve hard liquor to minors. So it was no problem being served at any of the local bars. Not to upset the apple cart they (The Politicians) covered up all the accidents and made the policemen look the other way.

It was at this time in my life that I experienced what greed would do to law abiding citizens. Came Sunday morning when I drove to church, there where many cars stranded in the drain ditches along Eastern Ave. All these cars belonged to all those young boys who were served hard liquor the night before. So now you can see why I was dismissed so easily. The Politicians could not stand the publicity.

The girl my good friend John introduced me to happened to be married. A minor detail that John forgot to mention. The man who was chasing me was her husband. Nice work John! This taught me a lesson I would not soon forget. Thank God all I lost was my car. In the future whenever I dated again I was much more careful to find out whom I am dating.

When I got back at the boarding house after my ordeal at the police station it was 11:30 Sunday morning. The first one I meet was Mr. Masson. The first thing he said was "you know Gene I just saw a car being towed away, it sure looked like your car. It couldn't be yours since you are not hurt. I dont know how any one could escape injury if he was in that car." I think he was just being kind. How many 1933 Buick seven passenger cars are there. I replied "Yes it was my car!"

He was right I don't know how we both escaped serious injury. The only explanation I could come up with is that the large eight cylinders under the hood took the shock. But here I was with a car that was totaled and I was back to walking.

John loaned me his car a 1932 Ford coupe to take my drivers license test. It was some car, it had the choke and the retard spark located at the steering wheel which I had difficulty operating. The engine backfired a couple of times before I mastered the controls but I managed to pass the drivers test. Upon presenting my Maryland's driver license to the Police Department all charges were dropped.

Well here I was without wheels. It was hard to take so I decided to go home check with Mom and see how much money she saved for me. With these savings maybe I could buy myself a car. Boy did I get

a surprise. Mom informed me that she used the monies I sent towards the new house she bought. She justified it by telling me I had a share in the house. I was shocked and from that moment on I never sent money home again. I still needed a car so Mom loaned me some money. The car I wanted to buy was a 1938 Buick convertible roadster. It was a beauty, it had parking lights in addition to the headlights shaped like bullets mounted on the front fender. It was a sweet car. But since Mom was putting up the money she picked the car. It was a 1936 Chevrolet sedan. What a let down. That's how my dream of owning a 1938 Buick convertible was quickly shattered.

Although John and I saw each other a lot he had his meals down the street from Mrs. Mohr. It was funny one day he approached me and wanted to know if he could join me at Mrs. Mohr for his meals. John was fortunate Mrs. Mohr had a opening and he starting getting his meals at her home. Little did I know that John was sweet on Betty and joined Henry and me at Mrs. Mohr to get close to Betty. It wasn't long until John, Betty and I were doing things together like swimming in the summer at Rocky Point beach and the movies in the winter. When ever we went to the local beach we drove down in John's 1932 Ford convertible coupe with the rumble seat in the back. John and Betty in the front seat and I and Deloris in the rumble seat. In the winter colds months we went out with my car the Chevrolet sedan. John and Betty hit it off and I slowly got out of Betty's life. Mrs. Mohr was not too happy with John as a son-in-law because of the big difference in their ages and tried to break up the relationship. At one time she asked me to interfere by asking Betty to go out with me again. I told her that this was impossible because Betty and John were very much in love. John was Twenty-two and Betty was only twelve at the time they were dating. John and Betty got engaged and set the date to be married.

All this time the war in Europe was going badly for our allies England and France. President Franklin Roosevelt was still insisting that none of boys would be sent overseas to fight any foreign war. He kept his word and the USA was prospering from the war furnishing the war equipment to our allies. At the same time Congress was reviewing our armed services and were shocked to see how little we had to defend our ourselves in a event we were attacked. In was in 1940 when Congress passed a law to conscript all single men over the age of 21 to serve one year in the services of the United States. At the time neither Jim, Sal or myself was effected. During this time every one was singing "Goodbye Dear, I Will See You In a Year". When the drafted men got into the training camps they were equipped with wooden

rifles. It goes to show how prepared we were for war. For Sal, Jim and my self there were no changes. With John and Betty getting engaged we saw less and less of each other and I again started making more trips back home to Brooklyn. When I did get home I didn't spend too much time with the family. It seemed I was always out with the boys and girls of the neighborhood. Tony had his friends he paled out with. Frank was nine years old and also had his friends. And of course there was Lena.

Mom and Dad had their thing to do. Some weekends I would drop Mom and Pop off at our cousin Mike's house, leave them there and return later to take them home. At that time I was dating Mildred H. and she would accompany me whenever I took mother and father out to visit their friends or relative. If and when I took one of my girlfriends to cousin Mike's house his boys would look over my date and let me know if they approved or not. The worst critic was Joseph, the firstborn.

Meantime the war in Europe and Asia was getting worse. Germany was advancing towards France and Japan was mobilizing and attacking China and India-China. It wasn't long before France was losing ground to Hitler in his drive to get to England. With France surrendering, Japan, Italy and Russia were signing an alliance. England was in deep trouble. It took much will power for our President to keep us out of the war. We helped the war effort by supplying England and China with the materials they required to defeat their enemies. That was the start of "Lend-Lease" Program.

"Lend-Lease, program of military and economic aid given by the United States to nations warring against the Axis powers in World War II. Despite the proclaimed neutrality of the U.S., Congress by the Lend-Lease Act of 1941 empowered President Franklin D. Roosevelt on behalf "of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States, to sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of, to any such government any defense article" not expressly prohibited. The law originally authorized an appropriation of \$1 million. The Office of Lend-Lease Administration, established in October 1941 to administer the act, was incorporated into the Foreign Economic Agency; in 1943 the office was transferred to the Department of State."

This meant that payment for the material furnished would be paid at a later date. The other thing we did was to stop the exporting of oil and scrape iron to Japan.

To supply England, China, and Russia (Russia became our ally soon after Germany made a surprise invasion across its borders) arms and food

we had to increase our production of our farms and also change our plants from manufacturing peaceful goods to war goods. Instead of making automobiles and home appliances we started to mass produce tanks, ships, airplanes, and war weapons. Jobs were now plentiful and every one who wanted to work had a job. This brought on the start of Inflation. People were earning more money in a week then they could earn in a month before the war started in Europe.

With the fall of France our production at Glenn L. Martin also was increased. Our department was put on a ten-hour day and six day week. This put us on overtime that more than doubled our salary. At the time I was working in the template department. I thought that I would like to change jobs and consequently requested a transfer to the tool and die manufacturing department. Much to my surprise I was accepted. I did this for a while and then I was transferred to the hydraulic department. This was a special department set up after the company was experiencing problems with the hydraulic cylinders controlling the operation of the landing gear of the B-26 medium bomber. A sub-contractor supplied the cylinders to us. Our job was to unpack all the hydraulic equipment as received from the manufacturers and disassemble them and inspect each part and reassemble. It was in this department that I got my chance to advance to the drafting department that I always wanted second to piloting. One of the controls was a four-way valve and it had a couple of gears that had to be installed to the valve. I designed and made a jig to simplify the installation of the gears to the valve. My superior was so impressed that he recommended me to Tool Design Department. I was very happy to hear that I was accepted and I was told to report to Tool Design Dept the following week. My new classification was to be "Junior Tool Designer".

It was in the summer of 1940 when on my way to the big city of Baltimore I saw a car that caught my eye. It was what I thought a red convertible coupe should look like. It was nothing like the 1938 Buick but I figured it wouldn't hurt for me to take a closer look. I went into the dealers lot and checked out the car. It was a 1939 Nash two door convertible coupe with drop seats in the back for two passengers seated side ways. The car was powered with an inline engine having six cylinders.



Fig 26. Gene's 1939 Convertible Nash Automobile

It looked in good shape and I traded my Chevy that I never liked and bought it. The price of the car was 700 dollars and we made a deal for 500 dollars and my car. I took out a car loan for 500 dollars. I wasn't old enough to get the loan by myself and I needed someone who was twenty years old to co-sign the loan. Luckily one of my associates volunteered to help.

After getting the new car I didn't go home as often. With John and Betty getting engaged, they pretty much stayed to themselves. I was making new friends at that point anyway. Mrs. Masson's sister introduced me to her sister in law. Her name was Mildred Z. She was seventeen attending a Catholic High School in her senior year. We went out occasionally. Most of our dates took place in the afternoons. Sometimes we played tennis and other times we just drove through the countryside. From her religious teaching in the Catholic high school she was very shy and timid making me very uncomfortable when I was with her. Not that I would do anything to harm her. God forbid if I even tried to kiss her! I respected her wishes and we had a friendly relationship.

In the winter of 1940 Mrs. Masson advised me that she was selling the house and building a new one on Harrison Avenue. This was only a block away. The new house was to have three separate rooms with one bathroom complete with shower and bathtub on the second floor that she was planning to rent. Each room would accommodate two people. The rent would be increased to four dollars a week. She then told Henry and I that we were welcome to one of those rooms. It didn't take us too long to accept her offer. It was January 1941 when Henry and I moved in Mrs. Masson's new house.

It was at this house I met Robert Stockslager from Sharpsburg, Maryland. We became good friends and we did a lot of things together. Although our work schedule was the same, he worked in assembly line as riveter and I was in the Engineering Department as a Junior Tool Designer. Robert and his

uncle occupied one of the rooms. Every Saturday after work Robert and his uncle would drive to their respective homes and return to work the next day. Sundays were a drag for me. My Sunday started with me attending mass, having breakfast at Mrs. Mohr and then reading the comics to Mrs. Mohr youngest son Donald. Some Sundays after leaving the Mohr's I would go for a drive in the country with the top down. If the sun was out (Winter or Summer) the top of my car would be down. Most of the time I would be alone.

It was on one of these trips I saw a priest walking on the side of the road. I stopped the car and asked the priest if I could drive him to where he was going. His reply was "You could drive me to the bus terminal in Baltimore." I told him I had nothing to do and I generally took long rides so it would not be any trouble for me to drive him to his destination. He accepted and I took him to where he was going. Although we didn't see each other, we kept in touch by writing to each other.

One weekend Robert invited me to his home. I accepted and we started for his home after work. To get to Sharpsburg Maryland we had to go up and down some high mountains with very sharp curves. These sharp curves were quite a challenge to Robert and I. We challenged each and every one of these curves by taking them at speeds exceeding the posted limits. Sharpsburg was approximately 90 miles west of Baltimore and we made the trip in two hours. When we got to Roberts house I was introduced to the family. There was his father and mother, two sisters Natalie 18, and Marie 16. Both were attending high school. Robert also had a older brother studying to be a minister. I got a warm welcome. They showed me to my room.

The house was very old and there was no inside plumbing. There was a hand operated pump in the kitchen. The water from this pump was only used for cleaning and washing. The water for drinking and cooking was fetched from the natural well located down the street. The toilet was located in the back of the house. Coming from the big city, I could not dream that anything like this still existed. The people were very friendly and because of the small population every one knew each other not only by sight but also by name.

Natalie was very pretty and fast. Winning the Queen of the senior class made her very popular. That first night Robert, Natalie, and I went to a local party of seniors. Not being a beer drinker I was shocked at the beer that was consumed that night. Most of the kids were feeling no pains and there was a lot of necking. I was with Natalie and we were also necking with some petting. These kids in Sharpsburg

were too fast for me and I was so informed by Natalie the next day. She apparently was looking for something more than I was willing to give. Even if some of the girls played pretty rough, I did enjoy going to Sharpsburg so I drove Robert home every week and I always received a warm welcome at Roberts home. The family got a big kick out of me packing so many clothes for a one-day outing.

With the draft creeping down my neck I spent must of my money for clothes and recreation. Saving money was not my idea of having a good time. I bought the best clothes money could buy. My clothes closet was loaded with silk gabardine slacks of all colors with mating sport jackets. I must have own about a dozen pairs of shoes. Name a color and there was an excellent chance that I had it. Some people spent their money on booze whereas I spent my money on clothes. I could never make up my mind ahead of time as to what clothes to wear so I always packed extra clothes whenever I went away for the weekend. This was no problem, all I had to do was put them in the back of the car.

It was on one of these weekend trips to Sharpsburg that I first saw Oralee. I spotted her on the other side of the street. She had the prettiest blonde hair I ever saw. It was too bad that I had no time to make her acquaintance since Robert and I were on our way to work in Baltimore. Robert knew her and he also knew her brother who was our friend and fellow tenant living in Mrs. Masson's house. He was Carroll Moss. I would have never suspected that Carroll was Oralee's brother. She was a beautiful blonde. Carroll's hair was red. Carroll, Robert and I paled out together and it was strange that neither Robert nor Carroll ever mentioned Oralee in our normal conversations. Also it was strange that Carroll never mentioned his sister to me during the times he joined Robert and I on our weekly trips to Sharpsburg. When I approached Carroll and told him that I saw his sister and would like to meet her, he hesitated a while and then responded: "Gene I hope you will not get hurt when I tell you why I can't introduce you to my sister. My father being German has a hang up when it comes to Italians. My mother is more liberal. Let me talk to my sister and mother, its possible they may talk my father in permitting you to date my sister. You can be sure I will be fighting for you."



Fig 27. Carroll and Oralee in Sharpsburg, Maryland

Within a few days I was told by Carroll that his father and mother would not interfere and that Oralee would be waiting for my call. That same night Carroll gave me this message I went out to the nearest phone and made a call to Oralee and asked her if she would see me that night. She said yes and Carroll and I headed for Sharpsburg. As we approached Sharpsburg Carroll told me to stop at the next General Store in town. We both got out of the car and went into the store. Imagine my surprise when I saw Oralee working in the store. After formally introducing Oralee, Carroll disappeared for a short time and then reappeared with a middle age man and women and introduced them as his mother and father. My first impression of Mr. Moss was that he was very proud of his heritage and made it known. On the other hand Mrs. Moss was very sweet and made you feel right at home. Mr. Moss was short and stocky but not fat. Mrs. Moss was taller than her husband and had a nice shape with very attractive breasts The reason I mention her breasts is that Oralee always reminded her mother of the fact that she kept them all to herself not sharing them with her. I am not going to say Oralee was flat breasted but it sure took a effort to

find them. Mr. and Mrs. Moss owned and operated the only general store in Sharpsburg. The store sold every thing from soup to nuts. In the back of the store there was a work shop where Mr. Moss took in radio's and electric appliances for repairs. The general store also had a couple of gasoline pumps. After the introductions, we looked at the time, decided that it was too late to take in a movie so Oralee and I decided to stay in the store and get acquainted. Carrol decided to visit his girlfriend and promised he would be back in time for our return trip to Middle River. So Oralee and I spent our first date tended the store and eating up all the ice cream we could digest. I bet we ate up all the profits that night. Oralee's favorite flavor was chocolate whereas mine was vanilla. That was one thing we disagreed on. That is enough for our first date.

After we closed up the store we went to her house which was located adjacent to the store. The Moss house was better equipped then the Stockslager's house. It had running water and a sink in the kitchen. Water was supplied by a huge tank on the roof. The tank was supplied with rainwater. The water was used only for cleaning. For cooking and drinking they had to go to the same well Bob visited. The toilet like every one else in the town was in the back of the yard.

It wasn't too long after we closed the store, Carroll got home and we started our journey back to our home away from home. Oralee and I hit it off and we agreed to see each other again. From that time on most of my weekends were spent in Sharpsburg. Robert always accompanied me on these trips. During the week I still was dating Mildred Z and when I went north to Brooklyn I dated Mildred H. I had the best of the two worlds. Oralee and I did not drink beer or hard liquor. Our Saturdays consisted of going for long drives in the hills of West Virginia. It's borders were only two miles west of Sharpsburg. The landscape not only being picturesque also had a lot of historical artifacts of the Civil War. Oralee and I liked to spend some of our free time in the old cemeteries reading the quotations on the tombstones. The tombstones in the cemeteries dated way back before the Civil War. Not too many people know it but the first monument dedicated to George Washington is in Sharpsburg, Maryland and not in Washington DC. The monument is located on the top of a mountain. There was only one road up the mountain and it was only wide enough for one car to go in either direction. It was a winding road with very sharp curves. It was a scary and dangerous road. The long drives and tours we made to the historical sites were always done in the daylight. At night we went to the local hang out which served ice cream and soft

drinks. The place had a jukebox with records of the popular songs of the time. All the boys and girls of the area attended this local ice cream parlor and we all danced to the jukebox music. The young crowd always tried to get my attention after they found out that I was from the big city of New York. It also helped that I was single, young, good looking, wealthy and was the owner of a convertible. It may also be that they appreciated it when I always paid my bill and theirs for the food and soda they ordered. You can see why they were always happy to see me when I came to Sharpsburg. Oralee and I would leave the parlor before it closed and drive to our love nest and neck. Every time we left we would sing the song of the day "Tonight We Love" as we went out the door.

In the three years I was courting Oralee we did have some arguments or misunderstandings (fight!). The first argument occurred when we were driving to Hagerstown for a movie. The radio was playing country music and Oralee changed the station. I asked her why she changed the station? She replied that she did not like country music. I got real mad (temper, temper!) and in my normal soft voice (ha, ha) I told Oralee "I LIKE COUNTRY MUSIC!" You have no right to change the station! From now on you are not to touch the radio unless I give you permission!" She was so shocked at my behavior that she was speechless. I was also shocked by my behavior and I apologized. She accepted my apology and we kissed and made up.

Another time we were coming home from the movies and I was driving at my normal speed (sixty miles per hour on the straight and curved roads through the mountains). Oralee was so frightened that she screamed for me to slow down. "No one tells me how to drive", I thought. So I pressed down on the gas pedal and went around the curves on two wheels. It was a scary ride even for me. When I got Oralee home she was all shaken up. I never realized how frightened she was, since she didn't let on throughout the trip. She was mad and told me that she would not see me anymore.

Robert Stockslager heard about what happened and he went out of his way to try to get me out of my lovesick mood. He took me to a local beer garden and we drank beer all afternoon. Not being a beer drinker it wasn't long before Robert and I were drunk. This was not unusual for Robert. He was always boozing it up. That's why we never went out together. He got me at the right time, when I was feeling sorry for my self. The whole time we discussed ways of showing Oralee how hurt I was that she would not see me. We came up with a bright idea. We would go pass the general store in Sharpsburg at

full speed and turn the car around and pass the store again and hope that Oralee would be in the store.

It was agreed and we got in the car and proceeded to go to Sharpsburg. We were both drunk and we had no business to be driving in that state. We hit the mountains at high speed and we were taking all the curves on two wheels. Robert was getting very excited and now was putting his foot on my foot of the accelerator. We came to the next curve which was very sharp and although I made the curve, we were on the opposite lane and the force of the turn threw me to the drivers side of the car. Luckily I had control of the car with two fingers on the wheel and missed the on-coming truck.

After getting out of that mess, you think we would sober up and stop acting up. No way we drove through Sharpsburg passing Oralee's General Store at a speed in excess of 80 mph and continued to the border of West Virginia. We than made a "U" turn and made another pass of the store and then we parked the car in front of Roberts house. When we got in the house, Robert's mother saw how drunk we were and she demanded that I give her the keys of the car. I gave Mrs. Stockslager the keys and Robert and I took a walk around town to sober up.

When we got back from our walk, Mrs. Stockslager advised us that she got a visit from the local Sheriff. He was checking up on a complaint he received of a car speeding up and down the main road. They couldn't identify the car. All they could see was a red flash go by. From that description it appears that it was a red car. The Sheriff was checking all red cars in town. He saw my red car out front. He stopped and knocked on the door of Mrs. Stockslager's house asked her if she knew who owned the red car parked outside. She told the Sheriff that it belonged to her son's friend who was spending the weekend with them. The Sheriff then asked her how long was the car parked at that spot? She lied and told the Sheriff that the car was parked there all day. The Sheriff asked her how she was so sure the car was not moved? She showed the Sheriff the car keys and told him the keys were left with her for safekeeping. The Sheriff then asked Mrs. Stockslager where Robert and I were? She replied that she didn't know. All she knew was that we went out early in the morning and she had not seen or heard from us since. The Sheriff left and we never heard from him again.

Oralee was in the store and she saw the car go past and she knew it was my car. She tried to get in touch with me but it was hard to contact me. Robert and I were so scared of the Sheriff that we were staying away from Sharpsburg. It was not until Monday morning that I saw Oralee. I went to her home and pleaded with her to forgive me. I told her I

would mend my ways. She kissed me and we made up again. Robert and I then took off to report to work.

Things were too good and good things don't usually last. With sunshine a little rain shall fall. Came that fatal Sunday afternoon December 7, 1941 when we all heard that tragic news over the radio, Japan Bombs Pearl Harbor. Oralee and I were driving through the hills of West Virginia. How can this happen to the USA, where was the military. How did we get caught with our pants down. That attack wiped out most of our Navy. Why were we napping, we knew a war existed in Europe and we were not too friendly with Japan. Many of us thought at the time that it was planned by Roosevelt to get us in the war. Only he never expected the damages to be so great.

After the bombing, things were happening fast. USA declared war with Japan, Germany, and Italy. Our young boys were rushing to join the services. Also the draft board was working over time sending out greeting to all the young men eighteen years old and over. The twenty-one men who were previously drafted for one year turned out that they were the first ones to leave our shores for parts unknown.

At the Glenn L. Martin Plant we were replacing all the men in the assembly line with women and relieving the men for the armed services. I was lucky I was considered essential to the war effort and was deferred from being drafted. Slowly all my young buddies were drafted. From back home Brooklyn, my brother Tony was drafted in Army Medical Corps, Jim went into the Navy and Sal in the Army Medical Corps. Before they left for the services. I tore a dollar bill in four parts and give my brother and my friends Sal and Jim a piece of the dollar and they were to hold on to them until we meet again after the war. At the plant John was also considered to be essential and he was also deferred. Henry, went in the Navy, Robert in the Army, Carroll went in the Army Air Force as a gunner in the bell turret of a B17 bomber. Mrs. Mohr's older son went in the Army and like all mothers she took it pretty bad. Like many mothers she couldn't accept the fact that some of us were deferred. Many a time when I took some days from work she would get angry at me and reminded me that her son was out there somewhere fighting a war and the least I could do was to make sure they were properly equipped. My reply was that I was on borrowed time and it will not be long before the Army will draft me so I am making the best of it until they draft me.

With the war many items were being rationed. Meats and gas was the big items. The gas ration hurt me the most. Oralee's father would not be generous with the gas so I was restricted to the six gallons a week I was allowed to have. Roberts uncle

drove to Sharpsburg every week and went with him. I don't know where he got the gas and I never asked. I had to make a decision as to where would I require the use of my car. That was easy it would be where Oralee was. So I rented a garage in Sharpsburg and left the car there. So Oralee and I had wheels when I visited her which was every week. Even if I wanted to drive home it was impossible with the amount of gas the government allotted me So my trips home were limited to the holidays. With the war Oralee and I put off any idea of getting married. In the meanwhile Carroll and his girlfriend got married. They courted for three years. The marriage was always held up by both parents because his girl was of Mexican parents. She was very pretty and had lovely black hair and eyes. They were a good looking couple Carroll with his bright wavy red hair and Margaret with her black curly hair. She had a figure of a goddess. When Carroll came of age he and Margaret got married. They got married on one of his leaves from the service. It happened so fast they had no time for a honeymoon. Back to service went Carroll and we never would see him again. He was the first casualty of the war. Margaret was with Carroll's child when she got the news of his death. The second one close to us was Mrs. Mohr's son Robert who was reported as being killed in battle. The Mohr's son never got married.

It was in the summer of 1943 when the government lowered the requirements to get into the Air Force Cadet training program. I met the requirements and I volunteered to go into the program. Oralee, her parents and my family and my parents all thought I was nuts. Being out of the war was not easy. The parents of boys in the service could not understand why a young healthy boy like me was not in the arm services. This made me uncomfortable.

Also I wanted to be able to say to my children in the future that I did my share in protecting my country from the enemy. I passed all the written and physical examinations and I was accepted as a Cadet of the Army Air Force. The Army gave me two weeks to take care of my affairs and I was to report to Baltimore for my departure to Biloxi Mississippi for my basic training. I resigned from Glenn L. Martin, packed all my things went to Sharpsburg picked up Oralee and we both headed for Brooklyn. Once in Brooklyn we got engaged and we celebrated it with my family.



Fig 28. Oralee, Gene and his Parents

We stayed one week with my family. I left the car and all my possessions with my parents and Oralee and I took off for Sharpsburg and then later to Baltimore for Basic Training at Biloxi.

----- ARMY HERE I COME ! -----