

Chapter Six:

The Home Coming

It was a cold day in December when I arrived home from just being honorably discharged from the Army Air Force. Everything looked like I left it.

The neighborhood didn't change much. At the door I was greeted by Pop. No one was expecting me so it was no surprise to me that the only one to greet me was Pop. Mom and Lena were at work and Frank was at school. Frank was fifteen years old, a high school sophomore.



Fig 44. Frank, Lena, Grandma & Grandpa

I was shocked at the sight of Pop, he was skin and bones. This was not the strong

man I left when I joined the services. Pop saw my disappointment in my face and he told me not to worry, he had diabetes and he had it under control. I had a cup of coffee with Pop and then took my bags up to Frank's room which we were going to share. Pop had a job as a night watchman at the Paramount Macaroni Co. The next thing I did was to go to the shop where Mom was employed. Boy was she shocked to see me. At the sight of me she screamed and ran towards me, grabbed me and hugged me so tight it was hard to breathe. I told her, this was her last day at work and I was taking her home with me. She packed all her gear and she told the boss she would not return. I promised her I would stay home, get a job and contribute to support of the household. She had no need to work outside the home. That night of my return from the Army, we had a family gathering. Every one was there except my brother Tony who was still in the Army stationed in England.



Fig 45. Gene's brother Tony in the Army in England

There was my sister Lena, my sister Josie, her husband Ray and her sweet daughter and my one and only niece at that

time Sarah (five years old) and my brother Frank (fifteen years old).



Fig 46. Gene with Sister Jose and niece Sarah

At the gathering I found out that my friends Sal, Jim and Tony were all back from the war. With the exception of Sal we all returned home safe and sound. Sal received a honorable discharge but was released from the services due to medical reasons. While on active duty on the front line with the Medical Corps he was blown up by an enemy grenade and was hospitalized. They removed most of the steel from his body but some of it still remained. The medical doctors at that time decided it was best to leave them in.

Now that I was a civilian again I had to take stock and plan my life. The government provided us with the GI Bill of Rights as follows: The jobs we left at the time we were drafted were to be offered to us after we were honorable discharged; We could attend a College of our choice either part time or full time, tuition and books paid for by the government. The government also

provided all the GI's with an income of twenty dollars a month for twelve months to help them over the hurdle of finding employment. This portion of the Bill of Rights was nick-named "The 52-20 Club"; If and when you were ready to buy a house, you were eligible to receive a GI mortgage. This mortgage allowed you to purchase a house with only ten percent down, thirty year, and with a low percent mortgage. The mortgages would be backed by the US Government. I was one of the lucky ones. When I reported to the state employment office, to my surprise they informed me that their was an opening for someone with my experience at the Republic Aircraft Co, The Company was located in the town of Farmingdale, Long Island, NY. It was approximately 30 miles from my home. I attended a interview and I was offered the job. I was hired as a Tool Designer first grade at a salary of 60 dollars a week and I was to start the next day. I was not only happy I had a job but also thrilled to get one that I really wanted. With the war over I never thought there would be a need to make warplanes. Republic was noted for its fighter planes. When I reported to work the next day, I found out we were not tooling up for fighter planes. Republic was tooling up for a new design passenger plane for American Airlines. To keep the shop busy while we were tooling up for the new design airplane, the shop was converting Army cargo airplanes for civilian passenger service for American Airlines. There were no fighter airplanes to be seen.

All this time I was using my Army issue clothing. It was time for me to check my wardrobe and see if any of still remained. To my surprise, the only thing that was hanging in the closet, was one suit. All the rest of the clothes and shoes were gone. Mom advised me that she could not see the clothes go to

waste hanging in the closet and she saw no reason why Frank shouldn't wear them.



Fig 47 Gene with mom, Jose and Sarah

There I was with one suit and no shoes except for army issue. Clothes were scarce, the clothing manufacturers were in the process of converting from Army to civilian production. I remember visiting my favorite haberdasher and the only suit he had in my size was a purple suit no one wanted. I had no choice so I bought it.

Raymond, my brother-law got me my second suit. It was green with vertical white pencil stripes. It was a beauty, Ha Ha. Within a couple of weeks of my discharge, Glenn L. Martin complying with the law sent me a telegraph advising me that my old job was available to me and I was to wire back and let them know if I was going to accept it. I had a Job and to leave home with Pop being sick and Tony away, I decided to stay home. I wired my decision to Glenn L. Martin the next day.

To get to work I had to get a bus to the train station located in Jamaica, Long Island and then take the train to Farmingdale. The station was a short walk from the Plant. I remember one cold winter night the train was late. The train station had no shelter from the weather and we were very cold. To keep from freezing we made a fire to keep

warm. There was nothing wrong with this except we were using the railroad's fence as the fuel.

The next thing I wanted to do was to buy a car. If you thought clothes were scarce, cars were un-attainable. They stopped making cars in 1941. It was now 1945. The cars that were available were so bad, you were better off without them. The car Tony had stored in the garage was getting to look better every time I saw what junk they were offering as cars.

Tony's car was a 1939 Ford four door convertible sedan. It was powered by a eight cylinder V8 engine. There the car laid with its rear end down and its engine requiring a overhaul, The body and its top was in good shape. With Mom's approval I agreed to fix the car at my expense. The car would still be Tony's but I would have full use of the car until he returned. After the agreement the car was towed to the local repair shop where they installed a rebuilt engine and repaired the rear end. That car was the sweetest running car I ever drove. For the first four weeks after we got home, Sal, Jim and I would hit all the bars in the neighborhood and some outside the neighborhood. It was good to be free and do what ever we felt like doing within the law. We were shut in too long. I never got to bed before one o'clock in the morning. Pop couldn't stand by and let me destroy myself. One night before I left the house, he talked to me and pointed out my short comings and advised me that I had to get my life together and stop burning the candle on both ends. His talk helped, I reviewed my behavior and I limited my visits to the local bars on weekends. Sal was lucky to survive the blast but he didn't see it that way. He had a chip on his shoulder and he flew off the handle at the drop of a hat. His attitude was that the world owed him a living for the time he spent in the Army. He carried a knife and he wouldn't hesitate to

use it. Jim and I tried to watch out for Sal and we tried to get Sal to forget the War. It wasn't easy but we like to feel that we helped. In the months that followed Sal quieted down and was the Sal we knew before the war. He got rid of the knife and we were all carefree and happy. Sal met Mary and we lost his company for the weekends.

Jim also started to get busy on Saturdays which left me alone. Jim never told me what he was doing for the weekends. Jim and I always spent the Fridays at the local bar. Sal was keeping steady company with Mary and he was not available for our frequent Friday night visits to the local bar. It wasn't until Jim's mother told me, I found out that he was dated his old girlfriend Marge. His mother was concerned about Jim going out with Marge who had a son out of wedlock. She wanted me to try to break it off. I told her if Jim loved Marge, I would do nothing to break it up, I don't know why Jim kept it from me, I respected his wishes and never let on that I knew he was dating Marge.

As for my love life Mildred Z. from Highland Town, Md., she sent me a wedding announcement, two months after I was discharged. I am sorry to say that I never got in touch with her since I was discharged. We were never too close so I was happy to hear she found a mate and was getting married.

The other Mildred H. of Queens, NY also got married. Oralee was still in the picture. I located her in Washington DC. I promised her I would get to see whenever I got the chance. In the meantime when I wasn't going out with Jim, I managed to ask Tony's sister for a date. We went on a couple of dates but there was no fire and we stopped seeing each other. From time to time I dated, but nothing to brag about or bring home to mother. Some Saturdays Mom would ask me to take her and Pop to

Cousin Mike's. If I had a date that night, I would take her with me when I dropped Mom and Pop at Cousin Mike's house. Cousin Mike's sons (my second cousins) Joseph, Anthony and Frank, would look over my date and without a hesitation let me know what they thought of her. There was a time I was dating a big hefty blonde girl, she was really stacked. The boys let me know in no un-certain terms that the girl was not for me. I assured them it was only a casual date. The boys were really growing up. They were all very interested in higher education. Joseph was in College majoring in Mechanical Engineering and the other brothers were attending College Prep. Their mother was getting her wish, she was always preaching to the boys the value of a higher education.

It was on one of those Friday night get-togethers at the local bar, Jim and I decided we would take a trip to Washington DC. We told no one we were going. It was about one o'clock in the morning. We got in the 1939 Ford and headed south. Just out of Baltimore, early Saturday morning the engine cut out. We got out of the car and looked under the hood. After trouble shooting the engine, we determined the problem was a faulty fuel pump which required replacement. Here we were in farm land, no man's land, miles away from a town or farm house. Our good Saint must have been watching over us, for in the distance we saw a car down the road approaching us. The car stopped when he saw us and he asked us if we needed help. We told him we had a problem with our fuel pump and asked if there was a garage near by where we could purchase a replacement. Jim and I were shocked at his reply, "looker here I will dismantle the fuel pump, take it into town, buy a replacement and return to the car and install it! In the mean time I will leave you two at my home where my wife

will cook you both some breakfast." Needless to say we were shocked. When he drove us to his farm, his wife was there to greet us and she made no fuss when the farmer asked her to prepare a breakfast for us. There we were Jim and I sitting in the farmer's kitchen having the best breakfast we ever had eaten. Just as we finished, in comes the farmer and advises us that the pump was replaced and the car was running again. We asked what we owed him for the pump, his labor and the breakfast. His reply was "The pump was twelve dollars, nothing for the labor and the breakfast is my wife's treat. We very seldom get company and we are very happy to entertain you in our home." I don't think I will ever forget the hospitality we received that day. On our way out Jim and I left some money on the table.

We got into Washington in the afternoon and we spent about an hour trying to find Oralee's apartment. Oralee and her girlfriend was waiting outside the apartment. They got in the car and we rode to the nearest park, had lunch and walked around the park taking in the sights. My re-union with Oralee was like we were meeting for the first time, no warm feeling. In the evening we decided to go to a night club where we drank high balls and danced. It was strange to me, being in a night club with Oralee. When I was dating Oralee before the war, we drank ice cream sodas and milk shakes and here we are now drinking hard liquor.

Our re-union was not what I expected. We did some necking all in good taste and then we took the girls to their apartment. Oralee was willing to continue our long distance courtship but I wasn't. I could not see me commuting every weekend to Washington DC. It was bad enough when we had that arrangement when I was in Baltimore and she was in Sharpsburg. So we

parted good friends and we promised to keep in touch with each other.

After we left the girls Jim and I checked our wallets and found out between us we had just enough money to pay for the gas to get us home. So that meant we had to sleep in the car. Jim has a bright idea, why not drive home. One of us drives and the other sleeps. We drove all night and we arrived in New York City Sunday morning about nine o'clock. We came to a telephone booth and Jim told me to stop, he wanted to make a phone call. When he got back, he shouted "Boy that Marge was real mad that I stood her up Saturday". I played dumb and I said "Who Marge". He then filled me in and told me everything. He told me that he felt responsible for Marge having a baby out of wedlock. He has been seeing her ever since and he was planning on marrying her. He was having a hard time getting his mother's approval. I got Jim home about ten o'clock in the morning. We said good night and I told him I would pick him up about five o'clock that evening. When I got to my house, there they were, my whole family and all neighbors waiting to bang my head in. My mother first, where were you, we had the policeman looking for you, we thought you had an accident. She then grabs me and hugs me to death like all Italian mothers do. I never realized all the worry I caused by not letting any one know of our plans. After it quieted down I headed for the bedroom and told my mother to wake me up about five o'clock. All I heard as I laid down on the bed was OK. When I woke up, it was seven o'clock Monday morning. I slept for twenty two hours straight. I guess that made up for the hours Jim and I went without sleep. From the time we left the bar to the time we got back home we went without sleep for fifty hours not taking into account the occasional cat naps we took on our return

trip. We may of made or broken a record of some sort.

Slowly that old gang of mine was breaking up. Sal was the first to get married and then Jim. Sal married Mary and due to lack of apartments, they moved in with his mother. Sal finished off the attic and made three rooms, a kitchen, living room and bedroom. It was a cozy apartment. Jim married Marge and for the same reason Jim and Marge shared a one family house with Marge's sister and husband. The house was located in Queens, NY. Sal was busy with his and Mary's family, we did not see too much of each other. On the other hand Jim, Marge and I spent a lot of time together. Marge was busy rounding up blind dates for me. Now that I decided to stay home I had to get in the swing of it and Marge was very helpful.

All the dates were casual acquaintances and I never dated them more than once. I was very fussy and Marge would get very upset. Whenever she had a date in mind, we went on a dry run and I reviewed the prospective date from a distance and gave my approval before Marge set up the blind date.

At this time Mom, Pop and Frank were still active fabricating the dog leashes which was a trade mark of the Durso family. Mom worked full time, Pop and Frank part time. I did not get to see Frank too often. If he was not going to school or working, he spent the rest of his time at his girlfriend Chris's house.

Frank and I did not have too much in common, until that day I started to build a photograph dark room in the basement. What started me on this venture, was when I saw a ad in the Company paper selling a photo enlarger. I bought it and that started me developing and printing photographs. Frank also got interested and we worked together building the dark room and

arranging the equipment. I used the dark room to developing the film I brought back with me from the service. Frank on the other hand was developing photographs he had taken the day before of the high school sport activities. Frank then made enlarged prints of the photographs and sold them to the individuals who appeared in the photographs. Frank was very busy those days, attending high school, working the dog leashes and developing film in the dark room.