

Thoughts on the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War II

We moved to Hawaii when I was 7 years old. My father was a hydraulic engineer working for the Geological Survey. He measured streams and water levels and was transferred to Honolulu, which was a highly desirable place to go, in the summer of 1939. My father loved the work, but he did not like being on an island because you can only travel so far. We explored every part of Oahu where there was a passable road, beach, trail, and extinct volcano. I loved Hawaii and so did my brother and mother. It was a paradise for a kid. I went to school barefoot each day. My school room had no walls above waist height, with a roof, and was open to the outside. My friends were all shades of brown and white. I had a good friend, who happened to be Filipino. I couldn't understand why the girls didn't like her. I didn't know about prejudice then, but later I learned that people can be excluded from a group simply because of their ethnic background. I climbed trees, played in the vacant lots, and climbed up the side of Punchbowl Crater, an extinct volcano, at the end of our street. On Easter morning my family and I climbed up the winding path to the top of the crater, where there was an early morning service. I learned to swim and rode the waves in an old inner tube. Then my father asked the Geological Survey, after 2 years, for a transfer. They were slow to respond because he did his job well, and he had about another year left in Honolulu. We left Hawaii 3 weeks before Pearl Harbor, on the last civilian boat to leave, just by chance. We went to Los Angeles to stay with relatives, to find out what my father's new assignment would be. On December 7th I heard the news, and hid in a closet. I had never been to Pearl Harbor, but I knew it was there. The noise of bombs going off and sirens on the radio alarmed me. My friends were there. Everyone was very scared, especially my family. In one of the families we knew, the father was an officer in the navy. My father later heard from him, about how chaotic it was that Sunday morning. He was awakened early in the morning, told that we were being attacked. He rushed to Pearl Harbor to find bombs dropping and Japanese airplanes strafing everywhere. People were running all over and dodging bullets. The ships and airplanes were being hit. It was Sunday morning and most had the day off. The cunning Japanese came from the back side of the island. All our planes at Hickam Airforce Base, above Pearl Harbor, were pointed towards Pearl Harbor. That was where the enemy was supposed to attack, not from the back side. The planes were sitting targets, as well as the people. Very few planes got off the ground, and if they did, they got shot down. The local people who helped keep the base working were killed as well. A bomb fell not far from our house, but it did not go off. Very few civilians in Honolulu died. (How many) About 4000 servicemen were killed. Civilians were also killed, going out in their small boats to try to rescue the servicemen on the aircraft carriers.

My father got relocated to St. Paul Minnesota, and was happy to explore and work in the great outdoors. He and my mother bought the beautiful Bluewater Lake property from 'shirt tail relations' Harry and Ella May Nelson. Ella May's uncle was married to my father's aunt, in North Dakota, where they all had lived. We celebrated the end of World War II on August 17, 1945, in a small town called Cohasset, near Bluewater Lake. I was 15 years old then.

I went to Milwaukee Downer College on a scholarship, after high school in 1950 where I majored in Occupational Therapy. There I met two young women from Hawaii who were lots of fun and happened to be of Chinese decent. They went back to Hawaii after graduating.

I met my husband Ted Voneida, at Walter Reed Army Hospital. He had been drafted into the army during the Korean Policing Action (Korean War) in 1953. He was working on his Ph.D. at Cornell University with Dr. Markus Singer, his professor. Dr. Singer contacted Dr. Walla Nauta, at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, and recommended that Ted be sent there to do research on brain function. I had enlisted in the Army Women's Medical Specialist Corp as a second lieutenant, after finishing my B.S. in Occupational Therapy at Milwaukee Downer College in 1954. I needed to fulfill my Clinical Affiliation requirement to become a Registered Occupational Therapist. I knew that the training and experience the army would provide would be excellent. In 1955 I was transferred to Walter Reed Army Hospital where Ted and I met on a blind date. I was then a First Lieutenant and Ted was a Corporal. But he never saluted me! We were married in August, 1956.

Much later, in 1979, Ted, was teaching at the North East Ohio Universities College of Medicine. He applied for a semester interim teaching position at the University of Hawaii, to fill in for a professor there, who was on sabbatical leave. Ted was the Chairman of Neurobiology at the North East Ohio Universities College of Medicine (NEOUCOM) then. He had to compete with other candidates for the position, and was the one chosen. I joined him after about a month, to find that he had already purchased an 8 ft. dingy with a small sail, planning to explore the ocean! In one of our adventures with the boat we almost ended up at the international airport which abuts Pearl Harbor. We also visited the Pearl Harbor National Monument, where thousands of our boys are interred under water. It was very moving and sobering. While in Honolulu, I decided to look up my 2 friends from college who had come back to Honolulu. I located Connie Ching, who lived there with her husband. She invited us over and we had a lovely time. Her husband is a veterinarian. He told us that he was about 6 years old when the Japanese attack occurred, and he and his family were at Hickam Air Force Base. They were one of the families that lived there in a house at the edge of the base, working on the planes. On the morning of December 7th, the Japanese airplanes came, dropping bombs and strafing (spraying bullets) from their cockpits. The U.S. Air Force had been having drills, as war with Japan seemed eminent. In these frequent drills, U.S. planes went up and pretended to be the enemy, and drop bombs but there was only noise, no real explosions. When Connie's husband (then 6 years old) decided the bombs and strafing by the Japanese was real, even though his family said it was just a drill, he took off, and ran away into the woods. His family ran after him to bring him back, and then saw that the attack was real. That was why they all survived.

National Public Radio was reporting on the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, before the Corona Virus took over the news and necessarily, our attention. NPR reported how the General on that Japanese ship had planned the sneak attack. The top Japanese Generals were all meeting with Hiro Hito, discussing how they could possibly stop the American Navy. There was no way they could do it with a frontal attack on Pearl Harbor. Our navy was too strong, and they knew it. And we, the United States, along with our allies had put large tariffs on their export goods. As a nation of islands, they were afraid they could not survive under these onerous tariffs. Then one of the Generals said something like this, 'I have an idea. If one of our ships goes around behind the island of Oahu, and hits

the U.S. air force from the back, I think we can surprise them and take out their planes at Hickam Air Force Base. Then our Japanese planes can attack Pearl Harbor from there.' Hiro Hito replied, 'Okay, if you want to try it. I don't think it will work, but if you and your men want to commit suicide, go ahead.' This ship traveled with no lights, navigation or communication. They could not risk being discovered. They were amazed at how well the scheme worked! The Americans were all asleep. One enlisted man was not asleep, however. It was his job to man the radar station on a mountain high above Pearl Harbor. Sunday was his day off, but he decided to go up there anyway, because things looked dicey, and he felt it was his duty. He saw the Japanese ship with planes ready to take off approaching from the rear of the island, and called down to Pearl Harbor to alert them. They did not reply, even though they were in charge. The enlisted man kept calling them as he watched the Japanese planes take off, and hit Hickam Air Force Base and Pearl Harbor. Later, the men in charge said 'We ignored him because we didn't believe him, and thought that there must be something wrong with the radar.' We were complacent in our strength. It was a hard lesson, but one that had to be learned.

While we were in Hawaii, Ted and I went to the Pearl Harbor National Memorial. Standing on the dock, looking down at our U.S. ships sunken under the water, with all those men forever entombed, we were struck with deep sadness. Had all this been really necessary? We also went up to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, to try to find the grave of the brother of a dear friend of ours, Betsy Miklethun. Betsy's brother Wendel Geiwitz, was based in India in the air force during the war. He had malaria then, and was not required to fly until he was better. However, the captain of his crew asked him to come on a flight anyway. Their plane was shot down and everyone was killed. He had only been married a few weeks. Ted and I did not find Wendel's grave at the Cemetery because there are so many young men and women buried there.

Ted was invited by an old friend and colleague, Dr. Sven Ebbesson, Professor of Medical Science and Neuroscience at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, to a meeting that Dr. Ebbesson organized, in 1978. The meeting took place there at the University and its goal was to support Dr. Ebbesson's program there. The state of Alaska had a budget deficit, which would result in the end of his entire department at the University. Dr. Ebbesson's best Neuroscience friends from all over the world came to support him. Dr. Ebbesson had a post-doctoral fellow student, Hiro Ito, while at the University of Virginia, who was now Chairman of Anatomy at Tokyo University. Ted and I met Dr. Ito and his lovely wife Mieko at the meeting. We explored Alaska with them and the Ebbessons after the meeting, in our rented RV. Later we met Dr. and Mrs. Ito in Japan. Ted had been invited by Dr. Roger Sperry, Nobel Prize winner, to represent him at Awaji Island, Japan, in August, 1970, as Dr. Sperry could not go because of his health. The meeting was organized by the Futurist Society, to explore writing a companion document to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, called The Declaration of Human Duties. Ted had done a Postdoctoral Fellowship with Dr. Sperry, working with him at Cal Tech on the split brain research Dr. Sperry was conducting there. Dr. and Mrs. Hiro Ito entertained us at their home and showed us the area near Tokyo. While discussing the end of World War II, Hiro queried, 'Why did they need to drop the Atom Bombs on us? The government was in negotiation with the United States and its allies for a surrender'. We could not answer, thinking about the terrible devastation the bombs had caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in addition to Tokyo and beyond. Ted

said 'Why did we drop the second bomb? They could see the horrible effects from the first one. Did they need to reduce Japan to its knees?'

While in Japan we also went to see the Hiroshima Monument. We stayed at a bed and breakfast, run by the World Friendship Society. We met with a most gracious Hibakusha, a person who survived the Atomic bombing. She was in Hiroshima during the time of our Nuclear Attack. She was so kind and gracious to us, and appreciated that we had come to see for ourselves what had happened to them. At that time, the World Friendship Society documented these accounts, for future generations to know. The entire week is observed by the Japanese Government for a remembrance of these attacks and the destruction that occurred. We went to the Ground Zero Memorial Park in Hiroshima, to tour the many beautiful monuments to those who died there. There were strings of Origami birds everywhere, fashioned by children all over Japan. One little girl, dying from the effects of the bomb felt that she would be spared if she could just keep making these birds. The park was so colorful with the strings of birds and flowers everywhere. We also went to their museum, which houses the artifacts found later at Ground Zero. The line was long, with many families bringing their children, and others making the pilgrimage. I felt a little funny, being the only Caucasian I could see. But the Japanese people were so kind and really happy that we wanted to see what had happened to them. I felt so safe with them, and, like a pilgrim too. Later, on our way back through Ground Zero we saw where one unfortunate soul was forever etched into the concrete sidewalk. He or she was incinerated by the bomb, and their body was vaporized, because of the extreme heat. The exact print out of their dead body, through a chemical reaction, had printed a dark shadow of the person. To my knowledge, it is still visible today.

Later I heard on NPR that the Japanese General who carried out the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, had met with a high ranking General of ours, who had participated in World War II. Our U.S. General wanted to meet with the Japanese General, who I think, is still alive. Our U.S. General congratulated the Japanese General on his very clever plan, and they had a congenial meeting. In 1961 President Eisenhower warned us to beware "of the unwarranted influence...of the military industrial complex," describing how military solutions often trump reality, and industries are happy to produce the munitions and whatever is requested. He was president from 1953-1961.

I wanted to put my thoughts of these events to paper because this history is important! I think I have been fairly accurate as to the details. Now I can send this story to other people who may be interested. Also, it is a memory to leave with my family for years and generations to come. And, hopefully, will serve as a warning, to those that think that armed war is the answer. And that threatening to use nuclear weapons will convince others that we must be the victors! We all need to live on this beautiful planet, not blow it up. We CAN all work collectively, for peace!

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April 2020