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Family History Project
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The Majesty of Clarence

I view my grandpa as a cartoon character. His face is kind and within my lifetime he has always looked the same. He has that whimsy that seems it could only be found in a book. He is currently 86 years old but has never truly grown up or outgrown his childlike wonder of the world. His wonder and curiosity of the way the world worked drove him to college to pursue science, more specifically marine biology and later he became a professor. He began to encourage everyone (not just his students) to pursue child-like adventures and therefore encouraged no one's spirit to ever grow up. He encourages questioning things in such a way that you cannot continue the way you previously were; guiding you along to answer your own questions with elegance and grace. He continues to change his mind and view of things as he ages which I believe is very admirable.

My grandfather grew up in a community of Mennonite Brethren and was only able to get out of the rural Kansan sun for school.

“To [my sisters] I owe my chance to break away from the usual pattern of the family and get an education beyond grade school. When they were working in California...they sent me \$100 that jump started my education – that money had to be used for books and things related to school.”¹

My grandfather said when I asked about his family during the Great Depression. During the Great Depression his brother Isaac, and sisters, Luella and Ruby, went to California to work and sent money home for the rest of the family. Ruby and Luella quickly found work in an assembly plant that helped aid the war effort.

New military construction projects and the emerging war industries in California brought in tens of thousands of workers from across America. Women entered the workforce in large

¹ Harms, Elizabeth. “Family History Project Interview.” Personal, 2020.

numbers, learning to do industrial jobs that previously had been done by men. Six million women entered the workforce during the war to fill roles that were new to them². Women workers were appreciated in factories because they were adept at working in small spaces and remaining focused while performing repetitive tasks. The factories that produced war goods paid higher wages, which attracted many women. Since there was such a high demand for war products women worked six days a week, enjoyed a handful of holidays, and were pressed to take overtime to keep up with the assembly line working around the clock³. By 1941, car factories, steel mills, and other industrial plants all over the US began signing contracts with the government to produce various types of war machinery, and they were converting their facilities to war production. Even then, some companies realized they were on the verge of a labor shortage and might need to hire women. The first women to answer the call to factories were blue-collar women who were already in the labor force in 1940. Most had been in traditionally lower-paying female positions, such as waitressing or cleaning work. While a waitress averaged \$14 a week, a woman working in a shipyard or factory during the war took home an average of \$37 a week⁴. Many women were understandably happy for the opportunity to take industrial jobs.

My grandfather moved from his one room schoolhouse to Corn Bible Academy in Oklahoma. After he graduated he went to Tabor College which is a Christian University sponsored by the Mennonite church. At Tabor he was encouraged by his Biology professor Sol

²“People and the War.” *People and the War*. Last modified 2016. Accessed November 27, 2020. <https://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/special/ww2/people-the-war>.

³ Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Out to Work: a History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*. New York , NY: Oxford University Press, 1982.

⁴ Yellin, Emily. *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II*. New York: Free Press, 2005.

Loewen. “One day he gave me a challenge: why don’t you go on to graduate school and come back here to teach. I had been his laboratory assistant in several courses and he, apparently, saw something in me that made him think I could teach college – until then, I had only considered high school teaching.”⁵ He says. One of the things I really admire about my grandfather is the fact that he continues to teach people long after he has been retired from teaching, about 20 years. He may not be teaching in a classroom with active students but he continues to encourage people to learn and ask those hard questions.

Over his years he may not have matured in spirit but did however grow away from his previous ideals. My grandfather grew up in the Mennonite church. His father was even a preacher in his church so he had to be his best behavior and for the most part he was. As with any religious group, there are varying expressions of Anabaptism, which the Mennonites fall under. To those outside the subculture looking in, it is often confusing. Beginning in 1663, Mennonites immigrated to North America for many reasons. Most importantly to preserve the faith of their fathers, to seek economic opportunity and adventure, and to escape European militarism. Until the late 19th century, most Mennonites in North America lived in farming communities. They kept their German language, partly for its religious significance and partly to isolate themselves from their social environment. Their main concern was to be allowed to worship God according to their conscience and pacifist tradition⁶. “My family’s church was Mennonite and, as such we were challenged to be set apart from the ‘world.’ We spoke German at home and this made us suspect during WWII and we were sometimes called Nazis... Our culture taught us to be peaceful, hard workers, honest and thrifty.”⁷ Says my grandfather. The

⁵ Harms, Elizabeth. “Family History Project Interview.” Personal, 2020.

⁶ Augustyn, Adam. “Mennonite Religion,” n.d. Accessed 2020.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mennonite/North-America#ref4815>.

⁷ Harms, Elizabeth. “Family History Project Interview.” Personal, 2020.

Mennonite church at its essence is about discipleship and a willingness to follow Christ at any cost. Secondly is the idea that nonresistance or pacifism is the answer to conflict, and most Mennonites refuse service in the military. Instead, during times when the draft was in use, they served as conscientious objectors and gave to the world in other ways without the use of force.

Mennonites cite many verses from Scripture as reason why they are absolutely unwilling to fight in wars, explaining that New Testament verses portray Christians as non-violent and pacifist, and that Jesus encouraged his followers to love their enemies. As a rule they believe in being compliant with the government, except when compliance would contradict Scriptural values. Due to these strongly held convictions, Mennonites had to organize themselves and negotiate with the government to perform services other than fighting in the front lines during times of war. They began to meet as churches and as groups of people, strengthening one another's resolve and becoming increasingly adamant about what they stood for. They prayed together as families and friends and held one another accountable to the beliefs and values that they had been raised with. The leaders of the church also began to regularly meet together, seeking one another's council and taking strength from each other. This sense of community and prayer is still central to the Mennonite faith today.⁸ My grandfather's two brothers were drafted and were conscientious objectors. They received no pay for their work and, when discharged after the war, were not eligible for GI loans or other benefits.

Through this project my grandfather began to reflect about his growth and life over his 86 years.

"I grew up very conservative and was very limited in my views of religious faith.

The God I learned about was manageable! I have come to understand that God is

⁸ Dueck, A.J. "Making a Case for Non-Combatant Service: B. B. Janz's Negotiations with the Government During World War II." *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007).

not a conservative! God is as broad as we can make God. I've abandoned views of God as a male, chauvinist who sits on a throne and pulls strings. God has no gender, no physical shape, no location. God is a spirit and we are a spiritual force. I relate to people of various faith traditions. Dear friends are Muslim. I can worship with Catholics and Jews. Simply put, I have come to positions that are very different from my parents. But I thank them for a start that I could embellish as I moved along in life.”⁹

⁹ Harms, Elizabeth. “Family History Project Interview.” Personal, 2020.

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