

First in My Life



Betty Kruger

**This book is dedicated to my
family and friends.**



FIRST IN MY LIFE – A MORNING PRAYER

Father, I thank you for this day.
Bless all I do and what I say.

Send me strength for my daily tasks
And give me discernment when I ask.

May I see goodness in everyone I meet—
The Strong, the gifted, and even the weak.

I offer all my waking hours to you.
Let Your will be done in what I do.

Chapter 1

**Memoirs of my Early Years and Nursing
School**



The Kitchen Table

Growing up in a large family meant having a long kitchen table. This table had a white enamel top setting securely on four wooden legs and had two sliding drawers. Much of my growing up years was spent at this table. In the morning my mother used one end for making lunches for my father and all the children. For breakfast, I had homemade thick lumpy oatmeal or smooth white cream of wheat. On Sunday, we had creamed chipped beef on toast, pancakes or buck wheats with King Syrup. All our meals were at this table.

On Monday the table was used for sprinkling and wrapping up the laundry clothes before ironing them. Other days for making bread – for lining up jars and preserving vegetables and fruit – for holding the large bread pan and watching the dough raise the lid ever higher and higher. At mealtime the table was set for seven and many times more relatives arrived unexpectedly.

After dishes were cleaned and put away we children each had our study place at the table to do homework. My father sat at the table near the sideboard. He put on his glasses, smoked his pipe, read the Sun paper and listened to the radio. The radio was small, but the static was loud. At night the reception was not very good, but my father never gave up.

The kitchen table was our place where we played cards or tidally winks, cut out paper dolls, pasted pictures in scrap books. The boys did magic tricks, read comic books and teased the girls. It was at this table where I learned to embroider the lazy daisy stitch, the French knot, and the outline stitch. Relatives always visited here – sitting around the table in the winter time – bringing happy or sad news.

My father's birthday was on December 7th. In 1941 as we were at the kitchen table enjoying his birthday cake the radio program was interrupted – Pearl Harbor in Hawaii has just been bombed and war seems imminent came the ominous report. During the war years this table was the place where letters were written to my brothers, Bob and Joe, in the Navy. Theirs were read and re-read by us. Later, Korea took my brother Bud to war in the Army. The kitchen table was again the place for a war weary family to await news.

I do not recall what happened to this table after we moved, but it certainly has held many unforgettable memories for me.





ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH!

My mother, Anna Murphy was a black-haired, blue-eyed Irish Beauty whose favorite saying was “ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH!” Her father, James Murphy came to the United States at a young age – orphaned by the great “Potato Famine” in Ireland. A distant relative by the name of Coughlin had him live with them in Baltimore. My Grandmother, Sarah Thomas, an Irish descendant was born in the mountains of West Virginia and came to Baltimore to find work. She was employed as a domestic when she met my Grandfather (who was then a widower with a young son). My mother was raised in an Irish neighborhood and most of her classmates were of Irish descent.

When I was growing up if a prominent person with an Irish name did something good – we children heard - “ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH!” When we heard Irish songs the comment was “ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH!” We had to see movies featuring Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald as Irish priests because “ISN'T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH!” St. Patrick's Feast Day was no exception – after a meal of ham, cabbage and boiled potatoes, my mother brought out her stash of pins – Erin go bragh, small white pipes, green hats, shamrocks and

leprechauns. We proudly pinned these on our clothes on March 17th and wore them to school because “ISN’T IT GREAT TO BE IRISH”!



PIPE SMOKING

My father was a pipe smoker at home. He always used the straight brown ceramic or clay type of pipe - not the fancy Sherlock Holmes version. Most of the time he bought the large Prince Albert can of tobacco. First, he scraped the pipe bowl clean using his pen knife - then, blow through the pipe. Next, he would tamp the tobacco very tight into the bowl and light it. He always used matches - never a lighter. After several strong puffs the tobacco would start to smoke. As I recall, the odor was quite pleasant - however, I do remember the many times that my father just had an unlit pipe in his mouth. It seems that the tobacco often had to be re-lit. I never saw any other relative smoke a pipe - it took too much patience and practice to enjoy this.

The tobacco pipe originated in America for the reason that the tobacco plant is a native of America. Pipes have been discovered in burial mounds in South Eastern U.S. Inhaling tobacco was mentioned by Columbus to induce a trance resulting in visions. I'm certain that my father never had visions - he just enjoyed his pipe as a part of his life.





THE LANE

We lived on a street off the main road and we always referred to it as The Lane. It was not paved but had large cinders on it. There were three large houses – one family was an elderly couple – one had one child, his parents and his grandfather – and ours had many children. The lane was not a through street so there was very little traffic. At the corner there was an overgrown cemetery that looked like a woods. No one had been interred there for many years and this area was allowed to grow with many trees and unkempt bushes. On the lane past our house there was a path to the street below.

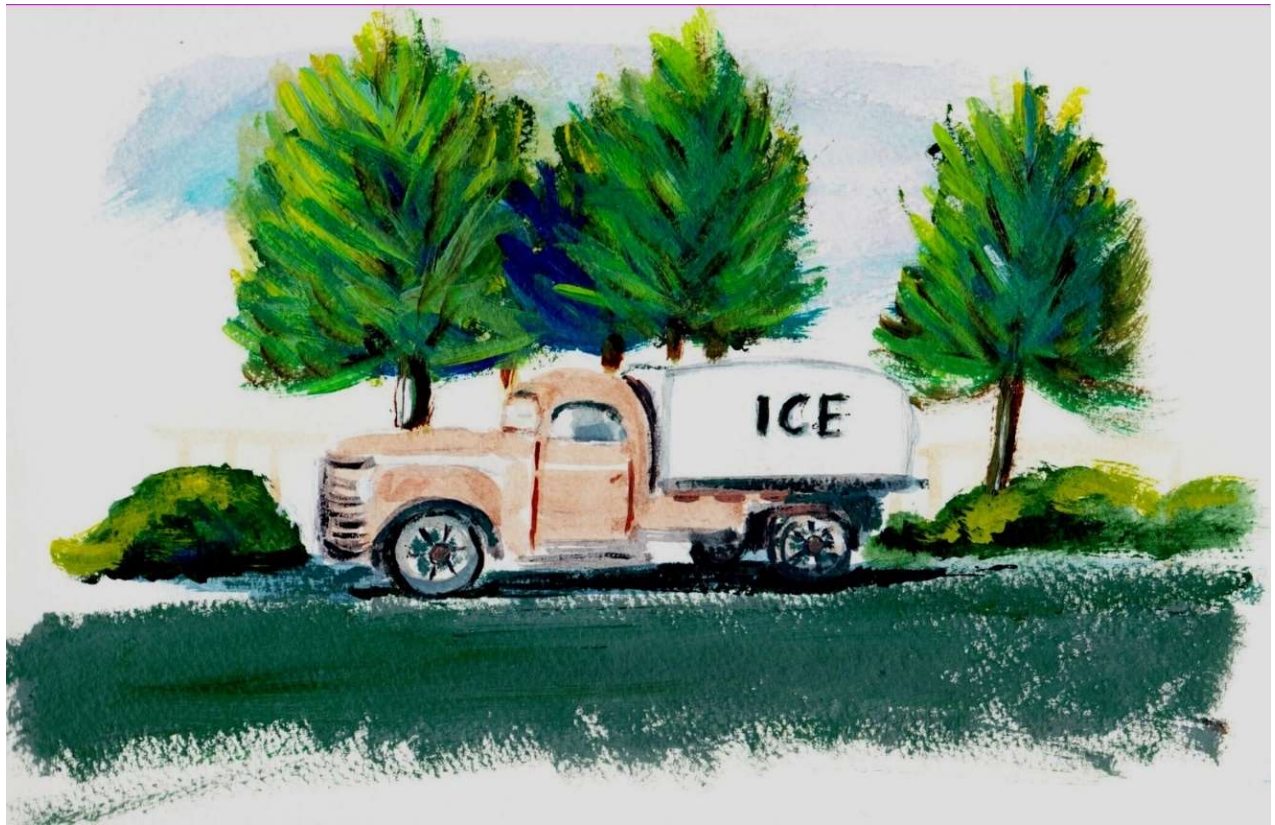
The lane was part of our playground. We skipped rope and drew hop-scotch in the dirt. There were always pieces of slate or pretty colored stones lying in the lane. When I wanted solitude I would sit on a very large rock that was flat on top. I would become very quiet, hoping to see fairies or dwarfs nearby. I was certain that they lived under this rock as there were holes that looked like small caves.

A large black walnut tree provided us with ammunition to see who could throw these walnuts the furthest. We could not pick them up when they ripened unless we wanted black stain on our hands. Other large trees were two huge oak trees whose large roots tangled over the ground and provided us with places to sit. Noisy squirrels would scurry over our heads and occasionally we were pelted with acorns. Further down the lane there were pampas grass with its sharp leaves that cut our hands and milk weed plants that we would peel and caress its satiny white bulb. Both sides of the path were a potpourri of skinny trees and weeds – with a little poison oak thrown in.

The only person who travelled through here was an elderly lady – everyone called her Grandmother Wallace who had relatives living at the end of our lane. She had a stick that she used as a cane and would always stop to rest on our bench. My mother would give her a glass of water and they would talk for a while.

Sometimes I see the lane in my dreams and I wake up with a nostalgic longing for times past. But, then I think “Isn’t it wonderful to be able to appreciate these experiences”

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THE ICEMAN COMETH

The small three-door brown, wooden ice-box rested in the pantry. There was a large galvanized pan under the ice box where the melted ice would drain and travel via a tube into this reservoir. Blocks of ice came in different prices according to its size.

Our ice man came several times a week. We placed a diamond –shaped sign in the window with the size we needed at the top point. The ice arrived in an open truck. There was a tarpaulin cover to protect it from melting. The ice man, Eugene, would roughly measure the block with an ice pick; next, he would chop the block. Using tongs, he would carry the ice and place it in the ice box.

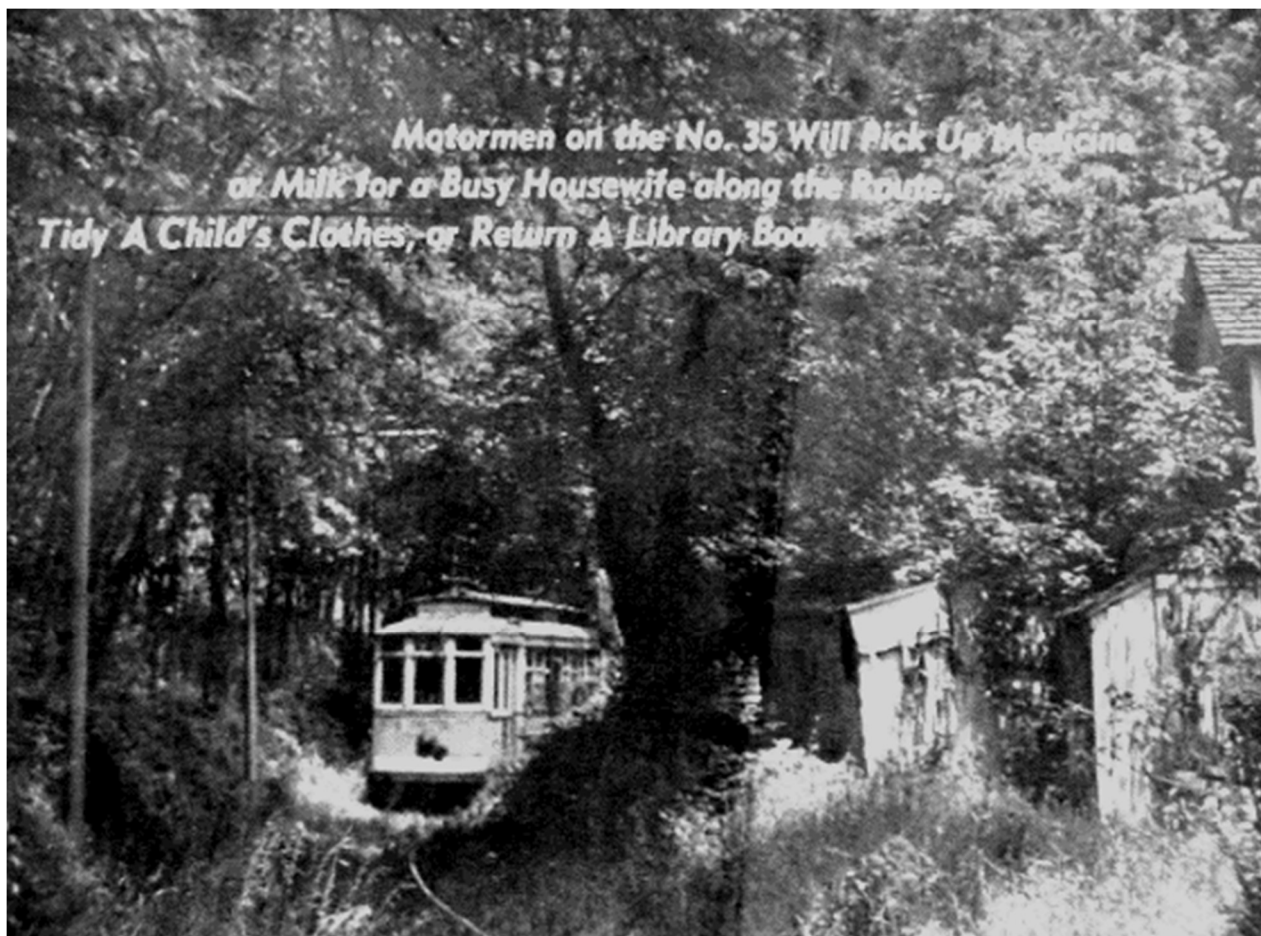
There were always small ice chips in the truck and the children would take these and suck them as though they were candy. We always knew when Eugene was in the neighborhood – there would be a trail of melted ice water in the streets. The ice man had no time for conversation – his business was literally melting away

When we wanted ice in a glass, we chipped a generous piece from the block – placed the ice in recycled salt bags and hit it with a hammer.

The next generation of iceboxes were called refrigerators. We had ice cube trays that measured out frozen water – each piece of ice was a standardized size.

The Iceman disappeared from our culture. I wonder if there is an exhibit at the Smithsonian depicting the Iceman's contribution to American living?

*Matrmen on the No. 35 Will Pick Up Medicine
or Milk for a Busy Housewife along the Route,
Tidy A Child's Clothes, or Return A Library Book.*



THE NUMBER 35 STREETCAR

The Number 35 “jerkwater” – it was called – ran between Lorraine Cemetery and Walbrook Junction. In the days when automobiles were a real luxury this No. 35 was our lifeline to the rest of the world. Everyone who lived along this route knew the exact pick-up time. I would board the car at Windsor Mill Road and Forest Park Avenue – at the Gatehouse to Kernan Hospital at precisely seven minutes, twenty-eight minutes or forty-seven minutes after the hour. Two streetcars ran all day between six AM and twelve Midnight.

Most of the line had one track. There were double tracks in Dickeyville where the first car to arrive either from Walbrook or Lorraine would wait until the other car passed. The passengers in both cars would wave to friends or neighbors as they passed. The terminals had no circles in which to turn so the motormen would just reverse the car’s interior. The backs of the cane seats were turned in the opposite direction and conductor would carry the fare box to the opposite end of the car. Even the wooden stool for the motorman was moved to the correct location.

This car had a sound and rhythm all its own. As it sped through the woods and crossed over the trestle bridge the car would sway from side to side forcing you to touch shoulders with your neighbor. At night you could hear the rumble of the car for many blocks away and one could even pin-point its exact location by the sound of its rhythm. The bell was used at certain crossing – it was a simple clang-clang noise and was situated on the floor. This streetcar always seemed to have the right-of-way at street crossings.

I never recall that any passenger would sleep during their travel. There was always someone who knew you and many times the passengers would just sit by each other and there would be no need for words.

The NO. 35 served a much greater need than travel. The fabric of the neighborhood was knit in these cars. Whether a family suffered a tragedy or a joy they would receive solace or pride as they traveled these three or so miles.

This streetcar has truly left a significant memory in my life.

Polio



A MODERN DAY MIRACLE

The fear of contracting poliomyelitis was always a dire threat to my generation. My earliest recollection of this disease was the seldom alluded to physical disability of the then President Franklin Roosevelt.

Then there was the story of a young girl who lived in nearby Catonsville. Her life was being spent in an iron lung. I could not even imagine what an iron lung was – but I was told that she could not move her body – she was paralyzed from polio.

A new student transferred to my high school in my sophomore year. Her name was Mary – she was a year or so older than we. She had had polio during her childhood and one leg was significantly smaller. She used crutches and wore a leg brace. Mary boarded the streetcar at one of my transfer points. Her mother always accompanied her to the streetcar and carried her books. The school was a half mile from the end of the streetcar line and Mary had to ride in a cab from North Bend. She and I became good friends and we shared our hopes and dreams. The following year Mary was very happy. She had graduated to wearing a very heavy brace on her affected leg and also wore a special high top shoes. She no longer needed her crutches. Mary valiantly managed to keep up with us and her positive attitude infected all of us. Then suddenly she began to have bruising over her body. She was admitted to the hospital and was diagnosed with leukemia. In just one short month Mary died.

My next encounters with polio occurred in nursing school. Each year some of the residents and nursing students developed this disease. I baby-sat a resident's two –year son who was a victim. His father would place him in a special device when he went to bed. Many of my classmates had polio. Shirley had the worst case – bulbar type. After struggling to survive she had to spend many months in an iron lung. Then, eventually she improved but as a wheelchair victim for her entire life. Shirley managed to have two lovely children and a saint for a husband. She always remained cheerful for her entire life.

My close call occurred at graduation time from nursing. One of my classmate's parents treated three of us to a trip to Canada to visit their relatives. On the way to Canada Gerri was sick. At one doctor's office she was treated for a severe sore throat. Her parents continued on the trip but Gerri's condition did not improve. She could not stay awake. At an ER in NY the doctor gave her penicillin and told her parents to go right back to Baltimore. Sure enough, Gerri had polio – the paralytic type. At City Hospital the staff was reserving iron lungs for Dolores and me. Through the intercession of prayers both of us were

spared. After several months of intense physical therapy Gerri regained the use of her affected leg. There is still a slight difference in the size of her leg. However, age related decrease in muscle tone is causing her a lot of problems in her leg. This is due to the polio of decades ago.



The miracle noted in my topic's heading is the almost complete eradication of this dreaded disease. I received the polio vaccine in 1955 and I felt as though I had the abortive type reaction – sore throat, stiff neck and fever which lasted a few days. Today's generation is very fortunate due to Drs. Salk and Sabin's successful research. They will never fear the possibility of a paralyzed body.



A. Toxin
Fluenza Hotel
Malaria Land and Valley Fever Blvd.
Belair, Maryland 21215

Date: Any time when you
least expect it.



Invitation

You are cordially invited to attend a dinner party to be given in honor of the pathogenic
And non-pathogenic organisms and held in the Fluenza Hotel at Malaria Lane and Valley
Fever Boulevard adjacent to Peyers Patches.

The guest list includes:

Mr. Dick Test
Mrs. Scarlet Fever wearing her rubeolas
Mr. Bruce E. Losis
Miss Den Gue Fever accompanied by her four cardinal prodromal symptoms,
namely Headache, Fever, Malaise and Nausea
Auntie Toxin and Auntie Serum

The menu consists of:

Jus du streptococci
Strawberry Tongue as the main dish with chicken pox on the side
Vegetables are: macules, papules, vesicles and crusts
Dessert: An Aedes Aegypti Mosquito stinger

The entertainment will be given by a cute tonsillitis doing the St. Vitus dance on a Small
Pox in the Circumoral pallor.

We will be itching to see you during the incubation period.

Infectiously yours,

A toxin who flunked communicable diseases.



AN OUT-OF-HAND COMPULSION

My house is filled with yarns and threads---
They're piled high in cupboards and stacked under beds.

I have half-finished samplers and pictures galore
And whenever I shop---I still buy more.

I've a bedspread I started in sixty-two
But since I don't need it---it's packed away two.

There are trunks and chests filled with hopes and dreams
I'm no marathon stitcher---so they'll stay stacked, it seems.

I'm a member of national and state needle art guilds
I keep sewing new items and my table stays filled.

I sew pulled thread embroidery and needlepoint too---
But the finished products are comparatively few.

My prayer now on entering stitchery shops
Is---"Please, Lord, remind me---the buying must stop".



Chapter 2

**Excerpts from Clement (Bud) Kruger,
Beloved Brother, about Korean War**

Copy of an Original Letter from Bud





HIGHLIGHTS OF LETTERS FROM KOREAN WAR

Aug. 12, 1950 – I'm in Fort Lawton, Washington. We'll be leaving here soon to go to Yokohama, Japan. We'll probably leave this Friday 18th. Today I got some more shots for yellow fever and what not. I have about 15-20 day boat ride ahead of me.

Sept. 7, 1950 – Pusan, Korea – Nearest fighting to here is about 35 miles. You can hear artillery fire. We are staying in a factory here where they make canvas and fish nets and different odds and ends. Took about 16 days to get here – will stay here until the big push. These people are always running – every place they go, they run. You ought to see the shacks these people live in – they wouldn't even make a good barn for cows. They are drafting all the S. Koreans into the army and they really have it rough. I saw them going to chow and before they went in to eat a Korean Officer was inspecting their hands. He found a couple of them with dirty hands – took them out and beat their hands with a bamboo stick.

Sept. 13, 1950 – Heunde – You ought to see these children. There was a bunch of food cans thrown out and the kids had their tongues inside the cans licking them out. I don't think the war will last long. The roads are bad – they're just wide enough for one truck. The people get on with ox carts and then you can't move. The roads aren't paved and are full of mud when it rains. I see a lot of hospital trains going by here coming from the front. They take the wounded to Pusan – then to Japan. There was one with both arms and legs broken.

Oct. 4, 1950 – Chinju – This is about 80 miles from Pusan. There was a lot of fighting here. There's still a lot of dead Koreans. I saw a North Korean tied to a pole with a bullet through his head. He really stunk. Along the roads you see hands and legs sticking out of the ground. If all goes well I should be home by spring. There's a lot of homeless children. I roasted some peanuts and gave them some candy. Every time I go out they are sitting there – I can't get rid of them. I'm now connected with the 2nd Infantry Division.

Oct. 14, 1950 – Seoul – Since we are crossing the 38th it shouldn't last longer than 2 more weeks. So I hope to be home for Christmas. I took a shower and shaved today – 1st time in 3 weeks. I bet I drove over a half million miles. Some of the turns on these mountains take 30 minutes to get a truck around them – one slip and you would go more than a mile straight down. The North Koreans run down the mountain like a bunch of Indians and push the trucks over the side. Haven't had mail for almost a month.

Oct. 28, 1950 – Saiwon, North Korea – Here I am in N. Korea. These people gave us a cheering. I guess they didn't like Communist ruling. I hauled a gang of prisoners to a POW Camp on the other side of the 38th. They were glad to get out of there. Hundreds of N. Koreans are waving

you down wanting to give themselves up – but we tell them to go home – the prison camps are filled up. It's getting cold up here. We'll probably be in the Salt Mines. This whole country is crazy. They grow all the wheat in the South and in the North they grow all the cotton. I don't see how they do it.

Nov. 7, 1950 – Sanchon, N. Korea – We sure took a beating since China came in. The 1st. Cav. lost over 3,000 men in about 2 days.

Jan. 15, 1951 – I'm on one end of Korea one day and on the other end the next. This war could go on for years. The people back home ought to do something about it. I sure need a rest. One of my buddies got shot – he hit a road block, but he just got hit in the leg.

Feb. 3, 1951 – Chongju – Heading North – This sure gets tiresome, going back and forth. I never knew Eddie Thorn was knocked off over here. If he was killed in Nov., well that was the time when the Marines were trapped in the Hanking perimeter. It took a long time for the War Dept. to contact Mrs. Thorn. He was probably wounded and somebody else was with him. He probably died from not having medical treatment, I guess the ones with him worked their way South through enemy lines which took a month or so – they then reported his death to their outfit.

March. 25, 1951 – Wonju – Just think if this war never happened I would have been discharged last Friday.

Mar. 28, 1951 – Wonju – If you ever get a chance to send the Sunday paper I sure would appreciate it. I may get home this fall.

Apr. 13, 1951 – Honchon – The people back there must really be giving it to Truman. I wonder what MacArthur did to get relieved of his command? If anybody should vote for Truman in this election they should get their head examined.

June 2, 1951 - & 17th – Houchon – I won't accept Sgt. over here. That makes you head man in front all the time. I'm happy the way I am. The higher up you go the more essential you are. It takes you longer to get home. I'm tired of this place now. I got my 4th battle star today. I hope I'm not around to get any more.

July 8, 1951 – Well, they started the peace conference today. I hope they go through alright. I should be leaving here next month, I hope. How are jobs back there?

Aug. 2, 1951 – I wish they would hurry up with this peace treaty. We get pretty good chow now. I starved last winter in N. Korea. When went through a town we would steal the chickens and eggs. Sometimes, we caught a pig.. Once we got a calf. The owner didn't like it very much.

Aug. 11, 1951 – Hanchong – I left Ft. Meade 1 year ago today.

Aug. 22, 1951 – Things aren't so well here now. They broke off the peace talks yesterday. Seven months from today and I'll be a free man again.

Sept. 21, 1951 – I have pictures of me here in Yanju. A fellow has a camera that develops your picture in one minute. He paid \$180.00 for the outfit and takes pictures 2 for \$1.00. He makes good money.

Sept. 27, 1951 – Things are booming again. I just came from up front – am loading up and then going back. Is my suit and topcoat still in good condition? Can you get it cleaned and pressed for me? About ten days ago a sniper shot a canteen full of water off my belt and the water ran down my back. I thought it was blood. There has been many a man killed over here.

Oct. 2, 1951 – Yangu, North Korea – See copy of letter.

+++ Mar. 22, 1952 - Bud died from injuries suffered in an automobile accident a few miles from home. Bud was discharged from the Army on Feb. 27, 1952.



Younger Nov 11 1951
Oct. 2, 1951

Dear Mom Dad & Gang

How are you all doing back there?
I'm doing pretty good. I just got back from
Japan. I spent five days in Tokyo. I'm a
rest hotel the Army runs. and did I have a
good time. I wouldn't mind spending the rest
of my life there. It's like you read in
story books. They really have beautiful women
there. They look like little dolls. I can see
now why so many Americans are marrying
them. It's just like any city in the
States. It's bigger than Balto. I think.
and it's clean as a whistle. I see them
wash the streets, and walk every day.
It was just like a spring day every day
over there. and all the bamboo trees make
it look that much prettier. I flew there and
back. The first thing we got when we got
off the plane was a steak and french fried
potatoes. I'll never want to eat
and as much ice cream you could eat.
I ate steak dinner four and five times
a day every day I was there. You had just

... save some my eggs and a couple of
slices of ham for breakfast. I usually ate a
steak dinner at ten or twelve every night.
That jazz beer was really good to. I went to
a jazz movie, but I couldn't understand it very
well. I know some jazz and some Korean.
Just enough to get along on. you ought to
see all the different kinds of toys. I bet the
kids would go crazy over these. I seen
pen knives with screw drivers, openers, cut saws
saws, knife, fork and a spoon, and even
scissors on all on one knife. With that
one knife you could probably build
a house. and I also made box. I got
four stripes now. I guess that will be
around a hundred and fifty or sixty a
month now. well I have to be signing
off now is. so long all

Beard

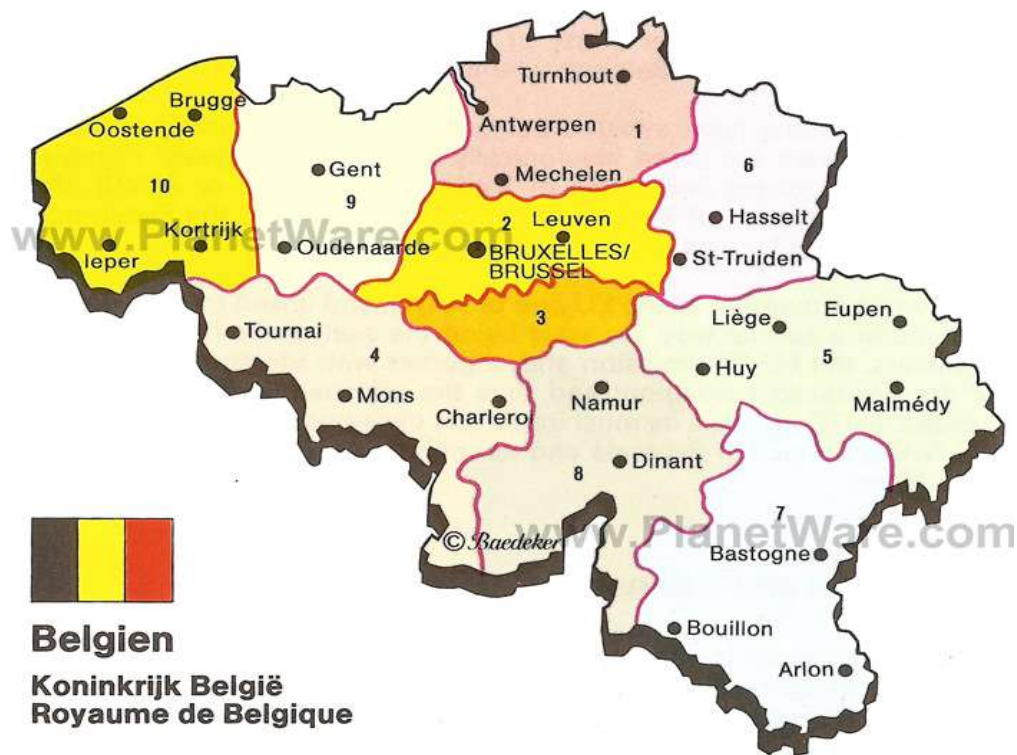
NINETEEN FIFTY-TWO

Shortly following Bud's Army discharge and his return home he had a car accident. He suffered damage to his cervical spinal cord and was permanently paralyzed from his neck down. He died eight days later from pneumonia. He was twenty-three years old.

Two weeks following Bud's death, my parents went to the police station and picked up items that the police had removed from Bud's car at the time of the accident. My parents were walking home when they were both struck by an automobile. My father was thrown atop a stone wall and the car's wheel was between my mother's legs and her head was against a rock. This accident occurred just a few blocks from their home. My parents were taken to St. Agnes Hospital where I was a student nurse at the time. My father suffered fractures of both tibia and fibula in one leg. He remained in the hospital for six weeks and he had to wear a cumbersome brace on his leg for the following six years of his life. My mother suffered a fractured pelvis and leg and had three hours of surgery to repair her scalp. She received multiple units of whole blood and was listed in critical condition for a week. She remained in the hospital for three months. Considering these severe injuries their physical conditions were tolerable; however, the loss of their son was a very sad burden to them for the remainder of their lives.

Chapter 3

Belgium and Vietnam Years





A CAPRICIOUS CAT THAT CREATED A CALAMITY

In 1967 I was assigned to SHAPE Interim Hospital in Brussels, Belgium. During my second year I had to move 40 miles South to the new SHAPE Hospital in Mons, Belgium.

Most of the hospital personnel had to live “on the economy”. The SHAPE housing office had a list of available apartments or houses for rent. One of the nurses located a furnished rental house. The owner, a professor and his wife were going to Canada on a year’s Sabbatical. Lisa asked me if I would share the house, so we signed the lease.

George and Marie, a middle aged Belgian couple lived behind us and they cared for the yard. They had a cat named Sheila – Soon after our occupation Sheila come to visit. Naturally, we fed her milk; so then, we were on her list of stops. Within a few months we noticed that Sheila was pregnant – but her visits continued.

One late night I came home from working with an emergency surgery and Sheila was at the door. She had her usual dish of milk, but then she disappeared. I was very exhausted so I went to bed and did not bother to put Sheila outside.

The following morning after awakening, I was astonished to find Sheila at my feet. Then, I noticed a lump beside her. I suddenly sat up and was startled to notice that the lump was moving. I moved Sheila to a scatter rug beside the bed and within the hour there were three more siblings. That afternoon Lisa and I brought Marie into the house to meet the new arrivals.

Marie threw up her arms in astonishment. She later carried the kittens to her house in a large cardboard box. I shall always remember Sheila's piercing cry as Marie carried the kittens away. Sheila leapt over the four foot fence that separated our yards, crying all the time. Later than evening George told us one word – guillotine.

Next, we had a psychotic cat on our hands. Sheila would be at the door and spend time in the birthing room. She refused the milk and would keep looking in the room for her kittens. Within a few months though, Sheila was pregnant again. But, this is NOT the end of the story.

Lisa rotated to CONUS and a few months later I received orders to Vietnam. The owners of the house were still in Canada, so their relative came to inspect the house before I left. He was a handsome man in his thirties – and did not understand English. When we went to my bedroom I wanted to explain about the stain on the mattress which the cat had made. I knew some French but not the word for cat. Lisa and I tried every available cleaner but the spot was there forever. I tried to explain the story of the cat but I realized my French was not getting through to him – so, I decided to show him the spot. I began raising the bed covers and then I noticed that his face became red and redder. He stepped back closer toward the doorway. At that time I realized what he must be thinking – then, my face was a reflection of his. But, I decided that it was too late to turn back. After I showed him the stain he gratefully relaxed.

Then we went to George and Marie's house and they told him about Sheila. While sharing a glass of wine all of us laughed about the cat – and I did not need to replace the mattress. Sheila is a cat that I shall never forget OR forgive.



LAOS

NORTH VIETNAM

DMZ

PHU

THAILAND



• SAIG



IS THIS THE PRICE OF WAR?

You, the mama-san, with your black teeth
Incessantly grinning, and patiently stomping
The laundry with your leathery feet.
Are you dreaming of the day when you man can
Stay Home? When you can enjoy your children
Together.

You, the ARVN, travelling wearily across your country
Year after year of battle and strife with
Never an end. Are you conditioned to this fate?
Or do you believe in a future for your torn nations?
How often do doubts cross your mind?

You, the children. The vision of tomorrow
Will someday be your present. Someday
Your children can ride water buffalo in peace.
Someday your children will not be terrorized.
Someday your children will not be maimed.
Someday ---

You, the beautiful young maiden, with your
Long black hair, your air of quiet dignity
Do you long for the day when your hopes and
Passions are culminated?

You, the families of South Vietnam, now you are
Scattered like leaves across your country.
Men, off to war.
Women, servants to the allies.
Maidens, earning piasters from GIs.
Children, begging, always begging.

Is this the price of war?





VIETNAM – January – December 1970

In January of 1970 I began a 12 month assignment in Vietnam. I flew from McChord Air Base in Tacoma, Washington on a Flying Tiger cargo plane along with 100+ military heading to war. Along the way the plane stopped in Alaska, Okinawa, Japan and finally we exited at Cam Rahn Bay, SVN. I remained there in quarters for two nights then was flown to medical headquarters at Long Binh where I was assigned to the 85th Evac Hospital at Phu Bai. The following day I was flown to Da Nang where I received a duffel bag of clothing and filled out many military papers. The next day I travelled by helicopter over the mountains to Phu Bai.

My duties were administering anesthesia. The wounded GIs arrived by helicopters. Many had received first aid in the field by doctors or medics. On arrival at the hospital the litters were placed on wooden horses and the triage doctor directed treatment. Some were rushed right into the operating room, some could wait and for some nothing could be done. Many men were injured or killed

by mines and weapons specifically made to mutilate and maim. There were lots of amputations and damage to legs. Pieces of dirt, metal and stone lodged in the wounds and had to be removed. One GI after the shock of being wounded, looked up at me and asked, "Am I alive?" It was unusual for them to see American women. It was not unusual for friends to arrive together and they would say "I'm OK. He's hurt worse than me". They had intense loyalty to each other. Patients were transferred the next day to Saigon, the Philippines or Japan. Our hospital would stay as empty as possible because you never knew how many injured would be coming in from battle. Our hospital did not have a neurosurgeon or a chest surgeon so the anesthetists would accompany patients with head or chest injuries on helicopters to Navy hospital ships, either USS Sanctuary or USS Repose, or to the Da Nang Hospital where those specialties were located. Another time I accompanied a small child to Quang Tri Hospital. He had ingested a poisonous substance. The other hospital had a pediatrician. The parents were with the child and during the flight I had to give CPR to the child. The following day the parents came back carrying a small box. The father thanked me for my help and he bowed several times in the Buddhist way. Our hospital treated many wounded GIs from three major conflicts during my tour.

My tour ended in December shortly before Christmas. In Seattle we were all debriefed and told that the country (USA) was very anti-Vietnam. "Do not wear your uniform in public". Also try to avoid confrontations with the anti-war groups. As I returned on the civilian plane, I was asked by the woman seated next to me where I had been. I answered "Vietnam". Immediately she got up and moved to another seat. I never spoke to anyone about my service in Vietnam until 1993. It was that time when monuments were finally erected honoring these brave men and women and we were contacted by the media and received recognition for service to our country. I still cringe through whenever someone says "Thank You For Your Service"



KENNETH K. LAMSTAFF PHOTO

Lt. Col. Betty Kruger of Bel Air, who served in Vietnam, stands near the Vietnam Women's Memorial.

Vietnam," she said. Kruger knew she would likely be sent to Vietnam. "I expected it, cause of my specialty. We received word any estheticians were going to Vietnam. We were critical staff — we were needed." She arrived in Vietnam at Da Nang in January, during the monsoon or rainy season. For several days she waited for a plane, which took her to medical headquarters in Long Binh. She was the only female on the plane. ("I was always the only female on the plane," Kruger said.) Even though she had been given information about Vietnam, "I wasn't prepared. It was hot and beautiful, but different. And the country was new."



The striking three-dimensional Vietnam Women's Memorial.

full of wooden horses. Litters with wounded men were placed on the wooden horses and the triage doctor directed treatment. Some were rushed right into the operating room. Some could wait," Kruger said.

"For others, nothing could be done."

For new medical personnel "it was a shock... especially to see all these young men," Kruger said. The average age for the Vietnam GI was 19.

"The first week everybody had to serve in receiving and emergency, to see how it was handled," Kruger said.

The wounded men came from aid stations set up in outlying areas where fighting was taking place, Kruger said.



RAIN

My eyes popped wide open as I began to step down from the helicopter that flew me to my new duty station – Phu Bai, South Vietnam. The ground was a sea of yellow mud. I wondered “How deep would I sink in this lake of mud?” The monsoon rains had just stopped.

During the monsoon season I literally lived in a fish tank. The rain just kept coming for weeks. We wore a rubber poncho that reached to the ground and wore large rubber boots over our jungle boots. The latrine was about a block away from my hooch and it was a very time-consuming trip just to answer Mother Nature’s call.

The Mama-San would gather our small electric heaters, wind rope all around the hooch and hang our laundry to dry. She would keep ironing the wet clothes and one could see the steam rising from the overworked iron.

Everything was cold and smelled damp. The Nurses who were leaving would sell their heaters and electric blankets to their shocked replacements. The electricity was so primitive that I hesitated to plug in the blanket – I used it along with clothes piled on top of me in order to keep warm.

The hooches had no windows – just screens in front of the outside wooden slats. We nailed sheets of plastic to the walls to keep out the chill.

The PSP walks and Highway One disappeared during the deluge. The wet sand covered everything for inches. Water would seep onto the hospital floors. One day while I was administering anesthesia to a wounded GI I noticed that the water on the floor had waves. It was discovered that the drainage pipe was plugged and had to be repaired. The wounded who required surgery had to be diverted to another hospital while the repairs were made.

I do not recall how many weeks that the rain fell – but suddenly the sun returned. The drying process took a while and all the rain gear was returned to the Supply Sergeant who stored these items for our replacements.



A VERY UNUSUAL SHOWER

The fabulous female latrine in Vietnam consisted of a long wooden hooch. This was a long building that had narrow slats, no windows, but a screen enclosed the interior walls, and a screen door. There were no locks on this flimsy door and at night the screen was covered with geckos in pairs fornicating. These hooches were erected by a company from Texas. Originally, this area supplied the Marines just 18 months prior to my assignment. When female nurses arrived the latrine was modified - ply boards separated the toilets - but just halfway - the bottom half. It was a luxury to have the building to oneself. During that time there was no one's head in your view while one answered nature's call. Multiple cubby hole shelves held our individual soap, shampoo, deodorant and other sundries. We kept our towels and washcloths in our own hooch. There were too many insects flitting-around the latrine just waiting to hide in the warm and wet linens.

The three or so showers had plastic curtains that permitted some aspect of privacy. The floor had wooden slats and the water would drain through holes to the ground several inches below. During the monsoons it was not at all unusual for tiny frogs to be hopping all over the wet floor. In the hot weather we were pelted with ugly tropical insects that were attracted to the light. The light, by the way, was one or two bare light bulbs suspended and crudely attached to the ceiling - a thick wire connected them to a wall switch. I do not know how the cold water arrived, but the

hot water was in a small tank that we would light when we took a shower. Needless to say, showers had to be quick before the hot water ran out.

My unusual shower occurred on a night when a group of oriental people were entertaining at the Officer's Club. The Club was close to the Nurses quarters. I was enjoying a solitary shower with plenty of warm water and no other human was in the latrine (or so I thought). Suddenly, the shower curtain was thrown open, and standing there staring at me were a very small oriental man and woman. I quickly closed the curtain and just as quickly these intruders opened it again. I said "Go away-go away" but they only stared. I said, Shoo-shoo" – "Leave me alone!" Every time I would close the curtain they would open it. Hoping that they would understand my gestures I threw my arms out and pointed to the door --but they still insisted on standing there. Finally, my modesty got the better of me. My towel was out of my reach in the middle of the room and neatly folded on the wooden bench. All I had was my small (it seemed tiny at the time) wash cloth, - and guess what part of my anatomy I covered - it was my Face! After a time (it seemed forever) I heard the screen door slam and the interlopers left.

I wondered why they were so curious - perhaps, they had never seen a shower before. But I never again took a shower alone when the club had entertainers.

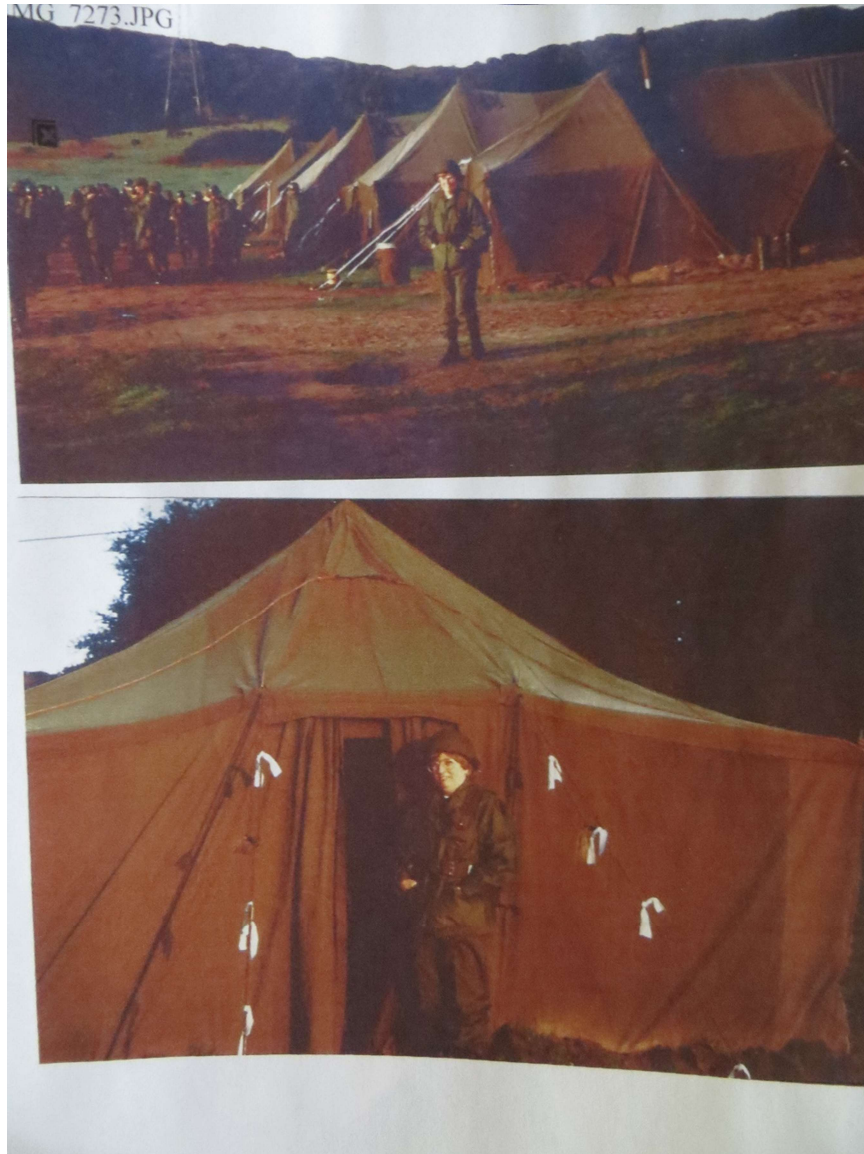




CLOTHES

Being a "clothes-loving" female I was completely mesmerized with the Vietnamese women's ao dai (ou'zi). This garment is a beautiful, delicate close-fitting tunic. It is high necked, split along the sides from the waist to the hem and worn over loose fitting trousers. The trousers were a black silk for satiny fabric. The ao dais were a variety of pastel colors made from sheer, thin gauzelike fabrics. The young women were small, 'very petite, had long shiny black hair, olive to tan skin and delicate features. This mode of dress definitely designed for beauty and grace.

The chador worn by Muslim women is a large black square cloth worn as a cloak' covering all their hair and reaching to the floor-- This garment is a coarse cotton fabric' very loose fitting and "cumbersome". There are no buttons so, when necessary, the women secure the cloak by holding some of it with their teeth. Seeing groups of females in this black attire would cause me to shudder at the lack of individuality. I have not done research on its origin, but I am certain that the chador was not designed by women.



SOMETHING I ALMOST GOT AWAY WITH

During the 17th year of my military career, the CO at Letterman Army Medical Center decided that all the medical personnel would spend several days at Fort Ord doing a field exercise. Over the years the "Medics" had avoided these exercises - we always avoided this duty because our expertise was always needed in a clean hospital setting. But this time we had to leave the hospital environs to the civilian personnel.

On the morning of the big exercise we picked up an overstuffed duffel bag filled with a blanket, cot, helmet, shovel, canteen, first-aid kit, etc. and boarded Army buses for the trip to Monterey, CA. A number of the Residents were vegetarians and they brought large bags filled with nuts, dried vegetables and fruits and whatever else that they consume. They constantly ate from these bags.

Upon arrival at the base camp we helped set up our tent sleeping quarters - the females shared a tent which held 8-10 persons. Our meals were tins of MRE's which we opened with our gear (after we found out how to use this utensil). I found this food very unappetizing and was becoming envious of the Residents eating from their bag of nuts, etc. In the evenings we had briefings concerning protection during germ and chemical warfare. We applied gas masks to our faces.

The next day we were split up and driven via trucks to unknown destinations into the woods where we were separated into pairs, given a map and compass, and ordered to find our way back to Headquarters. A young female dermatology Resident and I were partners and we were doing quite well until a pair of men caught up to us - being 'lifers'" these men determined that they would quickly lead us back to Camp. BUT were they WRONG!! We ended up walking into a large circle - so, the two of us discreetly lost the Pathfinders and quickly found our own way back to camp.

In the afternoon some of the braver Nurses tried rope rappelling from a very high wall - next, we ran and squeezed our way under and leapt over barriers during the mandatory obstacle course. Weapons practice was not given - medical personnel do not bear arms - only in very dire circumstances.

During survival training each group was given a live chicken. One lone sullen Medic who was forever reading a paperback book was ordered by his senior NCO to kill the chicken. Without apology he angrily threw his book on the grass, grabbed the chicken by the neck and swung it wide circles until the chicken became limp, then he took out his pocket knife and decapitated the hen. No way was I going to eat this meal. The Medic crudely cleaned the chicken while the rest of us gathered twigs, leaves and broken branches for the fire.

The nights at Monterey Peninsula were very cold. I chose to sleep near the tent opening so I could easily escape in case the Coleman Heater would cause a fire. Was I wrong - a guard came to make certain that all heaters were extinguished and a cold wind blew through the cracks in the tent flaps. I even slept with my boots on and piled everything including my duffel bag on top of me. There was limited hot water and we used our helmets to dip out the precious wash up water - hurriedly taking a cat wash.

One night we went out on night patrol - carrying only a dim flashlight and a night compass. A gentlemanly senior NCO kept very close watch on me - after all, I was the senior ranking female Officer in the group. He helped me over all the obstacles in the woods and protected me from the holes and ravines. I was Ma'amed to death, but I was oh- so grateful.

Finally, the day arrived for our return to civilization. But, that morning there were many itchy bodies - it seemed that the leaves and twigs that we gathered for the chicken roasting contained poison ivy or poison something and the supersensitive persons even had irritation in their respiratory passages from inhaling the smoke.

On the bus ride back to LAMC the Resident sitting next to me was still eating his nuts, dried fruits and etc. - but his paper sack was becoming quite empty

As they say, it's all in the life of a soldier - unless you can get away from field exercises.



Chapter 4

Iran Years

Notes from Iran Lecture Given



MY TRIP TO IRAN (Day One)

On January 3rd, 1978 I started my lengthy trip to Tehran for an eighteen month assignment. My flight was to leave NY at 9 PM and my flight from BWI was scheduled to leave at 4 PM. Snow began to fall at noon. My nephew, Tom, picked me up at 2 PM. I had a dreadful feeling when I said good-bye to my mother. She was 88 years old and her health had begun to fail. I felt that I was really saying farewell to her. The snow fell steadily and by the time that the plane left BWI several inches had accumulated. The flight left on time and it was full of passengers – all of whom were connecting to overseas planes. Some time later the pilot announced that JFK was backed up and we would be circling for the next hour over New Jersey. After the hour had passed the pilot announced that he would land at Newark airport. We descended and as we approached landing the plane apparently hit a wind shirr. It felt as though the plane was having a grand mal seizure. Silence followed and the plane lifted up to a high altitude. Finally the pilot announced that we were going back to BWI and would go to JFK on buses. An elderly lady was seated next to me – she was going to Switzerland to attend her sister's funeral, but decided to return to her home in the D.C. area.

The passengers were very interesting. There was a group of black people who were on their way to Africa to search for their roots. There were a couple in very summery clothes who worked for the State Dept. and were assigned to a country in Equatorial Africa. Finally the buses arrived. We had to get our luggage and take it to the bus. I was allowed four suitcases as it would take a while for my hold baggage to arrive in Tehran. The bus was full and there was even luggage packed inside the rear of the bus. It was still snowing and the bus sped up 95 to N.Y.

The man sitting next to me talked all the way. He was an American businessman living in Switzerland. Years earlier he had been in the Army but he could not conform to all the rules so

he was discharged. Then, he turned his life around and became prosperous eventually owning his business.

The bus continued on its way slipping and sliding on the N.Y. streets. By now the snowing had ceased. We arrived in NY about midnight and I was let off at the Pan-Am terminal. The employees had all left the airport and there I stood with four pieces of luggage and no one to help me. My procedure was to carry two suitcases: - go for a while then return - pick up the other two - and continue. I had missed my flight and would need to wait 24hrs - for the next flight. We were told to go upstairs and we could stay in PAN-AM's 1st class lounge – but the escalators had been turned off for the night. Somehow I got to the top of the stairs. By now everyone was gone.

I proceeded with my trek and then I noticed a lounge that said IRAN AIR. The furniture was soft and plush so I planned to spend the night there. But a guard checked the area and told me this was not safe and to proceed to Pan-Am's lounge. Now the only sounds that I heard were my footsteps. My destination was still not in sight.

A door to my right opened and two N.Y. men came in – they were in their 20's - wore jeans and leather jackets and sauntered, hands in pockets towards me. My only thought was that I would end up being a statistic in N.Y.C.'S police records. But I was so tired by this time that when they spoke to me I answered. Eventually I told them that I was in the military and had served in Vietnam. With that one fellow was happy as he had served there. I said that some friends were coming from the lounge to help me with my luggage - but would they mind giving me a hand as I had to get there soon. One man took two pieces and I took two. The other man just walked by himself,

I treated them to coffee and soda and they wanted me to come to their pad where I could be comfortable. As I was wondering how to shed these two, there suddenly was a loud noise and six or eight people approached. It was Tiny Tim, the singer, with his bodyguards. They had also missed their plane and were attempting to find hotel rooms. They all had coffee and my N.Y. men asked me if I wanted to meet Tiny Tim - "of course", I said. These men went to Tiny Tim and I shook his hand. He had his very small ukulele slung over his shoulder and his hair was very greasy with long curls. He just grinned, said nothing then turned away. Apparently they were able to obtain a hotel as they left shortly after their arrival.

At last the two fellows left and I had to sit in an uncomfortable hard chair. All the plush chairs and sofas had already been occupied. It was very eerie and quiet as there were no planes flying at night. But at 0530 the airport suddenly became alive.

MY TRIP TO IRAN (Day Two)

As soon as daylight appeared all of us were told to vacate this area. Pan Am did have a place where we could store our luggage. I very groggily ate breakfast and tried to decide where I should go next.

When I was at BWI on the previous evening I went to the desk for the military. I had wanted to know what I should do in the event I missed my flight. The GI there made me listen to the entire privacy act before I could ask any questions. Meanwhile the buses were arriving to take us to N.Y. and he hurriedly told me to talk to the military at the N.Y. airport. So I found the military desk where I was informed that there was a mistake in my ticket. Fortunately he fixed it. My previous plans had been to spend the night in Frankfurt then travel to Tehran on the following day. . However, I now had to stay on the plane all the way to Iran.

There was an Air Force man also inquiring about his flight to Ankara. He was stationed in Turkey and was returning from leave in the States. We began talking and both of us spent the day together. His flight also left at night. We had our meals together and watched all the activity. Again, there was a flurry of activity and Tiny Tim reappeared to board his flight to Rome. I do not remember this Airman's name but when his flight was announced he grabbed me in his arms and gave me a movie star kiss - then rapidly disappeared into the crowd.

My flight left as planned at 9 P.M.,. The first stop was in London where a lot of the passengers exited. The next stop was Frankfurt and after that I had a whole row of seats to myself. But, I had a very restless sleep. Most of the passengers were Mid-Eastern men - and all of them were snoring.

At last I arrived in Iran. When I finished with all the red tape at Mehrabad Airport, Tony, my sponsor met me and the hospital driver took me to the Evin Hotel.



LIFE AT EVIN HOTEL

The very afternoon after arriving at the Evin. I had to go to a briefing and learn all the dos and don'ts about living in an Islamic country. Plus, I had numerous papers to fill out and lots of pictures to turn in.

The next day Iranian realtors took me apartment hunting. I decided on an apartment, signed lots of papers and made arrangements with an Iranian bank where I was to pay the rent. The entire housing procedure was handled by Iranians - the American military had nothing to do with these proceedings. Meanwhile, I had to stay at the Evin Hotel until my car and hold baggage arrived.

The hotel assigned me to a room with twin beds. One night after midnight the manager moved a woman in the other bed - she woke me up but left the following a.m. Another time a woman from the Pentagon was moved in my room. She stayed for two nights then the Embassy had her stay there. This woman said that she preferred my company rather than the embassy people.

The meals at the hotel were delicious - my introduction to Persian cooking. This is still my favorite food. The maids were very curious about me because I travelled alone with no husband. One day the maid was showing another maid my closet. They were apparently discussing the fact that no men's clothes were there. They looked at me and pointed to their wedding rings. I shook my head "no". Then they smiled and both said "is goot - is goot".

One night I decided to go to the theater in the hotel. There was no TV in our rooms. One movie had just ended so I settled comfortably in the chair to watch the next film. It wasn't long before I realized that was a porno movie. When I turned around there were only men behind me. I waited through until intermission to make a hasty exit.

After a month at the Evin I was more than ready to move into an apartment of my own.



THE VILLAGE WEDDING

It was a hot summer day in Tehran when I left for a bus tour to Hamadan and Kermanshah, cities near the western border of Iran not far from Iraq. The American Women's Club sponsored the trip. The only person I knew was Judy – our civilian surgical nurse. Her husband John, also an American, who worked for a French business company, was on this trip.

When we arrived at Hamadan, John met an Iranian business associate and his cousin who lived in the area. Judy asked me to join them and we all spent the afternoon together. We visited an ancient bas-relief and an event of Darius that is inscribed on a wall beside the highway. I thought that I would then rejoin the tour at the hotel. However, another Iranian friend of John's was having a marriage ceremony - Part I - in the evening and I was invited to join them.

But, first, the five of us traveled in their compact car to a nearby orchard. We all sat on the soft ground and ate delicious red apples. Judy and I were both quite mystified and we remained silent. The men spoke softly about general topics, and then we were driven to the cousin's home. There, we met his young wife and their small daughter. We sat on their carpeted floor and were joined by the man's parents. His father was elderly and his pleasant mother was wearing her customary chador. She wore several gold bracelets on her right arm. John said that they wanted me to take their picture. I said "But I have no flash attachment with me". But John persisted, so I took pictures that turned out yellowish.

Next, we went to the other Iranian's home. The same procedure followed. We all sat on the floor - me - I never had the hang of what to do with my legs - and six-foot John was just as contorted as I was. This man's mother and young wife served us rose water, Persian nuts and fruit. I noticed that the wife was quiet and had a pillow at her back. Possibly, she was pregnant - but that talk was taboo there.

At last, we went to another village. The cement homes were clustered together on both sides of a very narrow red dirt street. In fact, the cars were parked outside the village. As we walked down the street, we Westerners were a curiosity. Many faces appeared at the open windows. When we arrived at the bride's home the men left Judy and me in the care of a young girl. We went upstairs via narrow steps in a dark house. Then we arrived in a very bright room filled with women and young girls. There was a beautiful bride resplendent in a lovely white wedding gown and veil. She sat on an upholstered chair. There were two folding chairs in the room for Judy and me. I eagerly sat on one of these. We all were served nuts, fruits and drink. One of the women had two empty plastic inverted jugs. She sat on the floor in front of the smiling bride and like magic she played a haunting rhythm using sometimes two fingers and sometimes the whole hands. The youngest girls began dancing before the bride. Next, older girls danced, their graceful bodies undulating to the rhythm. Finally, another woman played the beat and the

woman, who had been the musician began to dance. Her body was moving so rapidly that she seemed to be a blur. I was so fascinated that I was sorry when her dance finished. Then, everything became still. The door opened and the bride's ancient father entered. He began to cover his daughter with scarves, then tablecloths and sheets. She was completely covered. He had a lantern in one hand and his daughter's hand in the other and led her down the street to the groom's house. A young girl took care of Judy and me - leading us along the way. By now it was dusk and as we walked the neighbors from their open windows were calling to the procession: The bride's father answered them in a chant-like song. At the groom's house our guide directed us to be careful. At the entrance there was a recently slain sheep—a part of their ritual – which we stepped over. The courtyard was filled with men and boys – sitting at long tables. When the women entered, the men became very lively – openly flirting with the chador covered women. I particularly noticed that these women with only their eyes visible were flirting back - their dark eyes dancing coyly.

Upstairs, in a large room, on the carpeted floor covered with a plastic cloth was a feast fit for royalty. The two chairs were present - everyone else sat on the floor. The bride was no where in sight. All the children were also upstairs with us. We had many delicious Iranian dishes – even the very expensive saffron rice and alb aloo polo.

After the meal, I was requested by John to take a picture of the bride and groom. I went to another room where they were. This was an arranged marriage and I saw them shortly after they first met each other. The bride had tears in her eyes and the groom was very nervous. I felt very sorry because I knew that the pictures would not be normal colors. I still had outdoor film and no flash. I silently said a prayer and snapped a few pictures (I only had two pictures left on the roll). The groom thanked me. He said that he was very grateful.

This event was many years ago -but I still think of them and will always wish them happiness and good luck. It was a privilege to have been a participant at this phase of their wedding.





“IN THE DARK” IN TEHRAN

Life in Tehran in November of 1978 suddenly took an ominous turn for the foreigners in Tehran. The ailing Shah was still in Tehran and rumors of an Iranian uprising were being whispered in closed circles. My apartment building was in the process of being sold to an Iranian Air Force Major, who just returned to Tehran after spending several years at a U.S. Military base in Texas. The American couple, who had occupied the first floor apartment, were transferred to another Mid-East country. So I had the entire building to myself.

The Shah had already imposed a strict curfew throughout the city between the hours of 8 P.M. until 6 A.M. On this particular night as I was watching TV, I heard a strange sound outside the building. As I went to the balcony, the noise became louder. I could not understand the Farsi words, but I was aware that something significant was occurring. I phoned my Air Force friends, David and Linda, to find out just what was happening. Their landlord Mahmoud said that the Iranian people were on their rooftops shouting "the Shah must go or die". While we were speaking the electricity suddenly went out- turning the entire city into darkness. The shouting continued until gunfire sounded. The Shah's troops were riding through the streets on motorcycles and shooting at the people on the rooftops. I heard people running on my roof. They ran from building to building dodging the troops. After several hours the noise and shooting ceased. I shuddered as I sat in the darkness wondering "what is going to happen to the Americans". My mind became very imaginative and the minutes passed slowly. Eventually I drifted off to a restless sleep and at dawn I requested that the driver pick me up. I was too shook up to drive my American car to work. The blackouts continued sporadically. We could no longer function at work. It was real management by crises and we were victims of circumstances in a foreign land. All patients were almost immediately med-evaced to Germany. Tony, the other CRNA, and I rotated nights to spend at the hospital. We seldom had any surgery especially at night, but we were needed to stay there because we were essential personnel for resuscitations.

I dreaded the darkness - even though Iranian soldiers guarded the gates to the hospital. One particular event remains with me. It was shortly before curfew when I heard loud voices at the emergency entrance. I was the first to arrive and I met an Iranian man who was assisting an American down the corridor. This Air Force man had been shot in his arm as he was entering his apartment. Since it was now curfew time the Headquarters notified the police to escort the Iranian surgeon to the hospital. After the surgery the police then escorted the surgeon to an Iranian hospital where he treated wounded Iranians.

At no time in my life had darkness seemed to last so many hours. When I was in my apartment during "blackouts" I would reflect upon the freedom and safety in America and wish that I were there. Living under these curfew conditions was extremely isolated and more stressful than my experiences in the Vietnam War. After several months of surviving these dangerous conditions, the American military were finally evacuated from Iran.

For many weeks after returning to America I kept a nite-lite burning until I could again adjust to safely being "in the dark".

A SCARY MOMENT

Iran has many customs that seem strange to Westerners. There is an unwritten law (at least to us) that if one helps an accident victim, then you are responsible for his or her medical care even though you may not be involved in the accident. I had firsthand knowledge about this custom from Iranian friends.

One summer afternoon I was leisurely walking down Dowlat St. toward Sheybani and Honaryar Kuche where I lived. I was window shopping along the way and watching the lavash bread being baked in open ovens. I walked past the man selling fragrant hot spicy beets to passers-by, and stepped aside to let the men with their paint-marked sheep go past me. The tinsmiths fascinated me and I momentarily observed the artisans creating beautiful objects. The two-lane street was very busy with large, noisy, smelly buses, aggressive orange taxis and lots of motor bikes. I was walking close to the djoub, which is a deep trench gutter on both sides of the street that carries water down to the plains. I suddenly heard a “blat” then saw a motor bike driver go up in the air and he landed on the sidewalk just a few feet from me. I froze in my tracks. My first instinct was to provide first aid then the Good Samaritan warning came to my mind.

I instantaneously felt hot and cold. My heart was pounding as my adrenaline level was being stressed. A crowd encircled the victim. Obviously, no one attempted to help the man. While I was inwardly struggling with my conflicts, the man slowly moved, sat up and looked at us with a wondering expression. I breathed a sigh of relief, took control of my nerves and thankfully left this scene.

I had gratefully survived another crises in this country.



BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

During the Iranian Revolution in February 1979, I was assigned at the US Hospital in Tehran. One day during this tumultuous time, we military were told that the country was falling apart and it was time to leave the hospital - except for a skeleton crew. The Shah's soldiers, who guarded the hospital entrance, had just walked away and merged with the mob of confused people

We formed into groups. I was with a group of seven. Linda and I were with a group of five men. We packed into two cars and drove to one of the group's apartment which was several blocks from the hospital. His family had been evacuated back to the states in December of 1978. This was a large three bedroom apartment and the rest of the building was unoccupied. This place was to be our refuge until further word from the American Embassy and/or the U.S. Military.

Linda, the other female, had been Head Nurse on the multiservice unit. Her husband was an x-ray Tech and his parents were from Iran. Since he was fluent in Farsi (Iranian Language), he was kept at the hospital to be the interpreter. Linda and I shared the bedroom that had twin beds. She was very upset and crying a lot of the time - she feared for her husband's safety. Three of the men were hospital personnel and the other two were stationed down-country around the Gulf. These two men came to Tehran due to the deteriorating political conditions against Americans in their area.

We immediately turned on TV for news. English speaking TV reports were very sporadic so someone would call the hospital every few hours. The news was very bleak. We could often hear lots of shooting - cars would blow their horns - and people were shouting. Our street was not a major artery, so we were unable to see much of the activity.

That evening I called an Air Force friend knowing that his landlord would be able to help me. Azam and Mahmoud came and I gave them my key to my apartment. A few months earlier we were advised to have two suitcases packed for immediate evacuation if necessary. We each had a two-way radio to carry with us at all times. Azam and Mahmoud brought all my suitcases, my jewelry and my Persian carpets. They even gave me a carpet as a parting gift. They were very excited to have the Ayatollah back - but already they had some relatives killed in these early days of the revolution. Mahmoud folded the carpets and tightly tied them into small bundles so they would fit into my suitcase. We tearfully bade good-bye, a sense of foreboding hovered over all of us.

The following day we saw a mob walking toward the hospital. We notified the group by phone. Several times during the next two hours we called, but there was no answer. Finally, they phoned to say that these people had placed a large sign over US Hospital and renamed it The

Sacrificers. Their spokesman said that the Americans would treat all Iranians who came there. Later there was a group of men going to all the houses in our area. The U.S. military was not allowed to bring firearms into the country, but of course these Americans had a weapon in the apartment. They frantically tried to conceal it. For unknown reasons the Iranians bypassed our apartment.

One evening a carpet salesman came - he wanted us to buy more carpets. This was far from our choice of priorities. The baijiu (cook) came daily and prepared meals. She was crying the whole time that she was there.

Some of the men slept on the sofa and in chairs. During the day they would take turns napping on the beds. Fortunately there were no disagreements among us, none of us were able to read - there was clearly an uneasiness and talking was at a minimum.

One day we were notified that the American Embassy had been attacked, but no one knew exactly who was attacking. The medic at the hospital was requested to speak to an Iranian official. The official said that their war was not with the U.S. and they removed the persons responsible. However one of the Marines was slightly injured and an Iranian employee had been killed.

The Embassy said that we were now on our own and to avoid danger as best we could. Since the Iranians had tanks on the airport runways, there was no way that we could leave.

My thoughts during this time were disbelief.. I wondered what would happen next. I silently prayed that we leave safely. It was like a dream - so unreal -and helpless. The days and nights passed very slowly. After a week we were told that the Ayatollah wanted all foreigners to leave the country. We were allowed to take two suitcases per person. We all pooled the suitcases and packed the largest ones with as many items as possible.

The Embassy said that two planes per day were allowed for evacuation. The hospital personnel said that Linda would leave on the first day. The rest of us left on the second day. Our orders were to get to the Embassy on our own. So we took two cars and drove the ten miles - left the cars on the street and struggled with our suitcases into the Embassy.

We finally had left our apartment refuge and hopefully this hostile environment



EVACUATION

It was a chilly gray December day in Tehran. I was at the staging area with hundreds of American families whose dependents were being relocated to other parts of the world. My friends had asked me to help transport their luggage to the bus pick-up. David and Linda and their three children had been busy packing toys and clothing into large suitcases. The political climate in Iran had necessitated the urgency for moving the families to a safer haven. Exactly where their plane would take them was uncertain - but, eventually they would return to the U.S.A. The children ages four, seven and eleven were somber—they had to leave many of their prized possessions behind - their father assuring them that he would care for them. The crowds of families rapidly increased - tiny babies whimpering, but the rest of the children unusually quiet. The mothers were brave - having faced abrupt changes in their lives before this. It was almost a year ago that I had arrived in Iran. Some of these same families were my first friends - having lived together for a time at the Evin Hotel. Together we shopped and explored this city and were fascinated by its Persian inhabitants. We shared the holidays and their families seemed like my family. When my mother died they helped me through the grief process. Now, it was my turn to be there for them. The husbands quietly grouped around their family - each giving last minute reminders to their loved ones. Suddenly, the large noisy buses appeared. At this moment I quietly and suddenly departed. This was a very private time and I had no right to intrude. I felt a great sense of loss as I drove away.



IRAN (1978)

GEOGRAPHY

Iran is the size of the U.S. east of the Mississippi River.

It is three times as large as France.

Bordered on North by U.S.S.R. and Caspian Sea.

East by Afghanistan and Pakistan.

South by Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

West by Turkey and Iraq.

There are two large mountain ranges. Alborz in the North and Zagros in West and SW borders. There are two great deserts in the center.. Most major cities are located near or in the mountains. Elevation varies from 90 feet below sea level to 18,000 feet above sea level.

INDUSTRY

More than 50% of people work in agriculture - only 8% of land is cultivated.

Persian Carpeting.

Oil Production provides almost 80% of their foreign exchange earnings.

GOVERNMENT

Iran is a constitutional monarchy - granted in 1906 - consists of about 150 articles.

Composed of three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial. Shah assumed throne in 1941. He declared war on Germany in 1942. Iran was a charter member of UN in 1945. In 1963 the Shah declared a reform program. The clergy strongly opposed the land reforms and the emancipation of women. Later in 1963 they turned out large crowds of demonstrators but were unable to prevent implementations of reforms.

RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of Iranians are Moslems of the Shiite sect of Islam. About 10% are Sunni sect of Islam – rest are mainly Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Islam came to Iran shortly after Mohammed's death in 632AD. The dispute over succession resulted in a schism in Islam. . Shiites believe that succession passed from Mohammed to his son-in-law Ali, and from Ali to successive Imans. Iman is a Muslim leader. The divine light was transmitted to Ali and then to the following Imams. ' The 12th Imam being the Hidden Imam who disappeared but will one day return to set things right. The Sunni sect is composed of most of the rest of Islam. They believe that proper succession passed to elected caliphs of a tribe in Mecca'. One main difference is that the Shiites are not strictly bound by the teachings of the Koran. They may drink alcohol and may make human images in their art.

The Shah's legitimacy is that he rules the people as the Vice-Regent of the hidden Imam who will return in the last days to establish truth, peace and justice. Their testimony is "There is no god but God (Allah) and Mohammed is the prophet".

Christianity has about 200,000 adherents - mostly Semitic Assyrians (Nestorians) and the Armenians.

Judaism has about 80,000 adherents. They form one of the oldest Jewish colonies in the world. They are wholly emancipated and participate fully in the economy and society. The Jewish shrine to Esther and Mordecai is at Hamadan and the tomb of Daniel is near Ahwaz.

Zoroastrianism is the most important minority-about 40.000. Zoroaster (Zarathustra) was born in the 7th century BC. They postulate a great conflict between forces of good and evil. Good (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Ahriman). . Ahura Mazda's symbol is fire. Temples were built over oil or gas seepages where eternal fires could be maintained. Priests are known as Magi's and their bible is the Avesta

IRAN (OVERVIEW)

LIVING CONDITIONS

I arrived in Tehran in January of 1978. There was no military housing so I stayed at the Evin Hotel. An Iranian man or woman realtor took me to many places. I rented a large two bedroom, second floor apartment - completely empty - even no light fixtures. I had shipped my furniture including a refrigerator and a bottled gas stove. Rent was \$1,100.00/month - had two bathrooms - one Persian and one Western. The Persian bath was a hole in the floor with marble corrugated tiles where you put your feet and squatted. There was a hose with a pressure lever that you used to send the contents down to the sewer. The western bath had a flush toilet setting atop a hole - contents also just flowed down an open pipe. I had a bathtub. My car arrived in a month. I drove to work (about two miles away). I was the only American living on my street. Friday is the Moslem Holy Day, so our weekend was Thursday and Friday. Our week began on Saturday. Living there was an adventure - I bought bread from small bakeries where I saw it baked on hot rocks or from men riding on bicycles. Street vendors sold marinated beets on trays. Small grocery stores sold U.S. products. I learned to drop my money in a dish - men did not take money directly from women. Large buses and aggressive taxis drove down crowded streets. They all had large pictures of the Shah in front. The muezzins at the mosques called the citizens to prayer five times a day. Men carried their prayer carpets over their shoulders and the backs of their shoes were worn down so they could easily slip them off when they entered the mosque to pray. Along the wide boulevards one would see expensive Mercedes next to camels and mountain men driving their sheep to markets. These sheep would have an X or a number painted on them. Many women drove cars - sometimes even wearing a chador (the large covering). A lot of the women in Tehran did not wear the chador when I was there. I traveled with groups to the bazaar - to one of the Shah's palaces - to carpet shops - to restaurants - to the House of Strength where athletes perform ancient rituals. When I bought expensive items the shopkeepers were overtly surprised that a woman could make her own decisions and even have the money to pay.

FRIENDS

My close friends were a young Air Force family. We arrived in Tehran together and often went house hunting at the same time. Linda and David and their three children lived several streets from me. Their landlord lived below them and he and his wife were very curious that a woman lived alone. They would often invite me to try all their Persian dishes. Azam and Mahmoud also took me carpet shopping. They called me "girlfriend" Linda became a very good Persian cook.

TRIP

Because of work requirements I was only able to take one four day trip. I traveled by bus with the American Women's Club to Hamadan and Kermanshah - cities close to the Iraqi border. These cities are mostly populated by Kurdish tribesmen. We saw many Kurd's still living in black tents following their nomadic life grazing their animals. On this trip along an ancient caravan route we saw ancient bas-reliefs from BC times to pre-Islamic times. Hamadan has the tomb of the famous Avicenna - a mathematician and philosopher who died in 1037. Nearby is a monument honoring Baba Taher, another Persian poet. I went to a Jewish mausoleum said to contain the tombs of Esther and Mordecai. On this trip I went to a village wedding-- a civilian nurse at our hospital who was also on this trip invited me to go. Her husband knew the groom. We went to an old village where we attended an ancient ritual. This was not the wedding ceremony, but one of the days leading to it.

Shah

When I arrived in Tehran, the Shah was definitely in power. His picture was everywhere. Often the Royal Family - the Shah, the Empress, and the Crown Prince were pictured with a light shining on them. We did not mention his name. Respect was the keyword. His picture was on TV many times during the day and the sign-off always honored him.

UPRISINGS

There was no freedom of the press and all papers and mail except for the military was censored. In the fall I noticed that the Shah's pictures were no longer around. The Americans started getting notes to go home. Then strikes occurred and gas stations closed. The U.S. flew in shipments of gas and heating oil for members of the U.S. military and DOD workers. When Iranian gas stations would get some fuel, the people would stay in lines blocks long. They would leave their cars at night and then come back the next day. The Shah declared curfew from 8 P.M. to 6 A.M. At night I would hear a hum all over the city. Mahmoud told me that people all over-Tehran were on their rooftops chanting "The Shah must go or die!" Then the Shah's troops rode on motorcycles while firing automatic weapons at the people on the rooftops. I would hear them running over my roof. The electricity would often shut off during curfew. Anyone out during these hours was shot.

The U.S. then recommended that the dependents leave the country. I drove Linda and her family to the pick-up point. Many wives with small children boarded the buses-not knowing what country they would be taken to. Some of the people at the hospital had fire bombs tossed into their homes – setting fire to the drapes. As a result their landlords told them to leave, so some stayed at the hospital. Shopkeepers placed signs in their windows saying Americans were no longer welcome. They were afraid of being firebombed. During the strikes the English language newspaper ceased publication and English language news was no longer on TV. BBC on shortwave was our only source at these times. Then the Shah left the country and order deteriorated even further. There was increased activity against Americans.



AYATOLLAH

On February 1, 1979 the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile. The people were jubilant and wandering Americans were given flowers and pictures of Khomeini- but the situation became worse. There were struggles among the leaders. Khomeini declared an Islamic government with a new constitution. He said foreign commanders and advisors must go - "We must cut off the hands of foreign intervention".

Then the Iranian military fell apart and the people took control. The Iranian soldiers who guarded the hospital just walked away. We received word to leave a skeleton force at the hospital. There were no patients there at that time. We were told that helicopters were coming to take us to Turkey - so we moved cars and made room for them to land. We destroyed the controlled drugs and burned the addresses of the locals who worked at the hospital. Several medical people went to care for any injured at the Officers Club in the Gulf District. Some Americans were being evacuated to that area. There was fighting everywhere - but between the Shah's military and the civilians. The Commissary and the Army Post Office were vandalized. The Communication Center was destroyed. The clerks were forced to burn money, abandon our records and flee. We were on our own. At the hospital eight personnel stayed and the rest of us left. We went to homes in the area. I never made it back to my apartment. I stayed with a group of seven at an apartment- we all had two-way radios and kept in touch with those at the hospital. For several months. I had two suitcases packed for immediate evacuation. So I called Azam and Mahmoud – gave them my apartment key and they brought the suitcases to me. They also gave me a Persian carpet as a parting gift.

We watched the revolutionaries going to other homes in the area - looking for the Shah's military. We could not leave the country because tanks were parked on the airport runways. We would call the Embassy but they could tell us nothing. Meanwhile, as the fighting continued we saw flares and fires a few blocks away. Sporadic gunfire was heard day and night.

Finally, the Ayatollah ordered us to leave. Two planes were allowed per day. The Embassy called on the second day of evacuation and told us to come there with two suitcases per person. We went in two cars - the Embassy was ten miles away. We just left the cars in the street - it was total pandemonium. Men wearing masks around their mouth and pointing automatic weapons at the people were atop the wall that surrounded the Embassy. The American flag was gone and white flag of surrender had been raised. We went through a mob to enter the building. There were hundreds of people there. Many had not been paid by their employers and they had no money to leave, so they had been waiting there for evacuation. Some people had no passports or immunization books. There was no food whatsoever in the Embassy. We slept wherever we could find space- At 6A.M. large buses arrived and took us to the airport. There were two Iranian men on the bus with automatic weapons. As we were driven through the city we passed many people going to work. Some shook their fists, others waved.



AIRPORT

At the airport there were people from-all over Tehran looking for an-escape. Three different times my luggage was searched. One man even started to feel me for weapons. One stare from me made him stop. I was on the afternoon plane. Pan-Am had all volunteers fly there to evacuate us. After being seated, armed men kept going up and down the aisle and staring at all of us. The crew made a plea for everyone to sit still and be quiet so that these men would leave. As the plane left the ground there was a loud cheer, but not as loud as when we entered Turkish Air Space.



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