



A War Not Forgotten



Carl "Cush" Byers, circa 1941.
Courtesy photo

World War II has been on my mind a lot of late.

My wife's grandfather Cush passed away a few weeks ago at the age of 95. For the past four years, he had been in poor health, but at 90, despite failing eyesight, he was able to build a bridge over a creek on the family farm and to write poetry to Flo, his bride of 70 years. A World War II veteran, he served in the Philippines and New Guinea. Six medals he earned are framed and displayed in the living room of their Bloomfield home.

Like most true heroes, Cush did not talk much about the war, just that his country had called, that he served as best he could, and that he was fortunate to make it home so that he could raise a family. Had he not returned, there would have been four daughters, seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren (so far) unborn.

For his service, Cush was awarded a military funeral. It was not like the military funerals you see in the movies. The seven marksmen who fired the 21-gun salute and the bugler who played taps were not active soldiers in snappy uniforms. They were elderly veterans dressed in their own heavy coats. Only their side caps identified them as military. The old soldier who gallantly (but shakily) saluted Flo and presented her with a folded American flag was of Cush's generation.

That generation is quickly dying out. But for those soldiers who survived the war, there were decades of living and there are families

that will go on and on. Those who fell on the battlefield were robbed of their lives and, more often than not, left no descendants. Flo's 19-year-old brother Wilbur never came home and is buried in France.

Our remarkable cover story about Schindler's List and the Arthur Fagen family of Bloomington resonates in a similar way. I remember seeing the film nearly 20 years ago and being moved by the epilogue, in which several of "Schindler's Jews" pay their respects at his gravesite. Arthur's parents were among them. Neither he nor his daughters, Gabriela Fagen, Rebecca Fagen Houghton, and Alicia Goldin, nor two grandchildren, would be alive today had they not survived.

I am extremely grateful to Arthur Fagen and his family in Bloomington and to his parents, Holocaust survivors Lewis and Rena Fagen, in Florida for allowing us to tell their story. We forever need to be reminded of the cruelty that man is capable of inflicting, and, at the same time, how the actions of one person can make a difference. On the ring that those he protected gave to Schindler, there is an inscription from the Talmud, "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire."

I think survivors, more than the rest of us, understand this.

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