

Magnetic Memories

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My father was a welder during World War II, building ships for the Navy. Because he was more valuable to the war effort in that capacity, he was not allowed to enlist.

But my cousin, Jimmy (JJ), was a navigator on a bomber. Whenever an airplane flew over our house, my grandmother would say, “There goes JJ!”

I was about four years old then, and I didn’t know JJ very well at that time. My attention was focused more on the magnet I liked playing with.

Because steel was being used for the war effort making tanks and weapons, a lot of pins my grandmother and aunts had for their sewing were made of brass rather than steel.

When I put my magnet in a whole dish of pins, I could find the few that were steel, and I used those to play with my magnet.

One of the phrases I remember most distinctly at that time was, “Before the war!” Before the war you could get all the butter you needed; before the war you could use as much gas as you wanted.

During the war, everything was rationed. Even after the war, there were still shortages.

Frequently in my neighborhood, people would burn their trash in the street or in front of their house, creating a large bonfire. That’s when a lot of the kids would scream, “There goes Hitler’s house!”

