

Second Chances

By Betty Mulcahy #76334

Heat radiating from the deck of the ship is so intense, I feel it through the soles of my sneakers. I follow closely behind my brother as we climb this vessel resting at an awkward angle in the sand. Only two years earlier it had been a warship engaged in World War II combat.



But it is now 1948, and I am four years old. I am ignorant of the ravages of war. I pay no attention to other hulks strewn nearby or to the remains of great ships projecting from the waters offshore. I concentrate solely on exploring this wreck, ignoring even my father who stands on the hot sand and stares into the distance, lost in thoughts that I cannot conceive.

Except for our family, this beach near Normandy, France, is deserted.

Only years later would I learn the role that Omaha Beach played in World War II. But only after he died would I yearn for the opportunity to engage my father in discussion of his war experiences and explore his emotions of those events.

How fortunate I am that before he died my father wrote his memoirs. Perhaps my negligence toward his past was rooted in the knowledge that I could thumb through this brief history anytime I chose.

The time I chose, however, came after his death when I could no longer probe for further details. And the memoirs merely hinted of his role in intelligence in London where he was stationed with the Air Force during the late years of World War II.

How I would love to ask him to describe the fear he must have felt when “bombs dropped near my hotel, including a few incendiaries that landed in

the lobby.”

My father had flown in the Air Force, recalled to active duty for the war, leaving behind a wife and two children.

Not understanding the implications of war, I paid little attention to his reminiscing that day on Omaha Beach. The beach, with all its broken warships, was nothing more than a playground to me.

Only years later would I wish I’d had the maturity to stand beside my father, forget the heat of this day and visualize history in the making.

Sometimes we get a second chance; sometimes we don’t.

Omaha Beach, Betty and her brother, Bill Helfert on Normandy April 1949