



MY LIFE, MY STORY

ELEANOR



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

1950



A Life of Service

Eleanor

I believe in destiny; it's a privilege. You meet the most interesting people. I was born during WWII, right before the Depression. Everyone was so poor it was unbelievable. We did without an awful lot. My mother was Irish, and my father Jewish. We didn't know. People didn't make a big deal about your background or anything. People made a lot of sacrifices during WWII. I grew up in Brickbottom near



Union Square in Sommerville, surrounded by commercial buildings and Squires meat-packing. One night, a three-decker caught on fire; we were on the third floor. The fire department got us out, but then we looked around, and my mom said, *where's your sister?* Hahaha. We forgot her! She never forgave us, even though she was like two years old. Everybody lived that way. And maybe it was just as well. At any rate, people made a lot of sacrifices during that period, and the atmosphere, so different from people who have lost a lot of compassion. People are different. In my experience, anyway.

And we went to parochial school, even though we were Jewish. Well, half Jewish; my mother was Irish. And we didn't know we were Jewish because nobody made any distinction-your background, where your parents came from, nothing like that. So we were kind of innocent, me, my brother and my sister. As far as education, I was the only one because my parents didn't have the money after parochial school, which is very serious. Anyway, you kind of get worn out. But as time went on



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things got better and we moved to a better part of the city. I wanted out of school.

There were less than 3,000 women Marines in 1949-1950. They closed them down after WWII, and then they were coming back. I thought I should check it out. I was working at R. H. Stearns and wanted to do something different. I went with my two girlfriends. We decided we would try this. We had an appointment at the Fargo building in Boston, but I was the only one to show up. I needed parental approval because I was 19; my parents said no. I said *when I get 20, I'm going*. When I turned 20, I went back, but I failed the medical exam because I was underweight. They told me to eat ice cream, milkshakes, and bananas. I got my weight up and passed the physical.

On Feb 3, 1950, we went by train to basic, which took more than 24 hours. On the train going up, we had one Black girl with us; the conductor came in and called her aside. They made her ride in the car by herself. No matter what we said or what we did, they made her stay in there. That was my first exposure to the problems of Black people: Annie Grimes and that train ride. On Wednesday nights they would have a dance; she being the only Black girl, they sent this tall, handsome Black Marine to the dance to be with her. The way things are now, Black people are still fighting for their rights. I had never been anywhere; when I saw Parris Island, I thought it was the most beautiful place in the world. I had to live in the government building; it was old, with lots of bugs, wood flooring, etc. It seemed to be the norm. Basic Training was much less than it is now.

We were an experiment, 39 of us, and they didn't know what to do with us. I was assigned to payroll, which is the last place they should have put me because math was my worst subject. We got through Basic. Some people stayed at Basic for a third type of school with typewriters with no keys. Then we transferred to Arlington, VA. They used to call me the "Irish Jew" because I used to go to Mass on Sundays. The Marine Corps bases did everything very



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quietly. You know, I don't know how it is now. I guess it's quite different. But I really wish I knew. My health started failing, and I went to Bethesda, and they said I needed to go home. They said I couldn't travel alone because I was so ill. A Navy Chief Petty Officer was going on leave for Boston. They assigned her to take me home to Boston. I got home safely.

I went to see the recruiter in Boston to say I was home. That opened the door for me to help with recruiting. I recruited two girls from Newton. They needed me because the girls were not enlisting. I met this Marine Corps photographer at a gathering; Veterans used to be very active socially. This guy asked me would I help him with events at the statehouse etc. I stayed so busy, even though I didn't stay in the Marine Corps for a long time. I was kept very busy,

very busy and all good things. The Corps helped me do that. Life was never dull. If I took a Civil Service exam, I went to the top of the list, I had really nice jobs. I was never bored. That's how I became a Chaplain. I love this story. I got a job at the city hall with the Veteran Service Officer, and there was only



another lady and myself. And he was the best, the greatest. He was this little man with a white mustache. He was a Veteran. And he had two daughters. And he treated me like one of his daughters. He was kind.

The job was to join the American Legion. It was an all-women's post, so I joined that. That post didn't last that long, maybe four or five years. This other post was in Newton-Nonantum Village. Fat Pellegrini used slot machine money to build the American Legion building. He was the most interesting person.



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He was such a gentleman in front of me, always telling them to watch their language because a lady was on board. He was like the mayor of the village. I was the only girl at the time. I ran for junior vice; at election time, a young Black Veteran joined, and they wanted him to be junior vice and eventually commander. So before I voted, Pellegrini took me aside and explained the situation. I thought I was being pushed around...I told him, you just got yourself a Chaplain.



My Irish was up. I knew nothing about Chaplains. I had to train myself because no one helped me, and now I'm still a Chaplain. I moved to Scituate and had to leave the 440. Now, I do that in Scituate. I decided I had enough this year and told the commander I needed to retire. I'm coming up on my 92nd year alive. No one stepped up to replace me, but all these events are taking off like gangbusters: Veteran's Advisory Board in Scituate, the Purple Heart organization, TB services, etc. I thought, "I'm leaving at the best time." Well, I got my first {COVID} shot. The VA called me at 7 pm to ask if I wanted a shot! My second appointment is tomorrow at 10:30. Anyway, currently, I'm still doing it because no one else has come forward because of COVID. If someone should pass away, I'd be like, "here I go again."

I spoke to someone at the VA a year ago. She said women don't want to join the American Legion because they don't have respect. It's pathetic if things are as bad as they say. I don't understand it. We grew up in a time where you just didn't do things you knew were wrong to do. One time I was out there to do my Purple Heart ceremony, and the ground was uneven. I use a cane now since I had my fall. I was slowly making my way up there when this young gentleman came up took my arm. He didn't say a word, he just



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walked me up there. Now, whenever we see each other at a meeting, he's always there, I have someone to lean on! People don't think that much of the military. I'm a Chaplain; I see so many attitudes and beliefs.

I lived in Mississippi, but I didn't like it. I learned that they didn't treat Black people the same, even coming in and out of a store. The atmosphere down there toward Black people was not good. I learned a great deal. My daughter lived there for over 20 years. She just goes her merry way; they just seem to go with the flow. All three of my daughters are widows just due to this past year. They are in their 70's. One's husband died in his 40's. I call them my three merry widows. In Mississippi, they just didn't treat the Black people the same. I just couldn't deal with it, and I just didn't like it there. I'm a New Englander; that's all there is to it. I wanted to come back here. When my hus-



Leading a VFW honor guard contingent to the Scituate Harbormaster's boat Monday morning, Eleanor [redacted] the chaplain in the American Legion Post 440 in Newton carries the wreath to be placed in near the SA buoy outside Scituate Harbor to honor those that lost their lives at sea.



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band came from Poland, they gave him a different last name. They couldn't pronounce his name. What a hell of a nerve these people have to judge us for anything. He died four years ago. It was a hard time. It's just as well that I didn't know what was coming.

The ignorant people, you don't need them anyway. I don't know what decisions you'd make if you knew what was coming. It's amazing how you can adjust. I don't mind being on my own. I only make young friends now. I can't deal with losing anyone else. Even in this trailer park, where I live, there are mostly young people. They are Irish,



good neighbors, great kids, every store you can imagine, yard work, etc. I still do it all, just at a slower pace. I feel very comfortable. They join me in my shoveling. When I moved here, this little old Black lady, God love her, she was on oxygen, we became good friends. She was older; she was a retired Civil Service worker. I did her yard, and she made me apple pie. But, down the street, I can feel the prejudice. Pick your friends wisely, 'cause you don't need the other people anyway.

My daughter, when she was 17-18, she decided she was going to go into the Marines. I wasn't too happy about that. Now the women do that same training as the men beginning to end. She enlisted, and I said okay. She did pretty well. She grew up fast. I have one son that joined the Army right out of high school. He retired after 33 years two months ago. They did him well. He was very spoiled, never drank or did drugs. He just did a great job. I have two more girls who didn't want anything to do with the military. So many young people today don't know where they are going. The atmosphere was so different from what it used to be. They have lost compassion; they're different. Even if they went a couple of years, it would turn their lives around like they wouldn't be-



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lieve it. There was such a sense of patriotism that you don't see anymore. I will have 13 grandkids in two weeks. They live in Texas, Mississippi, and New Hampshire. I feel bad for them. They are exposed to such violence. It's not a happy time for some people.

I would tell my grandkids this: I had the best of times. It was a different world; people had such respect for each other. Respect other people, no matter what



WELCOME ABOARD—is extended to American Legion National Commander Charles L. Bacon (right) on recent visit to the Bay State and Governor's luncheon. Honor Guard escorts included Sgt. At Arms of Women's Post #410—Marine Veteran Eleanor [redacted] and National Executive Committeeman Gabriel T. Olga.

color, I have all kinds of friends-Chinese, Black. That's what I would say. I don't understand the hate. People just don't know how to enjoy themselves. They don't need the drinking or drugs. I'm glad I'm not young growing up now. They face a lot of challenges. It's hard for the parents trying to raise them to live a good life and keep them under their wings. This time is very unique, with many things we didn't have to deal with. WWII was about food and jobs, it was problematic in its own way, but I'm glad for that versus this. Even the military has changed, just the different things I hear, the respect for women is different and not good now. We would never consider doing the stuff they do now. I

never drank, but I did smoke, unfortunately. Our parents were different too.

There was a program on Sunday, the history of the Black people. These people, it's so sad, but somehow, they just won't break. They are so compassionate; they are far superior to my own kind. That's so bad to say. They have so much grace. I still run into it too. A few years ago, I was doing a service in Scituate and a Veteran; he was an idiot, he was so prejudiced, and he started about



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Jews. The priest looks at me like, "what is he talking about?" You know? It prevails, and it's everywhere, and we have to be strong, that's all. You have to keep that attitude to fight back. You just can't explain it to other people. I am still discriminated against. I made a call to maintenance, I had to call because my roof was leaking last week. So many people wouldn't come because of the weather, etc. This Italian man on the phone was just the nicest. He had them come do the small part that was leaking and patch it until spring. I used the name "Kaye," and the Italian man on the phone sent a worker to fix the roof. I told him after he sat down for a drink why I didn't give them my real name. He said, *my two best friends are Jewish*; what do you think of that? Hahaha!!! I feel sorry that people treat people so stupidly. There are good people out there. When COVID is over, we should meet!! Let's get doughnuts and coffee. You made my day!



SHOW STOPPERS---exchange greetings at the Head Table during the luncheon sponsored by the Mayor preceding the St. Patrick's Day Parade in South Boston. Shown left to right: John B. Crump (relative of Kerry) 93 year old member of the old 7th Infantry Regiment and only New England survivor of the Indian Wars, being congratulated by Edward "Ted" Kennedy; rear Fr. Anthony Zator, Adjutant of the Carlson Raider Detachment, Marine Corps League Eleanor [redacted] late Comptroller Joseph Alecks. Observers of the parade all agree that Kennedy and Crump shared honors on receiving the congratulations from the on-lookers.

(Prendiville Photo)