



## My Life My Story



# Jean



## United States Army Nurse Corps

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I was born in Michigan in November 1919. My mother's side of the family came from Ireland; they were farmers. My mother married my father, Philip; he was a spring fitter; he made the springs (shock absorbers) that went on the cars. I have two brothers, Hal and Philip, and a sister, Mary; I'm the oldest.

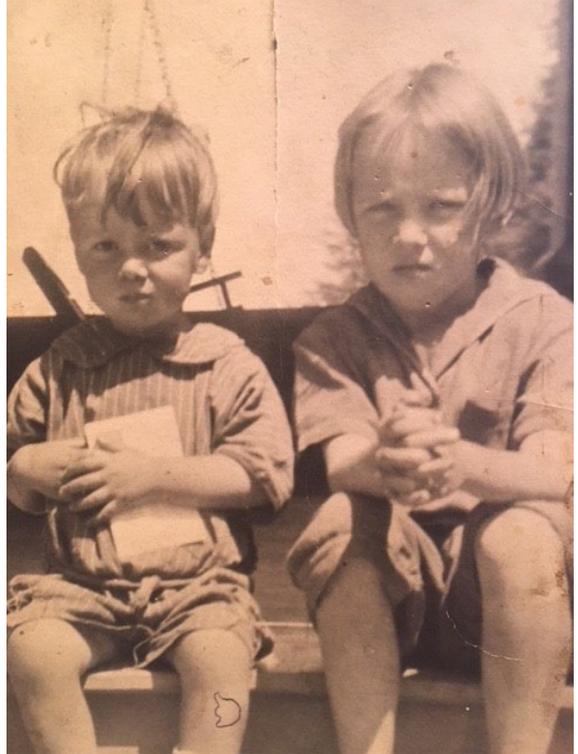
My grandparents had a big house on the farm, and we lived next door. We had a garden and chickens, and I grew up with a really good family.

When my brothers and sister were born, my parents shooed me out to my grandparent's house, which was fine because I like grandma. Boy, she would make that homemade bread with brown sugar and homemade butter on it. I'd be churning the butter, and she would say, "Time to set the table, set the table, set the table, set the table, set the table."

I'd also pick the beans. We had a bean picker, and you would put the beans in the box up top, and they would drop down onto the leather belt. I would petal, and the beans would move down the belt. I'd sit there and pick out the bad beans and stones and get five cents for a bushel of beans.

We worked back in those days. When we were old enough to do something, we did it.

I went to school in town at the Catholic school, St Michael. I graduated high school in 1938 and after graduation, I went to nursing school. I started in a hospital in Flint, but I didn't like it – too big. I changed to St. Joseph's in Mount Clemons. I liked it; it was smaller.



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I was going with a local boy in Mount Clemons; we went out two or three times. You know, the Sunday paper used to have pictures of the soldiers who had been killed. One Sunday, I had gotten the paper and I looked down and saw his face. I was so sad; I don't know, just sad. Also, a head nurse at the hospital, who was enlisted in the Army, had been killed over in Bali. When I found out about it, I thought, "Gee, Selfridge Field is just this side of town; I'm going to enlist." I went over there and said, "I want to check in, see if I can go."



I graduated from nursing school and went in the Army as a second lieutenant. I went to Camp McCoy, in Wisconsin, for basic in July 1944.

After basic, I had orders to France – the 179<sup>th</sup> US Army General Hospital in northern France.

We sailed over to Liverpool, England. It took us a week. Our quarters were right underneath the big guns, and when they shot them off, oh my God, I tell ya, they were so loud.

When we got to Liverpool, we took a train to South Hampton and from there, we got on a smaller boat – just our hospital unit. There were about one hundred of us to cross the English Channel to France. It took us three days to go thirty-two miles because the German submarines were in the



channel. We had this crazy crew; they were British, and they wore Fez hats from India. They gave us a small cabin, eighteen nurses all together.



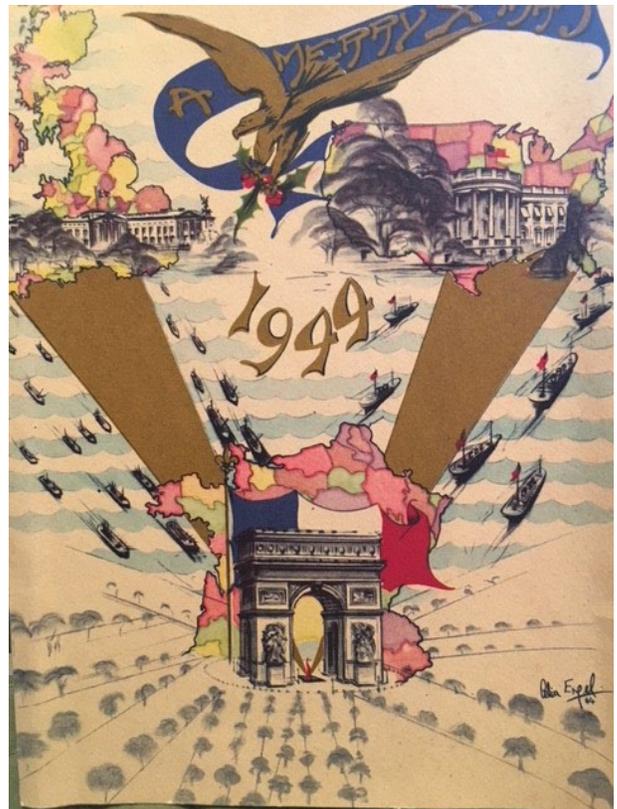
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Anyway, we got off ok. We came ashore Omaha Beach on a landing barge and were put in trucks. We came through Saint Lo, and the only thing standing was part of the mayor's house and the chimney. This was after D-Day, but it looked like it had just happened. There wasn't that much there – pretty flat.

Later, the mayor invited the captain and told him to bring a couple of men and a couple of ladies for dinner. I was one of those that went to dinner. Part of the house was standing, but the rest of everything else wasn't too good, you know. This was in Carentan, right next to Saint Lo. I can't remember what he served us for food, but I think it was pretty good considering we were eating K-rations. He had invited us to simply say, "Hello and Thank You for coming to France."

Anyway, we went through there and another little town and then, they dumped us out in a cow pasture. There were some tents for us; we were there for quite a while waiting. We were supposed to go to Belgium, but the Bulge was starting. The commanders came from Germany only a few miles away; we were right up there, real close. They said, "No, you can't go to Belgium."



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This whole time we are dressed in our dress uniform: heels, nylons, skirt, blouse, and jacket. See, when we got off the big ship about two thirty in the morning, and our foot lockers were left in England with all the infantry equipment: helmet, (many a bath in my helmet), gas mask, trays, sleeping bags, mess kit, and cargo belt. We didn't get them till the next February. Somebody screwed up! Why didn't they give us fatigues? I don't know.

In skirts, we had to climb down the rope ladder onto the landing craft. My white slip I was wearing, well after thirty days, it was black, black, black. With the rain and terrible weather, we were in the mud. We'd use sticks to pry our shoes out of the mud. I'd wake up in the morning, and my cot was in the mud; it had sunk down. I had got a cold, and I kept the captain awake coughing.

We were in some messes, but we made it. From the pasture, they took us to a hospital in Rouen, the 179th US Army General Hospital. It was built back in the 1600s; it was the cloistered nun's hospital the French started, but the Germans took over and finished it. The Germans were there, and we couldn't go till they got the Germans out. It took two weeks for the GI's to scrub up the place. We lived in a Chateau the Germans had used as offices, I guess.

Finally, we were able to set up the cots and beds and put on the sheets. The nuns would come over and help too. They had such fun. Before this, the nuns had to take care of the Germans. They had so many; the floors were lined with them. In the mornings, the dead ones, well, the nuns drag 'um out. There was no place for them, so the nuns buried the dead in the courtyard. You could see, well, we could tell they didn't get 'um too deep. The nuns were in the old part of the hospital, and they were tired and worn out when we took over.



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When we first got there, only a few wounded German patients were left there; I guess, they didn't want them.

About two nights later, we had over a hundred patients. Up north on the coast, the American troops got into this German prison

camp. It had British, French, and I don't know what all. Some of them had been there for six years or so – nothing but skin and bones, just sick, sick, sick. Of course, when they were liberated, they wanted to eat; they were starving and all jaundice. The doctors and nurses were in the kitchen trying to find a combination of cereal and something to feed them; we had to make formulas and then, we spoon fed them; they also got hard candies to suck on. It was hard to see all this.

I was working twelve-hour shifts at night, and I had a sergeant with me. We got some young ones, young Americans. They were all freaked out – shell shocked, and the colonel put them on the fifth floor. This was during the Battle of the Bulge with the bombs and the planes going full blast. The kids started jumping out the windows. I was running around pulling them back in. I didn't know much about the mental stuff, not much training.

There was this guy who chased me down with a long fire poker; he wanted to kill me; he thought I was a German. The sergeant came to my rescue.



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The colonel had also put some German kids working in the kitchen until there was glass found in the food, which ended that. There were also tunnels going from the hospital to the town. They found five German soldiers hiding out in the tunnel.

As you come out of the hospital, there was the big gate. You'd walk down about three or four blocks, and that is where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. If you go a bit



further, you would be in the town of Rouen. I have this picture of me in a jeep outside the gates and then, another thirty feet was the latrine. When you needed to go to the john, an enlisted man had to go with us, just to be safe.

We, the nurses, traveled mostly by ourselves through France on trains from Cherbourg to Marseille, the whole length of France. We were on the move all the time. The Germans liked to bomb the railroads, the same ones that we rode on throughout France.

We, the nurses,



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My friend Collie from Cook county in Chicago was with me a lot. Once, I went to the kitchen and made up some sandwiches. We went out to the country, and there were these cows. My grandfather had cows; you know. I sent him a letter with a picture and asked him if he liked those French cows?

I'd lost my bracelet out there on that picnic. I was so mad because my aunt gave it to me. I was looking through all the grass in the pasture. Again, I was in

nylons and heels in a pasture with cows.

Ten nurses, plus Collie and I, had received secret orders, and we needed to get our gear together. We left Rouen and went to Cherbourg to the 167<sup>th</sup> Army Hospital in northern France.



We waited a couple weeks for our orders to come through and then, we took a train all the way to Marseille. We waited there for a troop ship. We were put up at the fancy hotel on the beach in Marseille for several weeks.



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Then, we went to Cannes and were shown around. They treated us well and fed us in the large, beautiful dining room.

We got on a troop ship in Marseille and sailed home to Alabama through the Straits of Gibraltar. Troop ships were bringing our boys home, and the ships were packed.



We came into New York City and passed the Statue of Liberty on Labor Day. From there, we took a train to Alabama for training and then, we were on to the secret orders.

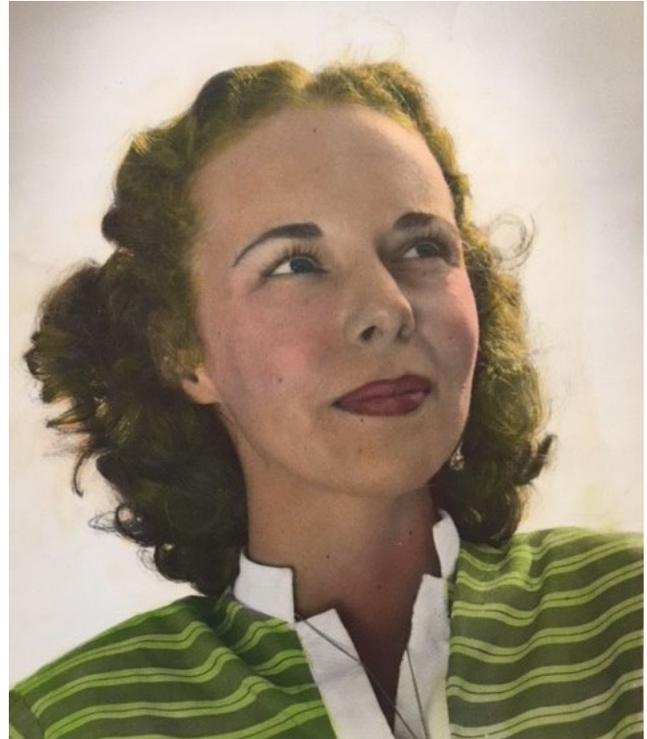
Before we go overseas, maybe Japan, the war ends. We were sent to Denver to Fitzsimons Hospital. We flew in a cargo plane, and the altitude pressure ruptured my ear drum. The next morning, I had blood on my pillow, and I was sent to the hospital. I stayed there until I was discharged.

I was to be promoted to first lieutenant; however, the lady colonel didn't feel I had worked, not a day and therefore, I wasn't promoted. I discharged from Sheridan, Illinois in 1945.



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I came out to southern California. My brother, Hal, had just come home from the Pacific. We got a house, and I tried to work a bit, doing nursing in a doctor's office, but I couldn't do it anymore. I had terrible pain in my neck. I had to have a surgery. I don't know if it was from carrying all the equipment on my back during the war or what, but I had terrible spasms in my neck.



The VA hospital kept saying there was nothing wrong with me, but I hurt so bad, I looked up a neurosurgeon in the yellow pages. I called him up and got an appointment at Queen of the Angels Hospital in Los Angeles.

While I was in there with Dr. Spicer, the phone rang, and I said, "Go ahead, take the call." He talked for a few minutes and then hung up. He said, "I have just been appointed as a surgeon at the San Fernando Valley VA hospital. You go there and check in, and I'll see you within a week. I will call and give them the orders."

They did a spinal tap. They took out the fluid, put that dye in, and hit this mess up here in my neck. Well, I tell ya, it hurt. Gee. The doctors at the hospital said they would rather see me in traction for two years than do the surgery because it was too close to the brain. I said, "I can't do anything anymore." My muscles were withering, I couldn't walk, and the pain. I said, "Lord, I can't keep going through all this, I better have the surgery. What do I have to lose?"



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I found out that Dr. Spicer was one of the top four doctors in the United States. I really lucked out there. Remember, I found him in the yellow pages.

After the surgery, I didn't come to for about a week. He gave me a private room and a private nurse. They used the Crutchfield Tongs on me; I have the scars right on my head. The staff didn't turn me enough, and that caused an infected mess that went down to the hair follicles.

When Dr. Spicer took off the bandages and saw that mess, he was livid. I would wake up at night and be screaming, "It hurts, it hurts." Someone came in and gave me an IV. The guy told the nurse, "This ought to shut her up." I could hear him. When my doctor came in and saw the mess well, he knew why I had been screaming. Anyway, the surgery worked, and I'm still here.

I went back to nursing in Santa Barbara after I healed up, but I didn't like the wet climate there, so I moved to Miami, Arizona. It's a small copper mining town, and that's where I met my husband, Robert – Bob. His dad owned a grocery store in town, and he worked for his dad.

Bob was in the Army the same time I was, and he was over in Europe at the same time too. He was a gunner on a B-24. He had a narrow escape. They were shot down coming from Germany back to England. They coasted into Scotland and landed. The plane was shot up, holes all over, and out of gas. The farmer came out to welcome them. They were there about two weeks before they were picked up. Bob loves to fish, and he went fishing every day. The farmer fixed him up with a pole and the stuff he needed. The farmer took good care of them all.

Anyway, the hospital was up on the hill, and the doctors and everybody would congregate there at the bar in town and have a drink. That's where I met Bob. We were married pretty quick in 1953.



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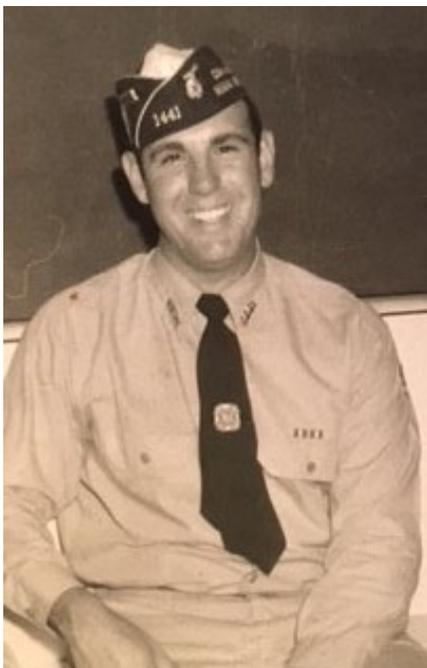


I had a poodle, Jack, and he didn't like Bob. It took a couple of weeks because well, Jack was my dog. Bob would open the door to our little apartment, and Jack would growl at him.

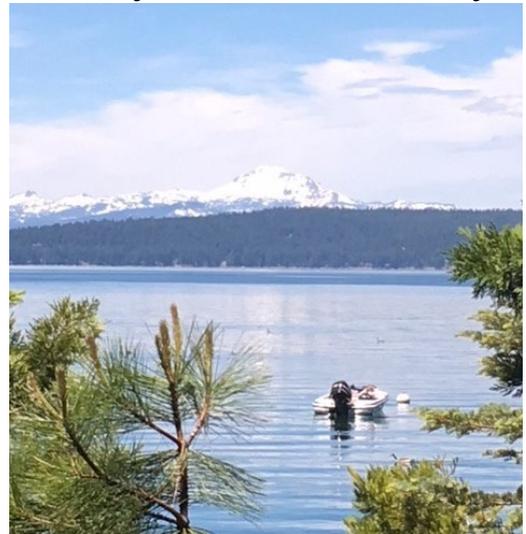
Bob wanted to develop real estate. He started a country club up in the mountains in northeastern Arizona, Pinetop, Arizona. He developed the country club and the houses that went around the country club. I worked a little bit at the small hospital in the little town of McNary. The hospital had thirty

beds, and they would get strapped for nurses. They'd call me and say, "Could you come over and help for a night or so?" I did that a little bit.

We had a land exchange company along with the real estate. A man brought us up here to Lake Almanor. He wanted us to



see this area. He drove us out here on the point, and some lady had just brought in a nice, big fish. That did it, that did it! We



decided to come up here in 1987. I found this house, and we have a beautiful view of Mount Lassen. Bob was in a wheelchair when we came from Scottsdale. You see, Bob had a brain tumor; and for thirty years, I took care of him.

Bob was the commander at the VFW. He died about nine years ago.



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I used to read, read, read; but now my eyes are going bad. I have a cassette I put on if I can't sleep. I don't sleep well, and I can't stand up long enough to do much; it's a pistol. I do have family that visit. My sister adopted six kids, and they visit, plus my cousin and her daughter came to visit. Good kids.

I also have animals that visit me in my back yard – all kinds of animals, even a bear. We have a grey fox, a coyote, geese with babies, turkeys, skunks, and deer. You name it, we got it.

I keep busy with all my visitors, but I like my quiet time.

