

Harold Megonigal

By Christian S. Lengkeek

My great grandfather Harold Megonigal was born April 14, 1928. He was born on a pleasant street in Willington Delaware near the 95 freeway. In 1928, lots of new buildings were being built including the first air conditioned office building. Nobody knew that someday he would be a carpenter. His father's name was Harold and his mother's name was Maria. His father was born in Wilmington; his mother was born somewhere in Lancaster. He had three sisters and one brother named Tommy, Betty, Margaret and Janet. He remembers both his grandmothers, but both his grandfathers died before he was born.

He was born in the midst of the Great Depression. He was an electrician, but he lost his job, so they moved to Maryland and started a cantaloupe farm. But that didn't work out because nobody had money to buy cantaloupe. They all got tired of eating cantaloupe! Then, for a while their father did not have a job. Sometimes they had trouble finding things to eat. Then their father had to go to place called Relief where he could get food. This was hard for him to do, because like most men, it's hard to ask for help. Finally, their father got a job at Du Pont. And when Harold was only ten years old his father was killed in an electrical accident at Du Pont. That left his mother alone in the Great Depression with five children. Du Pont gave her some money and each child was given a bit of money until they were 18.

After his father died, they bought a house for about 3,000 dollars on 2510 Chessup St. in North East Wilmington. Harold was excited! He thought the new house was the best thing in the world. Their old house was small and had a dirt basement. All the neighbors were Polish Catholics and they were the only Protestant family, so there was some tension between them. Their new house was a lot bigger and had a new cinder block basement. His mother's mother moved in with them. They also lived near the largest public swimming pool and a park. Swimming was one of his favorite things to do. They would go there nearly every day and swim and play baseball, tennis and football. The pool was so big that they could race model boats on it. There were different classes for the boats and they did all the rigging themselves! Also, next door lived a boy named Bobby Wilson; they were best friends for many years.

He had been going to George Gray Elementary school, but now he had to start middle school. He would get up early in the morning and eat breakfast and then hurry to school. At school he loved gym and social studies. His favorite teacher was his social studies teacher Miss Pearson. The teacher liked him the best in that class. Then in the afternoon he would come home and quickly cut the grass and

then go swimming and play baseball at the park. After playing he would come to dinner. He liked pasta and pork chops.

One night it snowed. At 10:30 he and his siblings sneaked out of the house when his mother was not looking and started sledding down the street. "Isn't this fun?" said his brother Tommy. They sledded for a while and then sneaked back to bed. They were very quiet and their mother never found out what they were doing.

It was summer. Harold and his friends canoed on the Brandywine River. One thing he wanted to do was to go to camp, but his mother did not have enough money to send him. But for a couple years in a row he won the marble tournament and got to go to camp for free. One year he won the pool tournament and got to go for free.

Now he was thirteen he had started high school at Brown High school. Each day after school he went to work at a grocery store two blocks away from his house. He worked from 3 to 6pm. Even though it did not pay a lot, he enjoyed working there. In those days people would send in food orders. His job was to deliver the orders, wait on costumers and restock the shelves. It also gave his mother a break on the grocery bill.

One day as he was sitting inside reading he looked out the window and saw all the neighbors were out on the street. His family ran outside. A neighbor said. "Did you hear the news?" "What news"? they said. "Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor! The president has declared war on Japan!"

In 1945 he was seventeen. It was near the end of the war. He did not know what to do, so he joined the navy. He was stationed in the island Adak of the Aleutian islands. During his time there someone found out he had worked for the post office and told the commander. So he became a mailman on the base. Every day he would meet the U.S mail plane and deliver some of the mail to the commander and the rest to the base. The rest of the time he would do the normal things postman do in a post office. One day they got the news a great tidal wave was come up North Pacific Ocean. It was heading for the island Adak, the island they were on. They had to evacuate the island and go into the mountains for a couple days. In the end, the tidal wave was not that bad after all. This was the only exciting event he had during the war.

After he joined the navy he realized he wanted to become a carpenter. So he went to night school to learn how to be a carpenter and he also took classes on how to read blue prints and measuring. He got married November the 15, 1946 to Jean. He first started going to church when he married Jean. They went to East Lake Orthodox Presbyterian Church church on 27th and Market in Wilmington, Delaware.

The first TV he saw was in 1946 when he and his wife rented an apartment from his uncle who owned a hardware store. He got a TV for his store and put it in his store window and everyday people would watch it. That was the first time he saw a TV.

The first car they had was a wreck. He got it just after he just after he got married. But they only had it for a little while before they took it back. Then they didn't have a car till my Grandmother was born.

He had four children. The oldest was my grandmother Carol, then came Debbie, then Faith and then David.

For his whole life he worked for himself. He was a carpenter, and built many banks, shopping centers and houses. He would build houses and they would live in it for a while and then he would sell it. All together he lived in about 13 different houses during his life. One day while he was building a house, he came back from picking up some supplies and all of the men were huddled around talking. He asked them what had happened, and they said. "Did you hear what just happened? President Kennedy was just killed!"

He loved going to the beach and playing Wiffle ball with his children. When they lived on Marsh Road they had a big yard. They would invite over at least two dozen people on the 4th of July and they would play Wiffle ball for hours.

Harold built houses forty-two years and retired in 1985. He said he enjoyed every minute of it. He has been married for 70 years. He is going to turn 90 years old and lives with his wife Jean who is 93 in Quarryville Retirement Community.