



Lonnie –

My mother was a very strong-willed woman and she controlled us with an iron hand. If you didn't do what she told you to do, she'd knock you across the room. Because I was a mischievous child, I got tired of being knocked across the room - I didn't learn very well. So one day I was going by the recruiting station. I was only 17 but I went in and volunteered. I used my step-sister's name, which was the same as mine except in reverse. And she was a couple of years older than me so they took me right away.

We got on the train to go to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and we arrived there in the afternoon. That evening before bedtime they played Taps and we were all lined up as they brought the flag down. I thought, "That's nice," but it really didn't do anything for me. But the next morning when we went out for reveille there was something so magical that happened to me when they raised the flag. My heart fluttered like it was a first date.

After boot camp we were shipped to El Paso, Texas, to Biggs Field. My first job was to move a bunch of big trucks from one area of the parking lot to another. I was 17 and had never driven anything but a car. But I moved those trucks!

After that they had an opening for inspectors on airplanes that had been repaired. I was with the first groups of the Women's Army Corps, or WACS, to graduate from that training school. The men were very resentful of the WACS. You're too young to understand that. They didn't want to go overseas to war, and with us there it meant that they had to. So they got pretty nasty and after a while I said, "I don't have to put up with this." They transferred me to recruiting and that's where I spent the last part of the war.

I met my husband in the service. That was a stroke of luck! That I would get such a good man at such a tender age. He was a very serious young man and I looked at him and I thought, "He's so sad. I wonder why he's so sad. I wonder if I could make him happy." And then we got married and I spent the next 73 years trying to make him happy. I did the best I could. It was sometimes good and sometimes bad - we had our pitfalls. My husband is 97. He loves me very much, he tells me. He can hardly stand to be out of my sight. That's quite amazing after 73 years.

We had five sons, five wonderful sons. My oldest son passed away when he was 57, but my other boys still live in Wisconsin. I love people. That's my saving grace. I love people and I love children. My husband, he loves work. He was in business as an electrician and he had to know exactly what he was doing. He was a perfectionist, let's put it that way. He's a great guy. Underneath it all he's a pussy cat.

Right now I'm having a hard time with my back. When I was younger I was in a gas explosion, a backfire of a gas furnace. It blew me from one floor down to the next floor. It broke my back and dislocated my





organs. I had multiple surgeries to put my bowels and bladder back together. And here I am, I'm still fighting the system!

Me and my husband are still living together. To stay married this long you've got to realize that everybody isn't nice all the time. But just cause they're not nice today doesn't mean that they won't be nice tomorrow. So you just take it and leave it and go on about your business. That's how you survive it.

We had some hot arguments, mostly about the kids. Because I was raised so strict, I raised mine too much the other way. It was against his religion to raise them so gentle - they should be whipped - and I didn't believe in any of that. But they turned out pretty good anyway. It doesn't matter really. They're going to be who they were meant to be no matter what you do or what you say.

You learn stuff all the time when you're living. Life is a learning proposition.

I always like to tell people this story because it's been very influential. I had an after-life experience in the explosion. It happened when my son Michael was a baby, probably 1955 or 1956, cause he was still young yet. When I hit the floor I popped out of my body. I'm up on the ceiling looking down. There's a white thread going from me down to this body laying on the floor. The body laying on the floor is like an empty envelope. It's me, but it only looks like me. [sighs] It was such a wonderful feeling. And then Michael let out a yell and I popped [snaps fingers] back in, just like that. If that child hadn't cried, I'd be gone.

And here we are today. This is the third time I've been in the Veteran's Hospital and there's no better care on earth than here. They've saved my life a couple of times. But here I am, sassy as ever. And as I talk all these memories are flooding through my brain. And because I'm not feeling the greatest I'm a little poorly organized in telling this story.

But I have such great love for the United States and it goes back to that time when my heart fluttered for the flag going up. That was just such an awesome thing. And when I arrived here Tuesday I was in such pain. But when I got out of the car to come into the hospital there was a whole line of soldiers sitting there out in front and they applauded me. That brought tears to my eyes - and I'm not a cryer. It really touched a deep spot.

So that's the story. It's kind of hit and miss, but you'll have to do the best you can with it.





Loyal –

I enlisted in the Navy in 1955 and served 4 years. I chose the Navy because my favorite uncle had served. My three younger brothers all joined the Army and served in Vietnam. I had a brother-in-law who also served in Vietnam. I was a tailor and a cobbler in the Navy. I served on the USS Iowa, the USS Curacao, and the USS Abelmayer.

I was born in Georgia. My father was a sharecropper. At the end of every year he'd count up what he made during the year and what he spent and he'd always say, "We come out even-steven!" He was OK; he did the best he could. My mother taught him how to read and write. My dad didn't serve in the military. He was too young for WWI and had too many kids by the time WWII came along. I learned to cook from my mom. I remember asking her, "Why do I have to know this?" She told me, "Well, you might get married someday." But she wasn't too excited when I did get married. I called her on the phone to tell her:

"Momma, I just got married."

Long pause.

"Momma, did you hear what I said?"

Click.

That was in 1958 and my first wife and I ended up getting divorced. We had a daughter who is now 57 and works at the UW Hospital. I married my current wife in 1972 and we have two sons who live in Minnesota. Married life is not for everybody. I'm like an animal, I like to be free. I tried to make the best of it when my boys came along.

I'm from the South but I actually found Wisconsin to be one of the most racist places to live as a black person. My milkman started a petition to force us out of the neighborhood. Two different neighbors changed the property lines so that they would have more of my lawn. My father-in-law was a racist. He always acted like he was doing me a favor when it was really the other way around. He and his wife lived in our house for free for 22 years and he liked to brag about how his truck was paid for and mine wasn't. It was nice having grandparents in the house for our kids but he never got any nicer. It's not very often that a jerk is going to change. All this stuff made me mad when it happened but I never let it get to me. I tell people all the time, "Once the water goes under the bridge it's gone and nothing's going to bring it back."

I've been here in the hospital for five days. I got an infection in my foot. A doctor tried to cut it out but it ended up getting worse and got into the bone. They sent me down to the VA and I can't say anything





bad about this place. My wife comes and visits me on the weekend. I tell her not to come every day. I'm looking forward to getting out of this bed. I'd really like to be able to get up, walk outside and walk across the road without a cane or anything.

I was a chef in civilian life. I went into business for myself and opened a restaurant in 1972. It was called "Loyal's Dream" and we served all 3 meals. As a chef I loved cooking so much that I didn't have any favorites. I used to give away free Thanksgiving dinner to anyone who came in. The business community in our town thought I was crazy. The first time I did it we fed 375 people. It became an annual event and people really looked forward to it. We also started hosting an annual party for elderly and retired people. We served free birthday cake, ice cream and coffee to them. I didn't do it for publicity but people learned about it. I've given away lots of free meals in my time. Every time a hobo would come by I would feed him. One old guy ate at my restaurant for 3 years without paying. Eventually he went on Social Security and started getting monthly payments. I never saw him after that, he started eating at other places and would avoid me in public. I wasn't mad at him. Most people look at life for money, I look at it for happiness.





Joe –

My younger brother died a couple years ago. I still miss him. He was my only sibling and he went kind of crazy when his wife left him. It felt like he was trying to kill himself. He smoked 5 packs of cigarettes a day and drank more than you can imagine. We always had an intense relationship. Once we fought after his wife died and didn't speak for a year. I was the one who broke the ice and started talking again. I was always the peacekeeper in my family. My parents divorced when I was 13. My dad was an alcoholic and my mom left him. He eventually got sober and wanted to get back together: the poor guy still loved her. I pretty much learned to grow up young.

I enlisted in the Marines in 1967. I thought it was the right thing to do. I did my basic in San Diego. Marine boot camp was just like you see in the movies, only harder. We started out as individuals and ended up together. "You cover my back, I'll cover yours" - that's how it works. My training was for infantry: a ground pounder, a killer, one of the real bright people. I arrived in Vietnam late in 1967. My first assignment was Da Nang air force base and I was temporarily reassigned to MP duties. For two months I was in charge of patrolling the base. When I had the opportunity to get back into the infantry, I jumped on it.

I was in the 1st Battalion 9th Marines and we moved around a lot. We fought in Con Thien, Phu Bai, and even in the DMZ. We lost a lot of people. At one point our company was down from 500 guys to 100. I didn't get injured. I did get a hearing concussion from an explosion and was bleeding out of both ears. It was rough at times but I just kept going. When times get bad you still bend over and pull up your socks. My tour in Vietnam lasted 13 months. I was shipped back to California, Camp Pendleton, and taught other people how to do it. I still get flashbacks at night, maybe once a month. I live out in the country and I've been known to get up at night, grab a deer rifle, run outside and start shooting at the trees. I'd snap out of it after a couple minutes and find myself outside in the snow. It's definitely better now than in the past. I'm able to wake up and calm myself down.

I got married in 1968 while I was still in the Marines. I was just back from Vietnam. It was rough the first 3 or 4 years. You did not want to wake me or startle me. On our honeymoon night my wife touched me while I was sleeping. The next thing I remember she was on her back and I was choking her. She learned to keep her distance while I was sleeping. We were married for 20 years and had 3 kids. We saw a counselor at the end but it was too late. She had already made up her mind to leave. We worked hard to not let it affect our kids. I think I learned from my own parents' divorce that it doesn't do the kids any good when parents fight with each other. There are enough negatives in life. You don't need to go out and look for them.

I'm here in the hospital because my sodium levels are too low. The doctors think it may have caused the stroke I had last year. It happened while I was camping. I had a seizure and another seizure after they got me in the ambulance. Then I had a stroke while they were getting me out of the ambulance. I woke





up two days later in the hospital with the right side of my tongue chewed off – I had bitten it during the seizures. A couple months ago I discovered a lump under my right arm and they removed a tissue sample yesterday. I should know in a couple days whether it's benign or not. My mom died of cancer. I stopped smoking 15 years ago when my sister-in-law was diagnosed with it.

I don't care to be unhappy, I just keep going. I'd rather be laughing than frowning. I'm proud of my military service. It didn't give me any skills that I could use when I got back to civilian life. I sometimes think that we killed off their people and our people for nothing. But I would sign up again today and do the same thing if I had the chance.





Steve –

It started when I met Hans Hofmann, in Germany.

I was with Company A of the 79th Engineers, in Pirmasens, Germany. I'd been drafted, but I didn't want to have to go into the reserves afterward—I didn't want to go to all those meetings—so I enlisted and said I'd do three years instead of two. I was in 26 months plus between 1960 February and 1963.

That's how I met Hans. He was seventeen, still in school, studying to be a mechanic. I was about thirty-one, but somehow we got to be friends. On my time off, we'd go for walks in the woods. He played the guitar, so we'd stroll and sing. His friends would come along. Hans had just two Marks to spend a week. I didn't have much money, either, but what do you need when you have your food and clothes given to you? So if we went to the guest house for a beer and a sandwich, I'd pay.

"Mein Freund"—my friend. Hans said that often. He'd put his arm around my shoulder and say, "Mein Freund."

When I come time for me to leave, I gave Hans my address and a photograph of Slim Whitman. All his friends wanted one, too, but I could only get the one. He loved it. Slim Whitman had so many good songs. "Vaya Con Dios" and "The Old Lamplighter." He was just a beautiful, beautiful singer. Anyway, when I departed Germany three German friends came to see me off. I was the only man on the train who had anyone at all see him off.

I go back to Trempealeau County and meet Barbara. We have our five kids. Forty-seven years later, I get a phone call.

A woman says, "Is your name Larry Rosseland?" "Yes." "Were you in the Army?" "Yes." "Were you in Company A of the 79th Engineers in Pirmasens, Germany?" "Yes." "Well, did you know Hans Hofmann?" I said, "Yes, I did, he was a good friend." "Well," she said, "He's been hunting for you for 47 years."

The woman said her name was Annette Zucker, and she was a cousin to Hans' wife, Hannelore. We talked for quite a while, just a friendly conversation about my family and so on. Then she said, "I'm going to hang up now and call Hans."

It couldn't have been more than two minutes that he called me back. "Hallo?" he said.

"Hello," I said, "Is this Hansel?"

He said, "Steve, I talk not much more English." In other words, it was in broken English, but it was good enough.





It turns out that every year Hans had looked up my picture and said, “Let’s find Larry.” Then Hannelore’s father died. Hans and Hannelore were feeling very low, so Annette tried to cheer them up. She only knew my name and that I lived in Wisconsin, but she got on her computer. It took her a few weeks.

Anyway, Hans and I talked for a time and then starting writing letters. Then one day Hans said, “I have for you a present,” and mentioned my coming over to Germany.

Well, I’ve always been a carpenter, you know—I did good finishing work. I did a lot of work for friends. You don’t mess up a friends’ house, and you try to help people out. I’ve worked reasonable. I’ve been proud of that. But we don’t have money for travel. The only time I lived away was when I was in the Army. “Oh,” I said to Hans, “I don’t have money to travel like that.”

“Well, I do!” he said. “How about if just send you a ticket and you come over!”

It was something I never expected. But Barbara was willing—I’d talked about Hans. So we got passports and so on. It took us about six months before we went over there.

At the airport, Hans was stopping everybody as they came off the plane: “Are you Larry? Are you Larry?” After forty-some years, who knows what you look like? But when I did come out, he knew me. We all hugged. Annette was there, too, and helped translate.

Hans and Hannelore had moved to a little village five miles away from Pirmasens. We stayed at their house. They washed our clothes. I could use Hans’ razor if I wanted. We did something every day. Every day. You wouldn’t believe the beautiful things we saw. The most beautiful churches in the world! Then we drove up into the mountains in Austria for nine days. We averaged a hundred miles an hour for five hours to get to the border, and there were cars passing us. But Hans had both hands on the wheel, eyes straight ahead. After Austria, we were in Italy and Switzerland. Three thousand pictures we’ve got. I seen things I never seen.

At the end, when we got back in Germany, we were all down in his rec room, and Hans pulled out his billfold and gave me ten 100 Euro notes—about \$1400 dollars. He said was going to pay for the whole trip. He insisted. The only thing I paid for was my souvenirs and some slippers.

A newspaper guy came over to talk to us and wrote an article in a German newspaper. It was 2010, and we had photos taken in same position as we did back in the sixties.

The last night, Annette come over and brought a turkey. Then she sang “Auld Lang Syne” for us. She had a little problem with the song, but who cares if it didn’t sound just right? She sang it for us. That’s the important thing.





Altogether, that trip was three and a half weeks. It was something I never expected. I'd been friendly to him back then, but the thing is, I paid. We didn't spend much, but that's besides the point. When we wanted a beer, I paid for the beer. He never forgot that.

For the next few years, we kept in touch on Skype. Then Hans got sick. I think he had cancer, in his gullet or his throat. He and Hanne both smoked something terrible—more than a pack of Marlboros a day. They'd get out of a car and right away, two cigarettes come out. One they light and give to the other, then they'd light on for themselves. And they drank. They'd mix up this drink—half lemon water, half wine—pour it in a big container, and take turns sipping.

Anyway, by 2014 things weren't so good, and Hans got a bit cranky. He was afraid of the doctor. He'd been in the hospital. He tore the stuff out of his veins. They don't know how he got home, but he got home. He lived for a while. He was stubborn, you know. A stubborn German.

Hannelore was going to have us back over, but she died shortly after he did.

My wife just bought me a phonograph record of Slim Whitman. She got it for fifty cents at Good Will. It was down half price from 99 cents. We don't have a phonograph, but she knows I love Slim Whitman.

I can show you a photo of Hans' grave, it's in the Thaleischweiler Cemetery:

Hofmann,Hans 1944-2014

Well, I tell you what, when you can have somebody after forty-seven years do what Hans Hofmann did, it is really something. "Mein Freund."

