

Tree Rings

by

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Chapter Ten

Obituary, Howard Glenn Kraay, 1922-2015



Howard Glenn Kraay, 1944

“I write this based on memory...”

So begins the 4,000-word reminiscence my father put to paper in 1995 or so. He was 73-years old.

Caregiving is by far the most challenging activity I have ever engaged in. I fulfilled my duty and my promise to my parents, but I was not good at caregiving. My

wife was at my side through those six difficult years from the fall of 2009 until my father passed in June 2015, but they say that women make better caregivers than men do. They are correct in my case. I lacked patience. It was because of the caregiving experience that I learned that it is unreasonable to expect other people to think and act as I do. Today, I am more patient. I am more tolerant.

His greatest fear was to die in a 'home' or in a hospital. I promised him that would not happen, and it didn't. On the morning of June 3rd, my wife and I entered his room at 4AM to find that his spirit had flown through the small crack in the open window. My wife insisted that we leave the window open just that small bit so that his spirit could fly when it was ready.

It is easy to remember the date of his passing because it is our oldest son's birthday, which is also the opening line of Neil Diamond's song "Desiree."

"It was the third of June on that summer night when I became a man..."

My dear friend at the time of my father's passing reminded me frequently, "You can only do the best you can do." He was right, although I carry the thought that my best wasn't very good around my neck like an albatross...

Nearly four years have passed since that day in June 2015 when the spirit left his 93-year old body. My granddaughters recently asked if I had pictures of their great-grandfather 'during the war.' I searched and found several along with a multi-page document he had composed in the mid-90s, an autobiography of sorts written by a man not much older than I am today and unaware that he had two more decades to live. I re-typed it to preserve a file copy and now share it as a proper obituary to recount those things that meant most to him at that time of his life. Save a handful of typographical changes – and I chose not to correct them all – this is an exact and accurate transcription of the document. This is what he wrote...

I write this based on memory...

I was born July 28, 1922 on the farm where we lived in White County west of Monticello, Indiana. The story my mother often told me of the day of my birth was a day which the fall harvest or thrashing was taking place on the farm which we lived. Mother's responsibility was to prepare a noon meal for a number of participants involved in the thrashing ring. While in the process of preparing the meal, mother encountered some discomfort, she simply went upstairs with a Mrs. Ferguson and Howard Glenn Kraay was born. I was the last and tenth child of the Arthur W. and Drusilla Kraay family to be born.

My earliest recollection was in 1926 when brother Harold and I were instructed to pick up the ears of corn from the overflow being dumped from the wagons into the trough of the corn elevator. The elevator being powered by a team of horses revolving around a gear box converting physical energy to mechanical motion through a tumbler shaft which was bolted together near the trough where brother Harold and I were;

suddenly brother Harold screamed which frightened me when I saw his foot and leg wound in the shaft.

A mystery that was never solved was how Howard and Harold being only five and six years of age managed to pull the two seated buggy from the shed into the field with a horse harness, harnessed the cow then hitched her to the buggy and while enjoying our Sunday afternoon ride around the field. To have all our fun and work interrupted by our elders spoiled our day!



Figure 1, 1929, Howard on far right, Harold on far left

I can vaguely remember the old and first automobile I understood my parents bought which was a Studebaker touring car, then came a model-T Ford four door sedan with flower vases on each side. For Sunday often times flowers were put into those vases when going to attend church (Presbyterian) in Monticello, Indiana.

While I was the youngest member of the family, I was the first and only to attend Kindergarten (now known as pre-school) for the beginning of my education. I too recall in those days of helping stuff mattress covers with corn shucks and when they became lumpy it was time to re-stuff them. Carrying warm bricks or stones wrapped in cloth to bed with us on cold winter nights was not uncommon. Our pillows were stuffed with feathers and down from ducks and geese.

In 1928 I moved with the family from Monticello to a farm 1-2 miles north of Lake Cicott, Indiana which my father purchased. I started my first-grade education at Jefferson Township School which accommodated grades 1 through 8. Brother Harold and I were in the same grade together grade 2 through grade 10 when brother Harold dropped out and decided to become a farmer. I was especially privileged to have had a third-grade teacher by the name of Mary Barr, who at that time had a special interest in my older brother James. My homework entailed bringing or carrying notes home to my brother, if necessary, taking them into the field wherever he was for they were important. We were privileged not to have enjoyed indoor toilets, water, electricity or central heat.

My Grandfather William J. Kraay many times came to stay with us for short periods of time, often he would give me money to purchase a small bag of Golden Grain smoking tobacco for his pipe while he always allowed me a penny to buy a piece of candy, so I would pester him with saying, "Grandpa, don't you need some tobacco today?" Grandpa Kraay died May 3, 1934. Brother Robert who had a Model-A Ford Roadster at that time drove my father with Brother Harold and I in the rumble seat to Danforth, Illinois that evening where Grandpa made his home with his daughter (Aunt Lena and Uncle Mino Vandervliet). There was an old Dutch custom explained to me at the time of my Grandfather's death, that the body was to be prepared for burial at the home, then to church or often services were conducted in the home and the body was taken to the cemetery. My Grandpa Kraay was the first corpse I had ever seen.

Perhaps it was no different for me than it was for the elders of my family, I was given responsibilities and expected to carry them out at a very young age. I attribute

those responsibilities to having built character with determination, patience, faith, self-confidence, respect for others as well for oneself. All of the attributes handed down by parents as a good example were great inspirations to work hard for whatever we wanted. During the years of the "Great Depression" 1929-32, I remember going to Burnettsville State Bank with my mother, father, Brother Harold and I; we kids stayed in the car, when Mother and Dad returned to the car, our Father was crying. I later learned they had lost most of their money through bankruptcy and all of their stock invested in International Harvester Corporation.

While our water consumption at home depended upon wind energy which powered our windmill, there were many times when there was no wind, so it became necessary to either pump water by hand or use the internal-combustion engine for we had no electricity. Often time difficulty of starting the old one-cylinder engine; which meant we either start it or pump the water by hand for all the animals, fowl and personal needs. I often would simply crank and keep on cranking with determination to get it running, after succeeding I was accused of knowing something of secret or just being mechanically inclined while it must have happened or was coincidental, my secret was that I would always say, "God please help me start this engine so I don't have to pump that water by hand," bingo! It would start every time. We had a windcharger mounted on the rooftop of the barn that would charge up a six-volt battery used for lights in the barn for during late chores in the evening or early in the morning, it was also used with a radio inside the home for entertainment. What a relief to have electrical lines through the community in the late 1930s. There was a huckster wagon (a sort of general store on wheels with chicken crates carried beneath it) came to the farm regularly when mother would often exchange poultry and eggs for essential needs of the household. When I ever felt ill or injured mother would refer to a home remedy book called People's Library and treat us with perhaps herbs or some concoction from the kitchen pantry to fit our needs. Of course after having gone through nine other kids in the family, it became a simple matter to diagnose my problems and ills except for time as medicine had advanced so much.

Brother Harold and I were often sent to Burnettsville which was approximately five miles from the farm with a team of horses pulling a box-wagon filled with grain and were to return with a load of corn cobs for starting fires in the fall and winter months. We experienced a runaway team (Tom and Fred) leaving the elevator, suddenly a train whistle blew which excited the team; what a well-remembered ride!

My father hired me out a few times for money or an exchange of deeds while explaining to me that I had no rights to make any decisions until attaining the age of twenty-one when I would become a man. He advocated and believed that all rewards

came from hard work which I questioned whether or not it only referred to farming. I questioned my father's interpretation of farm work being more important than education, I fully understood his views for often during planting, tilling, harvest time and other various needs be attended for successful farming, we were expected to stay home and work as opposed to going to school. School schedules in rural communities were adjusted and tailored to fit the farmer's needs such as the season, hours and curriculum. Brother Harold dropped out of Royal Center High School after completing the tenth grade in 1938 to become a farmer. At this juncture of my life, I was experiencing conflicting problems with my father for I wanted to pursue an education and play sports in high school, which my father did not agree with. For a short period, I lived with my older brother Jim trying to earn my keep while destined to finish high school and play sports. During a part of my senior year in high school, I lived on Market Street in Logansport working three jobs while going to school between Walgreen's, Kroeger's grocery and the bowling alley where we set pins by hand. Before graduation, mother asked that I return home as my father realized that I did not want to become a farmer, so I did return home until after graduating from Royal Center High School in 1940.

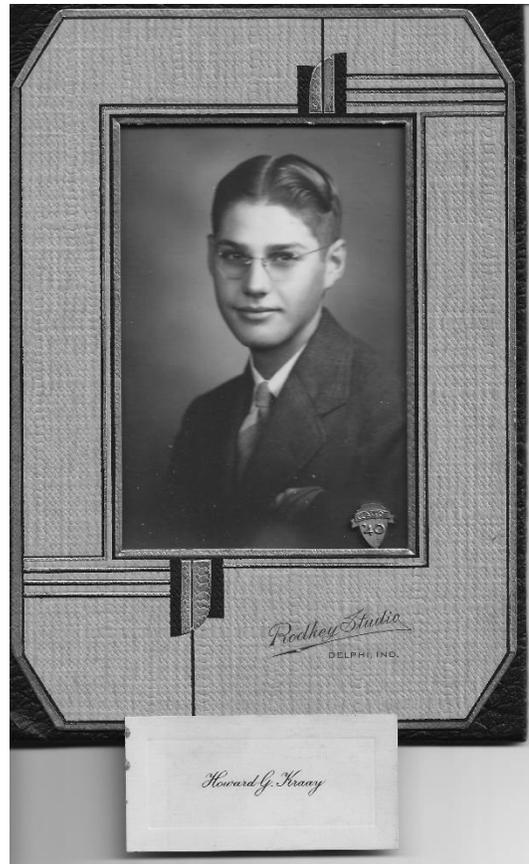


Figure 2, 1940, High School Graduation



Figure 3, 1941, Howard leaves Ellis Island for Panama

Due to my needs of finances, a gentleman by the name of George Raub who was the president of the Farmers and Merchant State Bank in Logansport, Indiana advised me to join the Army, then apply to the Army Air Corps for acceptance based on my interest in aeronautical engineering. Another important factor that helped me make my decision was the compulsory draft laws of the times were to serve your country for a two-year period. In September 1940, I followed Mr. Raub's advice and joined the service, with success I was transferred from the Army into the U.S. Army Air Corps. I managed to achieve high grades in all of the courses given in aircraft structure, engines, electrical, hydraulics, instruments and propellers. With these certifications on my service records, I chose Panama for my first assignment in 1941. Shortly after arriving there, we were sent to Rio Hato where we were assigned to a squadron of P-26A fighter planes, our



Figure 4, 1943, Howard front row, far left with mates in Panama

runways were grass, one-story barracks to sleep in, a small shed for our mess hall, one hangar for major maintenance and no hospital.

While I was destined to save money to pursue an education, my base pay was \$21.00 each month, after our laundry and other contributions were deducted, we were left with \$17.50. I would then go to the base postal service and purchase a \$15.00 money order and send home to my

mother for safe keeping, which left me with \$2.50 each month to spend. After buying razor blades, toothpaste, soap, stamps and writing paper, I might have had five cents left to buy either a package of chewing gum or candy bar.

I studied and memorized the manuals to become well versed in aircraft mechanics to attain a promotion to a private first-class mechanic, which was based on exams offered periodically.

We had to take our turns pulling guard duty at various ammunition storage areas generally located within a few miles of the air base at Rio Hato. The entire area surrounding the airfield was eerie, natives were posted to watch over their coconut groves until harvest time – the native drums beating up in the mountains all night long. While I was on guard duty one night at one of our ammunition storage sites approximately five miles from the base, an arousing alarm of noise to which I was blind in darkness had taken place. I, following my guard duty general orders (“Yell ‘Halt three times then shoot to kill’”) carried out my orders. I fired. The results: I heard a groan, so I called the guard house and the officer of the day arrived to learn I have shot a native cow. I was called on the carpet for not having made sure of my target.



Figure 5, 1944

When Pearl Harbor was bombed, we were alerted and told that the Japanese were on their way to bomb the Panama Canal. We stayed up for three days and nights without sleep getting weapons out of storage and planes equipped with armor, then transferred to France Field to protect the Panama Canal. Promotions and rank seemed to come rapidly as our responsibilities increased. I first worked on the engineering crew doing major maintenance and overhaul. I was a crew chief and flight engineer.

A strange coincidence took place when one of our pilots of then P-39s went down as a result of a mid-air collision. His name was Orzolek. I did not realize then that I was

to marry his cousin Frances Orzolek five years later. One of our pilots crashed when taking off on a standby alert status. As he was about airborne, another aircraft taxied onto the runway into his path. His name was William Grosvenor Jr. (his father was the president and editor of the National Geographic Magazine). His plane burst into flames with high octane gas and live ammunition exploding. Being near and determined after three attempts with a tarpaulin over my head, I dragged him clear of the wreckage. Bill was half-scalped, burned badly, scarred for life, but lived to fight again with the Flying Tigers under General Chenault in China where he became a war ace. Bill returned to the United States with another war ace in 1943 to organize the Air Commando Group who were to be trained to fight on land, sea or air. The group was to be made up of an all-volunteer group of seasoned veterans.



Figure 6, 1944, Burma with AirCobra, Howard front row, second from right

I volunteered to return to the China-Burma-India area to fight for our rights, freedoms and to protect our great country with my comrades. What more could one offer than their life to protect the principles for which they stand? That experience in combat was the nearest thing to hell on earth that I could possibly imagine – I was there. I had often thought of my grandfather when he spoke of the rigors of war. Now was my time to serve my country. It was a great feeling when “D” day was announced, for I had forty-one months of combat duty on my record which put me on top of the list to be returned home.

We returned home by air, routed through the Middle East. After takeoff, my squadron flew up along the side of us to present an aerial salute and farewell. We experienced a near crash during a very violent thunder and electrical storm being only one hour off the coast of Florida. There was a chaplain aboard with us and we were all praying and saying, “Oh God, why now?”

I so much wanted to get on with my life after receiving an honorable discharge. It seemed like a sudden shock trying to get back into a civilian lifestyle and how to pursue a better and more constructive life. Family and friends were helpful, however, I quickly realized that I was on my own. I immediately went to work upon arriving home after my discharge for the Studebaker dealer (Elmer Wills) of Logansport, Indiana as a mechanic, which seemed so simple as compared to aircraft, which I had been accustomed to. It was at this dealership late one evening when I was awaiting to meet Harold Lowe who had also served in the military in India where I too had served. Shortly after Harold arrived and we were getting acquainted, I noticed my sister Dorothy with friends walk by the show room, so I invited them in and introduced them to Harold Lowe. Sister Dorothy later married Harold Lowe.

In 1945, I applied to Purdue University School of Science and was excepted and attended for three semesters. In 1947, I joined up with an old Air Force buddy and his family to form a corporation, constructed a building according to Chevrolet Dealership

in the town of Gt. Barrington, Massachusetts. I took the responsibility of the service department and customer relations. While my brother-in-law to be was learning auto mechanics under the G.I. Bill in my department, he suggested I should go out and enjoy the evening socializing with friends. So, it was with his lady friend's sister who now is my wife Frances Orzolek Kraay.

We purchased our first home in Sheffield, Massachusetts two months before we were married for \$10,000. We were married on December 25, 1947. It was the greatest Christmas of my life!

August 13, which was on a Friday in 1948, son Thomas Arthur was born, his middle name Arthur was taken after my father. September 28, 1949, son Eugene Stanley was born, his middle name was taken after Frances's father. Frances now had her hands full with two in diapers at the same time while we had no throw-away diapers at that time. In the meantime, we moved from Sheffield to Gt. Barrington, Massachusetts.

In 1948, my business partner and I purchased an old antique bi-plane that had been disassembled and stored in an attic of a private hangar owned by a well-known aviator, designer, and barnstormer of his day. His name was Nick Parrish and he had competed against Jimmy Doolittle and Eddie Rickenbacker in the old well-known Cleveland, Ohio Air Races. I rebuilt and refurbished the entire plane except for the fabric. While it had not been airborne for twenty years, I volunteered to test fly it to demonstrate my self-confidence. It was quite an experience for the terrain past the end of the runway wasn't exactly an ideal place to have an emergency landing.

My business normally required eighty-three hours per week, which left me with very little time other than what was required for rest. I always felt more contented while staying busy with my head as well as my hands. In 1950 for my spare time enjoyment, I personally made a deal with a farmer who had an old 1921, 4-cylinder, 90 horsepower Chevrolet touring car where a barn had caved in on it with 11,000 miles on the odometer. We agreed that I would dig it out when I returned home from a week's vacation. Upon return, I learned my partners whom I was incorporated with went out to the farm and dug it out and laid claim to the vehicle. Even though I felt it was very unfair, I proceeded to completely rebuild the car, only occasionally to enjoy a Sunday afternoon drive through the country of maybe a parade. This was the beginning of dissolving my interest in the corporation.

I passed my commercial pilot's exam in 1950, which I never used beyond personal enjoyment. In 1951, I was offered a field service representative's position with the Chevrolet division of General Motors Corporation. In the meantime, the superintendent of the Pittsfield, Massachusetts School system was encouraging me to go for my teaching degree in education. At this juncture, I decided to go for my degree based on the desire to be near my family.

In 1952, I went to work for a Cadillac and Oldsmobile dealership in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where I moved with my family. At the end of my eight-hour workday, I would travel 60 miles to Holyoke College to earn transferrable credits toward a degree and finally arrived back home between 11 pm and midnight three nights a week until the course was completed. I took the summer off in 1952 to attend Fitchburg State Teachers

College where I earned my teaching degree while Frances supported the family for which I am forever grateful! Upon the completion of my certification, I was awarded a full-time teaching position at Pittsfield High School starting the fall semester of 1952. My first seven years of teaching I covered three subject: mathematics, science and mechanical drawing. In 1953, the University of Massachusetts offered me an extra teaching job for evening school classes teaching supervisor and foreman training classes for industries in the area of Pittsfield and Berkshire County. Because it was mandatory for teachers to meet the professional improvement standards in the Pittsfield school system, I took courses from many different learning institutions, colleges and universities, which led me to a master's level in education. Each year for over a twenty-year period, I would have attended one of the following: Fitchburg State Teachers College; Westfield State Teachers College, Springfield College, the University of Massachusetts and/or Ford, Chrysler or General Motors Institute. In 1959, I taught auto mechanics summer school.

In 1951, I drove to Quantico, Virginia to visit brother Ernest, and from there, Ernest and I drove to Indiana after learning of our father's failing health. I shall never forget our 'father-son' talk, which only now brother Ernest can attest to for whatever differences we may have had toward pursuing an education and/or leaving home was clearly resolved at that time. In 1952, my father died. I loved his strong determination, his attitude toward hard work to achieve whatever he wanted, and his example as a provider. Whatever was worth starting was worth finishing.

In 1959, I lost my mother who always tried to encourage me in everything I was interested in doing and to do it well. She always told me that I must go wherever my livelihood should lead me. She always gave me love and great moral support throughout my life. She always emphasized that there was more to life than just hard work! With that expression standing out in my mind, with the small inheritance I received from my mother and father's estate, I was able to purchase enough supplies and material to enable Frances, Thomas, Eugene and myself to build our very own cabin on top of Mt. Washington, Massachusetts on a five-acre plot of land, which we cleared and built on weekends. It was great to get away from all of your other daily and professional responsibilities for it was forty miles from Pittsfield where we lived and worked. There on the mountain, we enjoyed each other so much without much outside interference, yet so close to God's nature.

In 1961, we built our new home on Barker Road in Pittsfield with help from two of my fellow teachers, and it was here where we lived until retirement.

In 1964, I taught a course for the University of Massachusetts for persons interested in taking exams to become registry of motor vehicles inspectors for the State of Massachusetts. The course covered laws, regulations and mechanics for all types of vehicles.

In 1966, son Thomas earned his appointment to the United States Air Force Academy. In 1967, son Eugene earned his appointment to the United States Air Force Academy.



Figure 7 Howard, Gene and Uncle Ernie at USAFA 1971 graduation

In 1971, Eugene graduated from the United States Air Force Academy where he had become All-American in soccer as well. Gene went on to earn his pilot wings and brother Ernest and Art Kraay attended. Brother Ernest pinned Gene's wings when he graduated from pilot training. In 1971, brother Ernest, having been a retired commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps, commissioned son Thomas into the United States Air Force.

In 1972, after having served on the Massachusetts Vocational Association board for nine years I was elected President of the association.

In 1973, I took two summer months I had off from teaching and flew to Alaska to visit with Gene as he had a home in Eagle River, Alaska.

In 1978, I was awarded "Teacher of the Year" in the State of Massachusetts. Frances retired from the New England Telephone Company as a Chief Operator while I retired from the Pittsfield School Department. We moved to Holland Patent, New York.

In 1985, Frances and I moved to Logansport, Indiana temporarily with sister Dorothy until we were able to purchase a home of our liking, which resulted in purchasing a home on 3000 Woodland Drive, Logansport.

While I had enjoyed many years of woodworking as a hobby, having built a cabin, home, grandfather clock, hutch, writing desk, a few pieces of furniture and picture frames, it was now time to look for a new hobby. I became fascinated with stained glass. I built each of my granddaughters a granddaughter's clock of stained glass, each of my grandsons a replica of the old school clock, with each clock a story about time. The hobby became so creative that it inspired me to new challenges, which led me to making the emblem of our national security affairs support association being our American eagle in flight carrying a banner unfurled with the world in its claws of stained glass 48-inches by 22-inches in size. The results were that I was invited to Washington as an honored guest for it to be presented to the president of the association. The piece now is mounted in the reception room of their building in Annapolis, Maryland with my name engraved on a gold plate attached.

In 1991, Frances and I each encounter a few health problems and while distance separated us from our children and grandchildren, Gene and Marie had purchased a



Figure 8 Uncle Ernie applies Gene's USAF pilot wings, 1972

large home with a parents' suite and invited us to come share with them, so we moved from Logansport, Indiana to St. Charles, Missouri where we now reside in the same residence.

... a final, handwritten note reads, "My life continues as God grants me another day living with my son Gene and Marie... December 2, 2011"