

Survivor's guilt? No, survivor's purpose

Teresa Irish speaks about her father's life

By DAVID GREEN

Teresa Irish worked in higher education and in the staffing industry, and she was enjoying success as a vice president of a national home health care company, but she never found her true calling until a month after her father died.

It was on the first Memorial Day after his death that she pulled out his old Army trunk—the contents of which remained a mystery throughout his lifetime.

There were the usual spoils of war from his time in Europe during World War II, including a pair of daggers, a Luger pistol, a field mess kit, a program from a Catholic mass.

"Then I took out the top tray," Irish said. "There were more than 1,000 handwritten letters and more than 250 photographs. I never went to bed that night."

The letters had been mailed back home to Bud's parents and to the woman he would later marry.

"This was the story of every veteran," she said. "Within the first two or three sentences, I saw the power of those letters, to take people back."

Learning about her father's service gave her a purpose—to put a selection of the letters into book form and to speak to the public about her new appreciation for veterans.

"My dad left me his legacy and gave me my future," Irish said.

Sixty-five years earlier, the war itself helped shaped her father's life.

One of his letters discusses the odd feeling of sitting in a foxhole on Christmas Eve, 1944, on the banks of the Ruhr River with a cease fire underway and church bells ringing in the distance.

"It's so interesting that we can be sitting here together across a river thinking of peace on earth while we wait in silence for the enemy to move across the river to riddle one another with bullets," he wrote.

A few months later, near the end of the war, Bud was with a group of soldiers that became surrounded by Germans and he escaped only by feigning death, for what seemed like forever.

"My heart was pounding so loudly I was afraid they would hear it," he wrote.

There was only one other survivor, and Bud made a promise that he would return with an ambulance, which he did.

Did Bud Irish feel survivor's guilt? No, said his daughter, he felt survivor's purpose. His survival, while others died, inspired him to action—to live a good, purposeful life and to follow one of his many slogans: Use your head, your heart and your hands every day.

In his late 60s, Bud developed a new enemy—prostate cancer—and he went to war again. He became a passionate advocate for a pair of prostate awareness groups. He spoke with newly diagnosed victims and convinced them it wasn't the end of their lives but only the next challenge.

There are things that scare you more than cancer, he told people, and it's manageable.

He addressed a large group of physicians, urging them to see the human being in front of them and treat symptoms before taking radical action.

He once told his Hospice nurse that it wasn't his time yet, that he still had work to do.

"You see, 60 years ago I survived something that I shouldn't have," he said, "and because I got to live when my buddies didn't, every single day of my life I know that I have to make a difference."

Irish said there are three themes to her book, "A Thousand Letters Home." First, she said, it's a real-time account of a soldier's journey through World War II, from the first days of training in the U.S. to the front lines in Germany.

"Though they're my dad's words, it's the journey of all those who traveled through World War II," she said.



RETURN—Teresa Irish made a repeat visit to Stair District Library to talk about her book, "A Thousand Letters Home."

The second theme is that it's a huge book of unwavering faith. He named his Jeep "Why Worry?" and proudly offered its hood for church services.

The third theme, Irish said, is that it's a beautiful love story. Her father knew he was either going to return home and marry the brown-eyed brunette that he fell in love with at first sight, or he was going to meet his Maker. And both of those were peaceful, she added.

On his deathbed, he told his parish priest, "I sure hope God is proud of what I've done with the gift of life that I was given."

More letters

Irish found out later that her father's letters weren't the only family secret. Her mother also had a collection of the 400 letters she wrote to her future husband.

"Her letters were much sadder," Irish said. "We forget about the hardships that were happening stateside with all the soldiers overseas."

While Bud was fighting the Germans in Europe, her mother, Elaine, was back on her family's farm where German prison-

ers of war worked. Irish asked her mother how she felt about having those German boys at her table.

"I felt sad for them," she answered. "They were young, they were afraid, they didn't speak English, and they didn't start that war. They did what their country told them to do."

Some time after the book was published, Irish met a veteran who spoke as though his service, in Vietnam, would not be appreciated. Irish thought about her mother's words—They were young, they were afraid—and she has become impassioned about their plight. And now, the veterans returning from the Middle East have the highest suicide rate of any previous group of soldiers and her appreciation of their service is growing.

"We can't just lament the passing of the 'greatest generation,'" Irish said. "Regret should be turned into action. It's not just a matter of healing our veterans. It's a matter of recognizing every single day that we're given a gift in our lives."

The best way to honor the gifts we've been given is to make a difference, she said.

"It doesn't have to be anything heroic, but we can't be passive observers. Everybody has to be a caretaker every day of the wonderful life we've been given."

Someone in Morenci felt great despair today, she said, and needed a human being to see them, needed someone to look them in the eyes and say "Good morning."

She left the audience with the closing challenge to thank a veteran every day and to turn their lives into action. Realize every morning upon awakening that you have been given the gift of possibility.

"Make sure that every night when you lay your head on your pillow that you can remember whose life you made a little better today," she said. "It makes for a wonderful community."

Final downpour makes July a wet month

By DAVID GREEN

July went out with an exclamation mark: 2.65 inches of rain, all in the course of an hour.

"July was on track for fairly average precipitation," said Morenci weather observer George Isobar. "In fact, it was getting to be pretty dry the last few days of the month."

Then came the rainstorm July 29 that just wouldn't stop. Heavy rain, then a light shower, then another wave of the heavy stuff followed by a break, then another downpour.

The 2.65 drenching raised the monthly total to six inches, Isobar said, which makes it the sixth wettest July in the past 41 years.

"We've had four Julys of the past that were in the seven-inch range, but the leader came in 1992 with 10.34 inches," Isobar said. "That was just a really wet month because the greatest rain in any single day was 2.48."

The recent deluge was the second greatest single day rain event for July, dwarfed by a much bigger flooding in 2008 when 4.77 was dumped on the area in one day.

Last month also featured a 1.54-inch storm. Take away the two big storms and there was less than two inches spread out over the month.

There were only four thunderstorms last

month—none of them severe—as rough weather passed to the north and to the south.

"We've really had quite an amazing summer," Isobar said. "There were only two days in the 90s and eight in the upper 80s. And there were 14 days when it never got above 80. We really had a break in terms of temperature."

The high of 91° was recorded on two consecutive days—July 28 and 29. The low of 51° came on the morning of July 16.

"That was the other half of the 'nice summer' equation—the cool mornings," Isobar said.

Whatever heat came during the day was wiped out by morning. There were 14 mornings that started off in the 50s. There was one of the hot summer morning temperatures of 72° at 7:30 a.m.—the kind of day when you know it's going to be miserable—and another at 70, but everything else brought a refreshing coolness.

Actually, Isobar pointed out, the morning that it was 72 only moved up to 75 for the daily high.

"We've just been really fortunate this summer," he said. "I keep expecting it to catch up before fall comes."

The average monthly temperature came in



STRONG WIND—A line of thunderstorms moved through this area after midnight Sunday with strong winds bringing down a few trees, branches and wires. A large branch fell at the corner of East and Locust streets in Morenci.

DAVID GREEN/Observer photo

at 70.7° which is 2.8° below the normal for July. Twenty days were below normal and the hottest day was only 6.0° above normal.

AUGUST—July is typically a little hotter than August," Isobar said, "so maybe the nice summer will continue."

That's not to say that August can't be hot. In 1988, there were 15 days in the 90s. The

year before that there were 12, the same as in 1993.

"There were also a few rare years with nothing in the 90s or else maybe just a single day," Isobar said. "Forget the temperature. The important thing is to hope for clear skies Aug. 11 and 12 for the annual Perseid meteor shower. That's what August is all about."