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Designated Heroes Remember-Locals Tell Their Stories of World War II

By Andrea A. Firth



Pictured are authors and editors of the anthology Designated Heroes Remember. Back row standing (L to R) Sheila Dineen Jordan, Len Morgenstern, Susan Hochschild, Irmhild Epstein, Otto Schnepf, Steffi Plumb, and Joelle Phanick. Front row seated (L to R) Patricia Mills, Leo Bach, and Ruth Roque-Wood (far right) Photo A. Firth

a trip, but she was immediately committed to the task. The story of Pehanick's husband Joe and his brother Paul's experience in World War II is one of the closing chapters to the collection, which moves chronologically through the War. Jordan and Pehanick also brought on writer and friend Patricia Mills of Walnut Creek to help with the editing, "We were all in over our heads," says Jordan with a laugh.

When it came to turning the stories on paper into a published book, the three lady editors relied on the expertise of Leo Bach, one of the first members of the two-decade old Writer's Group at Rossmoor. Bach had established his own company, The Write Way Publishing, to publish his autobiography, Coming Home. Excerpts of Bach's story serving as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army during a bombing mission brought down by German anti-aircraft and his time spent in a German prison camp before being freed by the Soviet Army in May of 1945 are included in the anthology.

The four editors met weekly for almost two years to complete the project. "Leo knew how to publish a book, and he kept the three of us on task," says Pehanick. The book came out in April of this year and is distributed through several area bookstores and Amazon.com. Six of the authors recently did a reading at Orinda Books, which also carries the book. For more information about Designated Heroes Remember email sjordan@comcast.net.

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The harrowing sounds of breaking glass and people screaming that marked the destruction of Kristallnacht-an anti-Jewish program conducted in Germany and Austria in late 1938; the unexplained disappearance of a father, and a young girl's lonely train trip from Vienna to England; the story of a Jewish doctor divorcing his Aryan wife in order to keep her safe and free until they are able to reunite; and a magical greeting from the Statue of Liberty emerging from the fog before a young man is transferred to Ellis Island-these are a few of the emotional images portrayed in the anthology Designated Heroes Remember -- World War II Survivors Tell Their Stories, 1933-1945.

The Heroes World War II anthology was compiled from the works of the Writer's Group based in Rossmoor, a retirement community in Walnut Creek. The stories, written by authors who range in age from late sixties to early nineties and some who have passed away, share their experiences as young children and young adults with a variety of perspectives on the War.

Lafayette resident Sheila Dineen Jordan, who has participated in the writing group for ten years, recognized the theme of World War II survival stories emanating from the group and proposed the idea compiling an anthology. "I figured there will be no one left to share these stories with our grandchildren," says Jordan. "But I had never edited a thing in my life," she adds, noting that she quickly reached out for help.

Jordan recruited friend Joelle Pehanick, an Orinda resident and 18-year veteran of the Writer's Group, to help with the project. Pehanick laughs at the fact that she was recruited 'in absentia' while away on