

Chapter II

The Academy & Hollins

June 10, 1917 – June 30, 1921

On Sunday morning everyone saw Curly off at the train station and said their goodbyes. For Geannie it was the first of many that would become the story of their lives. Walt, who was attending the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. and had come down for the big party, was Curly's traveling companion.

As they traveled, their conversation included reminiscing earlier days and naturally turned to Geannie and Sarah. "We have talked of marriage. Now that she has graduated from high school, I am giving serious thought to proposing. I don't know how I am ever going to top that little show that you put on."

"Oh I don't know, you'll think of something. You could always go with my initial idea."

"What was that?"

"I was going to ride up on a white horse and sweep her away."

"That's not bad. How do you come up with such clever ideas? I just might use that one. Initially I thought we would wait until I have graduated. But now with us in the war and the talk of the draft, I'll most likely end up 'over there' as the call it. In fact, I am considering outright enlisting rather than going back to school this fall."

"Really? I don't see you as the military type."

"I never thought you were either. If I did that, I'd have to postpone marrying Sarah. It's just something I have been thinking about."

"Navy or Army?" Curly asked.

"I know that the Navy is a Brason tradition, but they want a four year enlistment. The Army only requires two, so I am leaning toward the Army."

As the afternoon wore on their conversation turned to what the future may hold in store. They arrived in Washington in mid-afternoon, giving Walt a little time to show him around. That night, Curly bunked out at Walt's apartment where he lived with three other seminary students. School was out and they were all working for the summer as intern pastors.

The next morning, Walt drove Curly the thirty five miles to Annapolis, situated on the Chesapeake Bay a little south of Baltimore. They pulled into the quaint little town about mid morning. They found their way around the provincial town with rough streets that extend from two circular hubs not far from each other. With only a little difficulty they found the Academy. Walt pulled up in front and got out as Curly retrieved his suit case. Standing on the side of the curb he gave his little brother a big bear hug and bid him farewell.

Two or three days later, a package from Curly arrived at the Brason residence. Inside was all of the clothes he had taken with him and a letter.

June 11, 1917

US Naval Academy

Annapolis, Maryland

Dear Family and Beannie

I do not have time but to write one letter so this is to everyone.

Well, I am now officially a midshipman, a plebe to be exact. That is what they call us fourth classmen. A plebe was the lowest class of Roman citizens and that pretty much applies to us.

After paying the entrance deposit and signing in, I was sworn in. Next I reported to Bancroft Hall and was given my room assignment. My roommates are Paul Candor from Los Angeles, California and Wade Stimple from Kansas City, Kansas. I haven't had a chance to get to know them yet. They seem like nice fellows.

From there I was directed to the midshipman's store and was issued my clothing, uniforms, and bedding. It took two trips to get it all back to my room. Then I changed into the prescribed set of clothes and had to labeled and stowed the rest, all according

to the regulations in the "Plebe's Bible" as it is called.

I was instructed to send all of my civilian clothes home, so that is why they are in the box. Oh, and Do Not send me any money. I do receive \$50 a month that goes into my account to cover my expenses and I get a dollar a month for pocket money.

All of that was this morning. At mid day, a bugle called us to muster, then we were marched to the mess hall. After the meal I finished settling in or "shaking down" as it is called. I had just enough time to pen this letter before I close up the box and take it to be posted.

I'll be fine, so don't worry about me. I already miss Geannie. I'm sure as I settle into the routine, I'm sure I will miss the rest of you too. I love you all and Geannie, I especially love you. I look forward to your letters. The rest of you be sure to write as well.

Love Curly

The next day the routine began. Roll call at six thirty followed by breakfast and straightening up his living space. The days comprised of inspections, drills, calisthenics and nautical instruction. Each day ended at ten o'clock with the taps. Bugle calls signified when to be were. The mode of getting from place to place was marching. Having been a wrestler all through school, he was assigned to the wrestling squad. Saturday was free of drills but consisted of athletic contests, games, and other recreation. On Sunday, all midshipman were required to attend religious services.

This routine continued throughout the summer until the upper classmen returned during the first

week of October to begin the academic year. Many of the drills were replaced with classroom instruction and lectures on a variety of college level subjects, and of course naval specific subjects as well. The required foreign languages were either French or Spanish. The plebes were arbitrarily assigned to one or the other, which they would study for the entire four years. Curly was placed in French. The only break from class and drills were on national holidays.

Due to the war, that summer the draft was reinstated. The law required that those between twenty-one and thirty-one years of age and later from eighteen to forty-five must register with their local draft board which issued draft calls in order of numbers drawn in a national lottery. The board also determined exemptions. Twenty four million men were registered and nearly three million were inducted into the military services. Geannie's brothers were given dependency exemptions as was Shenan. However, Walt enlisted in the Army and Geannie's cousin Billy was drafted. Walt served as a chaplain's assistant while Billy served in the infantry. Scores of young men from the Roanoke area answered the call. Many of them were friends of Walt and Curly.

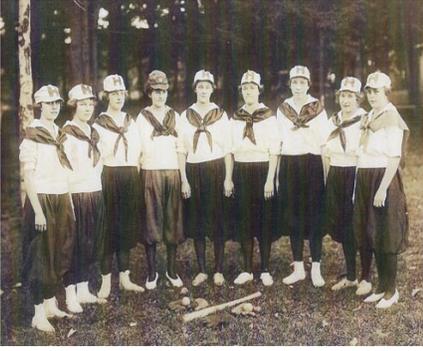
During the summer, Geannie worked full time at the telephone company as she looked forward to starting school in the fall. She missed Curly and anxiously awaited his letters. They had a system going that assured at least two or three letters a week. Each would write in response to the other's letters. They were filled with what was going on in their lives and expressions of love and affection.

Finally the day came when Geannie moved into her dorm room on campus. This she did rather than live at home so she could have the full college experience. Her roommate was Marsha Moncour from Salem, Virginia, just west of Roanoke. She too was also an education major. Geannie's emphasis was in elementary education, while Marsha was more interested in teaching at the high school level. The two hit it off well at the beginning.

Her father gave her his 1915 Ford Model T that had been his second car. It was black, of course. Henry Ford had said, "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black". The wheels and spokes were wooden and this particular model year was the first that featured electric headlights.

She learned to drive in that car when she was sixteen. Her father advised her to cup their fingers under the crank and pull up, rather than grasp the handle with the fingers on one side, the thumb on the other. He warned her that even a simple backfire could result in a broken thumb, or worse. She loved to drive it around with the top down.





While at Hollins, she kept her part time job as a telephone operator. She tried out for the baseball team and was accepted. The coach soon discovered the power of her pitching arm. As a freshman, Geannie became the starting pitcher.

For her foreign language requirement, Geannie strongly considered studying French since that is what Curly would taking. The French class was full so she opted for Spanish instead. She found it an easy language to learn. A surprising side benefit was a better appreciation for English.

The end of the academic year at the academy came in June. His year as plebe came to an end as he moved up to the third class, which were known as “youngsters”. Curly's training went to the next stage, the midshipman cruise. The midshipmen were divided into groups of thirty six under the direction of an officer from the academy and where dispersed among the battleships of the Atlantic Fleet. After being transported to the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia, Curly's group reported aboard the USS Arizona.

During the summer months of June, July, and August the Arizona patrolled the waters of the eastern seaboard from the Virginia Capes to New York. During this time, the midshipmen, particularly the youngsters got a taste of life at sea. Consequently, Curly didn't have much time to write more than short notes to Greannie. Finally, toward the end of July, he got break to write to her.



July 24, 1918

Aboard the USS Arizona in New York Harbor

Dear Geannie

This is the first real break that I have had to write to you. Thanks for tolerating my short notes. Since I last wrote,

we sailed from Norfolk on the 1st of July. The Fourth didn't afford much of a break from the routine of being at sea. I think the regular crew are glad to have us aboard. They watch us perform their labors and critique us on whether we are doing it right.

In addition to putting into practice and refining the lessons already learned, I am acquiring new skills as they are introduced. I'd say that the number one lesson that I have learned is that I am glad that I am going to be an officer rather than a deck hand.

On this cruise I discovered that there is a new love in my life. Not to worry, this love can not compete with you. I must admit that I have fallen in love with the sea. I can't explain it to you. The sea is mysterious; always changing. It fascinates me that one day I can be in one place and the next be a few hundred miles away without ever leaving the ship.

This training cruise includes an element of realism about it as we are at war. We are on constant on watch for German submarines known to be operating off the east coast. The reality of the threat was brought home on the 19th when the armored cruiser USS San Diego was torpedoed and sank just south of Long Island, New York.

One day while a bunch of us were standing watch, a mermaid was swimming along side. As she leapt and prolicked in the sea, my shipmates were captivated by her beauty and loveliness of form. I had to tell them that the creature paled in comparison to the girl I have waiting back home. They demanded proof and so I produced your photo from my billfold. They all had to agree with me!

We are now just past the midway point of the cruise. The day before yesterday the Arizona steamed into New York Harbor where we are to stay for a week. The regular crew were granted three day passes in shifts, a third of the crew at a time. But we midshipmen, being under greater restrictions, were only allowed twelve hours ashore in small groups under close supervision.

I just returned to the ship after my turn ashore and have a little time to write. It was exhilarating as we steamed past the Statue of Liberty. I can't describe the pride that she inspires. It reminds me of what it's all about. After leaving the ship, I got to go over to Liberty Island and stand at the base. Then we got to climb up the inside to the crown.

Then we got to spend some time right downtown. I found myself in Times Square. The streets were filled with people going in a host of directions, a very busy place. I found The

Woolworth Building particularly fascinating. Did you know that it is the tallest tower in the world? They refer to it as the 'Cathedral of Commerce'.

We spent quite a while in Central Park. I was kind of disappointed in it. It was so run down with dead trees and bushes, and vandalism and littering was everywhere. I did enjoy the Central Park Zoo. Hattie the elephant was fascinating. She was brought from Ceylon in 1903 and belonged the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. They say she is the "most intelligent of all elephants and is nearly human."

It was nice to have a break. It was the first real chance I have had to get out and about in more than a year. As soon as this cruise is over I get to come home for a whole month. I can't wait to see you. It won't be long now. How many kisses do have you saved up for me? I really missed you today and wished you were here with me.

I must close now, but it seems like there is something else I have to tell you. What is it? Oh yes... I love you. But you already know that don't you. I just wanted to remind you and didn't want you to forget.

Love Curly

At the end of the training cruise, Curly was given a thirty day leave and went home to Roanoke. It was a joyous homecoming when he stepped off the train fifteen months after leaving home. Everyone was there to greet him with Geannie right out in front. She was the first one he saw, followed by his father and mother. Everyone was there except for Walt who was conspicuously absent. He was on the front lines in France as a chaplain's assistant assigned to an artillery regiment pounding away at German positions.

The change in Curly was very noticeable. He had left a lad of eighteen and came back a man. His mannerisms showed refinement. There was resolve in his confidence. And that uniform! He looked so dashing.

He had barely stepped off the train when Geannie thrust herself into his arms. He had to drop his sea bag in order to catch her. She held him tight as she gave him the biggest kiss. She released him as everyone else crowded around wanting a hug or a handshake. The assemblage carried him off to the front yards of the Brason's and Austin's where a picnic was all spread out, just waiting for Pastor Brason to say Grace.

The first week, he and Geannie were practically inseparable, but after that, she had to return to Hollins for her sophomore year. Curly spent his days relaxing and spending time with his family. He and Geannie spent as much time together as she could afford between school, studies, and an occasional evening shift at the telephone company.

It all ended too soon and once again, Geannie saw him off at the train station for the return trip to Annapolis. As a third year midshipman, he had more liberty than he had the year before as a lowly plebe. There were less restrictions and more opportunity for leadership.

The war in Europe ended on November 11, 1918 and the soldiers began returning home. There were 116,708 who did not return. Sarah's brother, Private 1st Class William Brennon Austin, Jr. was one who did not return. He was killed during the Argonne Offensive in October 1918.

29 November 1918

Dear Curly,

I hope you got to enjoy a Thanksgiving feast yesterday. Ours was marred by sadness. Since I last wrote to you, my beloved Grandma Austin passed away on Sunday the 24th. That is why I

was delayed in answering your last letter. At age 76 she had been in good health until recently when she contracted pneumonia. It was only a matter of days as we watched her fail.

I have such fond memories of her and the countless hours that Sara and I spent in her home. There is talk already that Charlie and Abbie are going to move into the grand home that Grandpa Austin built.

On the bright side, we rejoiced that the war is over. I was so fearful that it would take you to into harm's way. As you know, Billy didn't come home. After loosing Aunt Martha nine years ago, Uncle Bill was so devastated that he has lost his zest for life and sank into depression. Winslow had to take over managing the sawmill.

There is more good news. Abbie had her baby on 24th, the same day that Grandma died. They have named her Elizabeth, after Grandma. Isn't it interesting how the circle of life works out. Stirling and MaryAnn have decided to name their baby girl Armistice. I think that is such a clever name, since she was born the day the armistice was signed. They call her Misti.

Yesterday the entire Austin family gathered for Thanksgiving. Aunt Constance and Uncle Jasper came over from Richmond, Aunt Natalie and Uncle Martin came up from Winston-Salem, and Aunt Jane came down from Baltimore.

Aunt Jane was telling me what a lovely place Annapolis is. It's too bad that you can't leave the campus. Most of my cousins were here too. It was good to see everyone. Many of them are married now with little families of their own. I do long so for the day when we are married.

Then today was the funeral. It was a very fitting service. Your father gave such an eloquent sermon, as always. In addition to family, there were so many from the community and round about there as well that the chapel was filled to capacity.

School is going well. I had two examinations before the break. One in Spanish and one in geography. Did you know that there really is a such a place as Timbuktu? I missed that one. It is in French West Africa. It is nice to have bit of a break. How are your classes coming? I'm sorry that you are struggling with French. I am really enjoying Spanish.

Before I close, I must tell of of my undying love for you. I shall not dwell on missing you for it would do neither of us any use. Let me just quote Shakespeare, "Absence doth sharpen love, presence strengthens it; the one brings fuel, the other blows it till it burns clear."

Love Seannie

Those returning from the battlefields of Europe brought something unexpected with them, a deadly influenza virus. As it spread in pandemic proportions, it took a heavy toll on healthy young adults in contrast

to most influenza outbreaks that affect the very young, the very old, and the very weak. Just six weeks after her twentieth birthday, Geannie came down with the symptoms. She was at school when suddenly she felt extremely fatigued. Her mother was contacted to come and take her home.

Geannie made it to her dorm room and put herself to bed where Marie found her. Marie packed Geannie's suitcase and helped her into the car and brought her home. Within hours, she began to run a high fever. She coughed so hard that it tore her abdominal muscles, causing her cough up and vomit blood. Dark spots appeared on her cheeks and her flesh turned blue.

The epidemic hit so fast and caught the population by surprise. A strict quarantine was imposed which closed schools and canceled all public gatherings. Curly was fortunate. The Naval Academy was locked down before anyone could be infected.

For three days, Geannie lay near death. Curly's mother, Ellen, who had attended nursing school as a young woman looked after Geannie and others in the congregation. Gennine didn't seem to respond to anything that was done for her and continued to get worse hour by hour.

By the time the overwhelmed doctor called at the Austin Mansion, she was ever so weak. Marie answered the door, "Oh, good. You're here. Please come in Doctor Gates."

"Where is the stricken maiden?"

"Right this way." Marie took him upstairs and into Geannie's room where Ellen was attending to her. Before entering her room, both Doctor Gates and Marie donned gauze masks.

When he entered the room, he found poor Geannie propped up in her bed with a cold press on her forehead. Bloody drool had stained her nightgown and bedding and she was completely unresponsive.

Dr. Gates could tell immediately that Geannie was in a bad way. "Tell me, when did this come on?"

"The day before yesterday we got a call from school for us to come and get her. She was in the middle of class when she was suddenly struck down with dizziness and weakness. We brought her home and put her right to bed. Since then, she has got worse." Marie explained.

"What has been done for her?"

Ellen answered, "I have been giving her salt of quinine in an attempt to reduce the fever but it has had no effect. When she is awake, I've had her try drink as much water as she can."

Doctor Gates opened his black bag and removed his stethoscope. "Set her up in bed and loosen her gown, please."

Marie untied the string that held the gown closed, she on one side and Ellen on the other, moved her into a sitting position, holding up her head. The doctor placed the stethoscope on her back and listened for a moment. Then he placed it on her chest and listened again. "Okay. You can lay her back down now." he instructed.

He put his stethoscope back into his bag and next removed a thermometer, a bottle of rubbing alcohol, and a cotton ball. After cleaning the thermometer, he placed it in her mouth, under her tongue.

While waiting for her temperature to register, he took her by her wrist to take her pulse. After laying her hand beside her on the bed, he said, "Her pulse is quite weak. I'm concerned that it is that low. She is heavily congested. I fear that she has a considerable build up of mucus and blood in her lungs. From all of the blood, it is obvious to me that she had coughed so violently that she has most likely torn the lining of her abdominal muscles and perhaps her internal organs. Now that she is too weak to cough, the mucus will continue building up in her body. She is extremely hot to the touch. What has her temperature been running?"

"It has been right around a hundred and two and a hundred and three." Ellen answered.

"Lets see what it says here." He removed the thermometer and looked at it. The change in his countenance revealed grave concern. "This shows a hundred and four. That is dangerously high. She's literally burning up.

"It appears, Mrs. Brason, that you have been doing all of the right things. I hate to say it, but it doesn't look good for this young lady. Do what you can, but prepare for the worse. I don't see how she can survive the next twenty four hours.

"The only other thing I can suggest is to remove all of her clothing and immerse her in a lukewarm bath. A cold bath would be too much of a shock to her system and most likely kill her. If her fever doesn't break by morning, she will certainly die. I wish there was more that I can do for her. Fortunately there are others I can save and I must go to them. This young lady is in hands greater than mine. Do what you can for her. I can see myself out."

As Doctor Gates left the room and made his way downstairs and left the mansion Ellen said to Marie, "Go fill the bathtub with lukewarm water. I'll get her undressed. I think we should burn her clothes and bedding."

Marie went quickly to fill the upstairs bathtub. Ellen carefully removed the clothes Geannie was wearing. When Marie returned to the room, her heart was moved with compassion for her dying daughter. She shook as she embraced her long time friend. Looking down at Geannie she remarked, "Isn't it tragic that such a gorgeous, perfect body on the outside can be so ill on the inside?"

Together, Marie and Ellen carefully lifted Geannie off her death bed and carried her naked, feverish body down the hall and gently situated her in the bathtub. Geannie groaned as her body reacted to the temperature difference. They lowered her as far into the water as they could. "Marie, I need to go and check on the Proctor's. Stay here with Geannie and I'll be back in an hour to take her temperature. I don't think we should leave her in the water any longer than that. If she comes around try to get her to drink

some water.”

Ellen left Marie alone with Geannie. Her tears bathed Geannie's face and she bent down and kissed her on the forehead through her gauze mask. She reached for a cup and dipped it into the water to pour water over her forehead and chest. They whole time speaking softly. “Hold on, baby girl. Stay with us.” Then she did what comes naturally to a mother comforting a sick child. She began singing lullabies to her.

As she sang, she cleansed her body as she did when she was a baby. She also washed her shoulder length auburn hair that had become sweaty and matted.

Before returning to Geannie, Ellen stopped by Emmett's office at the church to give him an update on Geannie. He picked up the telephone and requested that the operator put him through to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Once he was connected, he identified himself as Pastor Emmett Brason and asked to speak to the chaplain. Once he was connected, he asked that a message be passed on to Midshipman Sheffield Brason that Geannie was in critical condition and was not expected to live.

About an hour later, Ellen returned. The first thing she did was to check Geannie's temperature. It was between a hundred and two and a hundred an three. Still dangerously high, but an improvement. Geannie's skin was wrinkled like a prune after being in the water so long.

Ellen took over as Marie went back to Geannie's room to remake the bed with fresh bedding. She took the bedding and nightgown downstairs to Charles and had him take them out to burn them.

Ellen pulled the plug to let the tub drain. Using a towel, she began drying off Geannie's unresponsive body. Once she had remade the bed, Marie returned to the bathroom with a clean nightgown.

Together they dressed Geannie and carried her back to her room and put her back into her bed. Marie continued her fussing over her. She brushed out her hair and put on her make up. If she was going to go to heaven, she wanted he to look like the angel that she was.

The vigil over her continued through the night. As night fell her temperature crept back up. Her father donned a mask and sat up with her through the night. The first thing the next morning, Ellen came over to check on her. Her temperature was one hundred and four degrees.

With the words of Doctor Gates echoing in their ears, there was only one hope left; faith and prayer. Both families as well as the entire congregation had been praying for Geannie and others who had been stricken by the influenza.

Curly was devastated when he received the message from his father telling him that his lovely fiancé was at death's door. Having been taught to have faith, he secluded himself in the Naval Academy Chapel and poured his heart out to God. “Please don't take her from me before we're even married.” he plead. “If you must take her, give us at least twenty years together first.” he begged with tears gushing unrestrained onto the alter. At age twenty, twenty years seemed like a lifetime to Curly. “I'll take such good

care of her and love her with all of my heart for as long as you will let me have her.” he promised.

At about the same moment, Pastor Brason, Ellen, Charles, and Marie, all wearing gauze masks, entered Geannie's room and knelt around her bed. The Pastor offered a prayer pleading with God for a blessing of healing on the dying young woman.

They didn't realize just how close to death's door that Geannie was. She had been unconscious for several hours as the high fever took its toll on her body and mind. For the most part, it was as if she was in an oblivious world of nothingness. All alone in her room, she stopped breathing as her lungs were so congested. At that moment, Geannie found herself standing in the air looking down on her lifeless body lying in her bed.

As she wondered at the sight she was approached by a woman who looked very familiar. “Geannie, its your time.” the woman said.

Geannie turned to face her, “Grandma Austin?” she quizzed. “You look so much younger.”

“And you look so much more mature, Geannie. Come with me, there is something you need to see.”

In a blur of light and motion, Geannie and her grandmother were in a grand chapel, above and behind an sobbing young man bent over an alter. As they drifted around in front of him, she recognized that it was Curly. She called out to him.

“He can't hear you, honey child.”

Geannie and Grandma Austin lingered long enough to hear his plea for her life. Then in another instant of a blur of light and motion, they returned to her bedroom, just as her mother and father and Curly's mother and father entered the room and knelt around her bed. They listened to their prayer in her behalf. Once they were finished, Grandma Austin said to her, “I have to leave for now but I'll be back shortly.”

Geannie returned to a state darkness as she began breathing again. After a while, how long is hard to say, she saw her grandmother standing over her and again she rose from her body. “They have great faith and love for you my dear. Their prayers for you have been heard and now you have a choice to make. You may come with me into the next life, or you may remain in mortality for another season.”

“What is the next life like?”

“More wondrous than I can describe.” was the answer.

“And if I stay, how long will it be for?”

“Like I said, for a season. That is not for you to know.”

Geannie paused for a moment then said, “I want to stay.”

“Very well, my dear. You may stay. I must tell you that you will not recall any of this. Return now

and live your life to the fullest.”

Once more Geannie resumed breathing as her consciousness again returned to a state of nothingness.

Within the hour, her fever broke and she regained consciousness. She opened her eyes to see mother at her side. “Oh, Geannie!” she cried. “You’re awake. We thought we had lost you.”

Geannie didn’t respond.

“Here, baby girl. You need to drink some water.” Marie cradled Geannie’s head in one arm and with her other hand, she put a cool glass of water to her lips. Geannie took a sip and then sputtered. “There, there. Have another sip.”

She laid Geannie’s head back down on her pillow and dabbed her forehead with a damp cloth. “Let me take your temperature.”

Geannie weakly opened her mouth enough for Marie to slip the thermometer under her tongue. After enough time had passed, she removed it and read it out loud, “One hundred point five. That’s wonderful. Rest now and I’ll be back shortly.”

Geannie closed her eyes, aware of her own breathing. It came much easier than what it had been.

Marie left the room and went downstairs to tell Charles that Geannie was awake and called next door to give Ellen the good news. Before long, Ellen came back over and together they went in to Geannie’s room.

Geannie heard the door shut behind them and opened her eyes. To be sure, Ellen took her temperature again. It registered ninety nine point seven.

Over the next few hours, Geannie began to show signs of improvement. Slowly, day by day, she got better and eventually recovered. By early spring Geannie was well enough to return to school. She didn’t miss much because a few days later Hollins canceled classes until the pandemic was over. When they resumed, they carried the abbreviated semester three weeks into the summer break.

Geannie considered it a miracle and it set in stone her faith in God and planted her feet firmly on the path that she had been taught to walk as a child and in her youth. A path she vowed to walk for the rest of her life.

In the United States, about twenty eight percent of the population suffered from the influenza, and between 500,000 to 675,000 died from it. Worldwide, the influenza may have killed as many as twenty five million people.

At the conclusion of his second year midshipman cruise Curly was able to come home for his thirty day leave. After Geannie’s brush with death, they would have got married right then if it hadn’t been for his commitment to the Naval Academy.

They did however attend Walt and Sarah's wedding where they were bride's maid and best man. Before leaving for the Army, Walt rode into an Austin family gathering on a white horse and swept Sarah away. When he brought her back, she was sporting an engagement ring. Rather than going to college, she continued to work full time at the telephone company while Walt was away in the Army.

Walt had returned from Europe in the spring and was stationed at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia. He had just been discharged as a corporal at the end of August. They were married by Pastor Barson on September 4, 1919 in Austin's back yard. After a three day honeymoon in Washington D.C., they settled into their apartment close to the seminary and he returned to school on the 8th.

Curly's thirty days came to an and he returned to Annapolis. It was pretty much the same for his third year, with a three month midshipman cruise and a thirty day leave in September. During his third and fourth years, as a second and first classman he had even more privileges and opportunities for leadership. One perk available to upper classmen was a forty eight hour leave at Christmas. Geannie traveled to Washington and met up with Curly at Walt and Sarah's.

After four years, Curly and Geannie both graduated in 1921. Geannie and her parents accompanied the Brasons to Annapolis to attend Curly's graduation. On their way, they stopped off in Washington D.C. for Walt's graduation from Seminary on Friday. Walt and Sarah and their baby daughter Emmaline then accompanied them on to Annapolis for Curly's graduation on Saturday.

Geannie was so proud of Ensign Brason. From then on she always used his rank as a term of endearment. She never was fond of flowery, sugar coated pet names. She never liked the way her Grandma Austin called everyone honey child or sugar pie or some such name. With the Academy behind him, he was a commissioned officer in the United States Navy. He was granted a thirty day leave before reporting for duty.

Curly rode home on the train with those who had come to his graduation. A few days later, Geannie's graduated from Hollins. With her degree and teaching certificate in hand, Geannie moved back into her old bedroom in the Austin mansion and began looking for a teaching position in the fall. Curly and Geannie spent nearly every waking moment together during his time at home. They talked a lot about their pending marriage but decided to wait a few months so they could both get established, particularly Curly.

At the end of the month, Geannie saw him off at the train station when he left for Norfolk, Virginia to report for duty at his first assignment. Before he could be accepted for pilot training, he had to complete two years of sea duty. That fall Geannie began teaching at an elementary school right there in Roanoke. She realized that being a Navy wife would require her to independent, which came naturally to her.

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Curly's experience at the Naval Academy is also described in the book cited in Chapter I.

Hollins Universality is an actual all female school located in Roanoke, Virginia.

Beginning in 1918 the midshipmen cruises were conducted aboard the battleships of the Atlantic fleet. The USS Arizona that Curly's first cruise was aboard is the same Arizona that was sunk at Pearl Harbor.

In 1918 the Woolworth Building in New York City was the tallest tower in the world at the time. The Empire State Building was not completed until 1931. The Woolworth Building located at 233 Broadway was completed in 1913 and its 57 stories stood 291 feet above the street.

At the time World War I was referred to as The World War or The Great War until the Second World War.

The influenza that nearly took Geannie's life was an actual pandemic as described.