

Chapter XXXV

Geannie Goes to Sea

November 24, 1939 – January 1, 1940

The day after Thanksgiving, Curly got a letter from Geannie.

18 Nov 1939

Dear Commander Curly

I'm glad that you got a good home cooked meal. Since I'm not there to take care of you, I asked Ramona to see to it that you got one. I'm glad that you had a nice visit with her. I can't wait to see her again.

I have kept busy with school and getting ready for the move. It helps, but I still miss you, especially with Thanksgiving coming up in a few days.

Have you been following all of hoopla about Thanksgiving this year? Here in California its on the 23rd. When is it Hawaii? After President Roosevelt moved it from the last Thursday in November to the fourth Thursday, some folks a pretty upset. From what I understand, some states are having it on the 23rd and others on the 30th.

In Virginia it is the 23rd, but Mather says the Austins are having it on the 30th. Charlie says that regardless of what FDR says, the Democrats can celebrate Franksiving whenever they want, the Austins are commemorating the real Thanksgiving. According to him

its all about money, that the President gave in so the stores can have a longer holiday shopping season. Doesn't that just sound like something Daddy would say?

Something you said in your last letter got me to thinking. As much as we miss you, the other families certainly miss their husbands and fathers too. When you mentioned that the ship hosts Thanksgiving dinner for everyone, I thought, why not do the same thing here.

I was able to secure the cooperation of the station commander, the use of the main hangar, and the help of the Navy Wives Organization in putting together a Thanksgiving dinner for the families of the air group. Naturally, some of the men aren't married. Some of the families have somewhere to go. In all, forty four families have committed to participate. It should be a nice affair.

After that is over, I'm going to have to get serious about getting ready for the move. The house sounds lovely. I'm sure it will do nicely for us. I'm excited to have a yard! I assume it will be furnished with the basics. Otherwise we'll have to scrounge something up. I'm so glad that you were able to get it.

You will probably need some money to get the utilities hooked up and other expenses. I will wire you some money after you have had enough time to have received this letter. I think a hundred dollars should do. Find a bank nearby and open an account for us. Once you

do, let me know the name of the bank and the account number so I can wire the rest of our money directly to the bank.

I haven't tried selling the car yet. I'm afraid that if I do, we won't have a way to get around. I think I will put a classified ad in the newspaper after Thanksgiving. If it sells, I'll have to figure something else out until we move.

The school district has hired someone to take my place. She will be observing my class and getting to know the students until the end of the semester. I was wondering if you could contact the school district there and see if there are any teaching positions coming open. If there isn't anything permanent, tell them that I could substitute.

Yes, I still have my grass skirt from all those years ago. Maybe I can take a lesson and learn how to do the hula for real. Would you like that?

The kids are doing fine, now. I had to keep Austin home for a couple of days last week. He must have picked up a bug somewhere. They miss you and are excited about the move. They haven't really been here long enough this time to get real settled.

You will be missing our birthiversary in a couple of weeks, too. Once we get there, we'll have to make up for it all, including Christmas, and have one big celebration.

I can't tell you how much I miss you. As much as I miss you, I love you even more. I trust all is well with you. Be careful up there in the wild blue yonder. Oh, I forgot. The "wild blue yonder" belongs to the Army Air Corps. I have to admit, it is a catchy tune. Well, Flyboy, be careful anyway, wherever you are.

Love Seannie

On Thanksgiving, Geannie's dinner was a huge success. The families who attended really enjoyed themselves. Many of them were also planning on making the move to Hawaii. Others had decided to return to their own hometowns.

The day after Thanksgiving she went to the bank and withdrew one hundred dollars and took it over to the Western Union office and had it wired to Curly. She also put their car up for sale and immediately began to receive inquires.

Their birthaversay came and went like any other day. The very next day, Geannie received a letter from Curly.

December 1, 1939

Dear Gower,

I hope this gets to you in time. Happy birthaversary. The last eighteen years seem to have passed so quickly. Yet on the other hand it seems as if it were another lifetime. Look at how far we have come. Happy birthday, too. You're not getting older, you're getting better! If you were here, I'd miss it any way. We will be at sea all week and won't be back until the 9th. But I certainly will be thinking of you.

I hope your Thanksgiving went well. I'm glad you thought of the men's families. I let them know what you were doing for them. That's just like you. I'm so proud of you. We had ours on the 23rd too. It was nice. Ever try to feed three thousand people at once? The hangar deck was filled with tables from one end to the other.

I did get the money, and I did as you said and opened an account at the First Bank of Hawaii. They have a branch office nearby. The account number is 0048 4457. I will get the lights and gas switched over and the telephone hooked up when I get back from this cruise. The house should be available by then. Yes, it does come furnished with the basics. When I was shown the house, the furniture looked in pretty good shape.

I also found the school district office. That is cutting it pretty close for the next semester, but they will keep you in mind for a substitute.

I wish I was there to help you pack up and move. At least I'll be here to get in on this end of it. I will have a moving van lined up to get us moved in. It might have to be the next day since I doubt I'll find anyone to do it on New Years Day. We'll just have to camp out with what we have.

Since my last letter, I did see Romona again. She is excited for you to come. I ran into her while I was at the hospital for my physical, which I passed. It was rather embarrassing. I had to drop my drawers for her so she could stick me in the butt with a needle.

She invited me over for Sunday dinner again and we had a good visit. It was nice to have a home cooked meal again. I can't wait to set down to some of your cooking again. I must say, she can sure bake. Thanks for having her look after me. You know I wouldn't be going to her place to have dinner without your approval.

I don't have much more to say. It has been pretty routine around here. A month from today and you will be here. I agree, we'll have to have a big celebration.

I'm counting the days.

Love Curly

The rest of December went quickly. Geannie and the kids got serious about packing as the time got closer. She got an offer on the car that worked out very well. The buyer offered what she was asking and was willing to wait a couple of weeks to claim it. Needless to say, that was the offer she accepted.

Geannie turned her classroom over to her replacement during the last week so she could get ready for the move. There was so much to do. She had everything boxed up and ready for the moving van to come on Friday to haul it to docks across the bay to be loaded aboard the ship. She had to close out their apartment and their bank account. She kept enough money for the voyage and wired the rest to the bank in Hawaii. When school let out on the Friday before Christmas the kids came home to an empty house. Over the weekend and on Christmas day they were living out of their luggage. On Sunday, she turned the

car over to the buyer and put the check in safe place in her luggage. Despite spending Christmas Day in an empty apartment, excitement filled the air. They celebrated the day in quite a different manner that year.

On Tuesday morning they had their luggage waiting out on the street. Freddy and Susan showed up right on schedule to take them across the bay to the docks. Freddy came with a navy jeep to haul their luggage, while they rode over with Susan in her car.

The SS Lurline was tied up at the Broadway Pier in San Diego where Freddy and Susan dropped them off. They waited while Geannie checked in with the ticket agent. Everything was in order and her cargo was aboard. She checked their luggage, which was taken to their stateroom. Freddy and Susan bid them bon voyage and Geannie, Sandy, and Austin boarded the ship and joined the other passengers along the railing for the departure. From the ship, they could see Freddy and Susan down on the pier.



At precisely ten o'clock, the ship's whistle sounded as streams of confetti drifted down on the passengers and spectators alike. They could feel the movement of the eighteen thousand ton ocean liner as it was being pulled away from the pier by three tugboats. The passengers cheered and waved at those assembled on the dock.

A few moments later, the ship was out in the bay. The feel of motion was added to by the ever so slight vibration of the ship's two propellers as it slowly began making way through San Diego Bay. Geannie took the kids to the other side of the ship where they could see Coronado and North Island as they passed by. Geannie had so many memories of those places.

As the Lurline rounded North Island, she passed along side the Saratoga, tied up at the pier at the air station. Both had been such a big part of Curly's earlier career. Soon the liner was gliding past Zuniga Point, the southwest extremity of North Island. Geannie could see the strip of beach that they had enjoyed so much. Moments later the Lurline made a right turn, passed the lighthouse at tip of Point Loma and headed out to sea.

The vibration from the propellers increased as the six hundred and thirty two foot ship picked up

speed as she steamed out into the open Pacific. Geannie had often watched the ships as they sailed out to sea and wondered what it would be like to be on the ship, looking back. It was an almost eerie feeling as the shore grew more distant. As the ship traveled farther out, more and more of the coast came into view as it became more distant.

Geannie could have stood their longer and watched until the coast disappeared altogether, but Sandy and Austin were anxious to go check out their stateroom and get on with their adventure. Most of Lurline's staterooms were first class, as was theirs. It was located on the outside of the ship with two portholes.

It was quite spacious with two double beds. Austin called dibs on the one he wanted, leaving the other one for his mother and sister. Their luggage was there waiting for them. Geannie assigned out the drawers and closet space and they each put their clothes away. There was no sense in living out of a suitcase for six days.

After their belongings were situated, Geannie released the kids to go exploring on their own. Geannie gathered up a few valuables, including the check for the car and took it to the purser's office to be put in a safe deposit box. While there, she had them send a telegram to Curly. It said simply:

PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p style="margin: 0;">This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: small;">NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT J.C. WELLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT</p>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">SIGNS</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">DL=Day Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">NM=Night Message</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">NL=Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">LCO=Deferred Cable</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">NLT=Cable Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">WLT=Week-End Letter</td></tr> </table>	DL=Day Letter	NM=Night Message	NL=Night Letter	LCO=Deferred Cable	NLT=Cable Night Letter	WLT=Week-End Letter
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The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

Received at

1939 DEC 26 AM 11 08

CMDR SHEFFIELD BRASON USN

COMMANDER ENTERPRISE AIR GROUP

FORD ISLAND NAVAL AIR STATION

TERRITORY OF HAWAII

ON OUR WAY STOP SEE YOU SOON STOP GEANNIE STOP

MRS GEAN BRASON

AT SEA ABOARD SS LURLINE

Gennie joined a group that was assembling for a tour of the ship which took them throughout the ship, showing them where all of the amenities were located. The guide informed them that ship had been built in 1932 at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts. The Lurline was the newest of three sister ships owned and operated by the Maston Line. She typically operated out of San Francisco, on the West Coast, Hawaii, Australia run. The ships of the Matson Line rotated through Los Angeles and San Diego, providing service from those ports as well.

Geannie learned that it could carry seven hundred and fifteen passengers and had a crew of three hundred and fifty nine. Her cruising speed was 19 knots which is equivalent to 25 miles an hour, with a top speed of 22 knots. She wished Curly was with her to explain things to her. After a ninety minute tour that took them from stem to stern and top to bottom, they returned to the lobby where it began.

She was looking around in some of the shops, when an announcement came over the loud system, "All passengers return to your quarters and standby for the lifeboat drill!"

Geannie returned to their cabin on B Deck just as Austin showed up. Sandy was already inside. They reviewed the evacuation instructions posted on the inside of the door and waited for the signal.

Three short blasts of the whistle were sounded and they left their room and joined the orderly flow of passengers in the corridor. They made their way to the nearest stairs and ascended one level and out onto the boat deck. The ship's hands had the canvas covers removed and assisted the passengers into the boats. Once all of the boats were loaded, they were dismissed and invited to enjoy all that the Lurline had to offer.

There was something for everyone, adults, teenagers, and youngsters. Some of the activities included potato sack races and musical chairs. They opted for one of the two swimming pools. Austin was sent into the bathroom to change with instructions to wait until he was told that he could come out. Meanwhile, Geannie and Sandy changed in the stateroom. Given the "all clear", Austin came out of the bathroom and bolted out into the corridor and raced off to the pool. He had found it on his own earlier and was already in the pool when Geannie and Sandy got there.

Austin had found a beach ball and tossed it to his sister as she stepped into the pool. The three of them played catch, tossing the ball around in a triangle. It soon evolved into a game of keep away. Being taller, Geannie definitely had the advantage there. After a while they tired of the game and Geannie got in a few laps before getting out of the pool, leaving the kids to play.

She put a wrap around her waist, donned her hat and sunglasses and sat back in a chaise lounge with an ice cold Coca-Cola on the table next to her as she watched the kids and read.

"Is this lounge chair taken?" a man asked.

"No." Geannie replied. "Help yourself."

As the stranger sat next to her, Geannie hollered at Austin, "Hey! Hey! Don't drown your sister!"

"Are those your kids?" The man asked.

"Yes. That's Austin and that's Sandy." she said pointing them out. "And I'm Geannie." she said as she extended her hand.

"Charles, Charles Tucker at your service." the man responded. "Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

"Likewise." Geannie responded.

Then Charles asked the inevitable question, "Are the three of you traveling alone?"

"Why, yes. We are." she answered. "We're on our way to join my husband in Hawaii. He is a Commander in the Navy."

Mr. Tucker's countenance fell. "Oh I see." he said. "I was hoping a beautiful woman like yourself might be eligible."

"I'm afraid not." Geannie blushed. "What about you? Where are you going, Mr. Tucker?"

"I'm actually on my way to Australia to inspect a mining facility owned by the company I represent."

"Are y'all travelin alone?" Geannie asked.

"Unfortunately, yes." he answered.

"I take it that you don't have a family." Geannie observed.

"I was married, but travel took me from home so often that my wife found someone else." Mr. Tucker related. "We have two children about the age of yours, they live with their mother."

"I haven't seen my husband for three months. As lonely as it gets, I could never do that to him."

Realizing that he wasn't going to get anywhere with this one, Charles was ready to move on in his quest for companionship on the voyage. "Can I at least buy you a drink sometime and maybe take a turn on the dance floor?" he asked as he got up.

Geannie replied, "No thank you on the drink. But if you happen see me, I would oblige you to a dance."

"Well, then, if I happen to run into you, a dance it is." he said in parting. "Good day, Mrs....?"

"Brason." Geannie answered.

"Good day, Mrs. Brason."

"And good day to you, Mr. Tucker."

After a while, Geannie went over to the edge of the pool and called Sandy and Austin over. "It's getting about time to get ready for dinner. Sandy, why don't you come with me. You can stay another twenty minutes, Austin. But no longer."

Geannie handed Sandy a towel as she climbed out of the pool. After drying off she wrapped the towel around herself and the two of them returned to the stateroom. Sandy took a quick shower while

Geannie changed her clothes. Sandy was getting dressed when Austin knocked on the door. After she was decent, they invited him in.

Once they were dressed for dinner, they went to the Waikiki Dining Room. The food was unbelievable! Everything imaginable was available. "I want a hamburger." Austin announced.

"A hamburger?" Geannie gasped. "You can have a hamburger anytime. Look at all of this. You can have anything you want, except a hamburger or a hot dog."

All three of them went for a seafood platter.

After dinner, they went to the Lurline Theater where the Wizard of Oz was playing. They had wanted to see it in August when it was playing at the Coronado Theater. Something came up and they never got to see it then. They sure enjoyed it that night.

As they went to bed, Geannie tucked them in after prayers. In a crackling witch's voice she said, "I'll get you, my pretties." Then she climbed into bed with Sandy. The motion of the ship was very relaxing and soon lulled them all to sleep.

The next day, there were plenty of activities to be involved with. Geannie and Sandy signed up for hula lessons each afternoon. At one point on the second day when Geannie stopped by their stateroom, there was a telegram from Curly waiting for her. It read:

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Received at

1939 DEC 27 AM 08 17
MRS GEAN BRASON
AT SEA ABOARD THE SS LURLINE

MESSAGE RECEIVED STOP WILL BE WAITING STOP

CMDR SHEFFIELD BRASON USN
COMMANDER ENTERPRISE AIR GROUP
FORD ISLAND NAVAL AIR STATION
TERRITORY OF HAWAII

On the third night, after dinner, Geannie sat and listened to the orchestra and watched the couples dancing. She was missing Curly when she was approached by an obviously inebriated man with a drink in each hand. He sat down at Geannie's table and began to make his moves. Before she could make her escape, she felt herself being pulled from her seat by one arm. "Come, they're playing our song." She looked to see who it was. It was Mr. Tucker.

"Thank you for rescuing me from that drunk. Mr. Tucker. I believe I owe you a second dance for that."

Geannie wasn't a bad dancer, but Mr. Tucker was excellent and knew how to lead. All Geannie had to do was to follow. He made it easy for her to be graceful. As that song ended, the orchestra began playing "Moonlight Serenade". The pair assumed the posture for the foxtrot. Geannie felt as if she were gliding across the floor; two steps backward, two steps to the right.

"This is our favorite dance tune." Geannie said. "But my husband isn't near the dancer that you are, Mr. Tucker." Geannie complimented.

At the end of the second number, a promise had been kept and a debt paid. Mr. Tucker returned Geannie to her table. "Thank you for the dance, Mrs. Brason. You're a pretty good dancer yourself."

Geannie had enough for the evening and returned to the stateroom and got ready for bed. A little later, Sandy and Austin returned from a teen activity that they had been too. Even though Austin was only twelve, Sandy convinced the chaperons to let her brother come in with her. The trip was half over! In three more days they would arrive at their new home.

There was certainly no shortage of things to do. Geannie found that one of her favorite activities was standing along the railing and watch the sea pass by. In the evenings, she loved to go out on deck after dark and look up at the billions of stars in the night sky.

She finally understood Curly's love for the sea. Maybe someday they could experience a voyage such as this together. At one point, they passed one of the Lurline's sister ships passing in the opposite direction. The two ships blew their whistles in greeting.

Geannie and Sandy attended their hālau, or hula lesson, each afternoon. The kumu hula guided them through the steps of three separate dances and explained the meaning of each. Naturally the instructor, a native Hawaiian, offered merchandise to make the experience more authentic. Geannie bought a full length strapless Hawaiian hula gown with a four inch ruffle at the bottom for herself and one for Sandy. Hers was blue with a white floral print, while Sandy's was red. A strapless dress is not something Geannie would typically wear, but this seemed to fit the occasion. She took them to the ship's tailor and had them fitted to their liking. She also bought couple of leis apiece and a phonograph record that featured the music for the dances they were learning. For Curly and Austin, she bought matching Aloha shirts.

Curly's matched hers and Austin's matched Sandy's. After the last lesson, those who felt confident enough, could perform in front of live audience. They worked hard to learn the steps so they could be ready.

Their chance came during the last full day of the cruise which happened to be New Year's Eve. They felt confident as they and a dozen other women and girls of all ages stepped out onto the stage adorned in their costumes. Gracefully swaying to live music they told the story with their hands and their bodies as the instructor narrated the meaning. Geannie couldn't wait until she and Sandy could dance for Curly. She also had a private performance in mind for him with her old grass skirt.

During the course of the voyage, Geannie got to know several other passengers that she socialized with. Mr. Tucker, who had found a traveling companion, was part of that group. Sandy and Austin had their friends as well. On New Year's Eve, the Lurline went all out. After a fabulous Hawaiian luau, the kids and their friends went off to a teen activity while Geannie joined her new friends for an evening of entertainment and dancing. At the conclusion of the entertainment, the orchestra began to play and the floor filled with dancers. Mr. Tucker treated each of the ladies in the group to dance. Occasionally, one of the men asked Geannie for a dance. But alas, as the clock struck midnight to ring in 1940, Geannie was alone, wondering what Curly was doing at that moment.



Not long after midnight, Geannie retired to their stateroom. Sandy and Austin returned soon after. This was their last night aboard ship. In the morning when they awoke, they were anchored off Diamond Head. The ship had dropped anchor there around three o'clock.

After the passengers were served breakfast the Lurline weighed anchor and made way for Honolulu Harbor. While the ship steamed slowly into the Harbor, Geannie and the kids packed their baggage and prepared to disembark. The Lurline tied up at the pier at nine o'clock. With Sandy and Austin in tow, Geannie stopped by the purser's office and retrieved her valuables and placed them in her handbag. When they emerged on deck, they were greeted by hoards of people waiting on the dock. Geannie scanned the crowd below, searching for Curly. She was able to pick him out of the crowd because of his white uniform as he made his way toward the gangplank. When it came their turn to leave the ship they were meet by Hawaiian greeters with a lei and an "Aloha."

* * * * *

For 75 years after Lincoln issued his Thanksgiving Proclamation, succeeding presidents honored the tradition and annually issued their own Thanksgiving Proclamation, declaring the last Thursday in November as the day of Thanksgiving. However, in 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not. In 1939, the last Thursday of November was going to be November 30. Retailers complained to FDR that this only left 24 shopping days to Christmas and begged him to push Thanksgiving just one week earlier. It was determined that most people do their Christmas shopping after Thanksgiving and retailers hoped that with an extra week of shopping, people would buy more.

So when FDR announced his Thanksgiving Proclamation in 1939, he declared the date of Thanksgiving to be Thursday, November 23, the second-to-last Thursday of the month.

The new date for Thanksgiving caused a lot of confusion. Calendars were now incorrect. Schools who had planned vacations and tests now had to reschedule. Thanksgiving had been a big day for football games, as it is today, so the game schedule had to be examined.

Political opponents of FDR and many others questioned the president's right to change the holiday and stressed the breaking of precedent and disregard for tradition. Many believed that changing a cherished holiday just to appease businesses was not a sufficient reason for change. Atlantic City's mayor derogatorily called November 23 "Franksgiving."

The SS Lurline was an actual luxury liner belonging to the Matson line as described. Whether or not she actually sailed from San Diego to Honolulu at the time depicted is hypothetical. The pictures are actual pictures of the Lurline during the time period. The first one is at the Broadway Pier in San Diego. The second is in Honolulu Harbor next the Aloha Tower.

The heading on the telegrams is the actual letter head used by Western Union. The first line of the heading is the date and time the telegram was sent, followed by who it is to and the where it is to be delivered. The teletype machines did not have a period so the word "STOP" is used. The end of the telegram has the name of the sender and the return delivery location.