

## Chapter XLIV

### Remembering Geannie

December 17, 1941 – December 31, 1941

After standing there for how long he didn't know, both Marie and his parents noticed him at about the same time and rushed out to greet him. "Curly!" Marie exclaimed. "We weren't expecting you for two more days. Where are Geannie and kids?"

"Didn't you get the telegram?" he asked softly.

"Yes," Marie said. "It said, 'Geannie and the kids are fine. Am brining them home.'"

From the looks of Sheffield, everything wasn't fine. He said, "Let's go in. You will want to set down for what I have to tell you."

He led them into his parents home. After everyone was settled. He said. "No they are not fine. The message should have read, "Geannie and the kids are gone."

"But you said that you were bringing them home." Marie protested.

"I did. They're at the mortuary."

Still not catching on, Marie pressed further, "Land sakes! What are they doing there?"

Emmett interrupted, "Because they're dead."

Marie was stunned into silence.

Sheffield very slowly unfolded the horrible events of that day ten days ago. As he rehearsed it, the only sound other than his voice, was sobbing from Marie, Emmett, and Ellen. When he finished telling the story, he said, "Part of me died with them. The part known as Curly. I want him buried with them. Please just call me Sheffield from now on.

"Speaking of burial, Dad will you call Walt and have him come over. We need to make arrangements for a funeral."

While Emmett made the phone call. Marie and Ellen had a lot of questions for Sheffield. Some he couldn't answer. It only took Walt a moment to leave his office and walk next door. He too was surprised to find his brother there. He knew immediately that something was wrong. He got a condensed version of the story before he and Sheffield left together to go to the mortuary.

The funeral director told Sheffield and Walt that under the circumstances, the sooner the funeral could be arranged the better. Ten days is long time to keep a body as it was. Tomorrow was too soon, so they decided on Friday at one o'clock. As far as a viewing was concerned, they would wait until Friday morning to make the decision. If they opened the caskets now, the bodies would certainly not be fit for viewing by then.

They next discussed burial arrangements. Geannie was to be placed next to Charles Emmett. The other side of her was to be reserved for Sheffield. Sandy and Austin would be buried on the other side of

Charles Emmett. Arrangements with the funeral home taken care of, Walt and Sheffield returned home and with input from Marie, began make plans for the service.

While Walt and Sheffield were gone, word began to spread quickly. By the time they got back, Geannie's brothers had all been notified as had Sarah. They all came straight over. Shenandoah had also been told. Sarah took it upon herself to inform all of the out of town relatives. A gathering for both families was hastily put together for that evening at the Austin Mansion.

It had been two years since anyone had seen Geannie and the kids. Now to realize that it was for the last time made for the most subdued gathering ever. They were all looking forward to having them move home while Sheffield went off to war. The telegram had been garbled and the word "gone" came across as "xne". Everyone had just assumed that it was supposed to have read "fine".

As they learned for the first time of how they had died, Sheffield relived the emotions of that day all over, yet again. The evening did turn a bit light hearted as memories of Geannie were shared.

Everyone had been told of Sheffield's comment that Curly had died with them and that he would prefer to be called Sheffield. After calling him that for more than forty years, it was difficult to remember to call him Sheffield.

Sheffield placed a couple of telephone calls to their old friends stationed on the east coast. First he called Freddy and Susan who were in Washington, D.C. and Mason and Pat Owen who were in Norfolk. Susan took it particularly hard. Both couples said that they would try to attend the funeral.

That night, Sheffield stayed at his parents home. There were too many memories of all the times that they stayed in her old room. He had become accustomed to not sleeping with her from all the times that he was away. It was difficult knowing that he would never sleep with her again, or see her face, or hear her voice. The vision of loveliness that she was that morning when he said goodbye was how he wanted to remember her until the day that he died. Not how she looked when he saw her at the hospital, bandaged, bleeding and dying. Nor how she was laid out in a beautiful white gown in her casket. If only he hadn't been in such a hurry to leave and would have lingered for a few minutes. She could have given herself to him one last time, like she wanted to. Again that night, she came to him in his dreams, where she did.

Thursday was a day of rest for Sheffield after sailing from Hawaii and flying across country. He didn't leave the house. Walt came to see him and took care of the last minute details for the funeral service. His bandage hadn't been changed for three days, so his mother took care of it for him. Only a few more days and he could have the stitches taken out.

During the day many out of town relatives began arriving. Marie put many of them up at the Austin Mansion. The rest stayed with Charlie, Winslow, Stirling, and Sarah.

The morning of the funeral, he put on his dress blue uniform and Walt came by to take him to the

funeral home. The director had unsealed caskets to inspect the bodies to transfer the bodies from the shipping caskets to ones for burial. He found that Geannie was suitable for viewing, even the white gardenia was still fresh. However, Sandy and Austin were not fit for a public viewing.

Sheffield wanted to spend a moment alone with them before they were all taken to the church. During that quiet moment, he felt as if he wasn't alone. Somehow he felt that they were very near, if not right there with him. As he stood over Geannie's body, looking down at her, he said, "I kept my promise and brought you home. I just never thought it would be like this." Through his tears told her one more time, "I love you."

Standing next to him, Geannie heard every word he said. She wished that she could make him hear her. She had so much she wanted to tell him. Sandy and Austin stood next to her while their escorts, Charles and Charles Emmett stood back. Geannie hated to see him so distraught. She wanted him to know the peace that they were in. She wanted to assure him that they weren't really gone. She wanted him to know that she was grateful to him for bringing them home. She meant it when with her dieing breath she promised that she would be waiting for him when it came his time, whenever that might be. Above everything else, she wanted him to understand that her love for him did not die.

After a few moments, Walt and the funeral director returned to the room. "Sheffiled." Walt said, "Its time to go." He put his arm around his brother's shoulder and pulled him in close and then lead him out of the room. The funeral director remained behind and closed Geannie's casket.

Once at the church, the three caskets were laid out in a line, with Geannie's being last. Sheffield stood at her head with her mother next to him. Friends and family filed past the closed caskets of Sandy and Austin. Their most recent school portraits were displayed amongst the flowers that covered their caskets.

As people filed past, more than once someone commented on how she looked like the angel that she was. Each one stopped to offer their condolences to Sheffield for the loss of his family. Each in turn greeted Marie who had lost her precious daughter and grandchildren. Sheffield was particularly comforted to see both Freddy and Susan and Mason and Pat come though the line.

Once the viewing was complete, the family gathered around as Emmett offered the family prayer. Everyone was in tears as the casket was closed for the last time. The procession of the three caskets were wheeled to the chapel, Sheffield and Marie, arm in arm, while the rest of the family followed behind them. The chapel was full, as many old friends and neighbors had come to pay tribute.

Also present were many who where not seen, as if they were seated in an invisible balcony. Front and center were Geannie, Sandy, and Austin with Charles and Charles Emmett on either side. This other world congregation also included grandparents and other family members who had already passed beyond

the veil of death. Although they were unseen, many of the mortal congregation sensed their presence.

Walt began the service with a welcome and an introduction to the services for Gean Marie Austin Brason, Sandra Gean Brason, and Austin Sheffield Brason. Following the invocation the congregation sang "Abide With Me". Sylvia and Curtis each paid brief tributes to their cousins followed by remarks from Emmett.

Emmett paused for a long moment as he stood at the pulpit, staring blankly down through his tears on the three caskets lined up below him. With emotion ringing in his quivering voice he began. "In the nearly fifty years of my ministry, this is by far the most difficult sermon I have ever had to give. Proverbs seventeen six says, 'Children's children are the crown of old men.' As a grandfather I have been blessed with twelve of them. Each one is a crown in my old age. Each one is unique and special. Everyone of them think that they are my favorite. I'm sorry to disappoint you kids, but you are all my favorite.

"Watching each of them grow up was been a joy. Sadly there is one who never made it past one day in this life and I wonder what he would be like now at age eleven. I remember how difficult it was to loose him. Now, I look down the caskets of two more of my grandchildren. I don't know which is more difficult, not having any memories of Charles Emmett, or remembering the special times with Sandy and Austin, knowing that there will not be any more.

"They were great kids. Sandy was such a beautiful young woman, and so talented. She was so much like her mother. In the last letter we got from her, she was looking forward with excitement to attending a dance with a special young man. She told us how she really liked him. What a future, what promise.

"In the same envelope was a letter from Austin. He talked about the last driving lesson his father had given him. They drove downtown and he was so proud of how he had mastered parallel parking. He had all but mastered flying and was anxiously awaiting his next birthday so he could finally take his solo flight. He wanted so much to one day follow in his father's footsteps and become a naval aviator. What a future, what a promise.

"Why was the promises of such futures cut so short in youth? In all of my years of helping people with such questions, I told them that asking "why" and "what if" was counterproductive. Now I find myself wanting to ask those same questions.

"If there is one thing I have learned over the years, it is that God in his infinite wisdom knows what he is doing. Most of the time it isn't very clear to us and we just have to trust him. Trust him that there is a purpose and meaning to life. So let us each examine the lives of Sandy and Austin. Look closely at the influence they may have had on you. What influence did you have on them? What can we learn form their traits and characteristics? How can we be better people for having known them?

“Sandy taught me that I should be more observant of the needs of others. She was always looking for way to help and seemed to find them in small little ways. For example, the last time that they were here she noticed that magazines on our coffee table were all helter skelter and took it upon herself to organize them for us. It wasn't a big thing, but it mattered. She helped me realize that sometimes its the little things that matter most.

“Austin was so full of life and always had to be doing something. He never had a lot to say, but he always expressed his appreciation for the things others did for him. He always thanked his grandmothers for a nice meal. Thats something I'm afraid that I take for granted. I need to be more appreciative of the little things others do for me. If we take something from the lessons of their lives and make them part of ours, they'll always be a part of us. Just maybe it is the very reason that God placed them in our lives.

“We will miss them and life will go on for us. It won't be so easy for Sheffield. May each of us look for the little things that we can do for him in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Maybe it will be a conversation with him or after he goes back to the war, a short letter. You'll have to be like Sandy and be perceptive of what he might need. Maybe you could be like Austin and tag along and be interested in what he is interested in and ask questions like Austin did; then listen intently to what he has to say.

“Sandy and Austin were as good as any young people I have ever known and I commend their souls to God. There will always be a special place in my heart for them as there is for Charles Emmett, and all the rest of my grandchildren.

“I have to just mention Geannie before I close. Sarah and Walt will talk about her, but I just have to say how much I loved her. She was a very special person, as I'm sure you'll all agree. I am a better person for her having been in my life.

“Sheffield, you are a very fortunate man to have had such a lovely family. I am truly sorry for your loss. Know this, they have gone onto a far better world. Because of the war, during the months and years to come, we will see much suffering and loss. At least they will be spared what some of us may have to endure.

“May God bless you, Sheffield as you go back to a war that has already cost you so dearly. And to my grandsons who will most likely also be going off to war, may God bless you as well. The same to all who answer the call to arms.”

Sarah barely managed to hold on to her emotions as she gave a brief life sketch and and made a few comments about Geannie. She began by saying, “Geannie and I were the sisters that neither of us had. We had always been more than just cousins as we both had Austin and Winslow blood flowing through our veins. For those of you who might not know this, not only were our mothers sisters, but our fathers were brothers.

"I am only five and half weeks older than Geannie so we pretty much grew up together. Then when my mother died when I was ten and my father subsequently suffered a nervous break down, Aunt Maire stepped in and took over the role of my mother, even though I continued to live with my father. So as you can tell, sisters couldn't have been any closer that we were.

"Today, I am here to pay tribute to my cousin, my sister, and my best friend. Gean Marie Austin Brason was born on December seventh, eighteen ninety eight in Roanoke, Virginia at the Austin Mansion, just kitty corner from where we are gathered today. She was the last of five children born to the late Senator Charles Austin the third and Marie Beatrice Winslow.

"Also born that day in the house next door was the love of her life, Sheffield Brason or Curly as everyone called him. The three of us and Geannie's brother Stirling and Sheffield's brother Walt grew up as playmates and best friends. We did everything together, whether it was fishing or swimming at the lake or playing baseball or going to City Drug for sodas. It was easy to tell at an early age the special bond there was between Geannie and Sheffield. Their whole world seemed to revolve around each other.

"We all went to school and church together as we grew up. During the summer that they turned fifteen, the true love they had for each other began to manifest itself. About the same time, Walt and I began to be serious about each other as well, as did Stirling and our friend Loraine Reeves. When we graduated from High School in nineteen seventeen and went on to our own lives, Curly and Geannie became engaged, Stirling and Loraine were married, and before going off to the war, Walt proposed to me.

"While Geannie attended Hollins University, Sheffield attended the Naval Academy. It was during that time that we almost lost Geannie to the influenza outbreak. She was miraculously spared and in nineteen twenty one she graduated from Hollins with a teaching degree and Sheffield received his commission in the United States Navy.

"Geannie and Curly were married in this very chapel on December seventh, nineteen twenty one. For the first two years of their marriage she taught school here in Roanoke while he was stationed in Norfolk. Nearly every weekend, one or the other was either coming or going.

"They moved to Pensacola, Florida for Sheffield's flight training. It was there that their first child, Sandra Gean was born on November first, nineteen twenty four. For the next five and a half years they lived in Coronado, California where Curly was stationed. It was there that Austin Sheffield was born on August sixteenth, nineteen twenty seven. While still living in California, their third child, Charles Emmett was born on April ninth, nineteen thirtieth here in Roanoke while Geannie was home for a visit. Sadly he only lived a few hours.

"Geannie was a terrific mother who devoted her life to her children and her husband. During the years when the children were little, Geannie taught piano lessons. The greatest challenge in her life was

loosing Charles Emmett. Not being able to have any more children was devastating to Geannie as well and it took a great deal of effort for her to work through those setbacks. It helped when Sheffield was transferred to Washington, D.C. and they were close to home again. For the next several years we got to have them close enough for them to come home often.

“After two years in Washington, they lived in Providence, Rhode Island for year while Curly attended graduate school. When they moved to Norfolk, Geannie returned to teaching school. Next they went to Pensacola for the second time and then returned to Norfolk for a short time. I'll never forget the last time I saw Geannie and the kids. It was two and half years ago as we said good bye when they moved back to California. When Sheffield was transferred to Hawaii a few months later they went with him. Geannie loved living in Hawaii despite the fact that it meant that they couldn't come home. As the war drew closer, they made plans for her and the kids to come home. Who would have thought that this would be their homecoming?

“Geannie loved the motion pictures. She was always proud of her role in the film, Wounded Dragon. Looking back on it now, we can see that it was a foreshadowing of her death. A little before eight o'clock on the morning of Sunday December seventh, nineteen forty one, her forty third birthday and twentieth wedding anniversary, while on their way to church, Geannie, Sandy, and Austin were murdered in cold blood by a ruthless enemy, along with twenty four hundred others during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

“So ended the mortal existence of our beloved Geannie. She was preceded in death by her grandparents, her father, and her baby boy and joined in death by her other children, leaving only Sheffield behind. We all will miss her. Sheffield, our hearts and prayers go out to you.”

Following Sarah, Geannie's brother, Winslow, paid tribute by singing Stephen Foster's beloved ballad, Genie With the Light Brown Hair, only he took the liberty to make a couple of changes to make it suit his sister.

*Borne like a vapor on the sweet summer air;  
I see her tripping where the bright streams play,  
Happy as the daisies that dance on her way.  
Many were the wild notes her merry voice would pour,  
Many were the blithe birds that warbled them o'er:  
I dream of Geannie with the auburn hair,  
Floating, like a vapor, on the soft summer air.*

*I long for Jeanie with the daydawn smile,  
Radiant in gladness, warm with winning guile;*

*I hear her melodies, like joys gone by,  
Sighing round my heart o'er the fond hopes that die:  
Sighing like the night wind and sobbing like the rain,  
Waiting for the lost one that comes not again:  
I long for Geannie, and my heart bows low,  
Never more to find her where the bright waters flow.*

*I sigh for Geannie, but her light form strayed,  
Far from the fond hearts round her native glade;  
Her smiles have vanished and her sweet songs flown,  
Flitting like the dreams that have cheered us and gone.  
Now the nodding wild flowers may wither on the shore  
While her gentle fingers will cull them no more:  
Oh! I sigh for Geannie with the auburn hair,  
Floating, like a vapor, on the soft summer air.*

Walt began his remarks by saying, “Geannie was a charming woman who lived a charmed life. We are here today to celebrate her life and the lives of her children. They were taken from us as innocent victims of our nation's Day of Infamy, December seventh, nineteen forty one. Ironically, they were killed on their way to church that Sunday morning so they could practice for a part they were to have participated in that day.

“December seventh will live on in the collective memory of our nation, but for those of us who knew them, it will also be remembered as the day Geannie and Sheffield were born, and the day that they were married. Sheffield coined a term that best described their birthdays and anniversary. He referred to it as their birthaversary.

“Sylvia, Curtis, and my father did an excellent job of recounting the lives Sandy, and Austin and paying tribute to them. And my dear wife, Sarah, and Winslow have done the same for Geannie.

“This, I must say, is the most difficult funeral service that I have conducted during my ministry. I have known Geannie all of my life, having grown up next door to the Austins. As kids growing up, she and Stirling and Sheffield and I were playmates, pals, and best friends. Geannie was my brother's wife. She and my wife were cousins and practically sisters. She was my dear friend whom I knew well and loved.

“It is my prayer that when we all leave this day, we will do so filled with hope. For as tragic as their deaths were, there is hope. Hope in the glorious resurrection and a life hereafter through Jesus Christ.

“Sheffield told me that for her Bible study that morning, she had turned to First Corinthians chapter fifteen. I know that this is a chapter that she studied often. After Charles Emmett died she came to me with some very deep questions from that chapter as well as others. I have to admit that I couldn't answer them for her.

“Sheffield showed me her bible. I was amazed at the notations and cross references that she had made. It was obvious to me that she was a Bible scholar. Geannie had insights that I have never considered, and here I am a minister.

“But for my text this day, I would like to use verses fifty four, fifty five, and fifty seven of First Corinthians chapter fifteen. Not only did she have these versus underlined in red but they were also shaded over as if they had special significance to her. 'Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

He went on to preach a brief sermon regarding those versus. Then he continued his remarks.

“Geannie understood that death is not the end but the entrance into a far better world. A world free from the cares and sorrows of this world. I think she had a better understanding of what that world holds in store than most of us, including myself. She believed that victory came by overcoming the challenges, setbacks, and heartbreaks of this world.

“It was those challenges, setbacks, and heartbreaks that deepened her understanding of the true meaning of life. She knew that the source of victory over death came through the Lord Jesus Christ. She trusted in the hope that in the end He would wipe away her tears, dry her eyes, heal her broken heart, and take away her sins.

“You might ask, 'What sins could Geannie possibly have?' You see, our sins aren't just the bad things that we do, they are also the good things that we fail to do, if they were in our power to do. She was human just like all of us and had her faults, weaknesses, and short comings. For, as the Apostle Paul wrote, 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' Personally I can't think of any myself either. I'm sure that because of the way she lived her life that when she stands before her Maker to be judged, that He won't be able to think of any either, because they were taken away through the blood of Christ on the cross, just as He did for each of us. If we live our lives in the way that she lived hers, our sins too will not be remembered. It takes more than just living the best we can and Geannie understood that just as faith without works is dead, so is works without faith.

“My father, often said that what a person does is not necessarily who they are. For example, Sheffield, who was left behind by his wife and children, is a pilot and a military officer. Is that who he really is? Those of us who know him, know that he is much more than that. Who a person really is, is defined by

their characteristics and traits, by their integrity and so many other things. Its by how we live and perform the work that we do. Its how he love and treat others.

“Now, Geannie was a teacher, and an excellent one at that. She had away of making her lessons come alive for her students. How you make diagramming a sentence or long division come alive, I'll never know. Geannie was a teacher. Geannie did much more than teach school. Her lessons were far more reaching than the classroom.

“I dare say that she taught valuable lessons to each one of us here today and to the countless people she encountered throughout her life. Her entire life was a lesson in Christian living. Let me elaborate on some of those lessons.

“One of the greatest lessons that Geannie taught us was the lesson of faith. Some of you may remember her laying near death's doors as a young women. It was through faith and prayer that she was spared. She recognized it for the miracle that it was and lived by faith the rest of her life. She was well on her way to developing faith anyway, but that solidified her faith in God.

“Let me tell you something that I learned from her about faith. In her Bible she had a couple of notations next to Hebrews chapter one verse eleven. That verse says, 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' One notation said, 'Faith and fear can not coexist.' the other one said, 'Faith leads to action.'

“She taught us generosity. She was always giving. I know for a fact that she always left a generous tip for those who waited on her. I can tell you that she and Sheffield tithed ten percent of their income to the church and donated to other worthwhile causes. She was giving of her time and abilities, always there to do what she could.

“Geannie taught us courage. She faced her share of adversity and always worked through it. There was the time that she was assaulted, or when she thought that Sheffield had been killed in plane crash, and not to mention loosing Charles Emmett. Don't forget, she was married to my brother for twenty years. Not that that was an adversity, but she courageously followed him wherever he was sent, taking her away from the security of home and family.

“Through the adversities of life that she faced, she learned the lessons of endurance, perseverance, and determination. Certainly the integrity of her character was strengthened by the challenges she faced and overcame. She had a choice when she encountered the difficulties of life, as we all do. She could either choose to let it become a stumbling block or a steppingstone. She always choose the steppingstone even if the stumbling block would have been easier. She in turn taught those lessons to us.

“We all know how determined she was. If she set her mind to something, one had to get out of her

way. She wasn't intimidated by anyone or anything. It didn't matter if she was dealing with a salesman, an Admiral, or even the President of the United States, she had a way accomplishing what she set out to do. She did it in such a manner as she dealt with others that they came away intrigued by the combination her charm, intelligence, and determination.

“She taught us service. Wherever she lived, she found ways to serve others through organizations such as the Methodist Women's Auxiliary and the Navy Wives Organization. She served her family, taking such care good care of her husband and children. She was always looking after the needs of others. She was a role model to the younger women who were married to the men under Sheffield's command; serving them in the absences of their husbands, being far away from their families as well.

“She taught us lessons in compassion by the way she was always reaching out to others in their need, even when it wasn't convenient for her. She quietly went about doing acts of kindness and service for others. Whether it was watching someone's children or taking a meal to someone one who was sick. If there was a funeral, she was there lending a hand in whatever way needed. If there was a birth, she was there with a baby gift. If some one was ill or discouraged she was there. If someone had accomplished something, she was there cheering them on. All of this was done so quietly that they are almost obscure in the pages of her life.

“In yesterday's mail, Marie received a letter of condolence form a friend of Geannie's in Hawaii telling her how much of an influence Geannie had in her life. At the same time we all thought Sheffield was missing and presumed dead, her husband had been involved in the same accident and his fate too was unknown. In that time of great duress for Geannie, she told of how Geannie was there to comfort her. As it turned out, her husband was lost and never recovered. She went on to tell of Geannie's great compassion for her in her loss and how Geannie had helped her through her most difficult hours. She went on to describe how Geannie's example and friendship had shown her how to become a better person.

“Geannie taught us lessons of health in the way that she took care of her body, mind, and soul. She starting running as a way to relieve stress and found that it made her stronger and healthier. When she and the kids spent time at home here in Roanoke she went over to Elmwood park to run. I heard from some on more that one occasion that such behavior was unladylike. There was never a more gracious lady than Geannie and her routine of exercise and fitness paid off for her. She was strong physically. Just ask anyone who was on the receiving end of her pitching arm. She had a lot of energy. She was strong emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

“Geannie taught us to be positive and upbeat, always looking for the good. She taught us to be industrious and thrifty. Who can forget the great lesson in forgiveness as she frankly forgave the man who tried to attack her. How many of us could do that? The list goes on and on. Now it is up to us to apply the

lessons that she taught us. By so doing, Geannie will continue to live on with us in our hearts. If we apply those lessons, they will be perpetuated among those over whom we have influence.

“Now, Geannie, the wonderful teacher that she was, has gone on to the Master Teacher from whom she learned these lessons for herself and from whom we all must learn. I'm confident that Geannie passed the final exam. The question we must ask ourselves is, are we ready to take the final exam? Can we pass? If we paid attention to the lessons that this noble woman taught us, we might just have a chance.

“Now as we lay Geannie, Sandy, and Austin to rest, we must and can go forward with faith and courage, generously serving wherever there is a need, and in everything else just as Geannie taught us by her example.”

Following Walt's sermon, a chorus consisting of her nieces and nephews sang Amazing Grace and then Walt returned to podium and offered the benediction.

At the conclusion of the service, Geannie's brothers, Charlie, Winslow, and Stirling, along with Sheffield's brothers Shenandoah and Walt, and his father Emmett served as Geannie's pall bearers. All of the male cousins did the same for Sandy and Austin.

The procession made its way to the cemetery where they were laid to rest near Charles Emmett. Once they arrived at the cemetery, three freshly dug graves awaited them. It was a solemn occasion indeed as everyone surrounded the three caskets suspended above the cold dark cavern beneath them.

Walt explained that is was final resting place for their mortal bodies until the day of resurrection. He stated with surety that their souls lived on. He concluded by reciting a prayer asking their graves be hallowed ground. Just as the ground has been opened up to receive their bodies, one day it will be opened again to deliver them in the resurrection.

The crowd of mourners and well wishers lingered for a while as family and friends visited one with another and comforted the grieving. Many of the relatives hadn't seen each other for a long time and the gathering took on the semblance of a family reunion. Many friends and neighbors were also there, including long time friends, Bill and Marge Casper. Others had not known her as long, such as Samantha and Mike Taylor were there with their three young children. As the crowd began to disperse, many made it a point to not leave without speaking once more to Sheffield and Marie. As they all left, only Sheffield and Maire, standing arm in arm, supported by Walt and Sarah on either side, remained. After lingering a little while longer, Walt said, “Its time to go.”

Standing nearby, Geannie, Sandy and Austin observed and took comfort the outpouring of love. After everyone had gone and Walt and Sarah led Sheffield and Marie back to their car, Charles and Charles Emmett, who had been standing back, came forward. Together they watched as the car drove away. A light began to appear as the portal to the world beyond this one opened up. As it did, it grew

brighter and and brighter. Geannie, Sandy, and Austin were amazed at what they saw. The things that had been said about them assured them their lives had definitely been worth living. As sad as it was to leave those who they loved and who loved them, they were excited for what came next. Charles said to them, "Its time to go." Charles and Charles Emmett led them into the light and the portal closed behind them.

Following the graveside service, the extended family returned to the church for a luncheon hosted by the Methodists Women's Auxiliary for the family and friends, including Freddy and Susan and Mason and Pat.

The services were of comfort to Sheffield. His brother knew what he needed to hear and delivered it in such away for him to bring closure to the last twelve days since they died. Walt took him aside to offer more counsel to help him with the days, weeks, and months ahead. He wasn't the only one who took it hard. It was a difficult time for Marie as well.

Sheffield stayed with his parents during the time he had at home. He spent a lot of time with Geannie's family as well. This was to have been when he brought Geannie and the kids home alive and well for them to be safe and sound while he went off to war to defend and protect them from those who sought to destroy the way of life of freedom loving people.

It wasn't his nature to seek revenge, but he was anxious to get back to his duties and do his part to bring to justice those who had killed his family and plunged his nation into a second world war.

A couple of days later, all of their belongings arrived on the train. Sheffield put it all in storage in a shed behind the Austin Mansion. Someday when he had the time and the heart, he would go through it and determine what to do with it.

A few days after the funeral, Sheffield received a telegram from Admiral Halsey with a slight change of orders. Rather than return to Pearl Harbor and report back aboard the Enterprise, his new orders were to go to San Diego and report aboard the Yorktown to "observe, train, and assist and to report back aboard the Enterprise at the place of rendezvous."

While in Roanoke, his mother kept his bandage changed until just before he was to return when he went to the doctor and had the stitches removed. The wound had healed nicely and left a thin two inch scar where the shrapnel had been embedded.

The remainder of his time in Roanoke seemed to pass slowly. Life without Geannie did that to him. He stayed through Christmas and New Years. The holidays were empty without Gennie and the kids. It had now been three years since he had spent the holidays with them. Who would have thought that there would not be any more.

Sheffield spent a lot of time going back through Geannie's journals and the photograph albums that she kept. It was much more pleasurable to fill his time remembering the good times rather than wallowing

in the sorrow of the present or thinking about the emptiness of the future without them. He took comfort from being around their loved ones. He wanted to store up as much encouragement as he could to hold him over during the lonely days that laid ahead. He tried to pretend that this was just another of the many times that he had been away. The fact that they would never be there when he got back wouldn't let him escape reality.

Curly spent a lot of time talking to his brother and father. They listened to him pour out his heart and offered words of counsel. They both knew just what to say and how to say it. They knew that he needed to go back to work with a clear head. Not only his life, but the lives of the pilots who would be flying the missions he put together depended on it. Walt had seen first hand during the first world war what can happen when a battery commander learned that his brother had been killed. His inattention caused him to direct the battery to fire on a position occupied by American dough-boys.

Sheffield also spent a lot of time alone sorting things out. Sometimes he would go for a long walk, other times he would sit alone in the solitude of the chapel. He split a lot of firewood for both his parents and for Marie as well. Before he left, they had enough to last them through the winter. Splitting logs was an odd sort of therapy, it let him think about things and focus on something at the same time. It was a great release for pent up anger and anxiety.

The news on the war front was not good. The tanker SS Emidio was sunk by a Japanese submarine only eighteen miles off Crescent City, California on December 20<sup>th</sup>. The Army in the Philippines was in retreat ahead of the advancing Japanese. Then on the 23<sup>rd</sup> came the devastating news that Wake Island had fallen. Commander Brason felt he had a duty to be at his post doing his part. Sheffield took the news hard. He had only been there three weeks earlier as he had escorted the twelve Marine Wildcats there to sure up the defenses. He was worried for those twelve men, whom he had gotten to know personally, and wondered what became of them. The news kept getting worse, on the day before Christmas, Christmas Day west of the International Date Line, Hong Kong fell.

Sheffield spent Christmas eve by attending Christmas Eve services. Walt's sermon was titled, "Peace on Earth in a World at War." He talked about being at peace with oneself and with God. "True peace on earth," he said, "starts in heart and works outward from there." He talked about the evil designs to conquer the world which had as its main goal to conquer the hearts of men and women and extinguish the peace within. He said, "Even though peace has been taken from us, it is but for a season. Peace on earth has a price and it is worth fighting for. It will take effort and sacrifice and many will lose their lives." He recalled his own experiences from the last war and how peace was restored and expressed his hope that it would be restored again. "The greatest peace of all," he concluded, "is life with God through his Son, the Prince of Peace."

Christmas morning he spent with his parents and his brothers and their families. After dinner, they all went to services. The evening was spent with Geannie's family.

With the country at war, the nephews who were of age were seriously considering their responsibilities. One of Charlie's sons who had graduated from college talked to Sheffield about the officer training program for men with college degrees. Several others including Walt's son, Tim, were all talking about enlisting. Naturally, Sheffield steered them toward the Navy.

The Austin Mansion was the scene of a New Years Eve party for the Austin and Brason families. The party not only welcomed in 1942 but was also a farewell party for Sheffield who had to leave on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. He had no way of knowing when he would be back. In addition it was a send off for the boys who would soon become men as many of them had already enlisted or planned to do so in the next few weeks.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" is a parlor song by Stephen Foster (1826-1864). It was published by Firth, Pond & Co. of New York in 1854. Foster wrote the song with his wife Jane McDowell in mind. "Jeanie" was a notorious beneficiary of the ASCAP boycott of 1941. During this period, most modern music could not be played by the major radio broadcasters due to a dispute over licensing fees.

