

P R E F A C E

After my mother's death on January 24, 1999, my dad began writing a series of vignettes about their life together. They had been married for 58 years. He said then:

I saw ahead of me an empty, barren, and lonesome existence. The one real activity that I could think of that had meaning was to recall the wonderful life I had shared with my Lee. As I sat and remembered, little bits and pieces of our life began to stand out like cameos, little spots of special joy that were engraved in my mind. I began writing myself notes of these special times, and there were many of them.

I decided that it would be fun, as well as therapeutic, for me to keep a file, and whenever time hung heavy on my hands and it seemed pointless for me to go on alone, I could think about the wonder of being married to Lee, relive one of the highlights of our life together, and get it on paper. This gave me a chance to remember the special charm of the past while continuing to make the most of what was left of the rest of my life without her.

He would share each new story with me at the close of the day. I would often read it aloud, and we would talk about that time. The stories begin in the Territory of Hawaii when my parents first met and are filled with the adventures and the enduring love they shared. His writings are amazing in their detail and give background to both family legends and world events that my brother and I had grown up hearing. He titled the collection *Life with Lee* and kept it in a binder with treasured pictures.

Two years after my dad's death in 2001, I discovered a very old trunk in the storage room. It was partly hidden by two large, mounted rifles. One was inscribed near the bottom: "From the Irregular Forces of South Laos." A crude crossbow lay over them both. These mementos, from the Vietnam War, were given to Dad by his troops when he was the Vice Commander of Pacific Air Forces and was flying combat missions in Vietnam.

The top layer of the trunk held photos, albums, newspaper clippings, and playbills from the motion picture industry of 1911, when Dad's mother and father were acting in silent movies and plays around Hollywood, California. The bottom part of the trunk contained letters—hundreds of letters—written by my dad, beginning in 1937, as an Army Air Corps Cadet, and continuing to 1964, as a Maj. General commanding the 17th Air Force in Europe during the Cold War. The early ones were written to his parents from flight school, before he was married. The majority were written to my mother, Lee, and began in earnest when she was evacuated to the States after the December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

At first, I read letters at random, excitedly and quickly, uncertain of what I had found. Then, I sorted each letter by year and then by date. Even the envelopes had stories to tell. The return addresses told of rapid promotions and changes in location. The front and back of most of the envelopes from the early 1940s were stamped by censors and signed by inspectors.

This book began to unfold then. The chronological vignettes provide the structure and the big-picture view. The letters are interwoven and provide incredible descriptions and detail of the conditions in the Territory of Hawaii, both before and after the United States' entry into World War II; of the early fighting in the South Pacific; of the highly secret development and implementation of the Superfortress, which ultimately brought an end to Japan's war against the United States; and of the China-Burma-India Theater, as the war accelerated and the last mission is flown. The writings of correspondents from the United Press and *Newsweek* who accompanied my dad on combat missions enrich the story. Their stories gave an anxious nation a first-hand account of the war effort and of the men who were fighting.

For the sake of authenticity, I made changes to the letters and vignettes only where necessary for clarity and context. Where an explanation of something was required I inserted it in brackets, but if the explanation was lengthy, I included the information in a footnote so as not to interrupt the flow of the narrative.

Letters to Lee is a first-person account of two of the heroes of World War II and of the love they shared across the years and miles. They lived their lives with integrity and courage, but they were not the exception for this

time and generation. They are, however, one example of this great generation and this incredible period in time.

Our love was entwined with our love of our country and all the things about America that were good and clean. We were a part of it all, Lee and I. Our love and the life that we shared, even at that great distance, were a part of America and its glorious history. That brought pride to both of us and made our very private and very wonderful love even closer.

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Letters to Lee

