

## WWII and the Art of Aging

*By Bob Taylor*

In 1945, I was 27 years old and not yet serving in WW2. Nice people called me a soldier protecting the home front. Others, who were not so kind, looked at me and muttered, "why isn't that bum over there chasing Hitler or Tojo?" And I felt guilty, guilty because I was young, strong, and healthy, and no one was shooting at me. I had a three year old son, a sick and very pregnant wife and a deferment for essential work.

There were many shortages of essential goods and services for civilians. Butter, soap, coffee, gasoline, sugar and many other items were rationed. (I still have some of the ration books.) My friend, George, destitute father of six, and I decided to alleviate at least one of the shortages in our community. We chose soap because George had a recipe and the ingredients were available at little or no cost.

We bought a very large kettle, visited meat markets all over the city and told the proprietors we would haul their waste meat products away for free.

When the kettle was filled we drove to my house to begin the soap manufacturing operation, but my wife objected--violently. I explained that cleanliness is next to Godliness. She screamed, "Then take your blankety, blank soap-making nonsense straight to hell, scrub the hell out of Satan, and may the ovens of hell swallow the tidiest!"

We drove to George's place where desperation was more chronic and his wife was not home. We put the kettle on the stove, turned the flame up high and dreamed of obscene wealth coming our way. When George added his secret ingredients, my eyes began to sting, bum and water. Barney, the dog, began to snarl and choke. Then the phone rang asking what was burning, smelled bad and where to send the fire department. Before George got off the phone the fire truck was at the front door and the Housing Authority was tacking an eviction notice on it.

I thought it best to hide behind the furnace and let George handle the problem. The firemen disposed of our raw materials. The Housing Authority disposed of George and his family.

Overcome by a compassionate moment of weakness I suggested George and his crew stay with us until they found a place of their own. That would not happen today because I am older and wiser.

Our attempt to help the war effort and make a buck turned out badly. It was the first time, not the last time, that my wife threatened divorce. After two weeks living with a family of eight strangers, I didn't blame her.

I hoped she would order me to leave, but she was too smart for that. She made me take care of them. An event like this makes me realize that being young isn't always what it is cracked up to be. The idiotic judgments of a misspent youth makes aging feel better and better. I hope you have some foolishness to remember, so you realize that life is good.