

It Seemed So Far Away

by Harry Zirkelbach

I stand on a pinnacle; forward, nothing is visible, certain; but in that rear view of life, ah, what a panorama; and to think, something done every day directed my path here. I am a little god, determined my very presence with you today. Of course, I must recognize your infinity, for those choices that brought you to the very chair you occupy. You realize, of course, because of past choices, you couldn't be anywhere else in the universe, except there reading this. Scary.

There are days that determined our path without our awareness then.

One unusual, sunny, warm December Sunday in Detroit, after morning Mass, the half dozen fellows of the rental I shared, met in the street to play touch football. A ritual. Exercise, fresh air, friendship away from studies, unmemorable conversations except for relished sports phrases. One youth, a U. of D. scholarship Frosh lineman, another, frosh Guard, on the varsity basketball team already.

The others, enjoying too.

It was after one of our favorite designed plays, Tom, four steps, turn left at the new parked Chevrolet, a pass will be in your hands as you turn, catch, lateral across the street the streaking Jerry, catch, outrun the two defenders. Done many times.

Suddenly from the porch of several homes, "The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." Few there knew where Pearl Harbor was. This did not interrupt our exercise or neighborhood family plans. The 18 and 19 year old wisemen on the street forecast an early defeat of the Japanese. Concentration on the game continued until lunch.

After lunch I prepared for work at McLouth Steele, six miles north of the University. The clothes and gloves worn at work stayed in the shower area there, for the acids used in "pickling" steel ate everything. The clothes for bus travel belied the occupation; besides this was an unusually warm December Sunday.

The Japanese Pearl Harbor attack was better defined when our 3:00 shift began.

Stories here differed. None of this fifteen-man crew knew Hawaii, had been in the military in WWI. All but two were past 40 years. They had family to support with our pay, 77½ cents an hour, plus the tonnage bonus. Now conversation related to tomorrow's work changes. Steel fabricated went to the automotive industry. That would surely change. Talk of war remained non brutal. The conversation that evening, a mature concern for survival of these United States, McLouth Steele, the auto industry, family. I was to enjoy their friendship as never before, learn more of their families, life outside the factory.

All those eight hours were a gathering of concerned adults; heroism, death never mentioned. A contrast to that playground talk between braggarts, know-it-alls, winners. This topic never

belittled the enemy, saw victory as a certainty, unearned. A mature facing of the task, awareness that tomorrow, next week, month, or year, lives would be altered without our participation.

Wondrous men, who included me in their thoughts then, they in mine now.