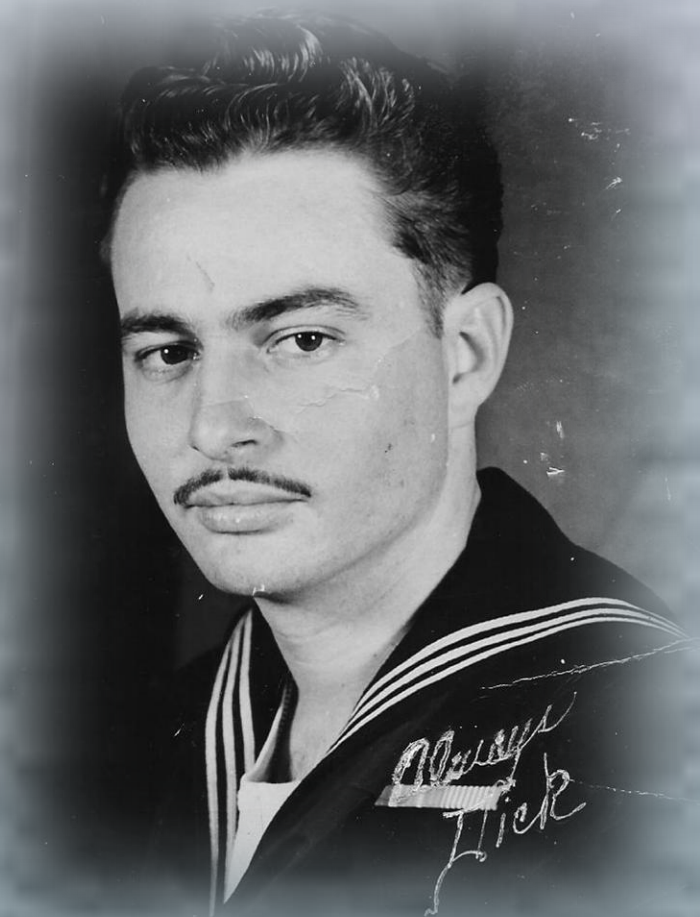


ANCHORS AWEIGH !



NEW HORIZONS



Chapter Eight

SAILOR DU PUIS

Galatians 5: 22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

TOMORROW

“Tomorrow” arrived at the first light of dawn; full of dreams stored in a young boy’s heart. This “tomorrow” whose contents was a time slow-built, made up of joys and tears, stood apart because it’s very fiber contained all the “yesterdays” from the life of Dick O’Neill Du Puis. Thousands of seeds that were so carefully and painfully sown had reached a ripe fruition and would now transform “tomorrow” into the golden bounty of “today”.

Thus, on a clear September morning, Dick opened his eyes feeling the pull from the universe calling him toward the fulfillment of his destiny. Although now departing as a sailor in the United States Navy, haloed were the joys of yesterday that were so deeply carved in the recesses of his heart. He would store forever the memories and lessons learned as a southern boy living in the bayou and wet prairies of Gueydan, Louisiana. Later, when he needed to steady and balance a troubled spirit, sounds from friendly voices of the town folk would play soft soothing strains in his head. If restless yearnings made bare his soul, he would need only to borrow from the bank of yesterday’s memories for the courage to shape the next “tomorrow”.

As Dick boarded the bus headed for boot camp in San Diego, California, his soft liquid eyes filled with sorrowful tears as he recalled the sad farewell from his mother. Although logic told her it was time for her boy “Sonny” to leave the nest, parting brought such intense pain to the core of her very being. Just that morning, the trusty old cot that was the only bed Dick had ever know, was removed from his “make-shift” bedroom in the dining room. Then, prior to making his exit, he had allowed his eyes to rest once more on the Singer sewing machine,

his one valued earthly treasure, in a final sweet caress. In his absence, he could imagine his mother tenderly dusting it as her tears of love splashed softly on the closed wooden lid. She would be recalling the familiar hum from its motor, as her “Sonny” busily sewed the family’s clothing. Instead, in its place would be only a deafening silence. Then, wiping away this time for reflecting, Dick bowed his neck vowing to step forward in a manner that would make his mama proud.

BOOT CAMP

After passing his physical and losing his curly locks of hair, a strenuous time of training had begun for the group of new recruits to which Dick belonged. In addition, the men were enrolled in classes where an abundance of information was delivered daily. Although Dick noticed his friend sitting beside him alertly taking copious notes in shorthand, this held very little interest to him. However, the studious man, who would later marry Dick’s sister, Teta, firmly delivered the message, “If you don’t want to get shipped overseas, you’d better pay attention.” Consequently, having been sharply brought into focus, Dick began soaking in the information like a sponge. Also, included in these classes was an aptitude test that all recruits had to complete before receiving their final placement. On this exam, Dick scored off the charts in the area of caring and compassion; traits he had previously developed and practiced at age 12 when nursing his entire family. Therefore, when all was said and done, Dick O’Neill Du Puis had been one of three recruits chosen out of eighty men to qualify for six months of training for becoming a medical technician. This meant moving close by the San Diego Hospital for a period of intense education.

SEWING EMERGES

While all these events were unfolding, Dick’s God given talent of sewing started to pluck at his heart strings. When God blesses his child with such an enormous gift, it will dramatically surface in the most unpredictable circumstances. However, what seems out of sync to the human mind is perfect and always right on time with God. Thus, Dick’s intense passion for sewing, he thought would be buried until after his Navy career had ended, emerged with breath taking speed and intensity. Answering the call, Dick visited a local retail store where he purchased a portable Singer sewing machine with an ample supply of thread and needles. Bingo! He was in business making money on the side sewing rips and tears, as well as stitching on uniform adornments. Little did Dick realize, at this moment in his life, the purchase of that little portable Singer sewing machine would shape his entire career in the U.S. Navy.

THE LONE STAR STATE

After completing successfully his six month program near the San Diego Hospital, he received a transfer for more practical work at a medical center located in Corpus Christi, Texas. It was here that he was assigned duty in the nursery; a job that presented no challenge due to his two year stint with his baby sister Selena.

While there he met an officer's wife whose legs were paralyzed and was diagnosed as being in a very serious emotional state. Since she was placed under a 24 hour watch, part of Dick's responsibility was for her welfare. Thus, having developed a feeling of trust toward Dick, she insisted that he be assigned as full time caretaker when she was sent home.

Therefore, after much negotiation, Dick was approved for this position, which meant living at her residence both day and night. He not only offered professional services, but also designed and sewed clothing for the patient that had a positive impact upon her total mental state. Soon, her daily tears were replaced with laughter; a situation that created feelings of jealousy in her husband's heart. She also had a little girl for Dick to pamper and love at the same time; a circumstance that made things even more irritating for the spouse. How could a total stranger help his wife when he had failed so miserably?

At this point, it is important to pause and recall why Dick was such a natural at providing care to this total stranger. After all, two years of training had already occurred when he took care of his bedridden mother as a boy of only twelve. Unfortunately, regardless of Dick's high level of professionalism, through no fault of his own, the jealous officer husband became so irate that he was instrumental in having Dick shipped overseas to Korea where an ugly war was taking place between two communist countries and the Allied forces.

HOSPITAL SHIP

Due to Dick's extensive training as a medical technician, he was immediately assigned to a hospital ship anchored in the Port of Pusan; on a vessel that housed thousands of people. Dick vividly recalls boarding the enormous vessel carrying his duffle bag on one shoulder and the portable Singer sewing machine tucked away in its own safe little case. The ship was so large it contained three real stories with that much repeated again beneath. The very center, being classified as the most stable area, contained the operating room. The ship's gigantic size allowed it to accommodate 1000 patients on the second and third floors, with the crew residing below.

Since congress never declared war against North Korea or China, these two communist forces positioned themselves to take over the U. S. zone in South Korea; the conflict that would change Dick Du Puis' life forever that was called simply, a police action. However, this

altercation is recognized by most today as the Korean War. The label police action simple meant it was a localized fight, without the declaration of war. Regardless, the U. S. and Allied troops probing northward in an offensive move faced such horrible conflict on the front-line; the soldiers dubbed it the “meat grinder.”

Thus, remembering his duties as a medical technician, Dick vividly describes the environment much like the TV show *Mash* depicted. The horrors of war were so intense and ugly, the hearts and minds of both the wounded and caretakers were forever changed. Dick recalls picking maggots out of the wound of a soldier who had been exposed to the elements for an extended period of time. Then, when a soldier’s peace of mind was so disturbed by the atrocities faced, he would be pulled out of battle and placed in the hospital ship’s psychiatric ward for a time of restoration.

When Dick first arrived on the ship, he was assigned to the psychiatric ward where his working uniform was a robe and pajamas. This comfortable attire allowed him to be non-threatening to the patients as he carried out his responsibilities. In the event of a refusal to take prescribed medication, Dick had placebo pills that he would consume as a demonstration so the patient would follow suit. If the patient’s medication was a red liquid, Dick would consume a strawberry flavored drink to coax compliance. When a soldier had difficulties showering due to fear, Dick would stand under the nozzle with the patient wearing his pajamas. These techniques were not part of the training program, but common sense strategies Dick developed out of need.

THE SINGER HUMS

After settling into his responsibilities with proficiency and ease, his little Singer started to hum as it sewed rips and tears for the population living on board. As a result, word spread like wildfire about the odd man who sewed, causing a strange reaction from the crew. Some expressed strong warnings in the event the Captain learned of this activity.

Consequently, to Dick’s great consternation one day, he was summoned to the Captain’s quarters. Fully expecting a stern reprimand, he received the surprise of his life, instead. The Captain, who was smaller in stature than Dick, asked if he would do alterations on his uniforms. Given his small size, every item of clothing he wore required resizing; a big headache for a Captain on the open sea. Therefore, over a period of time, the Captain and Dick developed a warm relationship of mutual respect. However, outside his officer’s quarters, he pretended Dick was the same as everyone else. When the Captain conducted inspections, he would walk along tapping his leg with a rolled up magazine as a show of power and authority. Then, as he passed Dick, he would tap his own leg and then Dick’s in rapid fashion; the only show of familiarity.

After a short time, the Captain recognized the young man's gift of sewing as an asset and moved Dick to a large office of his own where he was assigned responsibility for all linen supplies. In addition, a support crew was organized to assist him with the task of refurbishing surgical pads and everything on board that involved sewing. Even the cooks requested the mending of dish towels and potholders from Dick's crew; which earned him a beautiful birthday cake as a show of appreciation.

Day after day as the little Singer sewing machine hummed along, Dick became more and more aware of the large number of wounded that lay hour after hour on beds with no privacy. The fact that they were out in the open with their bodies exposed to all who entered stirred deep feelings of compassion within Dick's tender heart. Therefore, after approaching the Captain with a solution, he was granted permission to design and sew screens that were placed beside the beds of the injured; a gift that meant everything to those so badly compromised. He also noted the robes of the wounded hanging in a make-shift fashion over the portholes in an attempt to block the blistering rays from the sun. Therefore, additional screens were made to cover portholes, preventing the hot sun from weakening their compromised fragile bodies.

Then, one day when Dick was busily working in his office, a man appeared in his doorway in dire need of assistance. His entire body was so covered with dirt and grime that it was evident he had been on the front lines for a long period of time. He had been sent to Dick's office for a total clean-up. Unfortunately, since he had no extra change of clothes, Dick gave him a bathrobe, slippers and all the necessary items for the purpose of showering while his uniform was freshened. Additionally, possessing a heart filled with sympathy for the man in such a downtrodden state, Dick proceeded to spend the day in fellowship with the needy man. He took him to a movie, gave him a tour of the ship and treated him to ice cream. It was such a time of relief for the poor soul that he compared it to an experience in a fancy hotel.

As a result of this incident, Dick's doorway would be filled with one soldier after another calling for "Dick Du Puis". This occurred so frequently that he finally instructed his staff to prepare packages consisting of a robe, slippers and all the necessary toiletries for accommodating the battle worn men. Consequently, as each fragile man appeared at his office door, not only was the package ready, but Dick would put his work on hold and have a time of fellowship with each individual.

Even though Dick's new assignment of being in charge of the hospital ship's linens was an enormous job, it was still impossible to fight off the nightmares created by war. The ugliness and brutality of battle caused such a deep emotional darkness that light seemed so dim there was no way for it to shine on the souls of mankind.

Thus, for the first time, Dick who had always been gifted with making the best of every situation or challenge knew beyond doubt it was imperative that he find a healing balm for his troubled soul. In order to survive the horrors he was facing every hour of each day, a solace for his entire being must be created; a place where he could regain his balance and hold on to his peace of mind. Job 3: 26 best describes Dick's emotional state with the cry from this scripture, "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Then, one day when happening upon two, 5 gallon cans of green and white paint that had been sent to the ship in error, Dick requested permission to claim them for his own use. It was at this moment Dick's creative mind visualized a way to turn his gray mood and office into a sanctuary for his hungry depressed soul. Furthermore, little did he know that the thoughts traveling through his troubled mind at this instant were alive with the power of guidance from the Holy Spirit. Not only was this little man setting out on a journey of self healing, but one in which the long arm of God would use to embrace others in the process.

Thus, in typical Du Puis fashion, he painted the bins and walls in his office different shades of green and the floor a pure dark green that was then waxed to resemble an emerald jewel. In addition, his mother had sent two Christmas trees that he immediately reconfigured into one beautiful shape. It was then adorned with lights and ornaments that she had included as well as some he had picked up in Seoul. Also included in his mother's care package were records for his phonograph that filled the atmosphere with the familiar voices from home of Bing Crosby, Perry Como and Dean Martin crooning old time favorite sounds of the season.

Then shortly after this enormous find, he spotted bolts of green wool ordered for the recovering of pool tables in a corner being unused. Since no one on board knew how to accomplish this type of repair work, the material was just classified as excess baggage. However, in Dick's creative mind, they had "DRAPES FOR MY OFFICE" written all over the fabric.

Since Dick had grown up during the Great Depression, his background experience of making something spectacular out of nothing caused his creative personality to surface immediately. Thus, the once gray office to which he had been assigned shone like a beautiful royal emerald. Then, as Dick carried out his responsibilities, the wonderful setting he had created began to soothe his soul like never before.

However, upon spotting this total make over, everyone exclaimed, "YOU ARE GOING TO DIE BECAUSE OF THIS DECORATING!" This straight forward remark did not cause Dick to convert his room back to gray or shake in his boots. Fully cognizant of the healing that was occurring to his mind, he continued forward. Even though he had been told an inspection was on the

schedule, the music kept playing from his phonograph as well as his heart. Somehow, he would get through this terrible war and find light on the other side.

Consequently, when the Sergeant of Arms entered with his clipboard and found Dick sewing, dressed in full uniform and wearing only slippers, he barked, "SAILOR, YOU ARE OUT OF UNIFORM!" Dick then tried to explain he was wearing his slippers to prevent any scuff marks from marring the floor until after the inspection. Interceding immediately was the familiar voice belonging to the Captain saying, "YOU ARE ALL DISMISSED! I WILL COMPLETE THIS INSPECTION PERSONALLY!"

This time, Dick was absolutely certain his head was on the proverbial chopping block, but was surprised beyond words at the request that followed. The Captain had witnessed personally children living in almost inhumane circumstances in a Seoul orphanage and suddenly had visualized an opportunity to reach out to the downtrodden through the use of Dick's green sanctuary. Thus, he proceeded to describe the upcoming annual Christmas party as being an opportune time for his sailors to reach out to those in need. Therefore, upon entering Dick's room of healing, the Captain's vision had traveled beyond the usual. It was apparent to see how the hand of God was already starting to reach to His other children in need. Therefore, it was immediately decided that this year Dick's green sanctuary would be the place designated for the annual Christmas party.

What a celebration that occurred in Dick's beautiful office that year. A number of sailors had volunteered to act as big brothers to the orphans from Seoul scheduled to arrive on board for the Christmas celebration. The Captain would personally hand to each orphan the present purchased by the big brother. Then, the sailor and orphan would spend the day attending a movie, eating and touring the large ship.

As the time grew near for the party, gifts began arriving from the excited crew members that were placed beneath the tree at the far end of Dick's office. There were so many gifts the tree could not accommodate them all. However, in spite of the excitement, the sailors were totally unprepared for the destitute state of the 25 plus orphans that appeared that day. Never in their lives had they seen such poverty. At this point in time, they had to reach to the depths of their souls for wisdom to handle the feat ahead.

That Christmas, as the sun set over the large hospital ship, the crew was filled to the brim with emotions never before experienced. The scripture from Philippians 4:7 encapsulates it best with the words, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Inner peace comes from knowing and accepting that God is in control. And....it had been proven that very day to all with open hearts.

Having been label as an enormous success, on year two, the nurses on board asked Dick if he would consider designing and sewing their gowns for the annual party. What a wonderful break from their tired uniforms! As a result, wolf calls filled the air above the heads of the nurses as they made their appearance for the grand event. The compliments caused a warm glow to appear on their faces as they happily entered into the room where designer Du Puis received them with joy.

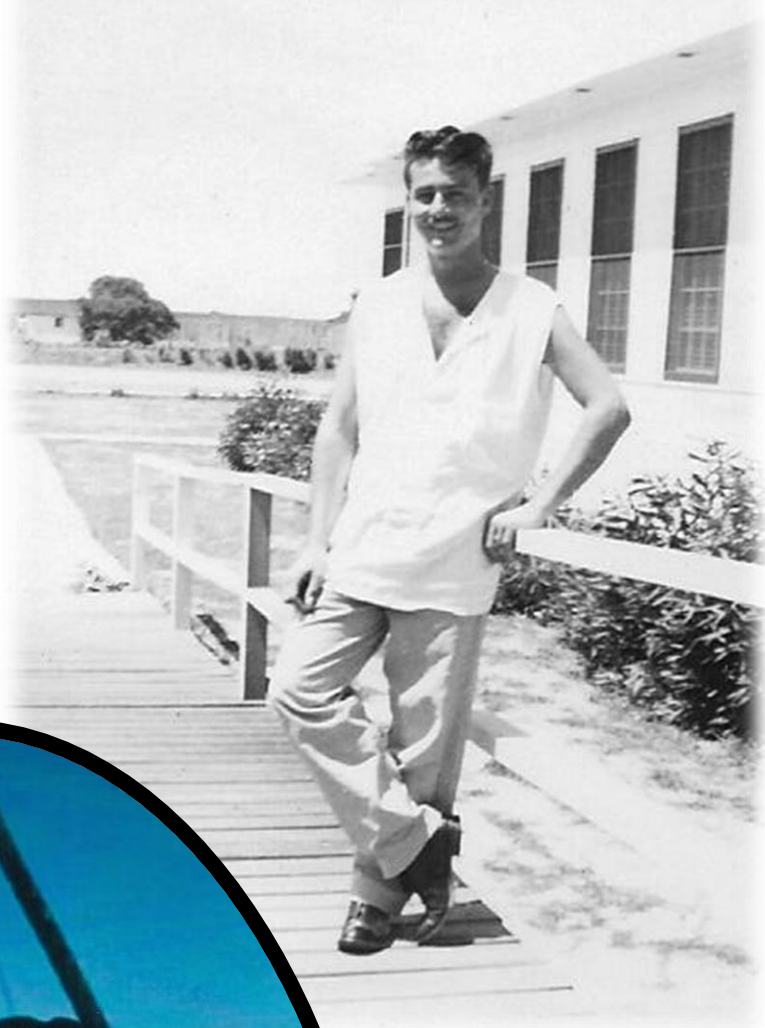
As Dick shared every detail of this wonderful Christmas on board an enormous ship as a young man in the Navy, his eighty year old eyes absolutely came alive with joy as he recalled the number of homesick hearts touched right in the middle of the war in Korea.

REFLECTIONS

One never knows when a little word or deed may open a window of light that shines brightly on a desperate and wounded soul in need. It took only one portable Singer sewing machine to be purchased by a man possessing extraordinary vision and courage to set off a chain reaction of compassion that would change thousands of lives forever. Also, it is important to acknowledge how instrumental the Captain of the ship was for thinking outside the box regarding one of his crew member's ability to sew. However, the most critical recognition should be in the form of praises to God for placing his child from Gueydan, Louisiana in just the right place at the correct time. In his omnipotent wisdom this event may have been one of the reasons for bestowing on Dick the gift of sewing. Furthermore, it certainly wasn't a coincidence that his Captain was smaller in size, and also possessed an open mind regarding human kind's individuality. Not only did the Captain show vision and acceptance of another, but desired that his crew benefit from it as well; a dramatic act of compassion toward his fellowman.

In summary, having been perfected by the fire of trials and hardships as a young lad, God's love poured from Dick O'Neill Du Puis' heart with such force that it transformed a mundane hospital ship into a vessel of radiant beauty and grace. What started out to be a quest to find inner peace, transformed not only one sailor, but a multitude of crew members into peacemakers. Matthew 5: 9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." And...so it was that day.

It is no wonder that Dick reflects back on his experience in the Navy as being extremely fulfilling and rewarding. Once again, he demonstrated his wonderful ability of making the most out of every situation during his life. His statement, "This is just how things are in my life right now. I must accept them and make the best of the situation each day," is a motto he still upholds.



NAVY DAYS



Left: Scrubbing and painting

Below: Dick & a nurse



Below: Dick and his father





(Dick and one of the orphans from Seoul)