



From
One of
the
Carroll
Avenue
Gang,

Mary
Louise
Meyer
Webster



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Editing assistance: Rita Pearce

Design and Layout by Rita Pearce

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**From One of
the Carroll Avenue
Gang,**

Mary Louise Meyer Webster

I had a happy childhood, but my father died when I was nine years old. That was a terribly traumatic event that took place, and I think it must have colored my outlook on things. But I have referred to it though, sometimes in a theme in school when I needed to write a paper. I went to Longfellow public school from kindergarten through the eighth grade.



1923

*Donald, Mommy, Edward,
Howard, Mary Louise, and Daddy*



*Mary Louise
11 months old*

I was a tomboy when I was growing up and we had a wonderful neighborhood. Both sides of the street of Carroll Avenue had lots of children. In my family, there were four of us; I was the only girl, but I had three brothers. Across the street was another girl with three brothers. There were several families with four children and we used to play out in the street. That was back when traffic was practically nothing in the neighborhood—you could play in the street and enjoy it.

We played Kick the Can, football, tag



*Mary Louise
4 years old*

football, baseball and the boys didn't mind if I were on their team. They would allow me to play with them.

It was such a nice neighborhood that 30 years later, we made plans for a reunion of the Carroll Avenue Gang. I was the one who was on the typewriter encouraging them to send in their money so they could stay on the mailing list and know what was about to happen. The reunion of the Carroll Avenue Gang was really a fun thing to do. When we all got together, we would talk about those times when we were growing up.

It was a small town. It wasn't a big sophisticated city, and it was a different kind of feeling growing up in the neighborhood. You didn't lock your doors—you didn't have to.

On Halloween, the boys would pull the trolley wire down from the overhead electric connection and stop the trolley, or they would dump garbage on somebody's front lawn if they didn't like the family that was living there. It's sad to say, but there was a Jewish family down at the end of the block that they picked on. That was the most of any meanness.

I was in junior high school just two or three days when my mother decided that I needed to go to a girls' school in St. Paul.

I was there for two-and-a-half years. I graduated in the middle of the year from eighth grade because I had doubled classes in the third grade. The girls' school was on the semester system. Everybody started in the fall, and there weren't half grades.

I went to University High School at the University of Minnesota. This was part of the college education and was a wonderful opportunity. We had practice-teachers who were working for their degree in education, so I felt as though I had an edge on schooling at that time. It was easy to make the jump from the small university high school to the big university itself, which was something like 27,000 students. Lots of people felt lost, but I didn't.

I majored in Romance Languages: Spanish and French, and minored in psychology. The languages were useful in a practical way, but not for employment.

I went to Business College, and got my BA from the University of Minnesota, but I wasn't prepared for a job. I decided to go back and took shorthand and typing.

I got my first job at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I wasn't very proficient in it. They wanted to hire me



*Mary Louise
at graduation*

before I really finished the course in 1939. I worked there for two months, and I didn't really like it. There were seven women to every man in Rochester, but there were a lot of young doctors, and it was interesting. After my two months, I was ready to go back to Minneapolis.

I then worked for Sears Roebuck and Company in their complaint department answering their complaint letters. The complaint letters would come in with catalog orders that they didn't feel were as they should be; so I'd have to answer those. That was an eye-opener just to see the number of questions and the number of things that people would write about. It wasn't a great job, but it was a starting point.

It just seemed like I was flitting around. I wasn't really pursuing anything in particular. In 1942, I worked for a huge bank in downtown Minneapolis, Northwestern National Bank, in the Trust Department. I worked on the balcony and could look down over the bank floor. It was a beautiful sight with its marble pillars and was quite impressive.

Minneapolis then was about a half million people. I lived in St. Paul. We lived in a district that was, more or less, between the two cities. We could call to any place in Minneapolis without paying a toll charge. There was a joke that they were going to rename both Minneapolis and St. Paul as one city. Minneapolis would be Minnie and St. Paul would be HaHa—Minnie HaHa.

I was living in Minneapolis then with my mother and my brothers. A good-looking neighbor said, "Why don't you go into

the Navy, Mary. It is a good thing to do and you get good pay. There aren't very many people left here in this city; they've gone off to war. Why don't you give it a try?"

So I made inquiries and went by train to Chicago for the interview in the Federal building. On the way, I could see the beautiful Mississippi River. I must have had a written examination of some kind. After I was there for a day, I went back home. I didn't hear for about a month. It was just a brief note from them saying that I had been accepted to enter the WAVES.

I left Minneapolis in December 1942. I thought how heartless can the Navy be to want me to leave home at that time of year just before Christmas; it was heartless. They just didn't even think about one's personal life at all.

I was there over Christmas. I had come from home a few days before, and I didn't know anybody there. No one invited me to go home with her, but I got through it.

We had our Navy indoctrination at Smith College in North Hampton, Massachusetts. It lasted about a six weeks. We recruits were assigned to groups designated for communications, the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, or the Paymasters. We were all Midshipmen, and slated to become Officers.

It was March 9, 1943, that I was sworn in as an Ensign in the United States Women's Naval Reserve.

We took the training course to work with electric communication machines (ECMs). Those were complicated

machines. They were typewriters, but as you typed it, the wheels would spin inside and jumble, encoding the message that you were typing. You'd type it straight forward in English, but the wheels would spin and it would come out in five-lettered groups, ten groups on the line. You learned how to put together a code and how to break it down. It was interesting.

Incoming messages were in code, and they would be in ten, five-lettered groups in a line, and you'd type that into the machine and it would come back in English. They said the man who devised this system was treated at St. Elizabeth Hospital, the hospital for the mentally ill.

I was in the Women's Reserve Training for three months from December 20 through March 9. After the indoctrination at Smith College, I received my first orders to report to Naval Air Station Glynco, Georgia by March 15. Again, I didn't have time to go home and needed to proceed to my duty station.

I went by way of New York City all by myself; nobody else was going my way. It was a little bit lonely, but I skated on Rockefeller Center Ice Skating Rink once or twice. That was fun. I was in uniform by that time, because we had to be. The daily routine required me to wear the dress of the day, which was skirts, not slacks. You didn't often wear off-duty dress. You were practically always in uniform.

I spent a couple of days in New York City, then went down to Washington, D.C. I found a place to stay, and it was so miserable that I cried. I couldn't believe I'd have to go in to such

a filthy hotel as this particular one was. It was right across from the White House and had a president's name. The room was the only one available in the whole city. Things were really crowded. I cried and was sick to my stomach. It was such an ugly place, and I had never seen anything like that before.

While I was there, I looked up one or two sorority sisters who were there. One had graduated from medicine, and was doing some kind of work there. It was fun to meet with her. I also went over to the Supreme Court and heard somebody speaking there before them pleading a case. I didn't find out until afterward that it was Wendell Wilkie. It was a big thrill to hear his voice and to hear him speak.

I had something like five days of "proceed duty," in which you get your orders and proceed to the next duty station. You have so many days all counted out. However, I felt lost. No one could even tell me how to get to Glynco when I was back in North Hampton. I asked, "How am I going to get down there? Where is it located?"

"Well, they have a post office for Brunswick."

"How do you get to Brunswick?"

"The train doesn't go there, but you can get off at another stop, and then maybe find transportation to get over to the town of Brunswick."

It wasn't very clear just exactly how I was going to get there, but I did. I got off the train at Savannah, Georgia and took the bus to Brunswick and got off it at the hotel. It was a

monstrous hotel of the 1890's vintage housing, and it was named for a man who was one of the first settlers in Georgia. I stayed in that hotel just for a night, before I got transportation to the base and to the Naval Air Station.

I went to my duty station in Glynco, Georgia. Brunswick was the rather backward, old country town, but it was on the shore. Glyn County was named for Glyn, the poet, and the name Glynco comes from Glyn County. It was beautiful—a wavelet of grass went through the marshes, and the shore had a beautiful



*Mary Louise at Glynco
Front Row, Center*

oak tree under which the poet, Sydney Lanier, had written *The Marshes of Glynn*. I am glad I found that place.

I lived in a rather luxurious hotel for the first two months that I was in Glynnco, because my WAVE living quarters weren't finished yet. I had a roommate from Georgia and we enjoyed living in a first floor apartment that overlooked the ocean and the beach. It was a beautiful sight. It made up for the filthy hotel in Washington, D. C.

When I finally was able to get into the WAVE's wing of the officers quarters, we each had separate rooms with a single bed in it. We had one general bathroom for all of us. I thought that was a little bit shabby compared to the quarters that the men of our same ranking had. They had twin rooms with a bath between two rooms, and it was a private bath for the two rooms. We women had one general bathroom for four WAVES and two nurses. We even had a couple more WAVES after awhile. But if quarters were granted according to rank, we didn't really have it as well off as the men did in having a private bath. It's a simple matter.

There were no inspections of the living quarters. When we got to Glynnco we were beyond that. We weren't as regimented as we had been when we were in training. There were inspections of WAVES as a group, however. I was an ensign and it was the lowest rank of the Naval Officers, which was the equivalent of a lieutenant in the Army. Then it goes from ensign to lieutenant junior grade to lieutenant. I eventually achieved the rank of

lieutenant, which would be the equivalent of captain in the Army. I was in the Navy something like three years.

We did encoding and decoding of messages. The messages would come over the radio receivers from the radio room. We were between the radio room of the station and the operations office of the squadron.

The operations office of the squadron had a huge map on the wall that showed anything of significance out on the waters off the East Coast. A few times during the two and a



*Mary Louise at Glynco, Georgia
verifying the record of items burned at the
end of the month*

half years that I was there, there were a few submarines that appeared on that map. That was exciting! The blimps went out to protect the waterways for shipping to be sure that there weren't submarines that would blow them up, and that they weren't under fire in some way. The blimps were a patrol group to protect shipping.

The station was built to house 12 blimps, but they never had that many. The most they ever had were six blimps. We always wondered why they hadn't filled it up. We decided that they wanted to be sure they had enough room in case they needed that extra protection.

It was exciting to go into the blimps. The pilot was on the left side and he controlled any movement of the blimp from the lateral turning, left to right. The co-pilot was on the other controls, on the right side of the blimp.

He controlled the nose and the tail, the up and down movement of the blimp. To sit up in what



we called the greenhouse section of it, you had a marvelous view of every thing out there in front of you. The nose was glassed in, and you just really had a commanding view.

They also used the blimps to search for something. If somebody was lost in the ocean, they would do what they called the "box search." They'd go out to the area, make a large box around it, and then gradually close that box down to a smaller size until they covered the whole area.

One time we had a fire inside the hangar. The blimp was being refueled inside the hangar and there was a spark that was ignited by a chain that was dangling, and that spark ignited the

fuel, and started a fire. The blimp burned up completely inside the hangar. I was just frightened to pieces thinking what on earth was I going to do? Was this the time that I should dowse the code, the key to the code that I had for the daily decoding of messages? Should I dowse that in a bucket of water, which would obliterate the ink on the paper? Was this the time that I should use that security measure? Things seemed to be under control before too long, so I didn't have to do that.

On weekends, we loved to go to the hotel pool to swim. There was swimming in the ocean, too, but it wasn't as clean or as nice as the swimming in the pool. It was an elegant hotel, known widely up and down the east coast. People from Atlanta had summer homes on the peninsula that extended out from the hotel. Many of the people who owned these lovely homes allowed the officers based there to rent from them. It was a treat to be asked by some of the officers occasionally to come out and visit, or to have supper.

The Secretary of State had a daughter who was married to one of the squadron officers, and she asked me to come out once to have supper at her home. It was a lovely place. There was a movie star once, too, who was attached to the station, but I can't remember his name.

I was on duty on Christmas Eve, and a message came over Naval Communications from the radio shack. I broke the encoded message. It was classified "secret" and "urgent"—those are two of the highest classifications that a message can have. It

refers to the speed at which it's transmitted, urgent meant that it would go out ahead of everything else on the airwaves, and it was secret. It would receive smaller distribution than a general message, so fewer people would know about it. When this message came in, I was quite frightened, because it said that there was an enemy submarine in the waters off Long Island Sound threatening the east coast. The classification was secrecy, but the next morning I heard that many of the Navy wives were buzzing about it. They knew. They had heard about this message. To me, that certainly wasn't secret any more.

We had to keep our lips buttoned when we had classified messages. We needed to be very careful not to say anything about messages of that kind, so as not to compromise intelligence.

There was one WAVE who was married to an officer. And of course, this brought up problems of what they were to receive for compensation for housing and for food, or subsistence. Should they receive twice the housing allowance for an officer or should they receive only one housing, because that would be what an officer would have for himself and his wife. Each, separately, would be entitled to two; one each. I'm really not sure how they resolved it. I think they must have kept that a secret. But it was a question for awhile.

The pay for men and women was exactly the same; there wasn't any difference. You don't find that now in the real world at all, and the real world hasn't even come close to what Navy

ever gave in compensation for their personnel. We, women, were given the same serial numbers as the men were. If there were a raise in rank, they were designated from serial number such and such up to another serial number. All officers with those serial numbers would rise in rank at the same time. You couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman. It was exactly the same pay for each. And that always amazed me that we had the same pay. But in the real world, it wasn't so, ever.



In the fall of 1945, I left Georgia. I asked for a change of duty, and was ordered to proceed to the receiving station in Philadelphia, which was the headquarters of the Fourth Naval District.

When I arrived in Philadelphia, I looked around to find where people were living. I could find nothing available.

The enlisted WAVES were taken care of in a barracks. There was housing provided for them, but being an officer, I had to seek my own housing.

I ran into some WAVE officers who were living in the historic part of Philadelphia in Chestnut Square. There was a stairway that went up to the third floor. On each floor's landing, you'd find a living room and a dining room, and up another flight would be a bedroom, and up one more flight

would be another bedroom. It was a handsome tiered house and a narrow one, too. There were several of them in the section that were totally different styles than any I had seen before. I lived there for about a month with the WAVE officers. I had to go out and buy myself a bed and have that delivered so I could have a place to lay my head.

I kept searching the ads to find something more permanent because that was just a temporary situation.

I found a woman who lived in Queens who would let me live in a room in her house. From there I could take a train down into the center of Philadelphia, and take the train then to the south edge of Philadelphia, where I would get a bus. The bus would take me down into the shipyard, where the receiving station was located.

One time I took that trip and I was the only woman and the only white woman on that trip down into the naval shipyard, but those were war times. At the shipyard in Philadelphia, I was to be in charge of the WAVES who were there, and to see that the things were running smoothly. I had no definite duties, just to be on hand.

One of the things that I thought that this group of WAVES needed was something to occupy them. To make life more interesting, I organized a softball team. We arranged for a contest between a New Jersey Army group and our WAVE group. It was exciting. It was important that we have this game between the two groups to take off some of the loneliness and to add a little

bit of something to do for the group.

The war was over by that time. The woman I stayed with and I took trips out and around, so I got to see some of the surroundings of Philadelphia. It's certainly an interesting countryside with stone houses and old houses, many of which were over a hundred years old. It's just pretty. The area around Philadelphia is not flat; it's more hilly. It was scenic countryside. There were old historic places where Washington had slept, or where the army had gone through on its way to upstate New York. We stopped to see where Washington had crossed the Delaware River in a boat among the floes of ice. It was interesting to get a mind's eye picture of Washington crossing the Delaware.

We went down to Annapolis to see the Naval Academy, to Mount Vernon, and to Longworth Gardens. There were just



Edward and I met at this dinner party hosted by Ms. Joy and Ms. Crabb

so many interesting places in that area.

I finally decided maybe I should go back home. I stayed in the Navy though. I was in the Reserves still,

even after I was discharged from active duty.

It wasn't until the Korean War came about that I began to get a little uneasy. I was still in the reserves, but not on active duty. I was



afraid they were going to call me up and put me back on active duty. I had a little baby who was less than a year old. So I quickly sent in my resignation to Bureau of Naval Personnel

and resigned my position.

That was the end of my duty with the Navy.

My husband, Edward, was a civilian. He had not been in the war because

he had had a

thyroidectomy and his health wasn't completely good for more than a year after he'd had the

thyroidectomy. I met him through a mutual friend



who lived in Wichita and was attached to Friends University. We met in July of 1948. My mother and my brother and I were in Wichita to visit my mother's sister and my grandmother. Some friends wanted to have a dinner for Mother to entertain her while she was here, and also included my brother and myself, and others our age. We all just enjoyed each other tremendously from that meeting. Edward came up to Minneapolis to see me after I got back home. We'd met in July and we were married in December of that year, so it was a fast moving event.

Edward was with Oxford University Press in New York. He loved books—especially college textbooks. He interviewed the professors to decide what books would fit their needs. He was editor in several states in the Midwest, and he had to travel. He had a car furnished by his publishing company and served the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Illinois, and Missouri. He'd be traveling at least two weeks at a time, or three weeks, and I went with him. We didn't have a place to live when we were first married; so we lived out of a suitcase. His mother lived here in Wichita, so we'd come back to see his relatives or we'd go to Minneapolis, where he'd have maybe two weeks at the University of Minnesota. We just enjoyed being on the campus; it's always an interesting place to be. The atmosphere of a college or of a university is just right.

Edward would be busy for the day interviewing people, or talking with them about their work. I'd busy myself and go to the art museum or to the historical museum there on the campus.

I always found something interesting to do.

I didn't travel for six months or so because I found I was pregnant, and that put an end to the traveling. We found an apartment in Evanston, Illinois. Chicago, of course, was the great hub for transportation; so that would seem like the logical place to live. You could fan out from there to all these different parts of his territory. Chicago was the central point, and easy to get in and out, but Evanston was more of a homelike place. It was north of Chicago, and was much better than just living in Chicago.

Charlie was three weeks early and was born on December 22, 1949. He was named for my grandfather, Charles E. Potts, of Wichita. We thought I was running out of time, and was approaching the age limit for having children. Sixteen months later, I had the next child, Edith Mary (Dee Dee). She was named for Edward's mother, Edith, and my mother, Mary. We had a third child, too. He came along four years after Dee Dee, and we called him, Louis, after Edward's uncle and my paternal great grandfather. They were all born in the Evanston Hospital.

Edward didn't really like Chicago that much. There was lots of traffic and noise, but it was nicer in the suburbs. We lived in Evanston about nine years. Then we moved to Larchmont, a suburb of New York City where Edward and his boss directed the college textbook department for Dodd, Mead, and Co. The *New York Times* was delivered to our door then—it was wonderful! We lived there for twelve years.

At that time, drugs were introduced in school. I was worried about that. We even thought of moving West, but two of the children graduated high school in New York. Louis finished junior high there and went on with us to live in Wisconsin and finished high school there.

We moved to Wisconsin and lived near the university. Edward had lost his job demonstrating textbooks and became Director of Development at the University of Wisconsin, Parkside Campus, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. He always loved being connected with a college campus.

The children took the move to Wisconsin in stride. After all, it was their father's main job. In Wisconsin, people were milder and less up-in-the-air about things. Wisconsin was a litigious society—they were always ready to file a suit on someone. There's a big difference in the way Wisconsonites look at life. Midwesterners are more laid-back, easy-going people.

Edward received a better offer to be a development officer for Wesley Medical Center in Wichita. Edward liked the idea since he was from Wichita.

I was from Minneapolis, and was afraid he'd want to go there with all the ice and snow, but fortunately he chose Wichita instead. I had some cousins here and it was where my mother grew up (from age 7 until she was married), so I felt like I was coming back to that home.

In Wichita, Edward was in development for Wesley Hospital to raise money. He liked it. Wichita is a slower moving

community, but that didn't bother me. We lived here for about five years when Edward died in 1984. He was 64 years old, and had melanoma, a very serious form of skin cancer. He lived for about six months after he was diagnosed.

I lived in our home a little while, but decided to move to Larksfield Place so that the children would be more comfortable about my living arrangements. My daughter, Dee Dee is now looking for a place in Seattle for me—if she can find somewhere as nice as Larksfield Place is. Then we can see each other often.

