



JENNIFER VIVEKANAND

History Being Made

In 1941, IVA COLLIER has a rendezvous with anxiety

I sat at the school desk; my feet barely reached the floor. The same size desks were used for all grades 1 through 11. For a 9-year-old child, the desk was too high, hard, and uncomfortable.

December 8, 1941. I don't know why I remember the desk, but I think it is because that was where I was when the fear came. The teacher was explaining that ships had been taken by surprise and bombed the day before, and that many lives had been lost. She said we were most surely going to war.

War I did not comprehend. I knew it was something very bad of which to be afraid. Maybe my Daddy would go away and never come back. He might be killed. The thought of him dying was the worst of my fears.

1941 was before television. Children spent their time in simpler pursuits. We were far less worldly-wise. Even so, I knew something big was going down. That afternoon, as I walked home alone from school, I worried as only a child worries.

Daddy walked to and from work, as did most of the neigh-

bors. Few persons had cars. We lived in a so-called "factory row" house. Before 1941, most common folk in central North Carolina worked in mills or factories. The company owned the factory, the house one lived in, and usually the only grocery store in town. By payday on Friday, most families owed, if not their souls; their paychecks to the company store. The country was just awakening from the Great Depression, and most of the men were glad to have any kind of job. Life, though simple, was good. Neighbors were truly neighbors and children played without fear.

That fateful afternoon, Daddy came home from work shortly after I got home. His voice and Mama's were higher pitched than usual, and louder. Few of our neighbors had radios, but we did, so later that night many came to our house to hear the president speak. No one gave the children any attention. Mostly ignored in

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Iva Collier is retired in Raleigh after years of working in the medical-laboratory field. Her story "Joy Amid Depression" was in the February 2000 Urban Hiker.



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the confusion, we dealt with our thoughts and fears alone.

I sat in the corner on the floor and listened. If grownups were this excited, I thought, something very important must be happening. Neighborhood gatherings were commonplace when there was big news. Everyone became quiet as they gathered around the cathedral-shaped radio to listen to President Roosevelt give his "Day of Infamy" speech. When the speech was over, they all agreed that this meant war. History was being made.

Things changed. Life was never again to be as simple as it was before the war. Our family moved to the coast and daddy went to work in the shipyard. Mama became a Rosie the Riveter. We lived near the water not far from a military installation. Soldiers were everywhere. Planes roared overhead; sirens wailed. Blackout window blinds were drawn when there was an air-raid warning. Sixty years later, I can still remember the sounds.

The children, including me, mostly looked after themselves. Two of my friends drowned in the waterway. I also remember a group of us walking by ourselves through trees to see an airplane which had crashed nearby. The plane had made a big hole and when we got there, they were still clearing the wreckage; the plane still burning. We grew up fast.

Sixty years pass. I am loading the dishwasher when the telephone rings. "Turn on the TV! Terrorists have struck!" My childhood fear returns. Fear and sorrow are no respecters of age. Despite the many modern marvels developed since 1941, human nature has not changed.

I watch the events on television in disbelief for most of September 11, and then I fall asleep. I awaken, hoping to find it had all been a bad dream. I switch on the TV.

It is still there; it is not a dream. It is reality.

The digging for the dead.

History being made. •