

Submission to Retrospect for the theme, War & Remembrance

## **A Family Without Men**

I was four years old when my mother's sister was invited to move into our little bungalow in Norman, Oklahoma. She brought with her two kids and their dog, Fluffy. Their dad had shipped out to Italy and would move on into Germany. My own father was in the Philippines and would later be part of the occupying forces in Japan. My Uncle Jim was part of the China, Burma and India forces. We were a family without men. Life changed.

To have my two favorite cousins living with us was a delight beyond words, and I have actually claimed that ironically WWII was the happiest time of my childhood. We played war in the backyard. My cousin, Virginia, was almost exactly one year older than me. My little sister was barely two. Howard Jr., seven years older than me, taught us three little girls to goose step and salute like Nazis and to make the screaming-bloody-murder cry of a kamikaze pilot crashing into one of our carriers. Fluffy went wild when Howard, up in a gnarled old willow tree, bombed us girls with paper airplanes.

My Aunt and my mother were able to concentrate on their children as they never had before. They taught us to do the Charleston and sing "Mairzy Dotes" and "God Bless America." They helped us with costumes and sat in for serial games of Monopoly. Without the eagle eye of my father's discipline, life was relaxed. The mothers peeled all the old greasy paper off the walls in the kitchen and put up big, beautiful pink roses. The man at the store had told them that rose wallpaper was meant for bedrooms, but they put it up

anyway and painted the woodwork pink. Then they took my paternal grandmother's old walnut china cabinet and painted it pink too and the round oak table—pink like a birthday cake sitting there in the middle of our rosy kitchen. They said they were wild women. They laughed like crazy and had to put down their paintbrushes to wipe their tears and blow their noses.

The men were far away and couldn't stop them.

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