

Book 3 AFTER THE WAR

Coming Home, Further Education and Social Life

Arriving at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin at 3:00 a.m., came an announcement through loud and clear that we would start processing immediately, or we could sleep a few hours. Everyone agreed to begin processing immediately, and by 3:00 p.m. all of us were on our way home. It took fifteen hours to arrive in the city of Bemidji - which was again 6:00 a.m. The day was bright and sunny and the walk from the depot home was only sixteen blocks. The old town had not changed much and the walk took me all of fifteen minutes. (1430 Bemidji Ave)

When I arrived home, everyone was still asleep until Dad came out to the living room saying how lucky I was to be home. I immediately noticed that his hair had turned from black to gray-white in less than two years. After a couple of hours of answering questions from my two kid brothers, who were ten and twelve, we drove out to the farm to find my civilian clothes. (Scott relates that in about 2006, as Lowell's health was failing, he was sitting in Scott's office at Allied and was talking about the War. Lowell was relating what it was like when he arrived back in Bemidji, and no one was there to meet him. He started to cry as he told the story to Scott.)

One of my two sisters had moved to the state of Washington and was married to a returning veteran from a Japanese prison camp. The other sister was completing her first year at the local teachers college.



The first day at home, most of the relatives in town came over for the afternoon, including my grandmother who was eighty-five years of age. This all happened on the first day of the weekend and there was some talk of going to church, but too many plans were being made for the afternoon party.

The next morning my uncle called and asked me to go fishing with him on one of the northern lakes, which seemed like a good idea as it was opening day. We had a chance to discuss a lot of the events that had happened the last two years. One was a trial partnership with my Dad in the local business, which did not work out as my uncle really was a schoolteacher at heart, and he did not need that kind of stress. After fishing for a couple of hours and answering questions about my life away from home, we decided it was time to quit with a catch of one fish.

That evening Marv, Hutch, Gordy and Herb came to the house and suggested we all go out and catch up on the social life, mostly because they had been home from service a short time. First stop was the VFW club where most of our friends were swapping lies and war stories.

Most of the summer was spent improving and adjusting to civilian life. During our spare time, some of the guys went to work on the railroad as members of what they called the extra gang. This involved tamping ties, etc. This job was the hottest in summer and coldest in winter. I went to work as a brick layer, laying cement blocks on a new garage Dad was building for the future Farm Equipment business that was supposed to improve machinery that was not available during the war.

My Mother thought that I should register for the fall quarter at college but I had no interest in becoming a teacher, and in the meantime all the guys were signing up with the Fifty Two Twenty club. This meant receiving twenty dollars per week for fifty-two weeks while seeking employment.

The employment office was across the street from where I was working, and when three of us walked in to apply the lady at the desk asked me what my qualifications were. I answered stating that I was a trained demolition specialist. She told me there was no work available near Bemidji for that type of work, which made me eligible for the Fifty Two Twenty program, and my first check would be in the next week, on the same day of the week. If I was not working I would be eligible for another twenty dollars the following week. When I was picking up my first check the lady told me she had a job for which I would qualify. She had been watching me working on the building across the street. Mrs. Goodman gave me the check, but said there would be no more as I had refused a job. This did not surprise me, but I thought it worth a try.

Due to my two years in the service, I was entitled to four years of free education. One evening I discussed this with Glen Q. as we had been in school together since first grade. Why not sign up at Bemidji State Teachers College (BSTC)? This made my Mother very happy, and also Dad thought this was the right thing to do. The building I had been working on was almost completed, so I agreed to work Friday and Saturday for my room and board.

After registration, Glen and I became locker partners, and our first notice as to who would be in charge was when the ruling came out that our classes would be scheduled on Daylight Saving Time which meant all classes would begin an hour earlier. Legislature had not yet passed this into law, but seems the professors acted as this would allow them to begin their golf game by two o'clock in the afternoon.

Classes were about seventy percent veterans and this seemed to make some of

the instructors very nervous. Maybe one reason was the availability of text books, which would accommodate only about ten percent of the students, plus enrollment increased from two hundred to five hundred students.

A bill was before the state legislature recommending that all returning veterans be required to take a course on readjusting to civilian life. This was a slap in the face and would make it appear that we were all not quite normal, mentally. As a result, action was taken by some of us circulating a petition and this was mailed to our legislator. We stated that we were deeply offended by this and as a result the bill died in committee.

After the completion of the first semester only a quarter of the freshman class returned. This was due to such things as adjustment to routine, low grades, housing problems, and also the single guys couldn't live on sixty dollars per month. If you were married, the amount was only one hundred dollars per month. Added to all these problems, necessary materials weren't available.

The only class I received a decent mark in was in biology and this was because my sister had completed this course the previous year and had left all her test papers available for me.

One of the requirements of the GI Bill was that we carry a minimum of twelve quarter hours to be eligible for our GI benefits. Most of us carried only the minimum, allowing us to adjust to civilian life more smoothly and be able to catch up on some of the fun we had missed while in service. Also helping us with adjusting was that most of us joined the local VFW, which was the main watering hole after classes each day.

As classes began each day we walked into the gymnasium on the way to our lockers. There would be Buster playing the piano in great style with his black Lab dog howling, trying to keep in tune with the music. After Buster's graduation, he became, not a teacher, but one of the most successful automobile dealers in our town.

As time passed, we became better adjusted and our social life at the Union on campus began to pick up. As the males outnumbered the females about three to one, any social event made it necessary for many of us to bring a non-student. The popular thing was to have house parties at least once a week, and this was quite economical for most of us as we were short on cash. In all, we were five couples, and the local roadhouse appreciated seeing us coming to their establishment to play the nickelodeon, drink beer, and dance until twelve p.m.

Time came for us to sign up for the second semester and we skimmed through with our twelve to fourteen quarter hours. I had noticed that Glen and Doris were getting more serious, and about half way through the second semester Glen had picked up a "quit" slip stating his college career was coming to an end. I asked to

see what it looked like and immediately tore it up and he agreed to finish out the semester. By this time Gordy had given his girlfriend a diamond and she was the sister of the girl I was dating. Also, Doris was wearing a diamond and a short time later she and Glen were married. Prior to Glen and Doris getting married, he and I had met with a representative of the Lorleid Tobacco Co. inquiring about a job. Glen had a cigarette habit acquired over the years, and this gave him qualifications to be hired immediately upon the last day at BSTC that spring.

The summer of 1947 had begun and there was a big demand for used cars. While working at my dad's shop, I bought and sold cars, which turned out to be quite lucrative and profitable. That summer, I enrolled at one of the business colleges, which turned out to be one of my better decisions. With this acquired knowledge, I returned to the business of selling equipment, which still had limited availability.



I lived at home until my twenty first birthday and then I moved to a rooming house near the center of town. This gave me more privacy and independence. My social life was beginning to seem dull until I purchased a motorcycle! There was Larry, Al, Spike, Josten and I all with Harley Davidson machines. Weekends we would go to all corners of the state to hill climb and other events. The final blow was one time in the fall of the year with the streets icy and I was driving too fast. A spot of ice was not in view until too late. After the spill I was upside down under a Greyhound bus, which luckily was parked picking up a passenger on the other side of the street. Thankfully, I had only a few scratches and bruises, otherwise okay.

One of the first times I was at Larry's house I met his dad, Charlie Sattgast, who was president of Bemidji State Teachers College. (A building on campus was later built and named in his honor.) He turned out to be a real regular guy and during our conversations he mentioned that he was taking the bus to Minneapolis for a meeting with the state legislature. I said that I had sold a new truck and needed it brought back to Bemidji to be serviced and delivered to a customer. Charlie offered to drive it back for me for the price of twenty-five dollars. Two days later it was parked in his yard for me to pick up.

Larry came home from WWII about the same time as I, and we had lots to talk about. Larry's mother was the outdoors type and was always ready to accompany us on our many hunting trips for grouse. Mrs. Sattgast was troubled

with high blood pressure and several times we would bring her home because of severe nosebleeds. After one of these hunting trips she died of a heart attack.

They had a standing rule at their house that breakfast was never served before 9:00 a.m. or dinner until very late in the evening. I remember Larry would be making his dinner at 8:00 p.m. because his parents had been invited out to dinner.

Larry and I covered the territory and during the summer when the temperature was near 90 degrees we would race around town on our machines, as we called our motorcycles. The local cops picked us up for making too much noise and four of us were fined twenty-five dollars each for disturbing the peace. When we met with the city clerk, and after much discussion, she allowed us to pay our fines over a three month period. This was on the condition that we not repeat the offence. We got new mufflers for our machines. By this time the weather had changed to cold evenings and we had to park our motorcycles and get antifreeze for our cars.

Late 1949: Our social life continued to excel from one friendship to another with the girls in the area. One of the most interesting was Ann, who came from a wealthy family in the neighboring town. We dated for about a year and finally her family wanted to meet my family. This seemed to be proper as I had been to their house for dinner many times. A short time later Ann asked me when we were going to get married. My reply was, "when are you going to start going to my church?" Her reply was, "I will drop my church affiliation, but will not join any other church." That ended our friendship, and the following year she married one of the local boys.

After Ann there was Gracie who had many good qualities and a good job as an RN at the local hospital. As just a good friend she became *very* aggressive, and at a New Year's party became very inebriated. She was a good friend of Larry's sister-in-law and the word came back to me, through Larry, that the sister-in-law was sure Gracie and I were having a sexual relationship. This was an outright lie. On our next date she invited Larry and me to a sleigh ride party. I met a student nurse who was in training at the local hospital. She had absolutely no time for me because I pushed her off the sleigh into a snow bank and her date neglected to help her. I came to her rescue, and we were so far behind the sleigh, they had to stop and wait for us. That night at the party I learned her name was Mello, (Manilla) and she was plenty mad at me about pushing her into the snow bank and trying to kiss her while helping her out. More on our relationship in a later chapter.