

Carl Drain's Belated Homecoming

by Ira Briggs

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During my adolescent years in the late 1960s, I was a paperboy in Hemlock, NY. My most preferred customers were Mr. and Mrs. Hugh and Gertrude Drain.

Mrs. Drain had been confined to a wheelchair for many years, and Mr. Drain always walked with a limp. We seldom conversed, because their limited mobility prevented them from coming to the door when I collected, but they were always congenial.

Every Friday, the Drains would leave a yellow and orange plastic Millbrook Bread bag hanging from their front doorknob. The bottom of the bag contained the weekly payment for the paper; above that was a knot and an assortment of hard candy; above that was another knot and loose change for a tip.

Each day, Mr. Drain would limp across the road to the Fire Department to raise the American flag. I often witnessed this ritual during my deliveries.

For recreation, Mr. Drain enjoyed building ornamental lawn windmills which he would sell to tourists from his front lawn. Designs included two lumberjacks sawing a log, a farmer milking a cow and a man cranking an old car. Mr. Drain's rendition of a twin prop airplane was everyone's favorite, but it was not for sale, not for any price.

As I passed by the Drains' house in May of 1982, I noticed a Rochester TV station news van parked outside. Later that evening, the Drains were interviewed on TV, expressing their feelings in response to the latest news.

Their only son, WWII pilot Corporal Carl A. Drain, had been found. His C-47A, a twin prop cargo plane used for carrying supplies and wounded soldiers, had gone down in bad weather on Dec. 10, 1944 in the dense mountain foliage of New Guinea. The remains of Corporal Drain and the copilot of the five-man crew had been found among the plane's wreckage and would soon be returned home. The remains of the other crew members were never found.



A WW II C-47A Cargo Plane

Following the surprising news, I learned from a local elder that Carl had been married and worked at his father's hardware store prior to the war. Mr. Drain's daily flag raising ritual had been instituted in honor of his son; his leg injury had occurred when he was struck by a car while crossing the street on one such occasion.

Hearing the rest of the story made me realize why that hand-crafted twin prop airplane had not been for sale. It was a priceless reminder for the Drains, and should be for all of us, to be mindful of the daily freedoms we often take for granted.

Editor's Note: Ira Briggs is a well digger, writer and Arc Living Skills Assistant and a University of Rochester employee who hails from Hemlock. He writes short stories from his memories of the people and events of Hemlock NY.