

Gary's Hope

by Gary Hope

“Gary’s Hope,” by Gary Hope. ISBN 978-1-62137-403-9.

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Lord, I've Got A Problem . . .

ME

This book is about some extraordinary people I've known, with some interesting (or not) facts and stories thrown in. Everything I'm writing about is true, to the best of my knowledge; however, it wouldn't surprise me if some of the men and women in these accounts will try to downplay their actual roles . . . which is understandable, due to the passage of time—which tends to blur our memories to some extent. And, because they probably think that their lives are so very normal and that they themselves are not noteworthy of any attention . . . I beg to differ.

I'm starting with a story I found to be fascinating as a whole and pretty amazing broken down into each facet. It starts with a young man born around 1893 I think; he had never been away from his home in southeastern North

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Carolina until he joined the Army during World War 1 and was sent to France to preserve our freedom fighting the aggressive and determined Germans (determined to once again unleash their fury on their neighbors . . . the boastful, arrogant high and mighty French) . It's truly a wonder more countries didn't want to fight the French; after all, it was a certain victory fighting them.

I recommend reading a wonderful book called "All Quiet on the Western Front," which gives a dynamic and graphic picture of what men went through during The Great War . . . and it's one of the best books ever written, not just about war, but ever written. The young man in my story—and my hero—was assigned to the front, which meant he was stationed several hundred yards from the German lines. WW1 was characterized by what was termed "trench warfare," which meant each side dug ditches, or trenches, about 6' deep all along the front and charged each other and shot at each other and bombed each other and gassed each other from these trenches. Each time one side advanced a little, new trenches would have to be dug—it was a full time job digging these ditches.

My hero, being strong of back and hard of head , was immediately recruited to dig the trenches. The front lines constantly moved—back and forth depending on the bravery of the Generals back at headquarters; so, new ditches were needed all the time. The very nature of war means no 8 hour days, or 40 hour weeks, consequently, he dug ditches all his waking hours, except when he was required to pick up his rifle and fire at the charging Germans. There were no barracks, no tents, everything had to be below ground level so the Germans couldn't see you and shoot you. That meant my hero, and all those other brave men as well, lived in the ditches 24/7.

He ate all his meals in the ditch, went to the bathroom in the ditch, slept there, fought there, cried there, cursed there and saw many friends and comrades die there. He was gassed (ghastly fogs of poison the Germans lofted in), bombed, machine gunned, and hand-grenaded . . . yet somehow he lived through it all for 13 months. In the winter, there was no way to warm yourself in the trench, no fires were allowed because the Germans could then see the smoke and loft a bomb over; so he, like all of his friends nearly froze to death . . . some did. It was common practice to urinate on your hands just to feel the momentary sensation of warmth on your fingers.

In the summer, all types of vermin inhabited the ditch . . . rats, lice, ticks, fleas and many unnamed and unknown other creatures that made their lives all the more miserable . . . if death and terror weren't enough! However, our hero survived it all (physically) and made it back home—a miracle in and of itself. From this time in his life until the end of his life he was reluctant to discuss what happened in those ditches; it was all too terrible to conjure up those thoughts again. Sudden loud noises, firecrackers, cars backfiring, or a book dropping to the floor always startled him and made him jump—50 years later he was still affected. Things like he experienced don't just go away . . . they stay with you.

But, he made it back to southeastern North Carolina—garden spot of the world, as it is; without a scratch from the war, met a young lady who was described as “sweet as cotton candy” but much prettier and got married. Soon afterwards, he was chopping some wood for the stove and cut off half his big toe; at least it wasn't the Germans who injured him.

My hero lived a fairly normal life, you could say; if you consider raising 6 children during the Great Depression normal. But, just as they are all getting used to “normal,” those crazy Germans are at it again. This time, it’s not just the surrendering French, they also invade Poland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and any other country their insanely, demonic Fuhrer tells them to. Finally, after the Japanese made the HUGE mistake of attacking us, we entered WW II. They should’ve let the sleeping dog lie, because when they woke us . . . it was OVER for them and their German buddies. It was only a matter of time before we settled the score; unfortunately, tens of millions of people lost their lives because of this insanity.

Seemingly, DNA from our hero was passed along to his children and during this latest World War his three oldest sons joined the military (the youngest son wasn’t of age, he had to wait until the Korean War to join up). And to cover all their bases . . . one joined the Army, one joined the Marines and one joined the Navy . . . off to war they went. My first story is of the son who was sent to France, just like his father, to fight the dastardly Germans (again) and save the homeland of the white flag waving French. Unfortunately for him, his arrival in France was on D-Day, June 6, 1944 parachuting behind German lines in the early morning total darkness of that fateful day.

The Germans, who were crazy but not stupid, knew we were coming, they just weren’t sure where and when . . . but they were ready and they were waiting for us. Our hero was in the Airborne, not very fortunate for him, a dangerous occupation at the time. It was decided by the Generals again, who were planning everything from merry, old England, that the invasion would start before daylight, so our hero, along with thousands of other heroes would parachute inland after the initial artillery

barrage. Jumping from an airplane is dangerous in and of itself; try jumping in total darkness , behind enemy lines, being shot at, not knowing where you would land, nor what you would do if you even made the landing alive—which many didn't.

Soldiers were landing in trees, breaking legs and arms; landing in lakes and rivers drowning; landing on houses full of Germans and being killed summarily . . . it was a terrible, terrible scene. Our hero couldn't see anything until the ground whacked him when he landed—he could only hear the bullets whizzing by him as the Germans were firing blindly at them. He didn't know where he was, nor how far it was back to the beach where all the other Americans were. The Americans were given little “clickers,” so they could click each other to let the other know he was an American . . . the problem was that the Germans stole the clickers from the dead GI's and now everybody had clickers! There was no way to know who was friendly or hostile in the dark, French countryside.

His orders were to make it to the beach and help with the invasion . . . and that's what he did. Eventually, after sun up he slowly made it through the bullets and the bombs to the beach where the Allies were landing. There was still heavy fighting on the beach front and it was a horribly expensive landing in terms of human lives lost . . . just horrible. Our hero, like his Dad before him, is hesitant to bring up those memories from the depths of his mind—I can understand that. The only time I ever heard him talk about it was the one scene that he can't get over, one that has haunted him for over 60 years; when he finally made it to the beach, they had all the bodies and body parts of the men who had died that day stacked up like cordwood all along the beach front; rows and rows of them—he has never been able to suppress that sight from his mind; it's

the image he sees when he closes his eyes at night . . . 60
some years later.

The next son (and brother) was also in WWII, but he joined the Marines . . . Lord only knows why. He was shipped off to the Pacific where we were fighting the Japanese at the time. Funny how time changes things . . . today, the Japanese and Germans are our great friends and economic allies and we love them—well, I think we do. But not back in 1944 and 1945 when our second brother was on an island in the Pacific where there was a terrible battle raging. His Marine platoon was in danger of being overrun one horrible day . . . Japanese troops surrounding them; withering machine gun fire, mortar fire, and tank fire had them pinned down hopelessly.

Suddenly, a Japanese tank starts motoring directly at our lines, with the intention of wiping them out once and for all. My hero in this story leaps over some fallen comrades, grabs a bazooka, runs out in the open to get a clear shot and fires his bazooka at point blank range making a direct hit, blowing up the tank and all those around it who were following on foot. This action so startled the Japanese and so emblazoned the Americans that it turned the tide completely in that battle. The Marines took the offensive and eventually secured the island. Our hero was awarded the “Silver Star” for bravery above and beyond the call of duty; for saving untold American lives at no thought of his own. However, he never told his story. It was only known from those who witnessed it and recommended him for the medal and award. When he got home after the war, he never mentioned it, never even told his family he had earned the medal.

Like his Dad before him and his brother, he never talked about those events which are too traumatic to relive. Fortunately, we were able to find out about these brave, heroic men and what they did for our country . . . there is no way to appropriately thank them for their service, their bravery, courage and will. We all will be indebted to them and hundreds of thousands of others just like them forever.

The third son chose to join the Navy and served his country in the Pacific during the war; even though I've asked him about his experiences on ships fighting the Japanese, he just sluffs it off saying he really didn't do anything special and was just one of many onboard the ship. But, what more would I have expected him to say, knowing where he came from.

The first hero was my grandfather, Grover Cleveland Townsend and his wife Ida Elizabeth Townsend (sweet as cotton candy) who my sister and niece are named after. Their sons, my uncle, Earl Townsend was our paratrooper; our Marine was my uncle G.C. Townsend and our sailor was my uncle Paul Townsend. I'm still hoping some of their incredible DNA has filtered down to me . . . however, I've yet to see it manifest itself in any credible form—but I've got a few years left hopefully. What I do know, is that it's there; maybe below the surface sitting latently, waiting for the opportune time; I hope I'm as brave as these men when the time comes.



G.C. and Ida Elizabeth Townsend

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*"If everyone's thinking the same way; then
someone isn't thinking."*

General Patton

My sister loves shopping at Wal-Mart . . . Loves it! I personally don't get it, but obviously a lot of people do, because the parking lots at Wal-Marts are full nearly all the time. I recently found some interesting statistics about Wal-Mart that I'd like to share:

Americans spend \$36,000,000 at Wal-Mart every hour of every day . . . again, that's every hour of every day!

This works out to \$20,928 profit every MINUTE!

Wal-Mart will sell more from January 1 to St. Patrick's Day (March 17) than Target sells all year.

Wal-Mart is bigger than Home Depot + Kroger + Target + Sears + Costco + K-Mart all combined.

Wal-Mart employs 1.6 million people, is the world's largest private employer, and most employees speak English.

Wal-Mart is the largest company in the history of the world.

Wal-Mart started selling food only 15 years ago and now sells more than Kroger and Safeway combined; and during this same period, 31 big supermarket chains sought bankruptcy.

Wal-Mart now sells more food than any other store in the world.

Wal-Mart has approximately 3,900 stores in the USA, which is 1,000 more than it had five years ago.

This year about 7.2 billion purchases will be made at Wal-Mart. (Earth's population is about 6.5 billion)

90% of all Americans live within 15 miles of a Wal-Mart.

Now, ask yourself this question: who would you rather run our country? Politicians, who have no practical experience in anything, except being politicians; or the President of Wal-Mart who absolutely knows how to run things, make a profit, grow, expand and serve the country?

Nothing is broken at Wal-Mart . . . everything runs very efficiently and effectively; whereas in our country today:

The Post Office is broken and nearly bankrupt

Social Security is teetering

Fannie Mae is a mess

Medicare and Medicaid are so convoluted and messed up, I don't think anyone understands them

The Department of Energy (created in 1977 to lessen our dependence on foreign oil) has ballooned to 16,000 employees with a budget of \$24 Billion and we now import more oil than ever.

Everything seems broken and we can't seem to help our own Seniors, Veterans, Orphans and Homeless; yet we can provide aid to Haiti, Chili, Japan, Turkey, Pakistan, etc., etc. etc . . .

Now, our politicians want to FREEZE Social Security payments (money we've all paid in over the course of our working lives by the way), yet they have voted themselves a pay raise in 2013!

Democrats . . . Republicans . . . Tea Party . . . Libertarians? No, no, no and no . . . give me the president of Wal-Mart to run our country and lets' get things moving again!

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*"What I'm looking for isn't out there . . . it's
in me.*

Helen Keller

Ever feel useless? Abandoned? Lonely? Worthless? We all do. . . . We all do. Ever ask why I'm here? What is my purpose? What am I supposed to do? Have you ever wondered how anyone, including God, could use me for anything worthwhile? Even the famous and beautiful people have deep periods of loneliness and self doubt. John Lennon always questioned his worthiness and suffered depression, Madonna has asked the question "Why am I here?" Kurt Cobain was so disgusted and tormented with his life that he blew his brains out. This list goes on and on and on. . . . The rehab facilities in California and elsewhere are PACKED with the rich and famous . . . why?

One of the most beautiful women in Hollywood, Halle Berry says "Being thought of as a beautiful woman has

spared me nothing in life. Not heartache, not trouble, love has been difficult, beauty is essentially meaningless and it's always transitory.”

Albert Einstein said “It is strange to be known so universally, and yet be so lonely.”

We all have a “hole” in our hearts, yearning for something, for a relationship with our creator. Drugs can't fill that void, drink can't, relationships can't, not power nor money nor any other worldly thing. That's why the rehab centers are all filled up, people are looking in all the wrong places to fill the void in their lives and in their hearts. We were made by God, and for God; and until we figure that out, life isn't going to make sense. But don't be disheartened, God loves you and wants you to be happy; He can always use you, no matter how broken you think you might be. Just look at a few of the people throughout history God has used:

Noah was a drunk

Abraham was too old

Isaac was a daydreamer

Jacob was a liar

Leah was ugly

Joseph was abused

Moses had a stuttering problem

Gideon was afraid

Samson had long hair and was a womanizer

Rahab was a prostitute

Jeremiah and Timothy were too young

David had an affair and was a murderer

Elijah was suicidal

Isaiah preached naked

Jonah ran from God

Naomi was a widow

Job went bankrupt

Peter denied Christ. . . . 3 times!

The disciples fell asleep while praying

Martha worried about Everything

The Samaritan woman was divorced more than once.

Zaccheus was too small

Paul was too religious

Timothy had an ulcer . . .

AND

Lazarus was DEAD!

No more excuses . . . God can use you to your full potential. There is no key to happiness, the door is always open. Faith is the ability to not panic. And always remember, God loves you and He will never forget you nor forsake you. He promised us that . . . and He always keeps His promises.

"The definition of a bore is someone who, when asked how they are feeling, will actually tell you."

Ruth Graham

And now, the definition of a "good man" . . . Alfred Paul Townsend. My uncle, my hero and one of the stars of my first story about WWII . . . Uncle Paul was the brother who joined the Navy. However, anyone could join the Navy, not everyone can be a model husband, father, son, brother and Christian man. Not perfect, he never could adequately correct that hook he had with his driver . . . just a good man.

After the war Uncle Paul and a friend of his went on a double date with two young ladies from Robeson county, so you know they had to be beauties . . . and they were. The problem was that Uncle Paul was attracted to his friend's date a lot more than to his own date. Not one to let a friendship get in the way of a budding romance,

Uncle Paul and the young lady quickly let it be known they wanted to switch dates—I think at Aunt Dot’s urging, but that may be in question. However, they quickly became an item and married forthwith and Uncle Paul had now done exactly like his Dad had done years ago and found him a wife as sweet as sugar cane; but you know, sugar cane can be a tad spicy if not harvested in time—and so it was with Aunt Dot. A little spice to keep the recipe healthy. After moves to Florence (not the one in Italy) and Chicago for schooling, they settled in Charlotte and raised three beautiful , intelligent children. Seemingly pretty normal stuff for the 1950’s and 60’s.

I first stated that this book was not about me, and it’s not; but a little background information is needed to fully understand Uncle Paul’s life. I was living in the best little town in America at the time, about a 3 hour drive from Charlotte in the days of two-lane traffic. I lived with my mom and sister and grandparents, no dad—a later story, maybe. Uncle Paul would make the drive from Charlotte to Red Springs once a month, packing up his three kids and come to visit his mom and dad and be a surrogate father to me. I don’t know why he took an interest in me, but he did; maybe it was just carry over love he had for his sister—my mom.

Uncle Paul would play catch with me in the yard and talk to me about things—it was nice getting advice and lessons from a man; I really loved that. But what I loved even more was that Uncle Paul would take me golfing! Just me and him, oh how exciting that was; later, when his son Ronnie was old enough, he would come along as well. I didn’t mind sharing Uncle Paul with Ronnie. I had a driver, 3 iron, 7 iron, 9 iron and putter and the advice and attention of someone I admired and loved. Uncle Paul was a golfer, he actually knew what he was doing . . . I

didn't have a clue; he taught me everything, or at least tried to. I'm pretty sure I was a knucklehead most of the time; I'll never understand how he had the patience to walk 18 holes with me trying to teach me about life and golf. But nearly every 3-4 weeks, he came, we played, he taught and I learned. He didn't have to do any of that, he was just a good man.

Years later, after my grandparents had passed away, and my Mom and sister and me were basically alone, Uncle Paul and Aunt Dot would invite us to spend Christmas with them at their home in Charlotte with their family so we wouldn't be alone. I'm sure this wasn't their optimal Christmas fantasy . . . having a goofy teenager like me and a petulant, moody younger teenager like my sister spend Christmas at your house. But they did it.

On and on through the years Uncle Paul always did the right thing, arranged family reunions, visited those who were sick, went to weddings and funerals when none of the rest of us wanted to. He did all the things you wished you would have done . . . but didn't. And all through his life , up till present day, I've never . . . NEVER heard him say a four letter word, nor an unkind word about anyone for any reason; and I'm sure he's probably lost his temper from time to time—I told you he wasn't perfect—but I've never seen it. Now, Aunt Dot . . . let's just say she will tell it like it is—and I respect that.

If you remember my story about WWII, you'll recall Uncle Paul's brother, G.C., who joined the Marines and won the Silver Star. After the war Uncle G.C. married and had 6 kids, it was tough providing for a large family, but he provided just fine. . . . nothing fancy or wistful, just a man providing for his growing family. Uncle Paul, knowing the financial constraints of such a large family, always made

certain that each of the kids received special Christmas presents. And checked on them throughout the year, helping when he could and should. He left a lasting impression on that family, one that resulted in one of Uncle G.C.'s kids, Kenny, naming his son after Uncle Paul. Enough said.

Finally, the last thing I'm going to write about (this book isn't big enough to list all I should say about Uncle Paul), is what he did for his other sister, my Aunt Mary. Her health had deteriorated to the point of leg amputations and heart attacks which made it necessary for her to reside in a Rest Home in King, N.C. She recently passed away, but for the entire time she was in the rest home (6-8 years, I don't remember), Uncle Paul and Aunt Dot would drive from Charlotte to King every week to visit her, bring her food, take her on short trips . . . everything you wished you had done for Aunt Mary, but didn't. Just fighting the Charlotte traffic is daunting itself, and being in your 80's as he and Aunt Dot are, making that drive every week to see his sister . . . Have you ever spent time in a rest home visiting? I could make it about 30 minutes, sometimes 45 minutes on my visits to see Aunt Mary . . . they stayed all day. I don't understand how they did that, I don't understand the innate goodness of those two people.

So, now you have the definition of a "good man."



Uncle Paul