



2020 Veterans Day Essay Contest
High School Winner: Matthew Miscikowski

When I was younger, I would sit on the floor at my grandparents house next to a kindly older gentleman who would tell me stories about flying in airplanes. I was very young and only knew him as some old guy I was related to but it wasn't until later that I realized I had the honor of knowing someone from the Greatest Generation. That someone was my grandfather, Michael Troyanoski.

Michael Troyanoski was a Sergeant in the United States Army Air Corp during WWII. He was a navigator, engineer, radio operator and gunner on B-17s and B-24s and flew in 37 bombing raids over Europe, destroying targets that were critical to the Nazi war machine. Later, he was stationed in South America as part of search and rescue operations in the Pacific. I had no idea that the man holding my Thomas the Tank Engine toy was a war hero who fought for the freedom of future generations. I would listen to his tales but unfortunately I could not appreciate them as I had no understanding what a PB-Y was or where was Germany. Now that I am sixteen and more knowledgeable about the history and events that lead up to WWII, I understand the great sacrifice of not only my grandfather but all the men and women who defended our country against the Axis Powers.

The true tragedy is that his stories would never touch my ears again as Michael Troyanoski passed away when I was 9. Regrettable, there are no recordings or handwritten notes of these stories. He had many old black and



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white photos of planes and places that we keep meticulously safe and treasured. Pictures of a young man in a uniform and a much too big overcoat with a duffle bag standing in line with other young men boarding the train to basic training or a B-17 limping back to home base, smoke pouring out of its engine and the gunner bubble blown to smithereens. Some of these pictures show the stark reality of war while others show young men just being happy to have survived another day.

As a young man, my grandfather had big hopes and dreams but all that changed on December 7th, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Michael Troyanoski was just one of the millions of American men and women who took up arms against injustice. Some volunteered, some were drafted but all went to battle not knowing when they would come home or if they would come home. My grandfather was one of the lucky ones and made it back to the small coal mining town in Pennsylvania where he grew up. He came home, married, started a family and took over the family business. When he talked about his time in WWII he talked about the friends he made, places he saw and most of all the planes. He loved those airplanes. He never talked about the missions and the loss of life he experienced until one day my mom was helping him preserve the treasured photos and found pictures she had never seen before. Pictures of planes destroyed in battle, smoke coming from enemy ships sinking into the sea, and scarred and charred earth seen from the planes as they flew over the land they had just targeted. When asked what these were pictures of he told his other



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stories. The stories he did not like to share because they dredged up sadness and questions of why did he survive when so many others didn't. But that is what the Greatest Generation did. They came home and carried on with their lives and shut away all the horror they had been through. We call them the Greatest Generation but they were a modest group of men and women. Never recognizing themselves as the heroes that they were but just as individuals doing what they had to do for God and their country.

To this day, the image of my grandfather still shines as a bright beacon which inspires me to be the best person that I can be. And one day I hope to be half the man that my grandfather was. We call them the greatest generation because of their humility, commitment, bravery and love of their country and there will never be another group like them. I close by saying that from their stories and pictures they will continue to inspire future generations to unite, to commit and defend the honor of this country.



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