

History of

ILA MAE SMITH COLE

I was born March 5, 1925, in Lake Mills, Iowa. I was born at my grandmother's home where she handled the midwife duties. She also handled the births of all but one of my brothers and sisters. The youngest, Roger, was born in a hospital. My parents, John Levi Smith and Agnes Luella Holland, were married June 13, 1920. My father was born on July 22, 1884, and died June 27, 1962, at age 78. He was primarily a salesman, mostly for stock foods for farm animals. He also worked in a variety of other areas—mail carrier for a time, and at a large farm equipment company. My mother was born April 20, 1898, and died February 14, 1989, at age 90. Before marriage she was a school teacher. During her later years she helped with school lunches and was forced to quit at age 70. She then washed dishes at a restaurant in Nora Springs, Iowa, our town of about 2,000 people. We were a family of ten children:

John LeRoy born July 3, 1921, died Dec. 28, 1981
Muriel Blanche born October 3, 1922, died Dec. 18, 1995
Oren Marcellus born November 22, 1923, died June 20, 1997
Ila Mae born March 5, 1925
Donald Fay born December 10, 1926, died January 27, 1927
Nadine Frances born March 16, 1928
Charles Henry born January 3, 1931
Dean Allen born March 12, 1933, died Oct. 25, 2008
LaVonne Agnes born October 21, 1934
Roger Dean born June 24, 1938

I was about 10 when Muriel, Nadine, and I would go to Mason City on Saturdays with a farmer with his truck loaded with vegetables. We would fill baskets and go door to door selling them. Customers waited for us because the produce was always fresh. I don't know what we earned but it wasn't much. But we ended up with an ice cream cone. When I was in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades I spent summers helping with housework on farms. One lady needed help when she had a second baby. I see them occasionally at the annual alumni dinners. One thing I remember is washing the separator every day after the cows had been milked. My sisters and I were waitresses at the restaurant for 2-3 years while in high school. I also worked in the book store at the high school when in the 12th grade. After graduation (in 1943 in a class of 18) I went to Des Moines for 6 months at the American Institute of Business. While there, I worked at Bishop's Cafeteria clearing tables and we'd carry the loaded trays to the kitchen. One of the regulars at the restaurant in Nora Springs loaned me the money for the school. I did office work for a time in Des Moines at an auto parts store. Then I was secretary to the assistant advertising manager at Better Homes and Garden Magazine. While there I managed to put \$1 a week into the credit union. We could sometimes purchase food if available from the test kitchen (cost usually 5 or 10 cents).

One Sunday afternoon I decided to go to the Navy Recruiting Office. I had thought about it for a while—so I joined the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). I was on my way to Hunter College in New York City on May 31, 1945, for two months of boot camp. Everywhere we went we marched—had drills all the time—marched to the mess hall where we had 20 minutes to eat—then we marched again. We were proud to be in the WAVES and very happy with our uniforms. At night we had lights out on schedule and we made sure we were ready for bed before that. Every morning we went to the hallways for muster (roll call). At the end of our boot camp, we traveled by subway to Yankee Stadium and performed at one of the ball games. It was a thrill for us. When the song Auld Lang Syne was played at the finale a lot

of tears were shed. It was very touching and that song always brings back memories. Several of us have remained friends thru the years. We'd get together at many conventions. Now several have died and I keep in touch with only 4 (it is now August 2011). While in boot camp we were asked where we'd like to be assigned and what we'd like to do. I said office work in California. I was one of the lucky ones and was assigned to the Commander Western Sea Frontier headed by a full admiral in the Federal Office Building in San Francisco. My immediate bosses were a Commodore and a Commander. I had regular office hours. I was in San Francisco when the war ended. We lived in a 10-story hotel. The 10th floor was a cafeteria. We had a swimming pool on one floor, a theatre on another, a laundry room, and an ironing room with about 10 ironing boards. We had entertainers, even Frank Sinatra sang for us. On weekends we went on various trips—Lake Tahoe, Yosemite, mountain trips and we'd ride on mules on risky trails, at dude ranches and several other places. On a trip to the Redwoods a tree was so big cars could drive thru the tree trunk. We were four to a room and each of us had a locker. They were small but big enough. Except for wearing our uniforms and keeping short hair cuts, we were living a normal life. When it was time to decide whether to stay in the Navy or get discharged, a few of us waited too long to decide and the billets were filled. They suggested we become Specialist (Vs), flight attendants (similar to airline stewardesses), so we did. We went for two weeks training in Pawtuxet River, Maryland. Then we were sent to Moffett Field in California. We would make regular flights from there to John Rogers Naval Air Station in Honolulu. Some of our flights were from Alameda to Honolulu and these planes were huge. Some were for passengers and some for cargo. These planes took off and landed on the water. We'd taxi out until take-off speed was reached. Before we'd take off, we counted life jackets and life rafts in case we'd have to ditch. It never happened with me. The planes from Moffett Field were R5Ds, ones with 4 propellers, and flights were about 12 to 14 hours long, depending upon the wind. We carried service people being transferred to R&R and some planes were fitted with litters to transport wounded servicemen. Some flights were called diaper specials—carrying families of servicemen. Our crews were set up in rotation and at times there was a short turnaround. But if a plane needed mechanical work, the crew waited for repairs. So we'd have a few days to spend in Honolulu (not bad duty) and we could spend time at the beach or whatever. I made a leather photo album in the hobby shop. I met my Aviation Machinist's Mate husband, Jim Cole, there in September 1947. We were married November 9, 1947—didn't take long. We were divorced on our 23 anniversary and he died 3 months later from a myocardial infarction. We have a wonderful son, Gary James, born August 31, 1952. He and Eileen (they are now divorced) have 6 children:

Brian Gary born March 24, 1977

David Robert born October 12, 1978

Kristen Marie born February 18, 1980

Daniel James born December 31, 1984

Michelle Lynn born October 10, 1986

Kevin Ryan born May 5, 1989

And 6 great grandsons:

Brennan Gariss born June 25, 2003 (Gar for Gary, iss for Dennis)

Aiden David born August 31, 2005 (on Gary's birthday)

Christian Ryan born October 31, 2005

Brady James born March 26, 2007

Connor Ryan born June 11, 2008

Dawson Michael born March 30, 2012

A World War II Memorial in Nora Springs lists 5 Smiths from our family--four of my brothers and me. It also lists several other relatives. I think you can tell I enjoyed my time in the WAVES. Women have come a long way in the military. One of the WAVES was an astronaut; some are in command of ships. One was at the top of the class at the Naval Academy. A ship was named for Admiral Grace Hopper. She had retired from the Navy in 1966 but President Ronald Reagan recalled her to teach computer science at the Naval Academy. She actually came up with the COBAL computer language. She retired again 20 years later and was 85 when she died. She was given yearly extensions to the mandatory retirement age.

I can't think of even one thing to be critical of in the Navy. After I was married, I requested to be discharged and it was effective November 14, 1947. We always had the best of everything. I doubt if I'd like the training that enlistees undergo today. I am glad I was in back in 1945. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese made their sneak attack on our military bases in Honolulu. They sank many ships, destroyed many facilities, and killed many of our servicemen. Our battleship USS Arizona was the worst casualty with 1,177 persons killed and 900 of them are still entombed on the ship which lies in 38 feet of water in the harbor. The Arizona Memorial sits over the remains of the ship and parts of it are still visible. About a gallon of oil a day seeps out of the ship and you can still see oil on the water. People become silent immediately upon entering the Memorial - realizing where they are and what it stands for. All Americans became angry with the Japanese and many rushed to enlist in one of the services. Patriotism was very important and they wanted to retaliate. With so many sailors needed in the war, there was a shortage of people to fill their jobs. In 1942 the Government decided that women could help. So the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) was started. Many men objected to women in the service but the word Emergency made it OK because they knew (or thought they knew) that it was only temporary. The women proved themselves capable of holding a variety of jobs and are now a complete part of the U.S. Navy. We who were WAVES still call ourselves WAVES but when we're no longer living it will just be Navy.

We were married in San Francisco and then traveled by way of Iowa to Chapel Hill NC where Jim's Mother lived. We were there about a year. I worked at Family Services in Durham NC. We then went to McKeesport PA. We made several moves in Pittsburgh until 1962 when we bought our first home, and I still live there. I started working for the Bureau of Mines (Department of Interior) in 1949. In 1970 I transferred to the Pittsburgh Energy Technology Center (Department of Energy) until I retired September 30, 1994. I liked working but retired at 69 when offered a buyout. With accumulated sick leave I had 44 years of government service. If I'd not been a lower grade employee, I'd have a nice monthly check, but I'm grateful for what I get, and I get by nicely. I'm 87 and in relatively good health and happy, so what more can anyone ask? I then worked part time at Macy's for 10 years.

as an Aviation Mechanic
Jim got a job with the Federal Aviation Agency, and was fortunate to get it. He did not go to high school, but went to the Pittsburgh Technology ~~Center~~ *Institute* and the interviewer took a chance hiring him. It worked out well - he got several promotions and was in an upper grade when he died. He'd spent all his time at the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.

Gary worked for ABDICK Company for 32 years in various capacities. Presstek bought the company and he worked there another 7 years. He has been with Verizon about 18 months, and is ok there.

I've had an opportunity to travel and I've been involved with the WAVES, the WOSL (Women's Overseas Service League), the American Legion and going out to eat. I've cruised to Alaska 3 times, Beijing with stops in Japan, etc, to Hawaii 3 or 4 times, South America, Mediterranean, Europe, London, and other places also. So life is not dull!

Ila Mae Smith Cole - June 21, 2012