

A Most Remarkable Man

The Life of
George Showers Gehr

1921 - 2018

By
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*This collection is dedicated to the life and memory of my father, George S. Gehr.
His was a life of integrity and honor, lived in very ordinary ways.*

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“Net Worth” (noun)

“the total wealth of an individual, company, or household, taking account of all financial assets and liabilities.” From: Oxford Languages.

A mathematical formula for expressing net worth might be something like this.

Assets – Liabilities = Net Worth

That may be fine for the business world, but how do you measure the *Net Worth* of a person? I am not referring to the size of their bank account. Bank accounts are not people. Rather, I want to know how you can calculate a person’s value as a human being. What is their character? What values do they hold dear? How honest are they? Are they respected by those who know them? What makes a person tick? Do their redeeming qualities outweigh their character flaws?

The answer to questions such as these is, admittedly, very subjective. What one person admires might be despised by another. The task is further complicated when the subject is closely related to the person offering an opinion. With this in mind, I humbly offer my view of the life of a man I am increasingly learning to admire with each passing day, my father, George Showers Gehr.

George was born on August 25, 1921, a Thursday. On that same day the United States formally signed a Peace Treaty with Germany to officially end the first World War. Although the United States joined the armistice of November 11, 1918 to end the fighting of The Great War, the actual Peace Treaty, known as the Treaty of Versailles, was not signed until June of 1919. In the United States, the House of Representatives ratified the Treaty of Versailles, but The Senate did not. The primary objection to the Treaty rested on the creation of the League of Nations. Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge led the resistance resulting in the rejection of the Treaty and United States participation in the League of Nations. Consequently, The United States and Imperial Germany officially remained in a state of war. Not until August 25, 1921 did these two nations finally agree to terms and formally sign the Treaty of Berlin.

Oddly enough, Germany was also the homeland for the Gehr family, which can be traced to Felden Valentine Gehr, born in the German town of Seckenheim, Baden-Wuerttemberg around the year 1650. His grandson, Johannes (John) Gehr, arrived in Pennsylvania in the first half of the 18th Century, possibly 1732, and quickly settled in the fertile farmland of northern Lancaster County. The first land warrant obtained by the Gehrs was dated February 20, 1734. It was issued for 103 acres to John Gehr, in the area known today as Hahnstown, Ephrata Township. On December 3, 1741 he added an additional 106 ½ acres

adjacent to the original. Within 17 years John Gehr and his sons owned a total of over 1,000 acres of land within a 100 square mile area. Their descendants would remain centered in this area for the next 200-plus years.

The house in which George was born was less than 3 miles from where John Gehr originally settled in 1734. Located in the little village of Hinkletown, on the border of Ephrata and Earl Townships, it was a 2 ½ story German Colonial-style stone house built in 1736, just two years after John Gehr took a patent on his first property in Pennsylvania. It was a large house with 15 rooms and three fireplaces. The house originally served as a hotel and tavern until George's father, John Wanner Gehr (1881-1956), bought it in 1918.



Figure 1 The Stone House in Hinkletown, formerly known as the Black Horse Hotel, as it appears today.

The Hinkletown Years

George Showers Gehr was born the twelfth of fourteen children. I suppose he could be known as George Showers Gehr IV, as there were at least three before him with the same full name. His father started out as a farmer and carpenter, but it did not take long before he really made a name for himself as a builder. Whether it was homes or barns, John W. Gehr became a respected name in the construction business. It didn't stop there, however. Though he only had an eighth-grade education, John Gehr was elected Justice of the Peace for Ephrata Township in 1901, a position he held 55 years until his death. By the birth of the last child in 1924, Gehr went on to become President of the Enterprise Telephone Company of New Holland, and a member of the Board of Directors for Ephrata National Bank, the Northern Mutual Insurance Company, and the Lancaster Manufacturing Company.

In 1931 John Gehr was recruited by the Lancaster County Republican Party as a last-minute candidate for County Prothonotary. He had no real ambition for politics, but he agreed to run. He was elected and served one term.

With so many irons in the community fire one might imagine there wasn't a lot of time left over for family matters. Being one of the last to be born, George found this to be true. He clearly was not as close to his father as his older siblings were. In fact, George became much closer to his mother and his siblings. His oldest sister, Brita, was 18 years old when George was born. She played a large part in raising him until she was married in 1927, shortly after George turned six.

I think this had something to do with why George never became interested in things like hunting. His father and older brothers were all active hunters. However, most of his brothers were married and left the house by the time George came along. And his father was so busy with his business interests and community affairs that he simply did not play a major part in George's life. George found himself being more involved with his sisters and, to some extent, his younger brother Paul. In particular, he became close to Carrie, Ann and Kathryn. They developed a friendship that lasted the rest of their lives.

George was an average student in school – good in some subjects and fair in others. He liked history and literature, in particular. The Gehr children attended the Bergstrasse Elementary School, less than two miles down the road from where they lived. George had to repeat Second Grade, for some reason, which put him in the same class with his sister Kathryn. Otherwise, he did well in school. His High School yearbook summed him up perfectly.

"George, one of the well-dressed members of the class, hails from Hinkletown. Not only is he a proficient shorthand student, but he is sincere, soft-spoken, and always willing to help a friend. Whether he follows in his father's footsteps or selects another profession, his sense of fair play and determination are sure to make him a success."

This short paragraph says volumes about George. Throughout his life he would remain a sharp dresser. He and his wife, Margaret, liked to wear coordinating outfits, especially to Church. He was especially fond of rather colorful clothes. The reference to shorthand

reveals that George focused on business courses in high school. The parts that strike me the most, however, are the adjectives describing his personality and values. *"Sincere"; "soft-spoken"; "willing to help"; "fair play"; "determination"*. These accurately describe the makeup of a person to be respected. They echo my impression of this man I am proud to call my father.



Figure 2 Bergstrasse Elementary School 1928-29

George Gehr would have been 7 years old. I do not know for sure but I believe he is the first one on the left, front row.



Figure 3 George Gehr, circa 1933



Figure 4 George Gehr, graduation, 1941

With a family this large the Gehrs certainly had many interests and experiences. Here is just a brief sampling.

BRITA (1903-1999).

The oldest child, Brita became the mother figure for many of her youngest siblings. She married Earl Musser of Reading. Like her parents, Brita remained actively involved with the United Zion Church. She and Earl lived in Rothsville, approximately 12 miles from

the homestead. Their daughter, Esther, was the oldest of my cousins, while I was the youngest. Earl was a bit of a character. I remember hearing that he was struck by lightning twice while working for the telephone company. Dad told the story of a time when a neighbor stopped by to see his father. The neighbor said he almost shot Earl the day before because he caught him stealing some of his chickens! John said, "Why didn't you?"

HARRY (1904-1992)

Harry was the oldest son. He took over his father's construction business and also did some farming. Harry was a good-natured fellow and a hard worker who enjoyed telling stories. He was a big hunter, too. Harry married Kathryn Bard. They lived just a few short miles from John and Annie. One of the crops Harry grew was tobacco, which is something his father never grew. As a teenager George helped his brother in the tobacco fields. It was one job he did not enjoy. George often complained that working with tobacco was a hot, sticky job. When my parents bought their house on State Street, Harry did considerable work on it, adding a new kitchen, replacing the old shed with a new garage and residing the house. When I was a teenager, I helped Harry put a new roof on our house. He was a good fellow to work with.

SAMUEL (1906-2003)

Sam and George got along alright but were not especially close. Like Harry, Sam was a hard worker and a hunter. He married Ruth Witmyer and remained in the Ephrata Township area. For a while he had a gas station and garage in nearby Murrell, where George helped by pumping gas. Later, Sam worked as a mason. For many years he was also the tax collector for the township. Sam and Ruth were active members of the Church of the Nazarene.

JOHN, Jr. (1907-1988)

I never knew John well. According to my father John was cut from a different cloth. For some reason he had little interest in the family or the area. He served in the United States Navy during World War II but never left the States. After the war he and Ruth lived in New York, Florida, and later, Ohio. I only remember them coming back to visit family in Pennsylvania once. I will say in his later years John seemed to reconcile with most of his siblings, including George.

ROBERT (1909-1963)

I did not know Rob well, either, as he died when I was about eight years old. He was a farmer who worked a farm owned by his brother-in-law Earl Wenger, located in Clay Township, Lancaster County. We would go there on weekends to visit and buy eggs. He and his wife Mabel had a daughter whom they adopted from Rob's brother, William.

EDWIN (1911-1915)

Eddie was named after his grandfather, Edwin Brooks Gehr. Eddie died as a child just a few days before his 4th birthday.

SUSIE (1913-2011)

Susie always seemed like a happy person who enjoyed life. She was married to Robert Slabach. They had two children and lived in the small village of Oregon, between Ephrata and Lancaster. She lived a long, full life and outlived two husbands. She was a

member of a very small country church where she played the organ. I had the honor of officiating at her funeral.

CARRIE (1914-1991)

Carrie was another person who was genuinely warm and pleasant. She was a nurse who worked as a dental assistant for her brother-in-law, Dr. Earl Wenger. Carrie, whom I knew more as Cal, was married to Fred Grant, a barber in nearby Akron. She and George were especially close, both when they were growing up and throughout their lives. Once George was sick, though I am not sure what the diagnosis was. Cal stopped by regularly to give him an injection of penicillin. I remember visiting with them often. They never had any children.

ANN (1916-2004)

George's sister, Ann, was always a very active, and somewhat outspoken, person. She married Dr. Earl Wenger and became quite involved in local community programs, including serving as a volunteer for many years at the Ephrata Community Hospital. As I was growing up, Aunt Ann would at times serve as a babysitter for us. Also, each summer she would pick us up and take us to the pool to go swimming several days a week while my parents were at work. Her two sons thought a lot of George and were close to him.

When John Gehr died in 1956 it forced the family into making some serious decisions about the big house and about Annie. It was decided that the house was too large for Annie to remain in by herself, so the property was sold in two parcels. One small section went to Annie. Harry built a nice, small rancher for her to live in. The rest of the property was sold to Ann and Earl. Their youngest son, Mel, was going to study to become a veterinarian. Ann and Earl held the property and the house in trust for him until he obtained his degree. For many years Mel and his family lived there. He even began his veterinary practice in the house until he hired his uncle Harry to build an Animal Hospital on part of the former farm.

As Ann grew older she suffered from Alzheimer's. Her sons, Doug and Mel, placed her in a long-term care facility. When they held an auction of her personal items, George spotted a Lionel Train set from 1934. His parents had bought it for him when he was about 12 or 13 years old. Years later he sold it to Ann for \$10. She bought it for Doug and Mel to play with. Being a somewhat nostalgic individual dad decided he wanted to keep his old train set in the family. Knowing that I enjoyed model railroading he brought it to my attention. I became very excited and decided I wanted that train. Dad told me to make sure I got it, even offering to help pay for it, if necessary. As I suspected there were two others present who wanted the train. The bidding was brisk, but in the end, I bought it for \$220.



Figure 5 George Gehr's 1934 Train Set

WILLIAM (1917-1990)

William, known more as Bill, was a carpenter like his father. Unfortunately, when he was a senior in high school, he began hanging out with certain friends who led him down a different path than most of the family. His was a very restless life mired in the darkness of alcoholism. Bill served as a Master Sergeant in the Army Medical Corps during World War II. He wanted to serve in the European Theater but spent most of his time in the States. He did serve for seven months, 28 days in an Army Hospital in England. In fact, he worked in the same hospital that his brother George was in when he was recovering from a war injury. Unfortunately, neither one knew the other was there until it was too late.

Bill was married twice and had four children. But he was never able to overcome his demons from alcoholism. He was a very good carpenter in his younger days but spent much of his adult life out of work. On several occasions he would come to George seeking help. George was cautious in his response, but clearly, he had a difficult time turning his back on his brother. Family was important to George, as was his Christian faith. I believe he was moved by the life and teachings of Jesus, who taught that we should forgive others seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:22).

CHESTER (1918-1985)

For some reason George and Chester never hit it off too well. They were less than three years apart, but of all his siblings it seems like George had the least in common with Chester. I never really understood why. Dad would not talk about it. I simply do not remember Chester ever coming to any family events. In fact, I do not remember ever meeting him.

Chester quit school following the eighth grade. He worked for a short while in a hat factory. He spent most of his career driving truck for Hamilton Equipment in Ephrata.

KATHRYN "KATE" (1923-2017)

Kathryn was the youngest daughter of John and Annie and the closest to George in age. They remained close throughout their lives. She was the last of his siblings to die. She married Carl Weaver, a farm equipment dealer near Lancaster. They had four children. Kate was a very pleasant person who enjoyed life. Family meant a lot to her.

Kathryn and Carl lived on a small farm outside Strasburg, PA. We always enjoyed every chance to go there. They were all big horse people. Their oldest son, John, trained horses for a living. All four of the Weaver children held their Uncle George in high regard.

PAUL, aka "JIMMY" (1924-1945)

Paul was the baby of the family. He and George were pretty close to each other. A family friend said of Paul when he was very young, "He looks like Jiminy Cricket. I'm going to call him Jimmy." The nickname stuck, and he was probably best known as Jimmy, rather than Paul.

Paul was only 17 years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. By the summer of '42 he wanted to join the Marines, but he was still too young. He obtained the necessary papers for his parents to sign but when he asked his father he was told "No, not unless your mother agrees." So, Paul went to his mother. She also said no, she would not sign unless his father agreed. Paul said his father already agreed, so Annie signed. He then went to his father and showed him his mother's signature. Reluctantly, John Gehr signed, and Paul went off to war. He was deployed to the Solomon Islands campaign, where he was injured in February of 1943. After spending about five months in a military hospital he returned to the Solomon Islands in July of 1943. On the morning of June 15, 1944 he was engaged in the invasion of Saipan. This was one week after the Normandy Invasion. U.S.

Intelligence had underestimated the Japanese strength on Saipan, and the Marines, who were the first to land, were met with heavy artillery. The United States suffered 2,000 casualties that morning. Among the dead was Private Paul Miller Gehr.

The American command believed they would capture Saipan in three days. Instead, it took three weeks and three days before the Americans were finally able to secure the island on July 9. This became a crucial turning point in the Pacific War as it allowed the U.S. to establish an air base from which they could begin bombing Japan. Within a week, General Hideki Tojo resigned his position as the Prime Minister. This was clearly the beginning of the collapse of the Japanese Empire.

I have gone through this list of siblings to emphasize that family was of great importance to George. Growing up in rural Lancaster County George was accustomed to hard work. There was always something to be done on the small farm in Hinkletown. Each person had their job to do, and the success of the family depended on getting those jobs done. When he was able, George worked in the fields and also helped to milk the family cow. In fact, later in life he liked cows so much that he collected anything with a cow motif. His father John chewed tobacco, and it was assigned to George to empty and clean the spittoon John kept in his home office. George hated this job because it was a dirty, sticky and smelly task. But he did it, as expected. As he entered his teen years George helped his older brothers, as I mentioned above, pumping gas for Sam and cutting tobacco for Harry.



Figure 6 The Gehr Family, circa 1940

*Seated: Robert; Ann; Annie; Paul (Jimmy); William; John W.; Kathryn; John, Jr
Row 2: Chester; Brita; Samuel; Susie; Harry; Carrie; George*

The formative years for George and others of his generation were dramatically shaped by the times in which they lived. The Roaring 20's had created an atmosphere of contradictions and excesses. The 18th Amendment ushered in the Age of Prohibition, making the production and sale of alcohol illegal. That same year, however, the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. Cars became the symbol of the day. The music was swinging; the economy was booming. The sky was the limit. That is, until October 29, 1929. Black Tuesday, as it would come to be known, saw the stock market crash like never

before, wiping out the dreams of many. But that was only the beginning. Things went from bad to worse as the nation struggled to stay afloat. As the economy sank further, jobs disappeared and were replaced by soup lines. The Great Depression gripped the nation by the throat for ten years and would not let go. This would have an indelible mark on the Gehr family. Amazingly, however, they survived. This was due, no doubt, to the diverse business interests of John Gehr. The Enterprise Telephone Company remained a viable business, and the Ephrata National Bank was never seriously threatened, unlike many of its contemporaries. The small farm in Hinkletown also provided resources for the family that many in the towns and cities did not enjoy. Through careful planning and hard work, the family learned to survive.

Still, there were lessons to be learned. Moderation; determination; faith; commitment; and frugality paid off. As George was becoming a young man it was these values that shaped him to become the person he was.

The Influence of Religion

The United Zion Church is a very small, localized Christian denomination that came from the Mennonite and Brethren tradition. John and Annie Gehr were members of the United Zion congregation in Hahnstown, but Annie felt her children should have the opportunity to attend Sunday School, a feature which their Church did not offer. One day a neighbor offered to take the younger children to the Bergstrasse Lutheran Church down the road. Annie agreed, and it led to most of them joining the Lutheran faith. This included George, who was baptized to become a member. Nearly all of them remained Lutheran, except for George.

When George married Margaret Stoner in 1949, they spent the first year or so alternating between Bergstrasse and Margaret's Church, the Ephrata Church of the Brethren. During that time George came to accept the Brethren teachings. He also liked Pastor Stauffer at Ephrata, who officiated at their wedding. When Margaret was pregnant with their first child, they decided they needed to pick one church. It was not a difficult decision to make. George made the decision to be rebaptized by Pastor Stauffer and join the Church of the Brethren.

George was an excellent singer who especially enjoyed singing hymns. I am not aware of him ever joining a choir but that did not stop him from singing along with the congregation.

Upon graduation from High School George was uncertain what he wanted to do for a career. For a while he worked in a shirt factory in Brownstown as a shirt collar and cuff press operator. But soon his immediate future would be decided for him.

World War II

Six months after George graduated from High School everything changed. December 7, 1941 brought the second World War to the American doorstep. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into a world-wide conflict never seen before. Not even the little village of Hinkletown could avoid it.

John and Annie Gehr saw three of their sons join the military in the course of nine months. A fourth son joined 13 months later. Between the four of them they served a total of over 122 months.

William entered the Army on March 17, 1942. He was discharged November 1, 1945. He served a total of 3 years, 7 ½ months. He had the longest term of service among the four.

Paul entered the Marines July 19, 1942. He was killed in action June 15, 1944. He served 1 year, 11 months.

George entered the Army on December 12, 1942. He was discharged September 14, 1945, after 2 years, 9 months. He saw the most battle duty.

John, Jr. entered the Navy January 7, 1944. He was discharged December 16, 1945. He served just under two years. As previously stated, he remained stateside.

I cannot speak for the others, as I never heard any of their war stories. But I know the Army had a huge impact on George. For the longest time he refused to talk about his experience. When pressed, he would only affirm the words of General William Tecumseh Sherman, who said "War is hell". He would go on to say that he hoped I would never have to go to war.

Dad entered the war knowing nothing about guns. He was a small man who stood 5' 6" tall and weighed 105 pounds at his induction. He did not smoke. He did not drink. He was a soft-spoken, friendly young man. The Army tried to change all that. Dad entered the service under the pretense that he would be an office clerk. His choice of classes in High School made that a natural path. He received special training for that purpose. However, when that training ended on March 14, 1943, rather than receiving an office assignment George was informed he was going off to war in the 82nd Airborne Division, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, Company B. He tried to plead his case that he was trained to be a clerk, but to no avail. No doubt, his physical size made him an excellent candidate for the Glider Infantry Regiment, in the eyes of his superiors.

His first deployment was North Africa. Based in Casablanca, Morocco, his unit was there as a backup and never saw any battle action. Instead, the time was spent in drills and exercises aimed at making the 82nd Airborne the toughest unit in the Army. General Eisenhower himself came at one point to inspect the troops and to see firsthand how things were going. It wasn't long, however, before he was deployed to Europe, where he was involved in the Allied invasion of Italy. Specifically, he saw action in Sicily, Foggia, and Naples.

Then it was off to England in preparation for the Normandy Invasion. They were instructed to be very careful with their bayonets, for if they would hit an air pocket the

England. I have been to several different hospitals and will probably be here until I am fully recovered. I have [redacted...] the others are only minor ones. I didn't know what hit me at first but I thank God that I am still alive. It was "Nick" who helped me get to the aid station. I'll never be able to thank him for all he has done for me..... When I was first hit I crawled along a field then Nick helped to carry me back. I'll never forget it. It is still in my mind. I am still in bed and know how tiresome it gets. You probably have read about it all in the newspapers. The Red Cross has been around and gave us things we need. I never knew they did so much. I have several of my favorite pictures with me and I look at them practically every hour of every day. That is a big comfort. I lost my small shaving kit in France. I still have the one Cal gave me for xmas. I don't have it with me. It is in my other bags. It will be quite sometime until I get any mail with this new address. The chaplain has just been around to see us. I'll have to close for now. So don't worry. I'll be alright. I'm in a nice hospital and am getting good care. I thank and pray to God for taking care of me. So have the others write as they feel better to write than I do to write. How is Doug and Mellie? Write soon. Love to all. George."

Surgeons removed as much of the shrapnel as they were able, but much remained. In the middle of the night of June 14 George was awakened with a start. He saw a vision of his brother Jimmy standing at the foot of his bed. Jimmy never spoke a word but remained silent for a while. Then the vision left. George had an eerie feeling that something seriously wrong had happened to Jimmy. Only months later would he receive a letter from his mother informing him that Jimmy died during the Battle of Saipan on the morning of June 15. Saipan is ten hours ahead of London., which means, for example, if George had his vision at 12:00 am on Jun 15, it would have been 10:00 am in Saipan. That would coincide with the time the Marines were landing and engaged with the Japanese. George was convinced his vision of Jimmy took place at the time his brother died.

In another letter George indicated that his sister Cal had told him in a letter that their brother John was home on furlough. It was the second furlough he had. Bill also had been home on furlough twice. Many years later George would comment that one regret he had during the war is that he never once had a chance to go home from the time of his induction until his discharge. He especially wished he could have gone home at the end of basic training, before being shipped off to North Africa. It was an indication of how much home and family meant to him. It also says something about the injustice of the military system. Those constantly engaged in life-threatening combat were never given time off, while those thousands of miles away and facing no threat whatsoever could enjoy vacations and family time. George was justified in his objections.

About two months after his injury George was returned to action. In early September, the 325th GIR was sent to Holland to join the British in Operation Market Garden. It would become the largest airborne operation ever, with extremely heavy losses. It lasted into November. By December 16, 1944 Germany launched a full-scale offensive in the thick forest of the Ardennes. It was a desperate attempt to split the Allied forces in two. Known as the Battle of the Bulge, it proved to be the most demanding test of American forces yet. The weather alone was unusually brutal, with deep snow, freezing ice and record-breaking cold temperatures. Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher and WWII veteran Warren Spahn would later write in his book *The Love of Baseball*, "I was from Buffalo, I thought I knew cold, but I didn't really know cold until the Battle of the Bulge." The Battle lasted over five months

and claimed a heavy price. 500,000 American soldiers were engaged. 19,000 were killed. 47,500 wounded. 23,000 were missing. George's unit, the 325th Glider Infantry, was caught in intense fighting, but they held their ground. The 325th was credited for crippling two German Divisions. In the process they earned the respect of their Allied friends. The Battle of the Bulge broke the German war machine. It was only a matter of time until this cruel conflict would end.

George went on to fight in the Rhineland and Central Europe. Finally, on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered and the European Theater came to a close. At some point in the first half of 1945 George was transferred to the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment in the 17th Airborne Division. On July 9, 1945 he wrote a letter to his niece, Virginia Slabach, that showed his return address as being the 194th GIR. His discharge papers also list him as in the 194th. This unit served in the occupation of Germany following the end of the war, until August 14. They then were transported to France and finally sent home to the United States.

During his nearly three years in the Army George had received the following decorations.

- Good Conduct Medal
- Distinguished Unit Badge
- European, African, Middle Eastern Service Medal
- 6 Bronze Stars
- Bronze Arrowhead
- Purple Heart

Throughout the war the Army gave soldiers rations of cigarettes, candy and other items. Because he did not smoke, George would trade his cigarettes to other soldiers for candy. He always maintained that sweet tooth!

Dad never used his army experience to draw attention to himself. He never joined any veteran organizations. Neither did he keep in touch with any of his army buddies. When the World War II monument was dedicated in Washington, D.C. in 2004 I offered to take dad to Washington for the dedication. He had absolutely no interest. I offered to take him there to see the Memorial about two years later. I thought he might like to see it, if for no other reason, for the sake of his brother Paul. He refused. I decided he had put that part of his life behind him and wanted nothing to do with bringing it back. I never brought it up again.

Life After War

On September 23, 1945 Private First Class George S. Gehr was honorably discharged at Fort Indiantown Gap and returned to civilian life. The horrors of war affected him deeply. He would never be the same – physically, mentally or spiritually. I cannot imagine how anyone could go through what he went through, see the things he saw, observe the death and destruction at every turn, and come through it unchanged. Here was a young man who grew up in a sheltered environment, protected from the evils of the world, naïve in many ways, who was suddenly and violently thrust into a very different existence for three years. He saw his friends die. He learned of his brother's death but could do nothing to help him. He, himself, had multiple encounters with death and was severely wounded. Yet somehow he survived.

George returned home with a number of items to remind him of the war. He had his uniform, his medals, his papers, a good number of letters and a German Lugar with holster he claimed off a dead soldier. He also had the injuries that would never leave him. And the memories. Somehow, he managed to store them all away and tried to forget about them. He had better things to do. It was time to get on with the life he had just fought for.

The big question now was what kind of career he would embark on. Aside from some business courses in High School George had no formal training. He tried his hand as a pharmacy assistant in Lancaster. I do not know how long he stayed with that, but he eventually decided it was not for him.

Without any clear direction for his future, George decided to take a career aptitude test. I do not know which one he took. The Myers-Briggs Test was newly developed around this time, even though it was not officially published until 1962. Whatever the specifics were, the results showed that George was well suited for one of two careers: A Mortician, or a Hairdresser. George chose hairdressing. He enrolled in the Empire School of Cosmetology in Reading, PA. When he graduated, he not only was a licensed cosmetologist, but he was also certified as a teacher of cosmetology. He never chose to teach. Instead, he returned home and opened up his own beauty shop in downtown Ephrata. He would remain in that same shop for an amazing 55 years. He never took in a partner nor any employees. He was a one-man operation and he loved it.



Figure 8 George's
Cosmetology textbook

His shop was located on the corner of Main and Lake Streets, in a commercial building known as the Weidman Building. Other businesses were located on the first floor as well, including a physician, a podiatrist, an insurance agency, an attorney, the Ephrata Area Social Services and others. All of these came and went through the years, except for George. His shop was the one constant spanning parts of six decades.

The building was owned by Mrs. Irene Weidman, the widowed wife of the former President of the Ephrata National Bank. George got along with her very well. She charged him a very low rent. I think it was \$12 per month. She never once raised his rent. When she died in

1964 the building was sold to Marlin Shreiner, Esquire. The first thing he did was to raise the rent!



123 East Main St.
The Weidman Building, where George Gehr had his Beauty Shop.

Figure 9

One day George was contacted by Paul Gravenor, a local mortician, who asked him if he would come to prepare a woman's hair for a funeral. George agreed. His first visit to the funeral home was on the proverbial dark and stormy night. Paul left him in the back door and took him to the second-floor preparation room. Then he was interrupted by a phone call. When he hung up, Paul said he had to leave to pick up another body. He asked George if he would mind staying by himself. George agreed, but he admitted privately that it was a funny feeling being alone in a funeral home at night, during a storm. It must have seemed like a trivial thing compared to the war. That night was the first in a long and friendly relationship with Paul Gravenor, as George became the House Beautician for well over 55 years. It became routine for him to receive a call from Paul to come and work on another body. On a few occasions he would let me come along and observe. What an interesting twist of fate that George would, to some degree, bring together both of the two careers that he showed an aptitude for: hairdressing and mortician. As I would reflect on that I gained confidence in those career assessment tests. It certainly worked well for him.

Each day as George entered the building to open his shop, he walked past the insurance agency whose office was in the front of the building. And every day he would see Margaret Stoner sitting in there working at a desk. George was acquainted with Margaret from high school, as they graduated in the same class. But he never really knew her. Margaret was a superior student. She was Valedictorian of her class. And she was a town girl, growing up in the heart of Ephrata. Dad would say later that the kids from the country – like him – were not all that accepted by the kids who lived in town. I don't know if that was true or not.

Finally, one day George decided to ask Margaret out for a date. They hit it off well and were married on July 10, 1949. There must be something to the old saying that opposites attract. George was a country boy; Margaret was a town girl. George was a friendly fellow who enjoyed socializing with others. Margaret was always reserved and stoic. She disliked drawing attention to herself. She would much rather remain a private figure. George enjoyed traveling and sightseeing. Margaret never really did. George really enjoyed playing games of all kinds. He was particularly excellent at croquet. Even very late in life he could beat anyone in the family at this game. He also was fond of just about any yard game, miniature golf and various card games (especially Hoss 'n Pepper); Margaret never found a lot of pleasure in games. She would go through the motions of playing cards, but I always felt she disliked losing and saw that as a reflection on herself. In short, George

enjoyed life and tried not to take things too seriously. Margaret, in my opinion, tended to carry a certain chip on her shoulder, as if she never could quite measure up.

Perhaps the most telling difference between George and Margaret was their family structure. George, of course, came from a very large family with diverse interests and a somewhat charged atmosphere. The Gehrs were talkers. They liked getting together and having a nice time. Margaret, on the other hand, was an only child. She didn't even have very many cousins. And the Stoners, by and large, were Lancaster County Mennonites. They were a little more plain and a lot more subdued. Margaret's father, Abraham, never owned a car. They walked to their destinations. To be sure, Margaret and her parents were not Mennonite. They were members of the Church of the Brethren, a slightly more progressive group but still quite reserved. Though John and Annie Gehr were members of the United Zion Church, most of the children, including George, were Lutheran. Margaret used to say it was a real culture shock for her to visit George's family for a meal. There was so much talking and lots of activities that it seemed a bit chaotic. The food was abundant and required a lot of cleaning up. In spite of all the differences, though, George and Margaret really hit it off. Margaret also found some close friends in George's sisters, Ann, Kate, and Carrie.



Figure 10 217 S. State St., Ephrata PA, where they author grew up

By 1951 George and Margaret had their first child, Sarah Elizabeth. Martha Louise would be born the next year. It would be another three and a half years before I finally came along to complete the family. George and Margaret started housekeeping on Martin Avenue in Ephrata. Their house was just a few yards away from Margaret's parents. George always got along very well with Abe Stoner, but his mother-in-law was a different story. Generally, they had a cool but decent relationship. There were times, however, when Nora made things quite tense. About six years into their marriage George and Margaret both agreed they needed to put a little distance between themselves and the Stoners. In 1956 they bought a house on South State Street. It

was a two-story frame structure built around 1890. It featured a large bay window in the front and 10-foot ceilings on the first floor, with exposed pipes. This home was not far away, but it was out of sight, which proved to be a good thing. I was eleven months old when we moved. About four months later, George's father, John W. Gehr, died of cancer. I do not remember a thing about him.

The hair business thrived. George developed an extremely loyal client base. He used the tips he received as a vacation fund for the family. Margaret chipped in by sewing aprons, mittens, hot pads and other items which George would sell to his customers. She was a fine seamstress and found considerable success at it. She also enjoyed quilting. She made many quilts over the years. George also sold greeting cards on the side. I often marveled at how my parents took such a versatile and diverse approach to creating income. Margaret was trained as a secretary by studying at a business school in Washington, D.C. Before she was married, she worked in the office for C. P. Wenger Feed Mills in Ephrata. Later she worked for the R. U. Fasnacht Insurance Agency. She also was a secretary for her uncle at the Green Dragon Farmers Market and Auction. After the children were born, she started as a secretary for the Douple Insurance Agency. Finally, in 1962, She was offered a position as church secretary with the Ephrata Church of the Brethren. She took the job and

remained there for the next 30-some years, working her way up to Administrative Assistant.



Figure 11 George and Margaret's Wedding portrait

*Back row: Jay Burkhardt; Carl Weaver, George & Margaret; Kathryn Weaver; Paul Freeding
Front row: Fred Grant; Betty Freeding; Ann and Earl Wenger*

George and Margaret enjoyed a good marriage. I will not try to present an idyllic fantasy void of any problems. But it really was a successful relationship. Though there were some personality differences, at the core they both shared the same values of honesty, respect and hard work. The family was vitally important to both of them. Not just the immediate family, but both extended families, as well. Every Saturday they would sit at the kitchen table to “make out the money”. This was how they jointly decided to budget their income and plan for their future. Neither of them ever received any benefits like health insurance or paid vacations. But they always lived a comfortable life.

They were both highly respected in the community. I was never allowed access to the details, but I know it was not uncommon for certain friends or relatives to stop by seeking advice on a particular matter. George and Margaret took this seriously, always sure to protect the privacy of others while being willing to talk. Dad was named Executor of an estate on several occasions, a testimony to the respect others had for his honesty and business skills. I recently spoke with Clarence Spohn, a leading community figure and former Mayor of Ephrata. Clarence told me how he once worked with my father as Co-Executor for an estate, and he was quite generous in his admiration for George Gehr.

Because of their caring nature and honest, simple life style they seemed to attract the respect of many. Dad’s aunt, Mary Miller, was never married, nor did she drive. Dad always had a special place for her and took her under his wing. Aunt Mary was always present for any holiday celebration. Dad would drive to Mount Joy and bring her to our house, then return her to her home in the evening. As Mary aged, it was George who handled her affairs. When she died my parents provided a burial plot next to their own.

The same held true for Margaret’s Uncle, Jack Stoner. Like Mary, Jack never married. George and Margaret made sure he joined us at holidays and frequently at other times as well. Jack lived to be 91 years old. He became quite feeble toward the end. He lived on the second floor in a small, one room apartment in downtown Ephrata. Jack became dependent on George and Margaret to bring him food and whatever else he needed. George stopped by to check on him nearly every day. One morning George knocked on the

door but there was no answer. He entered to find Jack sitting in a chair, dead. My parents made all the necessary arrangements, and I was honored to officiate at his funeral.

George and Margaret played an important role at their Church. George held the position of Financial Recording Secretary for a number of years. In addition to being the Church Secretary Margaret also served quite a few years as the Sunday School Secretary. They both served as deacons, too. In the mid-60's George was named Head Usher. It was a position he held for the rest of his life. The running joke in our family was that the Gehrs were always the first to arrive at Church on a Sunday morning and the last to leave. Clearly, Church life was extremely important to both of them.

George also had a keen sense of history. He knew important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries and deaths for both the Gehrs and the Stoners. He knew the Stoner family details better than Margaret. He was particular about preserving the past for future generations. He especially liked antiques, and he and Margaret had assembled a very nice and impressive collection. George committed as much detail as possible about each item to memory. Among their collection were the following.

- A beautiful, old Dutch cupboard that they received from Margaret's parents. It had original 12 pane "wavey glass", the type made by hand in the 18th and 19th Century. It also had notches along the edge of each shelf for hanging silverware. This was a perfect way for them to display their antique set of bone-handled silverware. The shelves also had grooves for supporting dishes in an upright position.



Figure 12 Dutch Cupbaord

My one regret is that I did not buy this at dad's auction. I assumed it would bring too high a price so I bought another hutch that they owned and which was sold before this one. As it turned out, the Dutch Cupboard went for a reasonable price. My bad.

- Dry sink. Annie Gehr bought this used in the early 1900's from a neighbor for \$10. She used it to set up housekeeping. It was well suited for canning and other kitchen duties. George ended up with it and always thought so much about it.



Figure 13 Dry Sink

- Canopy bed.
- Jelly cupboard
- Bowed-glass china cupboard and assorted items.



Figure 14 china cupbaord

- George's Top Hat – always the sharp dresser!



Figure 15

- A two-piece set of wash stands. George bought one of these at an auction. A few years later he was at another auction and saw the other one. He quickly ran home to make sure they were a match. They were. He returned to the auction and saw a lady who was looking at it. They started talking and both expressed interest in the wash stand, but when George told her he had an identical one at home she politely decided he should have it. He was successful in obtaining it and kept both of them on opposite sides of the couch in their living room where they served as end tables.



Figure 16

- Pennsylvania Dutch Taufschein Fraktur.



Figure 17

- 18th Century Tall Case Clock that has been in the family at least since 1848 but likely since it was built circa 1792. It remains in the family to this day and still runs very well.



Figure 18 Tall Case Clock

- A sampling of miscellaneous items



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24

George enjoyed making latch hook rugs. This is the very first one he made.

- Of special interest to George was antique miniature oil lamps. He had a total of thirty lamps he had collected over the years, many of which can be seen here along with other items.



Figure 25 Miniature oil lamps, along with assorted items, in the Dutch Cupboard.



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Figure 26 An antique clock that once belonged to Margaret's parents.



Figure 27 Tiffany Lamp

The full antique collection of George and Margaret is far too great to show here. Hopefully, this has given the reader an idea of the spectrum of interests they had.

Commitment to his family and indulging in his antiques seemingly offered a sense of order and peace to George that allowed him to overcome his wartime nightmares. Throughout my childhood he never wanted to talk about his experiences in the Army. When pressed he would make some vague comments, but that was as far as he would go. I can only conclude it was a most painful part of his life. Coming into the Church of the Brethren, I believe, was helpful. Whereas the Lutheran Church in which he was raised expected – and honored – military service as a patriotic duty, the Church of the Brethren was quite bold and committed to the Anabaptist theology of peace and nonviolence. The Brethren believe that “all war is sin”. They have never endorsed violence or military service. Instead, the Brethren seek to be peacemakers and servants in the world. They teach that we should follow the words of Jesus, who instructed us to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, and to forgive without reservation. Central to the Church of the Brethren faith is actively turning swords into plowshares.

Isaiah 2:4 (NIV)

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

For George, this was a new concept – one he embraced. He needed time to reconcile his past experiences with his present life, but he appears to have succeeded. Late in life he began opening up more about the war, but always with a guarded reluctance. While some family members tried to encourage his standing as a World War II veteran, he would just as soon ignore it. There was no way to deny it was part of his life, and I believe it gave him a certain feeling of accomplishment, but he certainly had no desire to exploit it. As I reflected on this through the years, I have come to believe that he acknowledged his Army experience before God – somewhat as a confession – and he had received Grace and forgiveness for it. This, in turn, enabled him to accept it and move on.

Throughout his life George loved having a dog. From the time he was single he almost always had a dog that he loved and cared for. I can remember at least seven dogs that he had over the years. The older he became the more important his dog was to him.

The Golden Years

After 55 years George Gehr finally closed his shop on Main Street. He continued to do a minimal amount of hairdressing from home as well as going to nursing homes with long-time customers who still wanted his services. And, of course, he continued to remain on call with Paul Gravenor.

A letter George received from Ida Leibold dated May 14, 1971 reveals the kind of person he was and the respect he earned. To many it may be a trivial thing. But it is those little things that prove a person's true worth.

Dear George,

Thank you so much for doing Grandma's hair. So many people think old folks don't care when they really do, it is only through kindness like yours that they can prove it. Thank you again.

Ida

Through all the years George never used any tobacco. On rare occasions he would have a glass of wine, but I can count on one hand the number of times that happened. Generally, he had no time for alcohol. These facts, together with his many years of walking to and from work helped him to grow old gracefully. He remained quite fit and slender at all times. It became a common sight to see George walking through town with his dog. He even took the dog into the bank. He was known as the little man with the little dog. His only physical complaints were the onset of arthritis, macular degeneration and, of course, those stubborn pieces of shrapnel that never left his body. He also suffered from a degree of hearing loss that was diagnosed as resulting from the artillery in the war. This became more of a problem late in life. Other than that, he was unbelievably healthy. The only medication he took regularly were vitamins for his macular degeneration.

Margaret was not quite as fortunate. She, too, had arthritis, but she also had heart disease. Once when she was in her late fifties she fell and tore her rotator cuff. While she was seeing the doctor for a follow up visit she collapsed and went into cardiac arrest. After spending time in the hospital, she returned home and went back to work. However, she had to take heart medication for the rest of her life. She also came down with breast cancer but following surgery it went into remission for many years.

As she continued to age she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. One day when George and Margaret were returning home, she went up the three concrete steps leading to the porch. At the top of the steps, she lost her balance and fell backwards, landing solidly on her back at the foot of the steps. It was a devastating set-back for her. She did make a partial recovery, but she was never the same after that. She became less mobile and increasingly confused. For a while we secured in-home services for her and we moved her bedroom to the first floor so she did not need to go the steps. Eventually she required full time care. We took the initiative in deciding to move her into a skilled nursing facility in her late eighties. The Alzheimer's continued to progress until she no longer communicated and had great difficulty swallowing. She quietly passed away on Christmas Eve 2014 at the age of 91.

George continued to live at home with his dog, Gigi. There is no doubt he missed Margaret, but I was a bit surprised how well he adapted. My sister and I shared responsibility for his care and maintaining the property, though she went to Maryland every other week to be with her son and his family. My other sister lived in Philadelphia. She was limited in what she could do. Over

time George showed signs of some mild dementia. He also began to exhibit some depression. On one occasion he became so agitated that he threatened to take the Luger and shoot himself. He did not have any ammunition for it, but I nonetheless decided it was time to get the Luger out of the house. I managed to sneak it out without his knowledge and store it in a safe, locked location. He never talked about that again, but I kept the Luger until he moved out of the house. Only then did I return it to the place where I found it.

One day he called me and said he was dizzy and did not feel well. I went to see him and found him to be weak. I tried to talk him into going to see a doctor, but he refused. Rather than pushing the issue I decided to stay at his house with him for a few days. I learned that his nights were restless. He would get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night and nearly fall because he could not balance himself. We got through the night, but the next day I took him to the Emergency Room. They kept him there for several hours before releasing him as they could not find anything wrong. Two days later he had another bad spell. Again, I took him to the Emergency Room and this time he was admitted. Tests showed that he was in renal failure due to kidney disease. The doctors wanted to keep him there in the Intensive Care Unit until he was able to go home. We were told he only had months or possibly weeks to live. The next night I received a phone call from the doctor at 1:00 am and was told he likely would not make it until morning. I immediately called my sisters to inform them. They both decided not to do anything, however I went to the Intensive Care Unit and stayed with dad through the night.

Over the course of the next few days dad showed signs of improving. He seemed like he was becoming considerably better and more alert. I advocated for him going into rehabilitation. The doctor resisted, saying it was not worth it and he could not justify it. However, I persisted and argued to try it and allow the therapists to evaluate him and make a call, which I would then accept. Reluctantly, the doctor agreed.

He entered rehabilitation for the next six weeks, making remarkable progress. It was determined that his time of living independently on his own was over, however. I attempted to talk him into either moving in with us or allowing me to move in with him. He was quite assertive in saying no. So, I then explored various Personal Care facilities. Having settled on Keystone Villa in Ephrata, we made another big step. Surprisingly, George did not put up a great fight over this. I was surprised. He accepted his fate with considerable grace and actually did amazingly well there. His biggest regret was having to give up custody of Gigi, but my cousin took her in and brought her to see him from time to time.

Through all of this we found the Veterans Administration to be a huge help. They provided all medications he required, which were next to nothing, free of charge. They also awarded him a generous monthly income that basically covered the cost of his stay at Keystone Villa. The VA determined he was now qualified to be considered a disabled veteran primarily because of his hearing loss and gave him full benefits. He continued to be seen at the Veterans Administration Clinic in Lancaster once a year. At his visit in 2017 the Doctor wrote this comment on his chart.

From: Veterans Administration Medical Record, Visit Summary September 25, 2017

George Gehr is a 96 year old male Veteran who presents to Lancaster CBOC today for a 12 mo follow up visit. He is a most remarkable man, doing very well at age 96, a Veteran who glided into France on D-Day, fought in the Battle of the Bulge and continues on to this day -- a National Treasure.

“A most remarkable man” indeed.

Meanwhile my sisters and I needed to deal with disposal of the house and all his personal belongings. I regret to say this became a point of contention, to some degree. Still, we worked through it. George and Margaret were very intent on treating the three of us as equals. Consequently, all three children were named co-executors. In the final analysis, I admire their foresight. It forced us to work together and make decisions by consensus. All things considered, we really were able to work through the challenges quite well.

When dad moved into Keystone Villa it became necessary for us to dispose of his personal items, including the antique collection. We decided to have an auction. I was concerned how George would respond to the sale of all his things. As it turned out, he handled it all quite well. He almost seemed relieved to put it all behind him. He continued to live peacefully at Keystone Villa. He still was only taking a very minimal amount of medication. He was able to walk very well and with no assistance. His appetite remained moderately good. In many ways he was doing fine.

I suppose I was just a bit surprised when I received a phone call from Keystone Villa early one morning to say that George had passed away. He tried to get up to go to the bathroom shortly after midnight but fell to the floor. He did not hurt himself and staff found him immediately. They helped him back to bed and put a 15-minute watch on him. In between checks he got up again, fell, and died.

Conclusion

I began by asking how we can measure the net worth of a man. As I think about the life of George Showers Gehr, I am struck by the little things that individually are easily overlooked, but collectively amount to so much. It is not the titles, the positions held, or the name recognition that matter. It most certainly has nothing to do with financial resources or material things. It goes so much deeper than these. I prefer to examine those qualities that lie deep within the soul: honesty; integrity; authenticity; respect; trustworthiness. An early leader in the Church of the Brethren was asked, *"How, then, shall your followers be identified?"* The answer was profound: *"By the manner of their living."*

George Showers Gehr was not the kind of person who demanded attention. He did not stand out in a crowd, nor will he ever be spoken of in scholarly circles. In physical terms, he was a little man. Yet on the scales of life his net worth is invaluable. He had a great sense of humor and was one of the best storytellers I ever knew. He went out of his way to do things with his children and to help a friend. He also loved his grandchildren and remained an important figure in their lives. Reflecting on his childhood, his education, his experiences in war, his example in peace, his loyalty, his humor, his love - - when examined carefully, I must agree with his doctor at the VA clinic. Without a doubt this was truly ***"a most remarkable man"***.

Appendix

THE GIFT OF LIFE

By George Douglas Gehr

August 25, 1921.

A big stone house in a small, rural township.

The gift of life is celebrated once again.

Quietly.

Humbly.

On this same day a Peace Treaty is signed. Again.

Twenty years later it will fail. Again.

The child was named George Showers Gehr, the fourth to bear that name.

Like most individuals, his was a life of contrasts.

His first eight years were an age of prosperity & growth.

The next ten were just the opposite.

They called it The Depression, but it was more than that.

For a child becoming a man it had to make a mark.

Lessons learned;

Life changed;

Change is constant and at times, traumatic.

In his 22nd year he learned a new lesson: War!

The country boy was now on foreign soil.

The quiet, peaceful farm was traded for horror and death.

He was forced to fight the country of his ancestry,

In a plane,

With no engine!

Though he survived, he paid a price.

The loss of his friend;

The loss of his brother;

And the loss of innocence.

But wars end and life resumes.

A new career leads to a new love.

The kid with 13 siblings marries an only child.

(The ironies of life are revealed in multiple ways!)

By some standards his life was modest, but don't tell him that!

He celebrated the Gift of Life daily

Through his family, his friends, his faith.

Through ups and downs,

Through sorrows and joys,

He found a peace he longed for.

His was a life of the highest ambitions:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Gentleness
- Faithfulness
- Self control

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit, in full bloom, in one man.
My father. My hero. My friend.

*Written by George Douglas Gehr on November 27, 2018
as a tribute to his father, George Showers Gehr,
who went home to be with Jesus November 24, 2018.
This was read at George's memorial service.*

Mother and Son

By George Douglas Gehr

A cool, clear night.
Clouds and stars intermingled in the winter sky.
A young woman faced with the fears of uncertainty places her future in the care of the Almighty, as the pains of labor intensify within her.

In hopeful trust she turns her face to her young husband.
Though trembling inside where no one can see, he gives her a smile and the soft, confident words of love she needs to hear. Words of assurance; spoken sincerely.

A cool, clear night.
And the miracle of life, infinitely complex and beyond comprehension, is again revealed. A young mother, filled with joy and overcome by love and gratitude to God; Her young husband, now relaxed even as he enters uncharted territory, Hesitant, yet wanting to learn the secrets of the universe mixed with the mysteries of his own humanness.
In silence they look deep into the eyes of the other as they communicate in words too Holy, too precious to be spoken.

A cool, clear night.
The strained yet delicate skin of a newborn child peeks through the bands of cloth in which he is wrapped.
Lungs so pure and undefiled now touched by the presence of air; so new; so natural; so right.

In a space so quiet the trio now enjoys the humble surroundings. Comfort is sacrificed in favor of contentment.
Selfishness exchanged for salvation.
As they surrendered their wills to an unseen God they now begin to gain a glimpse of understanding.

All the fears of the past are like a distant memory tonight;
Inexplicably it all makes sense.
The "how's" and the "why's" no longer seem important;
They melt away in the presence of love and the power of faith. Even the Darkness of the night is now consumed by Light. Forever.

A cool, clear night.
Beyond the door lies a world now celebrating the Ancient Birth. Yet in this room so dimly lit an aged mother lies.
Her thoughts are void of the future. Even the present seems irrelevant. It is the past that weighs heavily upon her mind.

Sitting by her side her son – her only son – speaks softly of the mysteries of life.
The flame which once burned brightly in her being is now reduced to little more than a flicker.

All that she is can be seen fading, like the brilliance of the sun beyond the Western horizon.

Thoughts of the future are clouded by the doubts that haunt her soul. Life always seemed to be systematic, predictable:

Work for what you get;

Reap only what you sow.

Eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth make perfect sense in a world of ledgers and balance sheets. And this had been her world for the better part of 90 years.

Heaven is a better place; a perfect place.

It follows then that Heaven cannot remain as such if even one good yet imperfect person should be allowed in.

Such a compromise, no matter how small in the millennia of history, would nonetheless corrupt the whole. How could it be tolerated?

No one alive knows her past like she does. At least not on this side of Heaven. Even her son is unaware, as he gently holds her hand and strokes her hair.

She still remembers the day her heart was jolted by anxiety as he announced God's Call upon his life.

She faithfully stood guard and watched as he rode the roller coaster known as The Ministry. Today, some 34 years later, she somehow discovered an unusual comfort as he drew even closer to her, Bible in hand, love in his eyes.

He opened the Book he knew so well.

He rehearsed this role a thousand times yet now paused as he groped for something familiar, something safe.

Psalm 62.

Safe enough. *"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone"*. The words sounded as sanitized as the mask on his face, the gloves on his hands, and the gown over his clothes. He continued: *"My salvation comes from him"*.

Again he paused, but this time not for uncertainty but in awe of the wisdom of the Spirit. *"My salvation comes from him"* - - not from myself, not from my goodness, not from me. Only from him, the only One who is pure and holy.

From there the words flowed like a refreshing mountain stream.

Galatians 3:22-25.

2 Corinthians 4:7

This son now cast aside all the shackles that tarnished their past.

And he wasn't even aware of it.

Before it was over her eyes, mostly covered by her eyelids throughout this day, were somehow able to shake free from their frozen gaze upon the past, to embrace the future and to do so eagerly; securely.

Salvation.

How strange that it once was a word without meaning yet now was a meaning beyond words.

Grace.

Until now always seen as a noun. Tonight it takes on new life as a verb; a transforming power long acknowledged intellectually yet now miraculously experienced.

A cool, clear night indeed.

All the fears of the past are like a distant memory tonight; Inexplicably it all makes sense.

The “how’s” and the “why’s” no longer seem important;

They melt away in the presence of love and the power of faith.

In the shadows of this room so dimly lit Death stands ready by the door. For 91 years and 8 months he waited for this moment.

Her aged lungs now showing signs of laboring for air will soon surrender the fight. Within an hour Death will be permitted to lay his claim upon her.

Then instantly he will lose his grip.

And she awakens to renewed life. Eternal life.

Forever.

On the evening of December 17, 2014 my mother, Margaret S. Gehr, started with a fever of 102 degrees F. By mid-morning on the next day she was transported from Ephrata Manor to the Wellspan Ephrata Community Hospital with influenza. She soon developed pneumonia. Further tests revealed that she was now in Stage 3-4 of Kidney disease and was beginning with kidney failure. To complicate things, she was unable to swallow as her brain could no longer send the instructions to her throat muscles. Honoring her Advanced Directive, the family chose not to make her go through surgery to install a feeding tube directly into her stomach just to prolong the inevitable. This decision was confirmed by both my mother and father before it was implemented.

In the afternoon of December 21 mother returned to Ephrata Manor. On Christmas Eve I came to visit her along with my two sons. We relieved my sisters and father so they could go for some supper and a little down time. I stayed with mother from 3:40 until 5:00 pm. She appeared to be conscious of our presence but unable to respond to us. Eventually I pulled out my Bible, read selected scriptures to her, and commented on the Word. I knew she had a long-held fear that she was not good enough to enter heaven. Grace was a difficult concept for her to wrap her logic-driven mind around. In the business world things were black and white.

Her breathing had become a bit labored while we were in her presence until I explained again the Doctrine of Atonement through the sacrifice of Jesus, connecting the birth of Christ with the purpose of his incarnation. As soon as I had mentioned to her that her parents were there in heaven and waiting for her the breathing pattern changed noticeably. It became more relaxed and steady. Her skin remained unusually cold, I thought, but her color was good, her breathing was stable, and it was obvious she was still alert enough to hear and recognize a familiar voice.

Why did I choose to leave at 5:00 pm that night? I have often wondered and to some extent regretted it. By 5:52 she had died. I wished I would have been with her. But God had a better plan. My two sons were spared the stress of seeing their grandmother die before their eyes. I am rather confident Jonathan, age 24 and intellectually disabled, could not have handled that. Perhaps more importantly mother had always been extremely private – annoyingly so. She hated attention being drawn to her. She was obsessed with the need to slip in and out of social gatherings unnoticed. This was her personality; her life. It is only natural, therefore, that this should also be the pattern for her death. In many ways she lived by herself. Now, she also died by herself. It is what she wanted, once, she was given the assurance of Grace.

George Douglas Gehr December 27, 2014



George (R) with two Army buddies



*82nd Airborne Division patch
The All Americans*



325th Glider Infantry Regiment



Glider Infantry Patch



Bronze Arrowhead (x2)



Bronze Star (x6)



Campaign Medal



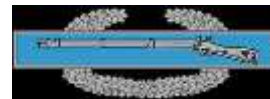
Good Conduct Medal (obverse & reverse)



Distinguished Unit Award



Purple Heart



Combat Infantry Badge



An American CG-4 glider in flight.



A British Horsa glider in flight.

1981 - 27

[illegible]

36

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA • DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH					
VITAL RECORDS					
WARNING: IT IS ILLEGAL TO DUPLICATE THIS COPY BY PHOTOSTAT OR PHOTOGRAPH					
Disposition Permit Number: E90602			State File Number: 367870-2018		
Decedent's Legal Name: George S. Gehr			Date of Death: November 24, 2018		
Alias:			Social Security Number: 167-14-7060		
Age: 97 Years			Sex: Male		
Date of Birth: August 25, 1921		Birthplace: Hinkletown, Pennsylvania		Ever in U.S. Armed Forces: Yes	
Residence Address: 100 N State Street Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522		Marital Status at Time of Death: Widowed			
Residence County: Lancaster		Surviving Spouse's Name:			
Father / Parent's Name: John W. Gehr		Mother / Parent's Name: Annie M. Miller			
Informant's Name: George Douglas Gehr		Informant's Relationship to Decedent: Son			
Place of Death: Nursing Home/Long Term Care Facility		City or Town, State, and Zip Code: Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522			
Method of Disposition: Burial		County of Death: Lancaster			
Location of Disposition: Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522		Place of Disposition: Bergstrasse Lutheran Cemetery		Time of Death: Pronounced 05:00	
Name and Address of Funeral Facility: Paul L. Gravenor Home For Funerals Inc. 100 W Main Street Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522		Funeral Director: Paul A. Leonard (Electronically Signed)			
PART I. Cause of Death:					Approximate Interval: Onset to Death unknown
Immediate Cause: Complications related to Arteriosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease					
a. <<<>>					<<<>>
b. <<<>>					<<<>>
c. <<<>>					<<<>>
d. <<<>>					<<<>>
PART II. Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death:					Was an Autopsy Performed? No
Atrial fibrillation Hypertension					Were Autopsy Findings Available to Complete Cause of Death? Unrecorded
Date of Injury:		Time of Injury:		Place of Injury:	
Location of Injury:		Describe How Injury Occurred:			
If Transportation Injury, Specify:					
Did Tobacco Use Contribute to Death? Unrecorded		Pregnant at Time of Death: Not Applicable		Manner of Death: Natural	
Hispanic Origin: Not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino		Education: High School graduate or GED completed		Decedent's Race: White	
Usual Occupation: Hair Stylist		Kind of Business/Industry: Beauty Salons			
Certifier's Name & Title: Cynthia Ann McIvor (Electronically Signed)					
Address: 2080 Spring Valley Road Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17601					
Date Certified: November 24, 2018					
Registrar's Name/Office Number: Bessie W. Rahbek (Electronically Signed) 36-339					
Date Filed: November 26, 2018					
This is to certify that this is a true copy of the record which is on file in the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in accordance with the Vital Statistics Law of 1953, as amended.					
Audrey C. Marocco State Registrar					

HY00100 12 Rev. (03/2009)

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Figure 28 George S Gehr Death Certificate

The following citations were awarded the 82nd Airborne for their efforts in WWII.

Presidential Unit Citation

Battle Honors

As authorized by Executive Order 9396 (sec. I, Bul. 22, WD , 1943), superseding Executive Order 9075 (sec. III, WD Bul, 11, 1942), citation of the following unit in General Orders No. 43 Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division 4 August 1944, as approved by the Commanding General, First United States Army, is confirmed under the provisions of section IV, Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943 in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction.

The citation reads as follows:

Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 82nd Airborne Division, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy between 6 and 9 June 1944 during the invasion of France.

The Forward Echelon of Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company landed by parachute and glider on D-Day, 6 June 1944, prior to H-hour, on the Cotentin Peninsula in the area surrounding **Ste Mere Eglise**, France. The enemy opposed drops and landing with intense antiairborne landing groups which attacked with machine guns, mortars, and artillery. Shortly after 0200, a division command post was established west of Ste Mere Eglise.

Headquarters personnel were augmented by predawn glider elements landing about 0410, and by further gliderborne increments during the day. Headquarters personnel from many gliders, which landed in areas not secured by parachute troops, fought their way to Division Command Post, into which they infiltrated during the first 48 hours.

The Division Staff and Headquarters and Headquarters Company labored without rest or relaxation day and night during the first 3 days of the invasion, at times under direct attack by artillery and small-arms fire, immediately adjacent to active fighting and frequently subjected to bombing attacks directed against nearby artillery batteries. Duties were performed unhesitatingly with utter disregard for personal safety and with superior efficiency and tireless devotion to duty.

The courage and perseverance shown by members of the Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 82nd Airborne Division, are worthy of emulation and reflect the highest traditions of the Army of the United States.

[General Orders No. 69, Washington 25, D.C., 22 August 1944.]

Official:

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Chief of Staff

EDWARD F. WITSELL

Major General

The Adjutant General

HEADQUARTERS 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION
Office of the Division Commander

APO 469 US Army
12 October 1945

GENERAL ORDERS:)
NUMBER 125)

NETHERLANDS DECREE, DATED 8 October 1945, AWARD OF THE "*MILITAIRE WILLEMS ORDE*" I MINISTERIAL DECREE, NETHERLANDS GOVERNMENT, 8 October 1945, WEARING OF THE ORANGE LANYARD, ROYAL NETHERLANDS ARMY II

I - NETHERLANDS DECREE:

Announcement is made of the Netherlands award of the "*Militaire Willems Orde*", degree of Knight of the fourth class, to the 82nd Airborne Division. The Netherlands Decree, dated 8 October 1945, is hereby quoted:

"WE WILHELMINA, by the Grace of God, Queen of Netherlands, Princess of Orange Nassau, etc., etc., etc. On the recommendation of Our Ministers of War and for Foreign Affairs, dated 3 October 1945, Secret Nr.Y.22; In accordance with the provisions of the amended Act of April 30, 1815 Nr.5 (Statue-Book Nr.33); In view of the clause 18 of the Regulations of administration and discipline for the "*Militaire Willems Orde*", as laid down in the Royal Decree of June 25, 1815, Nr. 10;

Considering that the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States Army during the airborne operations and the ensuing fighting action in the central part of the Netherlands in the period from September 17 to October 4, 1944, excelled in performing the tasks allotted to it, with tact, coupled with superior gallantry, self-sacrifice and loyalty;

Considering also that the actions fought by the aforesaid Division took place in the area of NIJMEGEN: HAVE APPROVED AND ORDERED:

1. To decree that the Divisional Colours of the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States army shall be decorated with the "*MILITAIRE WILLEMS ORDE*", degree of Knight of the fourth class;
2. To authorize the Division to carry in its Divisional Colours the name of the town of NIJMEGEN 1944. Our Ministers of War and for Foreign Affairs are each for his own part in charge of the execution of this Decree, copy of which shall be sent to the Chancellor of the Netherlands Orders of Knighthood.

THE HAGUE, October 8, 1945
(sgd.) WILHELMINA

THE MINISTER OF WAR
(sgd.) J. MELJNEN
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
(sgd.) VAN KLEFFENS

II - MINISTERIAL DECREE, NETHERLANDS GOVERNMENT:

Ministerial Decree of the Netherlands Minister of War, dated 8 October 1945, granting the personnel of the 82nd Airborne Division who participated in operations during the period of 17 September to 4 October 1944, authority to wear the ORANGE LANYARD of the Royal Netherlands Army is quoted:

"MINISTERIAL DECREE OF THE NETHERLANDS MINISTER OF WAR, dated October 8, 1945, Section IIIA, Secret No-X25.

The Minister of War considering that the outstanding performance of duty of the 82nd Airborne Division, United States Army during the airborne operations and the ensuing fighting action in the central part of the NETHERLANDS in the period from September 17 to October 4, 1944, have induced HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN to decorate its Divisional Colours with the "*MILITAIRE WILLEMS ORDE*" degree of Knight of the fourth class; CONSIDERING also, that it is desirable for each member of the Division, who took part in the aforesaid operations, to possess a lasting memento of this glorious struggle:

DECREES: That each member of the personnel of the 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION , UNITED STATES ARMY, who took part in the operations in the area of NIJMEGEN in the period from September 17 to October 4, 1944, is allowed to wear the ORANGE LANYARD as laid down in article 123g of the Clothing Regulations/1944, of the Royal Netherlands Army.

*THE HAGUE, October 8, 1945
THE MINISTER OF WAR
(Minister van Oorlog)*

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