

# Plain Brown Rapper

News for the Tandy and Grace Brown Family

Summer 2001

## THE HOME FRONT

Recently a great deal has been written and movies being made about World War II and the role our military played in the conflict. The people at home played a big part in the outcome of the war, we were called on to make a few sacrifices and did so without a complaint. The following are memories of mine which have been cropping up from time to time as these movies and shows come to the theater and TV.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Brown family was gathered around the dining room table having Sunday dinner. I'm sure it was fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, hot biscuits and all the trimming, our usual Sunday dinner. When Roosevelt came on the radio announcing the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the table grew silent and mother went in the kitchen to turn up the sound on the radio.

At that time I was 9 years old and didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was but can vividly remember mother's reaction. Her tears were, I'm sure, as much for her sons and son-in-laws, most old enough to serve as they were for our country. No one even thought what it meant to each of us as an individual, only what was ahead for the country. It was a day which changed our lives forever and everyone rose to the occasion.

We would come to understand the hardships suffered by our military because our brothers were deeply involved. Roy had been called to duty with the Wyoming Army National Guard Band in 1940, Frank joined the Marine Corp shortly after war was declared, Charlie Sylvester, Betty's husband, was called to serve in the Army. June's husband to be, George Smith was in the Army. While we didn't know George at that time, he was very much a part of the war and as I've told you before, was at Iwo Jima the same time as Frank, serving in the Quartermaster Corps bringing supplies to the island.

It was a terrible time for our country, also a binding time. The country came together rapidly and completely to remain behind our men and women in the Armed Forces – and to fight the enemies overseas.

There are many things to remember about that time. The entire country was coming out of a terrible depression. We were still very poor and many of the programs we see today were brought about because of the poverty experienced by so many during and after the depression. Cheyenne was centrally located in the country and became a "cross roads" so to speak. Since the Civil War, trains had been used to transport troops and supplies and the network of railroads in the early 1940's was already in place. The Railroad was our main means of transporting people and goods across the nation. Roads at that time were very poor and, in many parts of the country, still not paved. President Eisenhower was involved in troop movements during and after World War I. He was sure good roads would make the transporting of troops easier. Eisenhower made the building of Interstate Highways his main priority during his term as President of the United States. Now, in Wyoming and across the nation, we have major East-West and North-South Interstates.

Can any of you remember Anna complaining about the condition of the roads as she traversed the highway as a County Health Nurse? Her description of the "pot holes" was hilarious. She became a frequent caller to the Highway Department.

Highway 30, the Lincoln Highway, came right through Cheyenne. The name has been changed to Lincolnway and through the down town area it is 16<sup>th</sup> Street. *(Just a little trivia, as you travel from Cheyenne to Laramie there is a bust of Lincoln at the rest stop. The highest point on the highway is there and the statue is to remind us the first East-West highway was named for Lincoln.)*

Our airport had already achieved some notoriety as one of the 14 stops on the first Air Mail Route. The runways were asphalt at that time and in 1942 they were replaced with concrete so the B-17 bombers could land at the Modification Center where the "Nordon Bomb Site" was installed. It was all very secret. Leonard, Betty and Leah's husband Willis Shriver were employed there. As a consequence, during the years 1943 - 1946 Cheyenne had the largest airport in the world. In case you find that hard to believe, just remember Denver International (formerly Stapleton) was just a couple of shed style hangers and a runway, there wasn't any LaGuardia or other major airports. They all came about as a result of the war and the advanced capabilities of the aircraft.

Fort Warren (now Warren AFB) grew to more than 20,000 men, a Quartermaster Corp and Training Command. There was also a Prisoner of War Compound on Fort Warren which housed German and Italian Prisoners. When we read of the atrocities committed against our men who were prisoners in Japan and Germany, you might want to know those prisoners, here in Cheyenne, were fed and treated very well. In his early years, Bob VanAlyne and his brother Jack would ride along on the Bakery truck to help the man make deliveries. The driver was a wounded veteran and as a result was handicapped. The boys would load and unload many of the trays. When they delivered to the service clubs, where many of the prisoners worked, they would give Bob and Jack steak sandwiches. What a treat. Bob said they didn't receive pay for their effort but were rewarded with bread, donuts and of course those wonderful steak sandwiches.

Many of those prisoners opted not to return to their homelands and stayed in the United States. Nine are buried beside the National Cemetery on Warren AFB, not inside the cemetery, just on the outside in a small fenced area.

Mother always invited soldiers to Sunday dinner and all Holiday Dinners. This tradition continued for many years after the war, even when it was an Air Force Base. Some of those young men sent her cards and letters. Her Christmas mail was awesome. Mother invited those young men in hopes someone would invite her sons to dinner if they were in the same situation but she truly loved doing what she felt was her contribution to the war effort.

We hung our stars in the window, three blue ones, indicating how many of our sons and brothers were serving our country and thanking God we didn't have a Gold Star in our window as many did. The Western Union was a terrifying sight because it always meant bad news. Three times Betty received telegrams telling her Charlie had been wounded. Charlie was serving in Europe and his wounds did not return him to the United States, they patched him up and returned him to the lines. One time, he was close to an explosion and was buried alive for a long period of time. He brushed it off as "just one of those things" and laughed as he told his story. I'm sure at the time it was terrifying.

Telephones were primitive at best and we couldn't call Europe or the South Pacific and talk to our men in service. During the Vietnam War, Bobby would call home once in a while so we could visit. During the War, there were no communications with our troops except by letter and those were censored with black ink or cut up. We never knew where they were or what they had done. Sometimes you could figure a few things out by watching the newsreels and reading the paper. As you can imagine, life between letters was frightening and the postman was eagerly awaited. He will never again be appreciated as much as he was during the war.

There were many other things happening in our lives. The economy was taking an upturn. Dad worked endless hours and consequently his checks were larger. Everyone worked for the defense effort and no one complained. We grew our victory gardens which wasn't much because Mother put in a huge garden every year anyway just to feed our family. However, we thought we were doing something special and received a certificate for our efforts. Actually I don't remember Pat or I ever pulling a weed or watering but we sure got a lot of credit for mother's effort.

While there was more money to purchase, there were less things to purchase. Leather was a premium, used to make boots for the soldiers. We had ration books for shoes and the shoes were very poor quality. Dad had an anvil in the garage shaped like a foot so he could fix our shoes. He also had a piece of leather which he cut out in the shape of our shoe. This was glued and nailed to the bottom of the shoe. Sometimes, he got the nail a little long and it came on through so we put cardboard in the bottom of our shoes, which lasted a very short time. Pantyhose had not been designed and silk stockings were the norm (with the seam up the back). I can remember when Fowlers department store got in a shipment, June, Betty and Leah were called and could purchase one or two pairs each. They were a real premium. Thanks to the war, Nylon was developed and now we have inexpensive and very serviceable panty hose.

Many other products were rationed, gasoline and tires were the big ones. We had a cow which was pastured about a mile away from the house so we had a "B" gas ration book. As a result, Dad was allowed more gas and extra tires. Sugar was a short commodity but since we had so many children, we had lots of sugar coupons. Can you remember women calling mother to see if she had any extra sugar coupons? She was rather selective as to how they were given. Mother acting as judge and jury deciding who really deserved them. Actually, she was very funny having something so many needed. She had power over people who often talked about her having so many children. Please don't get the wrong idea, mother was a very generous person, but it pleased her a bit to have something everyone else wanted or needed.

We walked or rode the bus everywhere we went. Cars were a premium. During the years from 1941 to 1945, no cars were made for the civilian population. The only way you could get a car was if someone died or was unable to drive anymore and then it would be sold. Your name was on a list and if you were lucky, your name came up. That's how mother got the old 1942 Studebaker. However, Gus Fleischli was a friend of Leonard's and his dad owned the Studebaker Dealership and I'm sure mother's name was moved up a bit to help her out. Gus loved to come to Sunday dinner.

We bought our "Savings Stamps" on Tuesday at school. Only the rich kids could buy bonds, but we bought our stamps, 10 cents each until we filled a book with 185 of them and could buy a \$25 war bond for \$18.50. Remember, at 10 cents a week, the school year was 37 weeks long, it took nearly five years to buy the bond. Not sure I ever got the full bond but here again, we thought we were patriotic. After school, we rolled bandages for the Red Cross and filled boxes with soap and etc. to send to the War Orphans.

There were three forms of getting the news. The newspaper, radio and the movies. We went every Saturday to the movies to see the most recent newscast. To get into the movie you presented a milk bottle top. This presented a problem because we had a cow and didn't buy dairy milk. But we always seemed to find a bottle top somewhere (usually our neighbor Mrs. Hebert) and rarely missed a Saturday Matinee. (Milk came in glass, quart bottles and you could see the cream at the top. Always about 3 or 4 inches. We had a Jersey Cow who gave milk and there was about 6 inches of cream at the top!)

*(Editor's note: Recently I used an expression about "sliced bread" and received a humorous anecdote from Charles' daughter Cindy. She said, "Well, I don't remember slicing loaves of bread,*

although I do remember Dad's adventure with buying a dairy cow so we could have fresh milk and cream. Unfortunately for Dad, that didn't "fly" with me. I was deathly afraid of the cow and absolutely refused to drink it's milk so, my Mother had to buy my milk at the grocery store. Sorry about that Dad!"

Besides the regular newspaper, if there was a special event, the newspaper put out an "EXTRA" and Dick and Charles would rush downtown to pick some up to sell. (The newspaper cost 5 cents.) The radio carried news but nearly everything was censored. We always listened in hopes of gaining any news.

During the war years, there weren't any weather forecasts issued. Seems funny now, Bob gets up each morning and turns on the Weather Channel to see if it will be warm enough to play golf. During those years, we had no idea if it was going to be warm or cold or whatever. We just accepted each day as it came and relied on achy joints or the wooly worms to decide what was going to come next. The reasoning had something to do with the enemy not knowing what the weather was doing. I laugh now because I'm sure they knew the same things we did, and, when you think about it, the science of weather prediction was really bad in those years.

Everything was a secret. I didn't know until 1985 about the many ships which were torpedoed off the Eastern Seaboard. We went to a conference in Ocean City Maryland and there was an historic newspaper which told about the ships, many of them merchant marine vessels, we lost. We were never told anything and even more amazing, no one even asked. All the American people wanted to do was protect the men in uniform and if the government told us it was a secret, that's all they had to say, it was all we needed to hear. The slogan was "Loose Lips Sink Ships." Can you imagine them getting away with that logic now?

Dick, Charles, Bob Treadway, Bob VanAlyne and all their friends were Boy Scouts. They engaged in huge "paper drives" and "scrap drives." Bob VA remembers getting in the back of an old dump truck and going out to farm fields where there were men cutting up old farm implements into manageable pieces so the Scouts could load them on the truck. Canons from City Parks around the country were melted down to make guns. We saved tinfoil from our gum wrappers so it could be shredded and dropped from airplanes to cause havoc with their radar devices. String, a funny thing to have as a shortage, was in short supply so we saved and rolled into balls all the little or big pieces. We used them for packaging, no scotch tape in those days. Or at least none which did any good.

Our after school clubs had a drive of some kind going all the time. How many can remember using newspaper to fold into trash bags to hang on the side of the bed in the hospitals? We performed at the Veterans Administration and Base Hospitals on a frequent basis. There was a USO where the older girls entertained the soldiers. There was even a USO in the fellowship hall of the Presbyterian Church. They served meals and had entertainment for the troops. Dr. Pattison was one of the USO board members.

Mother was an "Air Raid Warden." I'm sure I've told you before, but she had her hard hat (which looked very much like a World War I helmet), a flashlight and an arm band. She had as much clout as a policeman and if you crossed her when she told you to put out your lights, she could send you right to jail. Mother was not a big woman, she stood about 5'3" and because she worked so hard was not heavy. So picture her telling some belligerent person to turn off their lights – well, I'm sure you had to be there but she only had trouble one time with an old drunk named Forbes who thought (wrongly) he didn't need to pay any attention to the Air Raid Siren. (*The Forbes' lived directed behind us at the other end of the alley. His house was visible from our bedroom window and Pat and I used to get into lots of trouble because we watched their parties from our room. Mother frowned on their life style.*) Mr. Forbes didn't go off to jail, but he didn't ever cross mother a second time – under any circumstances. Not sure

who took care of the situation, but she didn't have to go back. Poor Mr Forbes, his wife took care of him later when she chased him around the house and broke a beer bottle over his head during one of their "parties." He went to the hospital and they moved shortly after. Mrs. Barga (she lived right next door to them) was his nurse and bragged about how she used a dull needle to give him his shots. Think about it, things were different in those days. They were pretty colorful neighbors and the whole neighborhood was glad when they left as I'm sure they were just as happy to get away.

Those were strange years, everyone worked together for a common cause. Roosevelt was re-elected for a total of 4 terms because no one would change the government while our men were fighting. Black Market was rampant and the OPM (Office of Price Management) was established. Rental units were scarce because of the influx of defense workers and military personnel and rent prices skyrocketed. Because of our circumstances, we didn't suffer much. We had lots of ration coupons, plenty of food and during this time dad was making good money.

There was meatless Fridays for the Catholics so the Government made Friday meatless for the entire population. Later "Meatless Tuesday" was added and we learned the joy of Macaroni and Cheese. (Which I still don't like.) Did you know Spam can be prepared about a thousand different ways? It was not rationed or considered a meat product, in other words, you could eat Spam on any of the meatless days. The GI's had tons of it and I understand they loved it so much they buried it by the case. Spam cost 14¢ a can during World War II and is \$2.29 today, it can be fried, baked, sliced, cubed and added to almost anything – and no, I don't like it either.

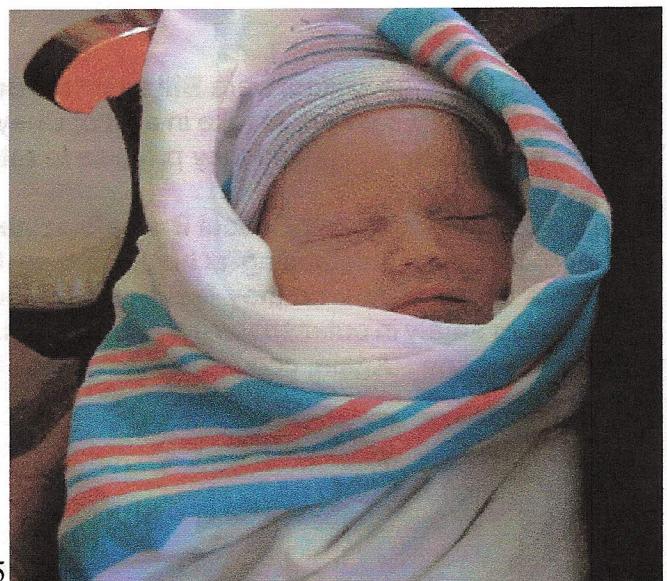
These are just a few of my memories. It was quite a time in the life of a pre-teen. All of our waking time was consumed with the war and probably a little bit of fear for the outcome. We went to movies to cheer our soldiers and boo the bad guys. We took pleasure in their destruction and as I look back I wonder about that particular emotion. Our armed forces grew into one of the worlds finest and we as a nation have gained from the inventions. The computer, TV, telephone communication, appliances and on and on have all improved because of the necessity of making them better for the war effort. Airplanes, Cars, SUV's and etc. There is very little we use today which not either invented or improved during those years. Our men came home and we are grateful, many didn't and we are sad. It was quite a time.

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### FAMILY NEWS ITEMS

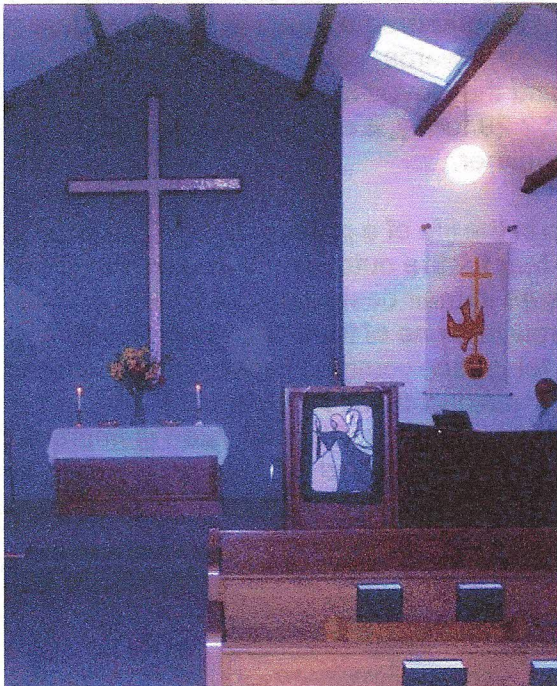
**Katie and Tyler Jacobs (Dick and Marty's daughter and her husband) announce the birth of their new baby, a beautiful little girl named Gretchen Marie, born on the second of July. Gretchen's vital statistics are: 7 pounds 7 ounces, 20 inches long, strawberry blond hair and very dark eyes. Katie says Tyler has beautiful brown eyes and Gretchen might have them too. Congratulations Katie and Tyler, we'll be anxious to see this new addition to the family.**

Gretchen Jacobs, 5 days old



**Bill Brown (Mike and Nan's son)** is fast recovering from the radical surgery to combat the infection in his lower legs. He recently came to our home for a picnic supper we had for the family and he looks great. Bill's desire for independence is so great that he is doing much more than they ever expected. Keep up your good work Bill!!!! Bill is in his home and is recovering thanks to the very capable assistance of his sister Jenny and her three little helpers. He loves hearing from all of you and would love to get a fun card. His address is Bill Brown, 3406 Birch Place, Cheyenne, WY 82001.

In the truth is stranger than fiction category, you should ask **Nancy Beardslee-Ekdahl** about her aborted cruise to Alaska. She and her husband Red had planned a cruise and when Vivian became so terribly ill, they cancelled. Later she learned the boat they were to have been aboard had some sort of steering problem, made a fast turn left and tipped the boat. The ship leaned so far to the side, the water rushed out of the swimming pool and caused several people to be propelled to the side of the ship. There were several injuries, none life threatening, but scary none the less. We can assume, there was another authority watching out for Nancy and Red when the events in their lives cancelled their trip. Or not, if you don't believe in that sort of thing.



Thinking of Vivian, this picture is of a beautiful "Angel Wall Hanging" which **Leah** had made and given to Vivian. It was hung on the pulpit of the church during Vivian's service and they liked it so much Nancy Beardslee gave it to the church and it hangs there today.

Recent Cheyenne visitors were **Bill and Ann Beardslee**. Bill is the oldest son of Bob and Caroline Beardslee. They were here to take in a bit of Cheyenne Frontier Days and see a little bit of Wyoming. We sure enjoyed their visit and they promise to return.

In the June issue I told you about **Bruce Blazine**, Bob and Caroline's son-in-law receiving the "Silver Snoopy Award" for outstanding achievement in the Space Program. This award is given by the astronauts to a person who they feel has contributed most to their safety. I'm sure the astronauts consider their safety in outer space a prime concern. The astronaut who presented Bruce with his award was Rick Sturckow. Again, congratulations Bruce for your work in the NASA Space Program.

Our grandson, **Devon VanAlyne (Roger and Susan's son)** has received his Naval assignment. He is a Nuclear Reactor Operator aboard the USS Ohio stationed at the Bangor Naval Station in Washington State. He's hoping to put in at Hawaii once in a while. Sounds like a great plan to me!!!



A new person in your life is always very exciting and **Pat** has a new granddaughter. Little **Crystal Louise White** was formally adopted by Enid White and she is now a member of the "White House." Crystal was born on April 9, 1998, a beautiful brunette with dark brown eyes and an impish smile. She will be a great addition to Pat's family.

Crystal and Enid

Our granddaughter, **Kelsey VanAlyne** recently received a Bronze Medal in the Breast Stroke at the Regional Swimming Meet in Trail, Canada. She is the daughter of **Rod and Cathy** and her sister **Katie** is following along right behind Kelsey and had several 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> finishes.

Wedding Bells are in the near future for **Matt Treadway!!!!** Matt and **Debbie Hampton** are looking at an early Spring Wedding. Congratulations!!!! We'll let you know the date and all the particulars. We don't want to miss this.



Watercolor by Marilyn Lamb Brown - 2001