



MY LIFE MY STORY



Doris



United States Army Nurse Corps

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I was born in Wisconsin in March 1920. My mother was a homemaker, and my father was a mechanic for the Wisconsin Gas and Electric Company. We lived in Kenosha, in a mammoth house. I had one older sister, a younger sister, and a brother. My mother and father had large families that lived nearby, so we had tremendous family get-togethers.



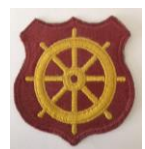
I went to school in Kenosha through high school; and after I graduated, I wanted to become an airline stewardess and fly off to Rio and gay

Paris. Back then, you had to be a nurse to be a stewardess. I found a nursing school in Racine, Wisconsin. I applied and was accepted. I was there for three years graduating in 1941.



I got a job in a nice hospital in Waukesha, Wisconsin. I was there for three months. I met another nurse, Mary Elizabeth who was very kind. Mary wanted to go into the service and follow in her brother's footsteps. As soon as the war broke out on December 7, 1941, we made plans to go into the Army.

It took a long time before we were called for our physicals. Finally, they sent us to a Navy place in Illinois. After our physicals, the doctors started laughing; I didn't weigh enough, and Mary was flat footed. However, we were both accepted.

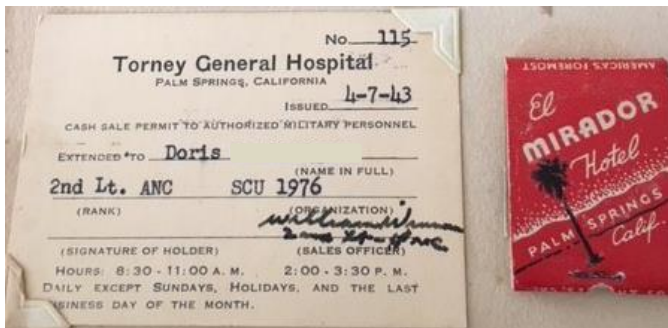


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In May of 1942, we arrived at Camp Grant, in Rockford, Illinois. I learned how the Army ran a field hospital as a second lieutenant. The way the wards were set up was fascinating. Mary and I were there for three months. We signed up for foreign service.

Soon, we had orders to Palm Springs. The boys were starting desert service in Northern Africa. They were in Blyth, California for desert training. The El Mirador Hotel was turned into the Turney General Hospital.

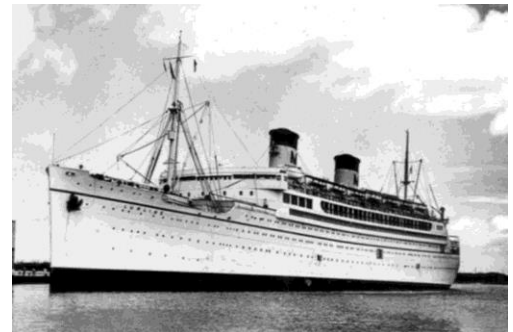


We had to set up the hospital, arrange the beds and order all the supplies that we might need.

I was on the surgical ward for a year. When we came in, it was empty; when we left, every ward was full.

Mary and I applied again for overseas service. We received orders in April 1943 to Camp Stoneman. We felt like we were there forever. There were no big hospital ships at that time. They were being built in San Pedro. We were in the 521 Medical Hospital Ship Platoon, separate. We sailed over with the troops.

We came back on a ship that had been made into a hospital. The Matson Line used four ships. I sailed on both the USS *Lurline* and the USS *Monterey* straight across the Pacific.

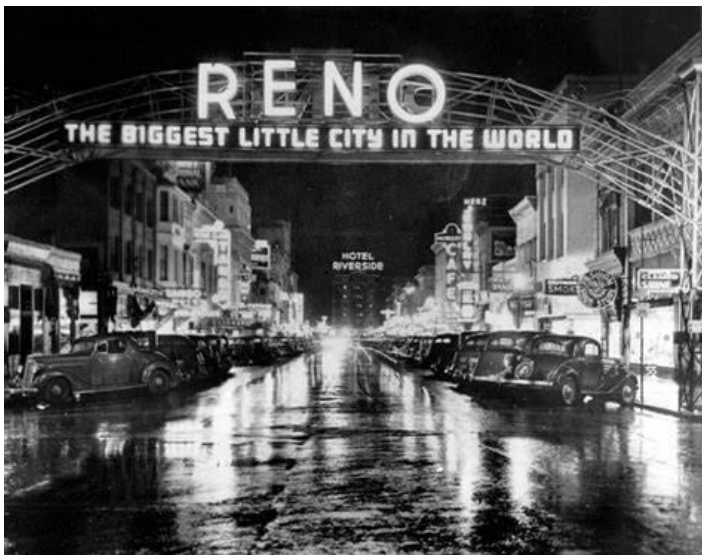


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They were beautiful, big ships. I got very seasick on that first trip. After that trip, I never got sick again. I was in three typhoons and even then, I didn't get sick.

The *Lurline* left Brisbane, Australia, sailed through the Panama Canal, and on up to the ship's home base of New York City. When we got to New York City, we had three days of leave after we unloaded our patients. I enjoyed seeing New York City. We were sent back to Camp Stoneman.

We took a train all the way to California staying in compartments. It was lovely. The walls would open joining the two platoons of nurses. We stopped at Harvey Houses for breakfast and dinner. As a side note, my first time in Reno was on this train.



We came into town around two in the morning. We woke up to see the arch that said, "The Biggest Little City in the World" and all the bright lights.

Back at Camp Stoneman, Mary and I waited for new orders. Every time you left the United States, you had to repeat your shots and training.

I had to do the gas mask training. I would put on the gas mask, and they would release the gases. I would run through the tent and halfway through take off the mask. I'm allergic to many things, so there I was weeping away.

We sailed on a small, Dutch hospital ship back to Brisbane, Australia. We weren't needed in Brisbane, so we traveled to Sydney on a brand-new hospital train. We were treated very well.



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After three days in Sydney, we were called back to Brisbane. The harbor had filled up with ships headed for home. We went right to the dock where all the platoons were waiting. They would call a platoon and assign them to a ship. In the heat, we stood on that dock in our winter wools for eleven hours.

The last ship, the USS *Monticello*, was a big, double stacker. We were the only platoon to go aboard. The male officers went on one side of the ship led by a Marine with a gun. A Marine with a gun also followed behind them. We were ordered on the other side of the ship, and the same thing happened. Our Marine took us all the way up to **A** deck to our cabin which was right behind the bridge. We opened the door hoping to see other nurses, but nobody was there. We were the only three nurses onboard. We were restricted to our rooms and told that we would be escorted by guards to our two meals a day. This went on for two weeks. We couldn't fathom what we had done.

Finally, an officer did come in with a guard to tell us that we could be put on duty. What he didn't tell us, but what we found out later was that the ship was full of mentally ill patients, shell shocked and sorts. The condition of the patients was why the captain didn't want women on board.

Mert worked with the captain in a huge ward, and Mary and I went down into the hold. It too was a huge ward full of the shell shock patients, one hundred of them. One male Navy nurse sat up top and watched what was going on. The patients just wondered around.

We tried to talk to each one of the guys. They were very glad to see us, a woman you know. It was kind of scary at first; but we got to know them, and they us.

There was another ward, that we found out about later. It was a gigantic room where all the severely, mentally ill patients stayed. We had to walk across a catwalk to get to them and treat them. You couldn't look down; you'd be scared to death.



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We headed back to Camp Stoneman and then, we went to San Pedro to pick up the USS *Comfort*. We took her out on the trial run. What a thrill—everything worked perfectly.

The USS *Comfort* was interesting. It had an Army medical unit and a Navy crew.

The *Comfort* went up to Port Moresby, New Guinea. You could see all the fighting inland. We made two trips to Brisbane from Port Moresby with casualties, then on to Hollandia, which was further north.

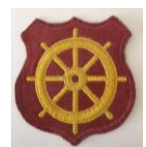
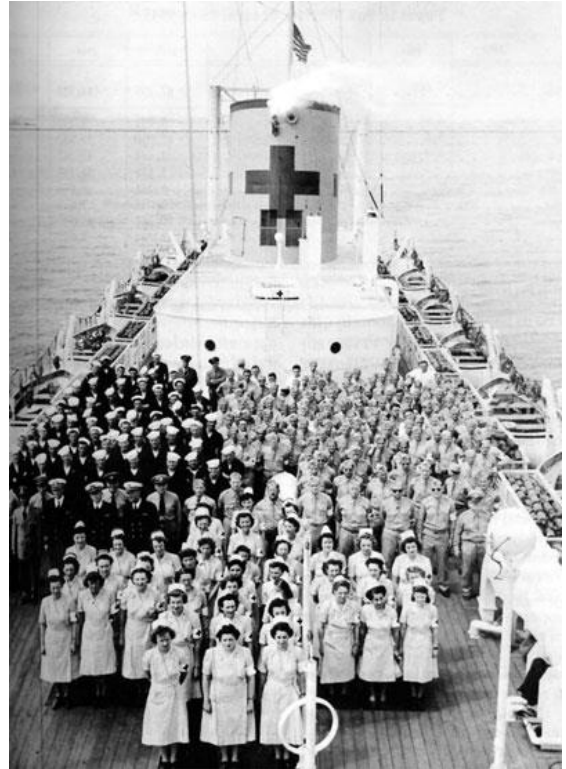
When the USS *Mercy* took over our old route, we went even further north. That was the first time I was in enemy territory, 1944.

We kept going north to all the islands: Admiralties, the Marshalls, and on up to Japan. As the US kept conquering the islands, field hospitals would be set up.

We would sail into port, and the wounded would be loaded on the USS *Comfort*. We would take them south where the field hospitals had been set up. We always felt protected because of the bright lights on deck. The ship was lit up, so it was easily seen as a hospital ship.

We were going to Okinawa on D-day with the troops, their first landing. We were there six days. They kept bringing us wounded till we were loaded to the point that patients were in the aisles.

I was in the ward that took patients immediately after surgery or as they were being loaded on ship. They would be horribly burned, comatose, or already deceased. It was a hard time.



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I can't think where we took them the first time, but we came back to Okinawa April 23rd. There was still fierce fighting, and the ships in the harbor had to go to blackout again. Okinawa was called the bloodiest battle of the war.



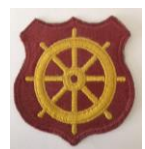
You would feel the bombs drop, and here I was trying to give shots. In those days, everybody got a penicillin shot every three hours around the clock.

There was this poor guy that had part of his face and neck shot off. They put him right next to the nurse's station, so we could keep an eye on him. What concerned me was the fact that he needed oxygen. Back then, it came in these large tanks. I worried about how stable the tanks were.

At nighttime, all the lights are off while in port for the safety of the ships in the harbor. We were all loaded up and heading out to sea.

We had gone just far enough that we could turn our lights on and breathe a sigh of relief. I had just started my twelve-hour night shift. I was standing next to the medicine cabinet loading a syringe.

All of a sudden, here came this awful explosion. The USS *Comfort* had had been attacked by a Japanese kamikaze.



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The explosion picked me up and threw me against the bulkhead. I only weighed eighty-five pounds. I hurt my spine and banged my head hard; I lost my hearing. They sounded the alarm to abandon ship. That alarm was deafening, horribly loud. I could just hear the alarm because there was an outlet right in my ward. Then, I didn't hear anything else till the next morning. I didn't have an officer or medical man; no one came. They had all been killed. From that point on, we had no surgical officer as we sailed back to the states.

I happened to have a very excellent head corpsman. I wanted him to get fifteen litters, and he just looked at me and shook his head. I had to get firm and say, "Please, get the litters." He wrote, "Come."

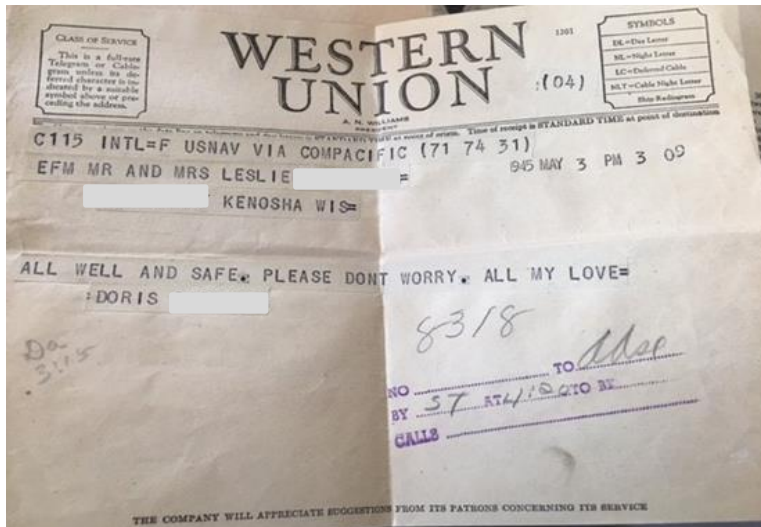


He took my arm and steered me to the big opening next to my ward. It was right next to the medicine cabinet where I had been standing. There was nothing in front of me. It was all crashed in! He helped me back to a stool next to the desk. He left me there and went to see if he was needed elsewhere.

There was a fire where the plane had hit. Many were dying. We couldn't take the wounded off the ship.



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We had the man with the neck and face injuries, plus many others that couldn't be moved. **I expected to go down with the ship.**

I looked at the poor dear and kept telling him, "I won't leave you; I won't leave you." I knew I would be sitting right there holding his hand when we went down.



After a while, we got the all clear. It seemed like forever. The Navy had marvelous engineers. They got us back up, and we limped into Guam for emergency repairs. From there, we went to Hawaii where we buried the dead.

After repairs, we headed back to San Pedro, California which took about a month.

I was very proud of our two surgical officers. Major Erikson never got much sleep because he was always with his patients. The other officer, Captain Clark worked and worked and worked. The ENT doctor, Dr. McPherson was called in to help with surgery also.

All three were killed by the kamikaze attack on the USS *Comfort*. Also, six nurses were killed who were in the medical wards below deck.

Our Catholic Chaplain, Father Weilandt was walking the deck at the time of the hit saying his "Office of the Day" prayers for strength.



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He was terribly burned and totally wrapped up in bandages. He died some days later in Hawaii.

When we got back to San Pedro, we were given the choice of staying on or getting off the *USS Comfort*. I pondered and pondered. I liked the duty, I liked being there. The *USS Mercy* moved up and took our place.

I took orders to Oakland Regional Hospital. It had been the Oakland Hotel turned into a very nice hospital.

There were six nurses that went to Oakland Regional Hospital. I was a first lieutenant and assigned to a floor where I outranked the charge nurses, so I became the charge nurse. Five of us were on duty, and one was in quarters. When the Army came to our quarters and talked to the charge nurse, they wanted to know how many of the nurses wanted a discharge. She said, "Well, they all do."

In September 1945, the orders went through, and we were discharged and sent home. I wasn't ready to discharge so quickly. One minute, I was doing my job and the next, I was discharged just like that.

I went back to Kenosha and lived with my sister who lived next-door to mother. I stayed with her because her husband had TB of the bone and was in the hospital. I would try to talk to my sister about where I had been. She was rather fragile and often fell asleep. There I'd be talking to thin air. No one wanted to hear my story. They cared more about what to spend their food coupons on.

I stayed home for a month and decided to go back to San Francisco where three nurses that I had served with were living. I found an apartment, and I was offered a job in a doctor's office at 450 Sutter Street which I took.

I worked for Dr. Adams and Dr. Rogers six days a week, eight-hour shifts, and Saturday mornings. I worked in that office for seven years.



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After work on Saturday mornings, my husband and I would go to Lincoln Golf Course in San Francisco and play golf. I loved to play golf.

I had married Texas in July 1947 at Saint Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. I was married for fifty-nine years.

Texas was named Texas because his daddy was from Texas. Texas had been a Merchant seaman during the war. He was also on the Matson Line.

My husband was working in the automobile industry, MOPAR parts distribution. He won many awards and prize trips around the US and overseas. He saw a chance to become a manager in Vallejo, California, so we moved there.

The doctor's office called asking me if I would come back and work during the week. I took a bus from Vallejo to San Francisco each day. It was really hard on my back. I did that for eighteen months.

We wanted to start a family, but I was having a difficult time getting pregnant. We decided to adopt.

Our daughter, Constance Anne was adopted in 1953. She sings opera and has her own marketing company in Silicon Valley.

My medical problem was resolved, and I was able to get pregnant. I had our son, Matthew, in 1956.



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He was premature at six months weighing one pound, twelve ounces and became totally blind. He lived with us till he was twelve and then, he moved to a home that helped take care of him.

He had developed other problems. He spoke as a child but then, he stopped talking. We don't know why this happened. Now, he lives in a wonderful, wonderful home in Chico, California. He is very active.

In 1958, Bill was born. Bill is also very talented and smart. I was almost forty years old by then.

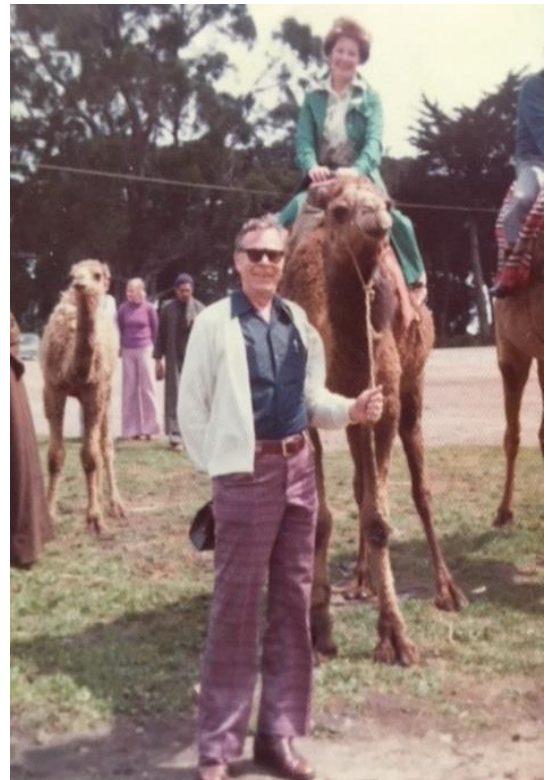


I started a swim project with the Parks and Rec of Santa Clara County which I ran for twelve years for children with disabilities. They swam once a week, year-round.

When the kids got older, I started helping friends care for their aging parents. They would ask for help, and my nursing came in handy. I did bed baths, administered medicine, and took them out for walks.

Later in life, I worked as a secretary at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Santa Clara. My daughter was the choir conductor there. We had been out to lunch, and we stopped by the church to pick up some music that she needed for the weekend.

When we were leaving, we went by the office, and the accountant mentioned that they needed a secretary. She asked if we knew of anyone who would be interested. My daughter said, "Well, here she is." I agreed to a trial run.



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I ended up working there for sixteen years and quitting when I was seventy-seven years old.

My husband passed away from cancer of the lungs in 2006. I lived in San Jose for forty-five years. My home was too big. My son, Bill and I decided to take a couple of trips and look around for a place to live. We decided on Reno. I love living in the desert, with the blue skies, white clouds, and sunshine.

I enjoyed many travels with both my husband and my sister. I've been to Europe, Israel with a church group, on a train trip through the Canadian Rockies and on five different cruises.

The VA in Reno is to be **highly** commended. The staff on the wards are wonderful. Now, I have home care, so I don't have to go to the hospital. It's just all wonderful. I am extremely happy about our VA.



Painting done by Frank Walsh, 2011

