

The MOAA Scholarship Fund was pleased to receive this biography and photograph, provided by the Ayers' son, Lee Ayers, in October 2016.

My dad graduated from Olympia, WA, high school in 1926. He had a football scholarship to Washington State College (now University), but after being there for one semester, decided he didn't like school. He then sailed for various shipping companies, mainly to Central and South America, as well as to most ports along the West Coast of the US, including both Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands, as well as China, Japan, the Philippines, and the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). He had a strong interest in marine Diesel engines, so during his years at sea, he became a Diesel engineer.

After he was through spending a few years working on freighters, he met my mom via his sister when both my mom and my aunt were rooming together as students at the University of Washington. Her name was Franc Ethel Robbins. She was from Buffalo, WY, where she had already earned both BA and MA degrees from the University of Wyoming, and was at the UW to earn another MA in librarianship.

My mom was raised on a cattle and sheep ranch, so knew about riding a horse and the hard work it took to keep a ranch operating. When she was 60 years old, her uncle, who was head of the Republican party in Johnson County, WY, bet her she couldn't rope and hog-tie a calf. She did both in under 5 minutes!

When my dad was dating her, he didn't want to tell his friends he was dating someone named "Frank", so he named her "Honey Bear", a name that stuck with her throughout her life. They were married in 1930 and lived a very interesting life together, and accomplished a lot.

Their first place of residence was in Longview, WA, where my dad was a field supervisor for the Standard Oil Company. They were transferred to Portland, OR, (I was born there on June 8, 1934), where my dad was the field supervisor for Standard Oil for the NW region of that company. We then moved to Salem, OR, in 1936, because he would then be more centralized so his traveling would diminish. He was transferred to Seattle in late May, 1939.

Because my dad was a marine engineer, had been a member of the Washington State National Guard as a high school student, the Navy became very interested in him as the nation became closer to going to war with Japan. He entered Naval service in late 1940 as a Navy Lt., equal to a captain in the other services.

When WW 2 came, we were living in Seattle. He was serving in that city, and when war broke out, and was immediately assigned to duty in the Aleutian Islands area since the Japanese had invaded the western-most larger islands of Attu and Kiska. The Japanese had also bombed Dutch Harbor, located to the southeast of that island chain.

My mom and I remained in Seattle. I was 7 1/2 years old when the war started on 7 December 1941. My mom became an airplane spotter for the Army Air Corps, which meant she usually worked at nights in downtown Seattle. She had many exciting tales to tell about that work!

My dad became the executive officer for the amphibious landing of our US Army troops on Attu, and later was heavily involved in the securing of Kiska. He was, by that time, a Lt. Commander.

He was then transferred to Portsmouth, VA, where he was named Damage Control Officer on the yet-to-be commissioned U.S.S. Shangri-la, a new, larger, Essex-class aircraft carrier (CV-38). He had attained the rank of Commander. My mom and I travel by train across the U.S., taking our time so we could visit all the major cities along the route. After his ship was commissioned, we returned to Seattle for the remainder of the war.

The "Shang" saw major action in the Pacific theater of the war, taking part in the liberation of the Philippines and later in the Battle for Okinawa where the enemy introduced their "Kamakazi" warfare technique, which called for their planes, load with bombs, to crash into our ships, which they did with terrifying results. After that battle, he was named the Executive Officer of the "Shang". Because of his service under many enemy attacks, he awarded the Bronze Star medal with a "V" for valor.

At the end of the war, he returned home to Seattle, where he was named Training Officer for the 13th Naval District, based in Seattle, where he served from 1946 until 1951.

In late 1951, as a Captain, he was transferred to Washington, DC, where he was involved in Navy intelligence and served as an aid to the Navy Chiefs of Staff. He also attended atomic bomb tests in Nevada. He retired in late 1954 as a 2-star Admiral. (Pretty good for non-Naval Academy graduate...)

While my dad was serving his late Navy tour in DC, my mom became one of the secretaries for Alan Dulles, the director of the CIA. Every morning, my dad would have to take my to a certain address in DC, where she would be picked up by a CIA operative, who would then take her to her work site, because the CIA was afraid she could be kidnapped by the Russians because she 'knew too much'. This continuous dropping off my mom became a nuisance for my dad, and one time he was asked where my mom worked. His sarcastic response: "The Cigar Institute of America!"

After they both retired from government service, they purchased a 38-foot sailboat and developed a travel service in the Bahamas, where they would take people on their sailboat for 5 days, fishing, snorkeling, and just having a great time. My dad could play any musical instrument and my mom was a remarkable cook, so their guests always had a great time. They both enjoyed this lifestyle until they realized that operating a large sailboat was taking a toll on their bodies, so they sold their boat and moved to Central Florida, until they moved back to Seattle to become grandparents and have time to visit with relatives and friends.

In Seattle, my dad was named by then-Washington State governor, Dixie Ray Lee, to head up a committee to establish shipping lanes throughout Puget Sound so the threat of collisions between large Navy ships, freighters, and the many ferry boats traversing the Sound, would greatly minimized.

In 1977, he was named "Maritime Man of the Year" for the state, and was also elected president of newly formed Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society that same year, with my mom serving as his secretary.

My parents then moved to Black Lake, outside of Olympia, in the summer of 1977, where they spent their last two years in the the state of Washington, enjoying living right next to the lake. They enjoyed, very much, just fishing from their 12-foot boat, feeding the ducks, and visiting with friends and relatives, as well as listing to their favorite music and reading interesting books.

Their last residency was in Hemet, CA, where they purchased property in a gated community in 1978, where many of their friends from both Standard Oil and Navy service resided. They traveled to Olympia for two more summers before deciding that Hemet was to be their last home.

Even in retirement, my parents were very active in their community in Hemet where they resided and also in civic affairs as volunteers, mainly working at animal shelters.

In their private life, they both were excellent shots with either pistols or rifle, both enjoyed salmon fishing and digging for clams, were very good golfers, spent many hours driving their car to learn more about new territories, like classical music, and did a lot of reading. They belonged to gun clubs in both Oregon and Washington. We always had at least two boats for fishing and camping. What a great life we had when I was growing up!

They never owned a new car until 1949, always bought houses that needed fixing up, and they taught me the value of both hard work and money. They were not in the least pretentious. After the war, we had continuous former shipmates, civilian, as well as both enlisted and commissioned former Navy personnel, come to visit us at our home in Edmonds, WA.

I can very easily tell that I was afforded a wonderful childhood by two very loving parents, both who I loved very much, and of course, both of whom I am very proud.

They talked with me about their desire to be involved in funding a perpetual scholarship fund to help deserving students attain a college education, which they did through the MOAA. I'm very happy that I can be a part of the procedure to be sure to see that funds are continuously set aside for this scholarship fund that is helping so many students.

My dad passed away at age 82 in 1989 from cancer. My 90 year old mom passed away in 1996... I sure miss them both very much.

I hope their picture and this story will tell considerably more about my parents than was know beforehand .