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V-J Day

In August, 1945, we were living in an apartment in Arna Valley, Arlington, Virginia. Franklin Roosevelt had died of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 12, and Harry S. Truman had become President. We had been transferred from Portland, Oregon, to Washington, D. C., in May, and Paul, a Cryptanalyst in the F.B.I., was undergoing two months of in-service training at Quantico, Virginia.

I don't remember the date, but the World Almanac tells me the date of Japan's surrender, V-J Day, was either August 14 or 15, depending on which page one believes. Did the international dateline have something to do with that confusion? Perhaps it was the fifteenth in Japan and the fourteenth in the United States. Whatever the actual date, generally reported as the fifteenth, I have very vivid memories of the events in my life on that crucial night.

Paul called soon after the exciting news was announced, saying he had a forty-eight-hour leave if I could come to Quantico to pick up him and some of his fellow agents. We had no car, but Jean, our sister-in-law, who lived in the northeast part of the District, did and was very generous with it, provided we could find gas. He was pretty sure he could get sufficient gas coupons. I called Jean, whose husband, Bill, Paul's brother, was in the Navy and stationed in California, anticipating transfer to the Pacific. She was understandably excited about the Japanese surrender; maybe now Bill could be home for the birth of their first child. (He wasn't, unfortunately, and the "child" was twins.) "Yes," she agreed, "come get the car."

I started out, first on the bus which took me past the quiet Pentagon and then delivered me to Twelfth and Constitution Avenue. My connecting streetcar was several blocks away on New York Avenue. The walk down Constitution and Eleventh to New York Avenue was exciting but uneventful. It was about ten o'clock at night, and the street was alive with happy servicemen in uniform, celebrating in various ways the end of the war and a few who were sleeping off their celebration on the sidewalk. If there were sailors kissing girls, as depicted in Life Magazine, I didn't see any, although I saw several couples walking arm in arm. I saw fewer uniforms as I drew closer to New York Avenue, and the corner where I caught my streetcar was deserted. There was no one on the streetcar which took me to my destination at Lily Pond Drive, the housing development where Jean and her son Henry lived. The development, however, was alive with wives and children celebrating the eminent return of their husbands and fathers. When I got to Jean's apartment, she said that Paul had called in a panic. His leave had been cancelled - too many people already on the streets of Washington - and the news on the radio claimed that the District of Columbia was a shambles of drunken servicemen rowdily celebrating the approaching end of their service by accosting any stray woman they came across. I was to stay put and not return to Arna Valley that night.

I had seen no unruliness in my progress across Washington, but perhaps the scene had deteriorated as the evening progressed. Jean persuaded me that I should stay the night

with her before returning home. And, certainly there was much noise and boisterous activity in the neighborhood where I was. There wasn't much sleep for anyone in our area that night; celebration was general and nobody was a stranger. Many partied all night. I met more happy strangers than I had ever seen before. I wondered how Arna Valley was celebrating. The disappointment of not having Paul home cast a shadow on my own celebration, but after all I couldn't be sad about the end of that terrible, long war. And in this manner, I marked the end of the World War II conflict.

