

## Write About a Veteran

11-11-24

My step-father, Nicholas Kost, was a veteran of WWII. When asked about his experiences, he would generally just shrug off the question with some wise-crack or flatly refuse to reveal anything of his experience. Every once in a while, however, he would spontaneously volunteer information.

Nick was born on New Year's Day, 1925, so he would have been prime drafting age for WWII. I don't know if he was actually drafted or if he volunteered. What I do know is that he ended up in Korea driving a jeep for some officer. Up until I heard that story, I hadn't even known that we were in Korea at that time. I guess they left that part out of my history lesson. That was about the beginning and end of what I absorbed from the little I learned from him.

After Nick was discharged, he made use of the GI Bill and attended Iowa University to study art. He used that degree to become an interior decorator and ultimately a Junior High School art teacher. I'm surprised that he picked Iowa for school as he was from the small city of Auburn in central NY. I'm sure that, without the GI Bill, he would never have been able to afford college tuition. His parents certainly couldn't have helped him, being among the middle of 12 children.

Nick's parents were Eastern European immigrants from one of those areas on the Russian border that kept switching countries. His dad left when the Tsar's soldiers came to town looking for conscripts. (I never

heard how his mother came to the US. She was from the same general area but they met in this country.) When I met the Kostos they were well up in years. Mr. Kost could speak passable, heavily accented English and loved telling his stories to me as I was a fresh audience and enjoyed listening to him, whereas the rest of the family had grown tired of the retelling. Mrs. Kost's English was rudimentary. She never worked outside of the home and there were many Russian speakers in the area. When someone came to the door, she would corral one of the children and shoo them to the door to translate.

Mrs. Kost's lack of English may have saved me some chores through the several years I spent as a peripheral member of the family. By the time I came along, she was a double amputee, secondary to diabetes, but still ruled the house with an iron fist. At holidays when we were at their house she would dole out tasks like a mess sergeant to all of the women present except my mother and me since we couldn't understand the language and she was still uncomfortable with English. That was how I was free to listen to her husband's tales.

As I said earlier, they could never have afforded college for my step-father. Putting food on the table had been a real challenge during the depression. They grew a large garden, fed the family from it and preserved all that they could. I remember hearing stories of the meat hung in the upper level of the two story garage. I'm sure that there was very little in the way of dairy products in their diet. It must have been very deficient in Vitamin D because Nick was very bow-legged from rickets. When he had his knee replaced when he was in his early 70's the surgeon observed that half of the joint surface was totally

destroyed while the other half was pristine. Looking at a family photograph taken in the 60's of parents and the living 11 children, it is obvious that the youngest boys, born after the end of the depression, are both a head taller than their older brothers. Amazing what having enough nutritious food will do for you.