

Rick Nedloe
by Lee Holden

They say I was born the youngest of ten children in Birmingham, Alabama on July 20, 1921. Life was hard during the Great Depression. One of my sisters died when she was 12 or so. I think it was from rheumatic fever, but was never really sure. Medical help was scarce and we were too poor to think about specialists.

My dad had been laid off from the local factory where he was a machinist. There were no jobs for machinists, in fact few jobs for anyone. Everyone tried to do what they could, but we got paid more often with a chicken, a few eggs, or a little flour than in money. At one point, I was the only one of the twelve of us who had a job, a paper route making a few pennies a week.

In spite of it all, my folks insisted that we all go to high school. That doesn't sound like much now but back then, a lot of kids dropped out early...quite a few when they turned 16. None of us considered college. That was something for rich kids. I liked school and was a decent student, but I lived for football. There isn't much chance I would get to play these days. I was only about 5'8" and weighed 130 pounds soaking wet. But back then, there were only a few guys bigger and they tended to be slow and clumsy. I was faster than most and played "quarterback". That was back in the days of the single-wing formation when the tailback carried the ball almost every play. The quarterback didn't throw passes. He was just a blocker, which accounts for the funny shape of my nose. We wore leather helmets without facemasks. Between that and boxing in the military, I had my nose broken so many times that there is no cartilage left in it. It lays there kind of crooked and flat.

After high school, the war came along just to show us how good life had been. Like all of my friends, I volunteered for the military, where they shoved my blond crew cut and blue eyes under an Army Air Corps cap. The Depression was bad, but as a kid I really didn't understand. At 18, the war made me an adult. I watched as several of my buddies were killed. My best friend Tom Spenser was killed not a foot away from me. I was the radio man and he was navigator in a Liberator B24 when we caught enemy fire over Germany. A single bullet silenced old Tom forever and the shrapnel from the side of the plane left scars on my back as a reminder.

Somehow, I survived, and Uncle Sam actually gave me an education in electronics that has been the basis for my career and a hobby, too. I suppose the internet and email will change things for the next generation, but I still operate a ham radio and love chatting (for real) late at night. After the war, I got into radio—repair, that is, not entertainment. Eventually I became a purchasing agent for an electronics firm back in Birmingham. After years of 70-hour weeks, I made it to head of the purchasing department where I am afraid I topped out. I should have gone higher, but there were too many youngsters with college degrees competing for promotions. More and more they even had master's degrees. Oh, I took courses throughout the years, and was tested out at the master's degree level, but without the piece of paper I never got a real fair shake.

The personal life has been rocky, too. I met Jane at the USO during the war. Like many in those days, we got married just before I shipped out, well before we got to know each other. After the war, Bill, Ted, Hillary, and Robby came along pretty quickly and we stayed together through some rough times so they would have a family. But, it was catch-22. I worked long, hard hours to feed and educate a family I never got to see while Jane played the kids against me. After Robby graduated she hired a witch of an attorney and they cleaned me out. After having to start over broken down and broke at 60 I am happy to say I made it back and am okay with the kids these days. Still, I didn't shed a tear watching them shovel dirt on her coffin this morning.