

“I CAN DREAM AGAIN” CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

CHAPTER 2 – “AUTOMATIC JACK,” A POW WHO MADE IT BACK

Fighting to Live

My father was a tail gunner on a B-17 with the 325th Bomb Squadron, 92nd Bomb Group, United States Army Air Corps. He fought for his country. He fought for his family. In the end, he fought for his life.

Battle though he did, my father was shot down over Brussels, Belgium, on his 13th mission and was captured by the Nazis on March 2, 1944. His life had started with such promise. How could it end here?

Missing in Action

The POW camp was a place of torture. In Stalag V, as sergeant, my dad was singled out for extraordinary abuse and punishment in an effort to get information. After 14 painful months of incarceration, he was liberated by English troops under Major Lightfoot at Fallingbosten, Germany, in May 1945. It was weeks before my mother would find out that he had been liberated from the POW camp, but no one could have predicted how long it would take to get the POW camp out of him. While she rejoiced in his return, my mother had no idea the struggles that lay ahead.

His Own Private Prison

We all remember when Dad gave up the fight to survive. Marianne had died, my sisters were becoming pregnant, and everyone was leaving home. When Dad got home from Marianne’s funeral he put on his pajamas and robe and rarely took them off. He went into depression, was given an early retirement from the school district, became a 100 percent disabled veteran, and secluded himself in the living room chair.

The accumulated weight of family pressure and the memories of the war that he silently endured led to his first mental breakdown resulting in stays in psychiatric wards. After the mental breakdowns, he was admitted into three psychiatric hospitals and given electric shock treatments. My mother began to have breakdowns as well.