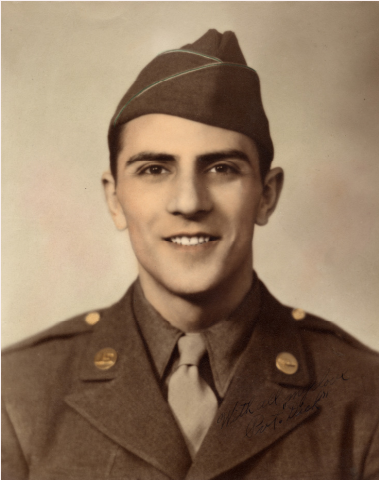


A Three in One Miracle During World War II

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By

Sara Insanna Lepeirs



Richard Lepeirs, 1944

It was a typical wintry evening, December 21, 1943, on the West Side of Buffalo, New York, when one letter started changes in life. Strains of "Silent Night" were playing on the radio as my husband, Richard, drew the drape and peered through the window, remarking, "It's snowing so gently right now, in tune with the

Christmas season." "That's perfect," I said, feeling so proud to be nursing our three-month-old, first-born Elaine Marie. "Please read the mail to me, Honey." Christmas greetings were steadily coming in from relatives and friends, bringing us more joy in preparation of our holiday festivities. Richard sat across from me, next to the end table where the mail was stacked. He read each greeting and personal note with much gusto. When he opened the last piece, he read it to himself and put it aside. I assumed that it must have been a utility bill or an advertisement.

After we had Elaine Marie cozily situated in her crib, Richard said, "I want you to sit here and listen to this special invitation that was sent to me." Forcing a cheerful attitude he read the "invitation" from "Uncle Sam" summoning him to service in the military on January 17, 1944. World War II was disrupting all of our future plans. It was appalling to us that he was about to be drafted in spite of his age of twenty-six years and his line of work as foreman of the paint division at Bell Aerospace Corporation. I had recently retired from a civil-service position in the Erie County Clerk's Office to be a full-time mother. We were overjoyed that we had become parents after being married close to five years. Now, we were to be separated in a few weeks!

Soon after Richard's departure in January, I was informed that the building on Niagara Street in which we

lived was in the process of being sold and that I had to move out. I immediately applied at the rental office of the Lakeview Project, a government complex where military families resided. Unfortunately, I was told that it would be several months before my turn would come up for the next vacancy. Disappointed with the news, I decided to walk over to the apartment building on Fourth Street where my Aunt Jenny and her daughter Gloria had been living for two years. Aunt Jenny's son Paul was serving in an infantry division. Before visiting her on the second floor, I stood in front of the building and vividly recall saying, "Oh God, I wish I could live downstairs from Aunt Jenny's apartment." I thought of how impossible it would be to procure that particular apartment among the hundred of others in that Project.

The following day after that "impossible dream" I received a phone call from the rental office stating that a tenant had moved out of her apartment overnight, without giving notice. She asked, "Can you move within a few days? None of the other applicants are able to move on such short notice." I was floored! I replied, "Yes, I will be able to move tomorrow. Where exactly is the apartment located?" "It's at 484 Fourth Street, Apartment #2," she said. I gasped—"My God, it's right beneath Aunt Jenny's apartment!" What an immediate answer to my prayer. We were so helpful to each other during the period that I lived there. This was the first of three instant responses to my prayerful requests.

Delighted to be in my new home, I made it a practice to write to Richard daily. I



Richard and Sara, 1944

described every detail of Elaine Marie's progress. I sent photos frequently so that he could see how she was growing from the three month old infant he had left, into a two year old "charmer." My brother Nick's photography hobby was continually exercised as he snapped and developed priceless snapshots of her many spontaneous antics.

On December 8, 1944, a Holy Day called the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, I was attending Mass at Holy Cross Church. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with apprehension for Richard's safety. I looked up at the crucifix above the altar and prayed fervently, "Oh God, please let something happen that will divert whatever impending danger Richard possibly may encounter." Tears just streamed down my face, as I gave vent to the pent-up emotions that had been stored since his departure.

Precisely, on that Holy Day, Richard was on a break from maneuvers with several other crewmen of the Third Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron in General George Patton's Third Army, playing a fourhanded pinochle card game. One of the crew was cleaning his rifle and inadvertently pressed the trigger sending a bullet through Richard's right foot. He was then transferred to a hospital in England. This unpredictable accident prevented him from driving his tank in the next reconnaissance maneuver during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium!

I had received word that Richard was wounded. His letters to me were not received consecutively. I didn't know how and where he was wounded. Would he have his sight, his legs, his arms? When was he coming home?

It was a warm day in August of 1945. I was wheeling Elaine Marie in her carriage towards my apartment building, after visiting my parents and grandmother who lived nearby. I made an abrupt stop in front of the building, probably on the same spot where I made my first

prayerful request to God. A statement that Richard had made to me on his last furlough, prior to being transferred to the European Theater, came to my mind. He said, "When I write to you, Sara, I cannot give you specifics as to where I am, what I'm doing, and when I may be coming home." He continued, "But remember this—when I write, 'Joseph will see the snow'—it will mean that I have good prospects of coming home soon." With that recollection, I automatically turned my whole being to the grace of God, imploring Him, as previously with "Oh God, please let me find a letter in the mail with the words, 'Joseph will see the snow.'" I proceeded to the mail slots and opened mine, and lo and behold there was the army envelope from Richard. I clung to it with heart pounding as I unlocked my door to the apartment. My cousin had come to visit at the same time. So eager was I to read the letter that I was hardly able to greet her warmly. Hurrily, I tore open the envelope and started reading the contents of the message. In it were the words I had wished to see, "Joseph will see the snow." I screamed, repeating the words over and over again. My cousin was terrified, thinking I had lost my senses. "Sara, what are

you screaming about; who is Joseph? What snow? It's not snowing! Calm down, dear," she said.

After I explained to her the meaning of the words, she exclaimed, "What a miracle that you should get your prayer answered on the spot!" It was the third time my prayers had been answered so swiftly. Now I knew that Richard was safe and soon would return home after almost two years.

On October 31, 1945, Richard was officially and honorably discharged. Thank God that the injury only required the use of a cane for a short period of time and that we could continue our lives together. We were blessed with another daughter, Linda, and a son, Richard Anthony.



Richard and Sara, celebrating
66th wedding anniversary

Sara lives in Granada Hills, California and will be celebrating her 95th birthday in December.