



The Best 90 Plus Years of My Life: A Voyage

Marvin Simkins

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By covering most of the 20th century plus more than a decade of the 21st, Simkins explores a diverse range of subjects. Purpose: to inform and amuse the reader as well as to portray himself in a variety of incarnations. Don't we all inhabit more than a single identity? This writer is no exception. He is a boy, man, husband, father, and concurrently, an employee, employer, sport lover and participant at all levels, world traveler, WW2 veteran of North African and Italian war theaters, cancer survivor, and legally blind.

Marvin has striven to bring all elements of his busy, productive life to bear in this long voyage of discovery. In setting down the narrative, he has attempted to be as candid as possible. In so doing he discloses a fallible person who is, in turn, reverent and irreverent: a person who does not shy away from strong and sometimes questionable language. He tries to paint himself as a human being with all the attributes and flaws that entails. He cares not if the picture shows him with some warts. The old Hollywood version of perfection he is not.

By focusing on persons, places, events, and cultural phenomena, rather than always on himself, the writer is attempting to present the forces that have made him the individual he is: unique and idiosyncratic. No attempt is made to exercise a value judgment with regard to him, though such forbearance is not exercised on many other subjects which crop up in the course of the book. It is the obvious aim of the author to draw pictures of the environments, times, mores: in short, the full flavor and essence of the long time spread during which he has dwelt on earth, well in excess of the biblical Three score and ten. The good fortune of his longevity he ascribes to genes, healthy living and life style, but most important, Chance and Luck. That his wife, Beatrice, has not only accompanied him on the long voyage, but has caused the trip to be both productive and enjoyable is icing on the cake.

The question of whether and what would one change in his past were he given the opportunity, arises in conversation from time to time. Everyone has regrets. Most generally they include mistakes, deaths of loved ones, etc., but the author's position has been that to change any one thing in the past would have the potential of changing all that follows. He would not chance that, as he regards his life as having been most happy, successful, and satisfactory on balance. No regrets.

In the book, the largest verbiage has been expended on life in the streets of south Philadelphia in its wide diversity, school at all levels, menial jobs, Army training, service at home and overseas, domestic and foreign travel, post war experiences in his chosen work, a number of hobbies and sports, and health issues. Treatment of old age and old-old age then take center stage. Simkins says, throughout, opinions surface, but not nearly to the extent they intrude on my thinking. That reluctance is likely the only area not given free reign. Should I be allowed to inhabit this planet sufficiently longer, that aspect between my ears will certainly be visited in either book or essay form.

Should you want an interesting story of the times in question, and are willing to work through what lights Simkins' fire, the promise is that you will be amply rewarded for your patience.

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Norbert Walling:

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