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"Alamogordo"

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The road into Clovis had been tortuous but tinted with the colors of the New Mexico desert subtly touched by the incipient autumn. Driving a military Jeep with a comrade from their former B-17 squadrons in Europe, Joseph Angelina thought how different it would be to fly in this clear, dry air, so remarkably pure after his recent years of trying to locate enemy targets in cloudy and moody Europe."

“Alamogordo”

Autumn 1944 *

Ron A. Ambrosetti, PhD

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Accompanied by fellow veteran navigator and fellow East Coast native, Conrad Stouffer, Joseph marveled at the shifting landscape on the eastward drive from Alamogordo. Although they had not flown in the same outfit, the two navigators had seen most of Europe and parts of North Africa; but, they had never dreamed of this magical and kaleidoscopic terrain outside of their watching the Hollywood Western movies that had been part of their parallel young lives before the war.

Although their youth had been quickly lost in shattered fuselages over the Romanian oil fields and a flattened monastery at Monte Cassino, they had fought a war in Europe that had now been won decisively. The New Mexican landscape that changed from the purple and blue mountains of the Tularosa Basin, with its amazing and massive dunes of the White Sands, now careened in an eastward look toward high plains of infinite uncertainty. The *Llano Estacado* stretched downward from the ranches of Ruidoso to the relentless prairie of Roswell and now finally the outskirts of Clovis.

*We are pleased to offer to our readers the first chapter of a recently complete novel, “**Maiden Choice Lane,**” by our college Provost.

Besides having flown B-17s over the turbulent and flak-filled skies of Europe for the many months past, both Joseph and Conrad shared another vital link. Each was a bridegroom in recent weeks, and each had married a hometown woman who had waited for nearly four years. The final connection was that both newly wed couples were moved suddenly to New Mexico for a supposed honeymoon, courtesy of the United States Army Air Force's official orders.

Steering the Jeep out of Roswell earlier that day, Joseph inquired of the happiness of the other newlyweds: "Have you and Phyllis discovered the connubial bliss of lying together night after night under the desert stars?"

Conrad smiled quickly as his own coarsening wit and barracks humor overwhelmed Joseph's too refined approach: "If she does not stop keeping me up all night long, I am going to need some serious medical attention. I am getting more wiener-wear than four ministers in a phone booth."

Almost coming out of the passenger's seat, Conrad immediately threw back his head and started yipping and yapping like a coyote: "I am the love-making wolf-man of the Tularosa Basin and I run coyote circles around the tireless lovers tumbling in connubial bliss under those twinkling stars." Without missing a beat and instantly switching to a fake Western accent, Conrad put his hand on the driver's shoulder: "Son, you might try your own game a little also." Conrad enjoyed his own humor as he persisted in his maniacal laughter and canine contortions. In all of these antics, Joseph recognized the intentional but brotherly assault on his own too slightly refined sensibilities, and he just stared stoically and drove toward the desert highway ahead.

Continuing, Conrad broke out into a broad grin: "Well, sure, Phyllis is happy. I just don't know if it was coming here on a New Mexico honeymoon or simply escaping from Newark."

Pausing slightly for a shift in tone, Conrad looked deeply into Joseph's eyes for the briefest of moments while Joseph trained his glance back on the road: "Has Theresa ever told you that you talk in your sleep?" Still watching the road, Joseph shook his head for negative.

"Phyllis tells me that I sob in my sleep, nearly every night." Joseph suddenly grasped that Conrad's vaunted all-night hardness was the cover for a softness that went way beyond the physical.

Several miles passed before Joseph spoke again. "We saw some bad stuff. Oddly enough, the worst part for me was not the actual flying but the waiting when my outfit did not go out. Once in North

Africa, we were waiting for a sister wing to return from a run over Italy. We heard that one of the planes was coming in on one engine. We did not know who it was until they made the approach and we saw the name and the markings on the nose. The plane had no windows left and the single engine was trailing thick, black smoke. They hit too hard and the plane exploded on impact. We had to go out and pick up the pieces. The airfield was festooned with twisted metal, sinews of human flesh, and odd bits and pieces of leather wallets and photos from home. We had had breakfast with those guys just ten hours earlier. They had walked out of the mess hall, laughing wildly and yelling back to us to ‘Keep the beer cold and the women hot.’”

What Joseph had not told was his own wounding in that incident as he stood too near the flight line and the entire back of his body had caught full force a violent metallic hurricane of tiny bits of shrapnel. What Joseph also did not tell was of the nights that Theresa would rub salve on the score of tiny wounds on her husband’s back and vertebrae. What Joseph did not know at that point was that the inorganic, alloyed parasites would corrode his insides and burrow outwards for the next 60-some years.

Both airmen held several moments of silence in wonder of the random sort of their own survival. Conrad watched the landscape pass by as the foothills knelt down reverently to a level and kind earth—not unlike a huge bomber’s gentle landing at its rehearsed eight-degree glide path angle.

Naturally in possession of a map, the two navigators on the approach from the south to Clovis actually needed no assistance beyond their keen and experienced eyesight. Their destination lay just to the west of town, an Army Air Force base. The landing strip and base could not have been missed as the endless rows of gleaming new B-29 Super Fortresses—seventeen in all—juttied upward from an endless horizon. These mammoth warplanes had just been delivered with special modifications from the Glenn L. Martin plant in Omaha, Nebraska. The scale of the sight of row after row of the brilliant bombers was awesome as just two of the planes could fill a football field with their 141-foot wing spans and sinusoidal tails nearly three stories high.

After clearing tight security at the front gate, the two veteran airmen were ushered to a stucco building adjoining the landing strip. There they were greeted by an unsmiling lieutenant colonel who would eventually pilot the most-famous-of-all B-29 to be named after his mother, Enola Gay Haggard of Glidden, Iowa. The colonel had given up medical school in 1936, in the face of opposition from his father

but with full support from his mother, to fulfill a deep desire to fly. The mother's influence on the son's destiny as an ace bomber pilot in Europe would later find a curious page in history in the cursive etching of her name on the much photographed nose of one of these specially rigged planes.

The two veteran navigators were given their orders in brief and unceremonious terms. The light colonel explained that an airfield would be constructed in Alamogordo to receive an unknown number of the shining B-29s currently reposing just outside the doorway to the adobe hut. Joseph and Conrad would assist in ferrying the planes to Alamogordo in the next few weeks. The colonel told them bluntly that once that task was completed both men might be transferred to the Pacific war theatre for combat missions on these or other squadrons of B-29s. Before handing the two navigators off to a subaltern for a tour of the planes and some hasty equipment training, the colonel told them to talk to no one unless spoken to and forget anything that they might see around the flight line today or later in Alamogordo.

Driving back to Alamogordo later that evening, the two airmen were less bothered by their secret mission than the realization that they might be sent to the Pacific front. It would have been fine to have gone straight from the 8th Air Force in Foggia, Italy to the South Pacific. But, now, to have escaped the threshing machine with its daily rhythm of the combat briefings, the sleepless nights before the missions, the camaraderie of the fearful crew, and finally the mission aloft itself—to have had the briefest of respites from that brutal routine—and to have known the love of a wife in equally sleepless nights of lovemaking on the desert floor—now the return to duty would be a cruel twist of fate.

Theresa Angelina, the radiant bride, on the very next morning and also after a rare night of no love making, recognized the dark clouds on her husband's brow. "Joseph, what happened in Clovis yesterday? You tossed and turned all night."

"I know. I hardly slept. Let's not talk about it now."

"Don't you think that Phyllis will tell all by lunch today? I hear everything else about her and Conrad's antics. I'd rather hear it from you, my love."

“We will probably not be staying here that long. There’s a good chance that I will be sent to the Pacific for the final act there. Most likely a massive air assault on Japan. Or, months of sorties over Indo-China and the occupied islands. Either way, the honeymoon will be over soon, it seems.”

“Joseph, I waited for nearly four years while you were in Europe and Africa. I will wait again—whatever it takes. I know that you will come home, just like I knew that you were coming back last time. Besides....” Theresa’s voice trailed off.

“Besides what?” Joseph was quick to pick up on the truncated thought and sentence. The attentive bridegroom sensed a significant silence. He looked deeply into the dark eyes of his beautiful, young wife. She responded slowly.

“I am not one hundred per cent sure, but I feel different. I think that I might be pregnant. Even if you must go to the Pacific war, you will come home to your son.”

Living in a small, makeshift adobe cabin on the outskirts of Alamogordo, Joseph and Theresa enjoyed a splendid view of the Tularosa Basin and its incredibly white sands surrounded by ranges of saw-tooth mountains. The cabin was rented out by a local couple, the Wilsons, who were the progeny of multiple generations of Anglo New Mexicans. The Wilsons had several children, all of whom were engaged in the family ranching and agricultural sales business. The Wilsons were Westerners down to their boots, and the entire family was a bit amused by their Eastern tenants’ sense of visiting a movie set on a Wild West film.

The Wilsons of Roswell, New Mexico had taken an instant and strong liking to the young Angelinas of Baltimore—despite a multitude of cultural and religious differences. The Wilsons were the sons and daughters of the High Plains who had descended from the wagon train settlers of the American West; the Angelinas were the first generation of a new wave of southern European settlers who came to America well after the Western frontier had closed. Nonetheless, the patriarchal Jared Wilson saw in the newlywed couple the very spirit that had fired his own ancestors’ dream of starting anew in a virgin land that held the future of both family and country. The Angelinas had come to paradise, fresh from the war’s blood letting in Europe, but full of hope and love for each other. And besides, the Wilsons brought the young couple in like family when the landlord family learned that their new tenants had sought

intentionally to live with the local folk and had evaded the rows of sun-baked aluminum trailers in the military temporary housing. On many evenings, the Wilsons made just a bit more food than usual and invited the happy newlyweds to join them for the local fare of venison, chicken fried steak or green chile stew. The Easterners had never imagined New Mexico-style enchiladas with a dripping fried egg laid on top of the soft corn shells and *pico de gallo* sauce. In a safe, new world, Joseph and Theresa lived and loved as if there never had been a war or a war's wearisome wait before Alamogordo; and likewise they were oblivious to their immediate surroundings of wartime secrecy and science, as if the final act of the Pacific War could wait equally forever. By day they pretended that Joseph simply went off to work in the morning and came home from a normal 9-to-5 job; by night they allowed themselves to be enveloped by the velvet night sky and countless, twinkling stars that were best seen from the prostrate but ardent acrobatics of lovers tumbling on the desert floor.

The bright, stainless steel blade of the foot-long Buck knife broke the skin just below the throat and was drawn effortlessly down over the rib cage and a little more deeply into the abdomen. Surprisingly the flow of blood was not torrential, even as the blade was removed from the exposed cavity of spilling entrails and organs. From her bedroom window in their rented adobe cabin, Theresa Angelina remained hidden but watched as Jared Wilson showed her husband how to dress a white-tail deer. Just a few feet from the window, a beautiful 15-point buck was hanging from a live oak tree as its entrails were quickly and expertly removed by a seasoned hunter. The Wilsons knew how to live off their beloved country and reap the harvest of their pioneer proximity to the plenitude of nature-- and its solitude.

Inside the window and not wanting to be seen, Theresa instinctively gripped her lower belly with both hands. She was many weeks late with her period and the morning sickness ebbed and flowed; but, she was certain that she was carrying a child. In fact, remembering her family's folklore about pregnancy and childbirth, she was certain that the child would be a boy. Her morning urine looked and smelled so differently.

Looking outside once again at the gutting of the prize buck, Theresa continued to hold in her belly with the pressure of her slightly spread hands across the abdomen, as if the scene outside the window threatened the safety of her own womb's precious contents.

While fighting off her own irrational fears, Theresa happened to catch the look on her husband's face just a few feet outside the window. He stood in the deep shadow of the sprawling live oak, but his memory leaped thousands of miles away to a rock and sand runway in North Africa. He saw the remnants of the cherry explosion of sinewy strings of red muscle and jagged bone splinters, but it was not the carving of the rich venison before his very eyes. His mind's eyes were looking up into a tranquil, azure Algerian sky. From out of the clear blue, a single engine labored and gasped to reach the safety of a runway way too far distant. The formerly proud bird was leaving a thick trail of oil and smoke; the crew was trailing invisible clouds of immortality.

Opening the side door to the adobe cabin, Theresa called quietly to her visibly tormented husband. The Wilsons had invited the greenhorn Yankee out for a western-style deer hunt that had gotten Joseph up out of the bridegroom's toasty bed at 3 a.m. Joseph had done well with the preparation for the hunt, even hoping to catch a deer in the open sights of his Winchester 30-30, up until the up close gutting of the large buck.

Looking at her husband's brightening visage as he approached the door, Theresa handed Joseph a steaming cup of Mexican chocolate. "Tell Jared and the others that I have more where this came from." Theresa invited the small band of hunters into the cabin for cookies and hot chocolate. The New Mexicans stayed briefly and then moved back to the task of spreading ground pepper into the gaping cavity that once held the heart and vital organs of the beautiful animal. The black granules of ground peppercorn would both preserve the meat and season the best cuts to the taste of the prairie dwellers.

From that same side door to the ancient adobe cabin, Theresa would see Joseph off to his daily, or sometime nocturnal, tasks. From this portal, Theresa was aware that Joseph was crossing another threshold. He was navigating the new, specially rigged, Super Fortresses over the mountains and into the Tularosa Basin. At each daybreak or dusk, she wondered about the rumored "gadget," as it was called, that was to be the precious cargo for these planes that Joseph was flying in mock trials. Each time he left, especially at the darkening dusk departures, from that obscure side door, Theresa would poke out her head with her characteristic pink ribbons and watch Joseph's jeep drive toward the deepening night of the east. Almost always, and always at night, she could never go right to bed or to sleep; instead she sat by a modest

fire in the hearth and instinctively held her lower belly and its own precious contents. From the first stirrings of life in her womb, she sensed and feared some distant and deep connection between the two mother loads and their awful deliveries.

Watching carefully as the pilot of the B-29 steered the sleek craft southward after passing Ruidoso and the crest of the mountainous peaks, Joseph Angelina was seated most unusually in the co-pilot's seat in these brief, unorthodox but mission-critical flights into the Alamogordo landing strip. As the mammoth bomber floated through its easy arc to the south, Joseph's eyes drifted to the north. One could not miss the brightly lit tower at the northern end of the White Sands testing range. The pilot, seeing his navigator's distraction in glancing at the forbidden and frightening world of the north range, simply said: "The home of 'the gadget' it is, eh? And how are the stables of eggheads going to fit that size contraption into the belly of our proud bird here, do you think?" After mixing with hundreds of comrades on the flight crews, Joseph detected a Canadian upbringing in the tag questions of the pilot.

Joseph smiled. Despite the pilot having higher rank over Joseph, this untested and newly commissioned captain had not been posted in the European or any air combat theatre. Because of his own veteran war time action, Joseph quietly assumed his own senior status and merely replied: "If that 'gadget' can end the war with Japan and save all of us—the air assault teams and the millions of ground forces—from senseless dying on all sides, then I am all for it." Joseph paused and thought about the option that many of the Trinity scientists were proposing: "Perhaps we only need to give a demonstration of 'the gadget;' that alone should bring surrender from Japan." Joseph's deeply private hope erupted from the many months of flying into hell and being partly responsible for the hell fire that consumed cities, civilians and flying machines. He knew that he did not want to bring a new, unimaginable Promethean fire to earth and its silly mortals. Perhaps, he even thought, his son would come into a world made better by the promise of such weapons so terrible that no plane or infantry brigade would ever again be sent into conflict.

The pilot accepted his subordinate role and he guided the Super Fortress to a gentle glide inside a massive bowl of White Sands: "The Trinity site is at the center of a six-mile circle that has been left empty; what does that mean for the plane that drops that thing? Do you think that we can get a distance of 3 miles

that fast before 'the gadget' explodes and evaporates the plane too? Are you planning on the being the navigator?"

Joseph replied quickly: "I am simply here to ferry these awesome air ships in from Clovis. I know nothing else." Without speaking, Joseph concluded in his own head: "I just want to stay here forever in the magical bowl of crushed white gypsum. I just want to hunt deer and make babies with Theresa."

Deer hunting season blended with Thanksgiving and as November waned, Joseph informed Theresa that all of the planes had been transported into Alamogordo. He anticipated his wife's first question and simply said: "No one is giving me any information. What is strange is that now that we have brought the planes here, I have been basically kept away from the flight line. Conrad and I have been intentionally kept away from the planes."

"What do you do all day?"

"Well, it has only been three days since we have gotten all of the planes in. But, otherwise a few of us sit in the company 'day room' and read newspapers and magazines much of the time. Every now and then we are asked some technical question about the specific workings of bomb sights in actual flight or different weather conditions."

"Have you ever seen any of the eggheads who are supposed to be making 'the gadget'?"

"Actually, yesterday I was brought up to the north end of the range near the Trinity test site and told to go wait in a small building."

"You didn't tell me."

"I was on stand-by for any questions, but no one came near for 2 hours. At one point, a truck drove up with a boiler-like contraption or furnace on the back. It was covered with masking tape here and there, as if it was patched up. I think that it was a mock-up of 'the gadget.' Several scientists drove up also and gathered around that boiler-thing. They then left suddenly. I think that I heard one of them speaking Italian."

"What was he saying?"

“From what I could hear, he was telling another egghead that the thing could wipe out Manhattan, from Columbia University to the Battery, if it worked as planned. That’s exactly what he said. He must have been a scientist from Columbia.”

“Then what happened after that?”

“A colonel came up to me and said that I was no longer needed. I was there in case the Italian scientist needed a translator.”

Suddenly Joseph remembered his encounter with Padre Pio, just a year ago on a snowy Christmas Eve thousands of miles away in Southern Italy. The incredible distance since that event was not only one of geography but also that of an inordinate passage of time. He had not ever told Theresa of the encounter with the famed stigmatic that now seemed more dreamlike than real.



Joseph meets Padre Pio and serves Mass

“What are you remembering and smiling about?”

“I just remembered the last time that I was able to act as a translator. It was last Christmas in Foggia. My unit went to mass at Padre Pio’s church. He was amazing—a saint that we all thought of as a Christmas miracle.”

“You never told me.”

“Since Christmas is around the corner, I promise to tell you the whole story on Christmas Eve.”

She looked at Joseph with doubt.

“I promise.”

“Who was the Italian scientist?”

“I believe that I have heard the name ‘Enrico Fermi’ mentioned at the plant.”

What Joseph could not have known at that moment in faraway and desolate New Mexico was that he would actually meet the famous Dr. Fermi much later in 1954. After studying at Johns Hopkins evening school for engineering after the war, Joseph would become a plant engineer at a major ceramics manufacturer in Baltimore. He, in fact, translated for Dr. Enrico Fermi and Mayor Thomas D’Alessandro of Baltimore as the famous scientist visited the city of Baltimore. Joseph remembered the famous physicist in person that year; in almost exactly the ten years since he had seen Fermi near the Trinity testing site, the Nobel Prize winner had aged deeply. While the mayor fielded questions from the press, Joseph spoke to Dr. Fermi in the Nobel winner’s native tongue. Joseph told of their chance near-meeting in New Mexico. A dark cloud passed over the scientist’s prematurely aging face and a wistful, deep gaze was returned to the translator.

Joseph remembered him again a few months later when the Fermi obituary was published in *The Baltimore Sun*. Dr. Fermi was to die of stomach cancer in Chicago at the not-very-old age of 53.

Of all of the Angelinas’ memories of New Mexico and the hospitable Wilsons, Christmas Eve and Day in 1944 was the happiest and most enduring. In fact, the Christmas season brought fresh and mixed news for the young newlyweds’ future plans.

A few days before Christmas, Joseph returned from the primitive landing strip and clutch of simple buildings that were his duty post. Theresa had been experimenting with a green chile stew that was to be a dinner still a few hours away on that wintry but bright afternoon. As Theresa chopped onions and green chiles, she would intermittently place both hands with fingers splayed over her swelling and protruding abdomen. She was happy—and she felt at home, despite being thousands of miles away from her parents, six sisters and lone brother for the holidays. The side door opened and Theresa saw sad lines etched across her husband's face.

“Are you flying ‘the gadget’ when it is ready?”

“No. I am not going anywhere near the Pacific theatre. But...,” Joseph's voice trailed off. “I am being sent to Salina, Kansas after the first of the year.”

“We are leaving New Mexico?”

“Yes.”

“What is in Salina?”

“Not much of anything. It is a small air base and in the middle of nowhere. My guess is that I know too much and the isolation of Salina and the small number of crew men will guarantee security until ‘the gadget’ is delivered.”

“And Conrad?”

“Don't know. We have all been forbidden to share the news of next assignments.”

“Did he go home early this afternoon also?”

“We all did. He seemed to be in the same mood as me.”

Theresa thought for a moment. “I love you, Joseph. You go to Salina and I will go home to have the baby. We have been so fortunate to have this time together. And our first child will be a living memory of what we did and had in this time and place. Very few people, especially in this time of turmoil and separation, have had the gift of a separate peace in the time of war.”

“I feel that I have failed you. I keep wondering if I could have done more here to get to stay on a bit longer in Alamogordo.”

“This thing is way bigger than us. We are small actors in a very large drama. You have done everything that a wonderful husband, and soon to be father, could have done. Come, my adorable husband,

and help me with shredding the cheese for a homemade green chile stew. Others, not you, will have their destinies and appointments in Asia. You have paid your dues.” A slight stirring in her abdomen would cause her to remember those prophetic words many years and emotional lifetimes later.

“I will join you in Baltimore after ‘the gadget’ is delivered.”

“And I will deliver to you the most beautiful baby. You will come home to a family and future that awaits you, once again and always.”

When the Wilsons heard that their favorite Easterners were on orders to leave right after the New Year’s start, the New Mexicans invited Theresa and Joseph to their mountain retreat for their traditional, family Christmas Eve. The Angelinas had not even known of the spacious log cabin near Cloudcroft. Rising abruptly from the eastern slope of the Alamogordo basin, Cloudcroft sat in the Lincoln National Forest and was a year round pinnacle of plenty. The desert rose within 20 miles to cherry and apple orchards drooping with heavy fruit in the summer; in the winter, Cloudcroft became an Alpine utopia far from the convection currents of the desert and its Frankenstein-makers.

On Christmas Eve afternoon, after a few days of packing and bidding farewell to some of their friends who departed New Mexico early for an intervening leave back East, Joseph and Theresa sat in their cabin in Alamogordo and waited for their ride to the Wilsons’ mountain cabin. The Angelinas had been warned to bring winter gear. While the Tularosa Basin could be quite warm in late December, the crests of the mountains near Cloudcroft were predictably cold and blustery. From the desert floor, Joseph could see the dark tops to the Cloudcroft peaks and knew that the snow would be piling up.

While Theresa double checked the suitcases for warm clothes and the modest Christmas gifts for the Wilsons, Joseph was struck silent by the similarities of this Christmas Eve to exactly that of one year ago. He was once again ascending a mountain in the snow for a quiet and holy celebration; once again he was looking forward to the break from war and fear. But, this time here in New Mexico, he had Theresa, her strong love—and the baby to be born in the coming year. Nonetheless, he planned that later that night, in the midst of snuggling and love making, he would tell Theresa the story of last year’s visit to the saintly Padre Pio on a bitterly cold night in the Apennine Mountains. Last Christmas Eve he had witnessed the miracle of the stigmatic Padre Pio, who had also imparted to Joseph strong words of hope and the necessity

of winning the war. This year, in the loving fold of the New Mexican natives and his own sweet wife, he waited for another miracle, even as his own faith had been exploded in the crushed fuselages of broken men and airships.

The mountain darkness was falling on Cloudcroft when Theresa and Joseph were welcomed into the two-story lodge that was the Wilsons' family retreat and ritual home for the holidays. The Angelinas were greeted by their new family and Joseph glanced immediately at a large hearth that held enough flame and hard wood smoke for the hanging hunks of venison and turkey. Facing the orange, glowing hearth was a Great Room that held a gigantic Christmas tree at the center; around the tree, sofas, small tables and chairs were positioned for food, drink and human warmth.

Climbing a sweeping staircase, the Angelinas were shown to a cavernous, candle-lit bedroom; they understood immediately that the Wilsons had forfeited their master bedroom. The entire interior of the log-cabin lodge was buttressed with unvarnished and rough-hewn mountain cedar. The setting seemed that of a medieval castle with knights, ladies, blazing hearths and tables groaning under the heavy platters of carved meats and libations. Beyond the castle's latticed windows, the gentle streams of candle light illuminated the driven Cloudcroft snow that danced around and decorated the outer edges of the lodge. Joseph and Theresa looked at each other in disbelief and willingly stepped into the final act of their fairy tale honeymoon.

Just a few weeks later, the Wilsons sadly waved good bye twice to their adopted children from the East. Theresa departed first, going back to Baltimore to live with family and prepare for the birth of their first child. Joseph saw his wife to the train station in Roswell and himself departed with a small band of comrades on a B-29 that flew directly to Salina, Kansas. There Joseph stayed, expecting to be deployed to the Pacific at any time, until the summer of 1945. However, outside of a few trips to Omaha to deliver new Super Fortresses, he never left the States.

At Mercy Hospital in downtown Baltimore, and true to her intuitions about the baby's gender, Theresa delivered a son at the end of June. The military authorities granted Joseph a compassionate leave to go home and see his son. The slow trains carrying the new father, however, were not so kind. Joseph

was detained as a low priority traveler and he had great difficulty making connections on the military railroad network.

And there was one more distraction that detained Joseph, even as he was bouncing up the stone steps to his in-laws' home in Highland town. Just inside the door waited his wife and their two and one-half week old son, John. Adjusting the leather strap on his heavy bag, and trying to open the front screen door to the elevated row home, Joseph glanced down at the morning's newspaper splayed open on a porch glider. The muted story at the bottom of the front page simply reported a successful test of a military weapon in New Mexico. It was July 16th, 1945 and Joseph knew that what could not have been written in the press was that the tower "gadget" at the Trinity site back in the White Sands must have produced unimaginable devastation. Joseph thought of the Italian scientist who must have witnessed his prediction made real. Even as he fell upon his wife and newborn son in an explosion of joy and pride, the troubling tower and its boiler-like contraption dominated his mind's eye.

