

“I love My Town” by Billy Nelson Ring

Recently, I was driving North on Mound Road, in Miamisburg, passing Indian Mound and I realized, that I, like the builders of the Mound, chose Miamisburg as my home. I owe many thanks to my parents who moved here in the early forties, from the hills of eastern Kentucky, to find work and a new home.

While descending Mound Road, before me lay the Great Miami River Basin and what is known as the very heart of Miamisburg. The City I loved as a child and still do.

The Great Miami River Watershed reaches North into ten counties. The Great Miami River sits atop the the Great Miami River buried aquifer that will always supply Miamisburg with water for domestic use. This water is of both quality and quantity. The City has a wellhead protection program to ensure water quality is maintained. The water quality test results are published annually in the Civic Focus.

Recalling the Miamisburg swimming pool on South First Street (formerly, Alice Street) and Mound Avenue, with the very, very warm water. Thank you for the toasty water temperature, Miamisburg’s own Municipal (power) plant or light plant, as it was known then. The power plant boilers turned the water into steam which turned the turbines, which then turned the generators that generated electricity. When the steam then condensed back into liquid phase, the municipal swimming pool was used to store water for the cooling phase. The pool water was ever so pleasant, always at a comfortable temperature.

In those earlier times water came from water wells located in Community Park prior to the newer wells now found on the Miami River flood plain. The flood plain is the area between the Sycamore Street and Linden Avenue bridges where the current domestic water wells are found. These wells supply the total domestic water supply for Miamisburg, which exceeds one million gallons each 24 hours. The City Power (light) Plant was purchased by Dayton Power & Light Company in 1966 for \$ 650,000. That money, by voting referendum, was placed in escrow where it remains as an interest account to this day where the principle stands untouched. The Light Plant sale caused much controversy and turned many friends and in some cases, relatives against each other.

South of the swimming pool and just east of Community Park is the, “Cut” as it’s known where the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks come north into town. Contrary to good sense, many Miamisburg youngsters would climb the cut, cliff sidewall onto the high ground of the land that met up with the Mound Lab, security fence. Not to mention the danger of falling while climbing the cut, sidewall, once you got to the top and walked around, the Mound guards would come right after you. Once, when I was climbing there, reached the top, and walked towards the fence, I encountered a guard. I casually said, “Hi” and kept walking. He immediately yelled in a most hostile voice to my friend and I, “You little bastards get the hell out of here!” I knew what that meant and I ran north until I couldn’t run anymore and stopped at Mound Avenue to catch my breath.

I lived at 710 North Fourth Street from age two until 1961 when my parents moved from there to 805 Cottage Avenue. Walking from Fourth Street to the swimming pool took me, due south, right down the cinder path, the former site of the Miami Erie Canal. The canal had been abandoned in 1875 and was filled-in with just about everything by anyone who cared to participate. Topped off, I suppose, with ashes from the city light plant. Thus the cinder path, which was a main course of travel by many Miamisburg residents to the downtown locale. The cinder path ran from just south of Kercher Street to Mound Avenue.

Due to the close proximity to the New York Central Railroad, occasionally hobos (bums, some called them) would come to our door and ask for food. My Mom and Dad, coming from hard, depression era times in the hills of Kentucky, would never refuse anyone food or a bar of soap. When these hobos would ask for food, my Mom had this Kentucky ability to put together a humongous plate of food in just minutes, which she would always do. They had to eat on the porch as she would never let them in the house. Ah, yes, someone for me to talk to, and talk to, and talk to, and talk to some more. Again, I was quite young and never stopped talking. So the hobo's, almost everyone, would eventually say the same thing; "Why don't you go play?" Their remarks normally came after my never-ending questions about every aspect of their lives. My response was, "I can talk as much as I want because this is my house and if I told my Mom you said that, she would run you off!" It seemed every one of them gave me this mean look and a long sigh which, of course was my cue to continue their interrogation, ad infinitum. My Dad often said that he believed the hobos had a, "Mark" of some kind that indicated our house was a sure stop for other hobos for food, although none was ever found or identified. Eventually they stopped coming to the door for food. I really believe they passed the word around that no one could eat in peace with me there so they looked for other places to go.

Just north of 710 North Fourth Street was Richard Street. Where Fourth met Richard, there was no through street to North Main as there is today. There was however, a suspended bridge that crossed the canal and provided access to North Main and all found there. Dunahue's Poultry & Eggs store, 1003 North Main Street, George Dunahue, owner, was there as was Thoma's junkyard. The swinging bridge was suspended on steel cables with a slatted wooden floor. As I would cross that bridge, the harmonics of my resounding footsteps, would, if you will, cause an increased bouncing of the suspension that could be substantially magnified if the footsteps were exaggerated.

Dunahue's Chicken store would later become Church's Flower's when Church's relocated from South Main to that location. Church's Flower's always was and still is, a mainstay florist for the community. My parents always did business there as have I. Once when my Father was ill, some forty years ago, Church's sent him flowers. They recently did the same for me following a bout of surgery. That is business loyalty that I won't ever forget.

Directly across the street from the Fourth Street home was the Miami Erie Canal, filled with water, which began at West Carrollton where it intersected Dixie Drive, known then as Ohio Route 25. The canal pretty much culminated just south of Kercher Street. From there the canal water entered a north-south, trough-like concrete sluice, which contained three, evenly spaced, one-foot square portals on its west face that permitted the water to fall into Sycamore Creek. Sycamore Creek flowed westward less

than a quarter-mile where it entered the Great Miami River. At one time, the Ohio Paper Company, 620 North Main Street, Glenn Stonecash, general manager, was located there, bordered by Kercher, Fourth and Main Streets. Ohio Paper used the canal at that location for water from which roofing paper was manufactured, coated with tar and sold as such. Once the canal was culminated at that point, south of there it became known as the cinder path. The sluice trough remains in place today due east of Stone's Automotive and is fenced off for safety's sake. Adjacent to this sluice, a very short distance to the east, is where the Fourth Street bridge spanned the Sycamore Creek.

Also, directly across the street from 710 North Fourth Street on the West side of Main Street was Interstate Box Board Division, G. K. Larick, manager, 711 North Main Street. This was another major source of smokestack smoke in the neighborhood. This company manufactured poster board of all colors, types and sizes.

The canal was off-limits for me and it was clearly explained by my parents that there was a troll that lived in the canal and that he ate little boys. So I asked her why the troll never ate my older brother and my Dad explained the troll didn't have any salt then but that he had plenty now.

The Fourth-street bridge was demolished when the current, Glenn Fortney Public Works Facility was built at Kercher and Main Streets. Glenn Fortney was a public works employee and a great guy, killed in a motorcycle accident. This was formerly the site of the Miamisburg, Ice and Coal, later changed to the The Miamisburg, IGA, 602 North Fourth Street, Treva and Marvin Meadows, owners, eventually closed, was abandoned and demolished. Also sharing this site was a two-story wood frame, Ohio Paper Building, pallet shop, which manufactured wooden pallets. It was on these pallets that the tar paper rolls were prepared and shipped. The pallet shop was destroyed by fire sometime in the early 60's. The Ohio Paper Company building suffered the same fate and also was demolished.

Ohio Paper manufactured a felt paper onto which tar was sprayed (tarpaper) and became the cover of the plywood roof-sheeting and then onto which, roofing shingles were secured. There were huge outdoor boilers which melted the tar that arrived at Ohio Paper in five-gallon quantities. With this system under constant pressure, anytime a coupling, hose or flange would fail in the piping system, there would be a huge fire fueled by molten tar. The molten tar would render considerable black smoke and this happened quite often. To my extreme joy, I often watched the fire department arrive and take on extinguishing efforts, sometimes for hours and hours. Later, I would serve a twenty-seven year career (1968-1995) with the Miamisburg Fire Department and retire as a Captain. Photo from 1985.



Where Kercher Street crossed the canal and culminated at Main Street was a Ohio Bus Lines, bus stop location. That was the forerunner of today's RTA. This stop was only a few yards from the large factory-type, always-open windows of the Ohio Paper Company building. I want to be nice about this, or, in today's lingo, politically correct – but let's say there were some crude men that worked in Ohio Paper because it was such a nasty, dirty place. Occasionally, said employees would come to those windows while my Mom and I were waiting on the bus to travel to Dayton for a day of shopping. Often they would yell one thing or another at my Mom who would usually ignore them. Mom was very pretty so, as tacky as their remarks were, they thought they were ok. One day an unusually ratty-looking man yelled at her, "Hey baby, how about a kiss?" Now my Mom was from Appalachia and was an in-your-face type that might be referred to as a "Hot headed Briar-hopper!" As that remark came to her attention, she very promptly replied, "You want a kiss? - then kiss my ass, you son-of-a-bitch!" I was really young at that time, but I knew that my Mom's response was well deserved by Mr. Ratty. His also, very ratty friends, laughed long and loud at him and, of course it was exceptionally funny since his manhood was seriously diminished after being put in his place by a woman. Margueritte and Elgin Ring photo from 1970



Who could forget the many annual parades, Halloween being just one, where anyone could march, dressed in costume, or not, as one might prefer, ride one's bicycle or, just drive a new car. Walking and waving, it was so much fun. I once rode in a friend's, parents new Dodge sedan and felt very important as I waved, from the backseat, at those lesser beings, standing roadside.

Christmas was another anxious event with the Miamisburg Fire Department sponsoring Santa Claus and delivering him atop the ladder truck turntable well illuminated with the ladder truck's spotlights.

Santa's arrival at the downtown fire station was followed by the promise of a reserved seat and private audience for every child present. Included, was a personal gift from Santa in the form of a small box of mixed, hard candies. Oh, it was so good!

Main street was filled with wonderful toy stores, Wescott's Five & Dime Store, Mr. D. J. Dininger, Manager, 18 South Main Street, where the candy was in glass cases right at the entrance where the lady there, Mable Updyke, would greet me and ask, "Would you like some candy, little man?" Simonton's Gift & Variety store, Mr. Vernard Simonton, owner, 63 South Main Street, was nothing but toys and was my dream visit with every toy imaginable, many even hanging from the ceiling! I still have some toy cars from there. Jansen's, Variety Store, Mrs. Esther Jansen, owner / manager, 17 South Main Street, also a toy store, tended by Ada Marsh, who welcomed everyone as they entered and asked about relatives she seemed to know, by name no less. But, wait! Western Auto, 29 South Main Street, a hardware store, was the number one attraction because the store had a long row of bicycles diagonally parked from smallest to biggest. The bicycles were boys and girls, all colors (black, blue or red) from heavy weights to English bikes. The pure attraction however, was the smell of their rubber tires – any boy would just automatically know that smell. I loved going there – it was bike heaven. Mr. George Quick, manager / owner didn't mind how much I browsed (drooled) and I can still clearly recall that great rubber smell.

Who could forget the Plaza Theater owned and operated by Mr. Raymond M. Johnson. It was a gathering place for the youngsters of Miamisburg. My Mom often took me there and I remember two exceptionally scary movies. One was, "War of the Worlds" in 1953 and another from the same year was, "Creature From the Black Lagoon."

There were ushers in the theater that would shine their flashlight on those who either were misbehaving or were about to. Bean shooter fights and paper-wads propelled via rubber band launchers were not uncommon. Smooching with one's girlfriend was another frequent pastime. One time in particular stands out when Mr. Johnson took to the stage, had the movie stopped and the lights turned up. He said to no one in particular and everyone in general, "**All y'all (All y'all is plural for y'all) gonna haf to take yo seats and be quite so everone can enjoy the movie – all that other stuff has to stop too!**" I was petrified that he might see me and know who I was and tell my parents about this episode. If he did that I would be grounded until I was 25!

I connected with the idea that I needed a means of earning money. I began that journey with a "Dayton Shopping News" route. Every Wednesday, the 60 or so papers were delivered to my parent's home. I hopped on my bike, fixed the paper saddle bags on my luggage carrier and did the delivery. Main Street, First Street, Gressbach Court and Ferry street all the way to Central Avenue. That was it. I earned a cool ten dollars a month for that labor.

Nah – that didn't cut it – I needed more cash, so, I went big-time and landed a Dayton Journal Herald morning route. The Journal Herald was taken to my customer's front door, Monday through Saturday at forty-five cents for six days. Consisting of forty-five customers, I usually got up around 5:00 AM to go get my papers at the West end of Cottage Avenue at Mrs. Colvin's garage. Often she would have them stuffed (sale flyers were inserted) or, if not, then I had to do it. My route was First Street, Main Street, Gressbach Court, Pearl Street, Ferry Street and West Central Avenue. I racked up five dollars a week, yes, much better. Now imagine today, sending an eleven-year-old out like that. No one ever bothered me with one exception.

I was collecting on a Saturday afternoon, going south on the west side of Main Street sidewalk, my Huffly Bike, rolling. As I turned from Main on to West Central, I was directly in front of the corner door of Mother's Bar. Just as I rounded the corner, the bouncer in the bar physically pitched a drunk guy out the door and onto the sidewalk. He landed right on top of me and my bike. Crash! Wow – what just happened? The drunk guy got up and wobbled around on his feet and said to me, *“Shay, are you okay?”* I said, “I think so, my bike is scratched up a little, though” *“Yesh, well thas awful! – here's five bucks, will that take care of your bike?”* “Sure,” I said and went on my way. Wow – five bucks – Hamburger Wagon, here I come!

Uh, oh! Mrs. Colvin's son, Charles broke his leg and it's in a cast. “Billy” she said, “Can you pass Charles' papers for a while?” He has a Dayton Daily News route and has ninety customers, “Huh, did you say ninety?” So for about six months, I passed that route in the afternoon and landed about twelve dollars a week. Yahoo – mega bucks! ☺

Walking home from the swimming pool had two other different and distinct routes. One was passing by Mound Ice and Coal at South 3<sup>rd</sup> street and Mound Avenue. Mrs. Lee Loesch owned it and sold coal in addition to ice and all other such associated goodies. Many homes in Miamisburg at that time ( early 50's) were still heated with coal. Stopping there ensured a quality (?) junk food meal prior to arriving at home. Or, taking the other route would take me by the Burger Chef at 222 North Main Streets and Sycamore streets. Burger Chef Restaurant was a winner place to eat. I would get a hamburger, French fries and a soft drink @ \$.15 cents each for a total of \$.45 cents, BUT, adding state of Ohio sales tax of \$.02 cents totaling out at \$.47 cents. So I could continue my walk home and pork-out on my culinary delight of a meal and be stuffed only to find out my Mom expected me to also eat dinner or lunch. I would later work there in high school starting at a whopping \$.80 cents per hour. Shortly thereafter, getting a second job at Andy's Market on North 9<sup>th</sup> Street between Kercher Street and Cottage Avenue where I earned another amazing wage of 65 cents per hour. I was always jealous of my best friend, John Denman who worked at Kroger's, made a \$1.20 per hour – but he had a union.

Having two jobs I was able to buy a 1955 Mercury at Stueve Ford, C.J. Stueve, owner, 811 South Main Street, for \$300 dollars. It was so costly that I had to finance it at the Farmers & Merchants bank, 41 South First Street, for 36 months @ 4% interest so I could make the outlandish monthly payments of \$9.66. Of course before buying this car my Dad and I “Tried it out” by seeing at what speed it could top Stoney Hill, otherwise known as West Linden Avenue, the steepest hill in the city. This automobile purchase was the beginning of my credit rating for which I still bank there, have for 60 years and know every teller, loan officer and other admin person's name. Of course, gasoline broke me up at \$14.9 cents a gallon which I usually bought at Bud Lutz's Shell Station, 155 South Main Street, Bud Lutz, owner (Old Main and South Main Street) or the Sinclair Service Station on South Main Street just south of Little League, Bell Civic park. Wait - it didn't end there, my monthly insurance payment was \$11.00 even, which I paid to Lewis Taylor, Nationwide Insurance Agent, just three houses up the street from my parent's home on North 4<sup>th</sup> street. The car had a slight problem, it leaked oil real bad, so I bought a gallon can of “Bulk” oil at the Bargain Barn in Moraine City. Each day I had to top off the oil and fill the gasoline as required. The oil spot on the surface of the street at 805 Cottage Avenue was bigger than the car but my Dad, Elgin Conway Ring, didn't seem to mind.

My Dad worked at Hankins Container Company, a cardboard box factory, on West Sycamore Street, actually Upper Miamisburg Road at Soldier's Home Road, later to be known as Miamisburg Soldier's Home Road. This road held its name because it was a route to be taken to the Soldier's Home on West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in West Dayton. Later, this would be known as the Disabled Veteran's Home and finally today as US Bureau of Veteran's Affairs. My Father's job at Hankins Container was a very good job because in 29 years he was not once laid off, was never late and never missed work except for some required surgery. My Dad was a good, honest man and was exceptionally polite and courteous to females. Even at a young age I noticed his exceptional conduct when in the presence of women.

My Mother, Margueritte Clay Ring worked at Lang Tool Company, located on 504 East Kercher Street just east of the New York Central railroad tracks, so named at that time and now known as Norfolk Southern Railway. Lang Tool manufactured wire restraints for reinforcing concrete structures. Her work was seasonal and during the winter months she worked at Friendly Nursing Home, located at 542 East Linden Avenue, S. W. Stull, owner / manager, where she was employed as a attendant, washing dishes and doing laundry. Mom got in trouble there, a lot. She worked second shift and any resident who wanted an evening snack, was personally presented whatever they wanted by Miss Margueritte, as the elderly residents addressed her. She also hand washed Doctor Martin's many white shirts and hand-ironed them, much to his satisfaction at the labor rate of \$.50 cents each. She was an extraordinary woman as she would take a voluntary layoff at her Lang Tool job so a single Mother of two young daughters could work in her place. When Mom advanced into her nineties, her standing mantra was, "When I can't care for myself anymore, take me to the nursing home, I won't ruin your life by living with you." When the time came she moved from Miamisburg Manor to Kingston, formerly Cristel Manor. Her care there was exemplary by all staff at all times. I explained to the staff that nothing was going to happen with my Mom until hugs were exchanged. Their response, "No problem." She resided there until her passing. Kingston cared for my Mom like anyone would want their mom cared for.

Living at 710 North Fourth Street, I began school at the Kercher Street school at Kercher and Eight Streets which housed the first and second grades, while Mark Twain school, located on 9<sup>th</sup> street between Cottage and Richard Streets, housed 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Walking to Kercher Street School took me east on Kercher, crossing the New York Central Railroad tracks heading towards, Kercher and Eighth where the school was located. Just across the railroad tracks on the north side of Kercher was Miami Foundry, 507 East Kercher Street, Mr. Carl Rocky, office manager. This was a nasty-dirty place where steel casting were poured from a molten steel cupola bucket into sand castings of one sort or another. When I walk by, my first reaction was, "Cough, cough, cough, cough" and so, on. Amazingly, the employees often sat outside near the sidewalk that I traveled on. These were mostly fathers of my classmates. They were all Caucasian but their skin was coal black and you could barely tell they were white men.

Later in my fire department career, as a paramedic, I would take almost every one of those men, often their last ride, to the hospital with breathing diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as emphysema and the like. I would also learn these men were exposed to Sulfur Dioxide as well as organics, metals, and mercury generated from molten-furnace applications.

These air contaminants would also travel via an easterly wind to my home one-half block away. With no air conditioning, the windows were up for air circulation and the bright green, polluted air would come into the house if the windows were not closed. Even outside I would have to come in because I just couldn't breathe in that bad, green air. I would close the windows and watch outside until the air started to clear and then raise the windows once again and go back outdoors. Keep in mind that these pollutants were coating everything outdoors as well as in, if the windows weren't closed.

The Ohio Paper Company was another terrible polluter. When they would let out their smoke, it was black, gritty and smelled of fresh hot tar. It would leave a trail of black grit on the surface of everything. Again, if the windows were up, they had to be put down quickly. If not, the floors, beds, kitchen table and everything else would be coated with the grit. It was like pouring salt from a shaker onto the floor and then walking on it. That's how bad it really was. If any outside painting was to be done, it had to be done on a weekend less a non-skid, grit-type surface would adorn whatever was painted. This smoke was almost as bad because it contained hydrogen sulfide and a multitude of other toxic contaminants. All this gives me a special appreciation of the Clean Air Act proposed by the United States EPA and legislated by congress.

Straight across Main Street was Miamisburg Boxboard Division, a poster board manufacturer. While not as bad a polluter as the other two, it still had boilers and nice black smoke on a regular basis.

My teacher for first grade was Ada Spencer Brown who was an amazing phonics teacher. She had a story for all the letters of the alphabet, with an additional and special one for the vowels. To this very day, I can sound out any word and can recite most of the letter's stories. It was very peculiar that we had an old hen fenced-in, in a pen in the classroom, sitting on a batch of eggs. Upon seeing those eggs hatch and the chicks peck their way out of the eggshells, absolutely astounded my 6-year old mind! When school let out that day, I ran the three blocks home and shouted to my mother's attention, "MOM, MOM, I KNOW HOW I GOT HERE!" Mom's response was, "How did you get here? I blurted out, "I was hatched!" I will never forget my mom pulling me gently onto her lap, hugging me tightly, and saying, "Yes you were, honey, yes you were." 😊

School then passed me to the second grade having Mrs. Mae Harroll for second grade, moving on to Mark Twain; Mrs. Hines for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Ms. Mary Louise Conover for 4<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Buchanan for 5<sup>th</sup> and Mrs. Mary Marrs for the 6<sup>th</sup>. Memories of the fourth grade with Mrs. Conover as the teacher, who would, midyear, become Mrs. Cavender after being married for the first time. With her as the teacher, it was sort of like the Marine Corps because she would carry this board around just to remind you she was definitely in charge. Most important was a wonderful field trip, on which she took the class.

By her arrangements, we boarded the New York Central train, at the train depot, located at the corner of North Fourth Street and East Central Avenue, 24 North Fourth Street, actually. Mr. W. M. Gunder was the ticket agent who saw us board the train in an orderly manner. I remember hearing him say, "Quickly children, quickly!" The Dental Depot is now the home of the used-to-be train depot. Imagine being seated in passenger cars, yes, I said passenger cars, for a train-trip to Dayton's Union Station. From there, we walked around the city on a short tour. We had a photograph made on the Steps of the

County Courthouse in the center of downtown. I have that picture and it is priceless. Mrs. Donohue was part of the learning experience but I can't recall how that came about unless she was a student teacher.

Finishing 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Mark Twain sent me to Wantz Junior High School from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade and after that to the Bell Building (old high school) on the corner of Linden Avenue and Sixth Street for 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Finally, then, the new high school was completed and opened, located at Park and 6<sup>th</sup>, due north of the Memorial Building. That high school was later changed to the "Neff Building." The New high school on Belvo Road and Gebhart Church Road, was opened in, if memory serves, 1973. The Neff Building was demolished recently for the remodel of Kinder School, corner of Central Avenue and Sixth Street.

Following my high school graduation in 1964, I applied for and was hired into an assembly line job at Frigidaire, General Motors Corporation (GMC) in Moraine City, referred to as Moraine City at that time but later would be known only as Moraine.

December 7, 1965 would see me drafted (conscriptio ☺ ) into the United States Army. Reporting to the Dayton draft board office to board the bus bound for the Cincinnati Federal building where I was sworn in and from there to Fort Knox, Kentucky where I was actually processed into the army. Boarding a plane and flying to Fort Hood, Texas was my basic training station. The weather there was unbelievably cold, snowy and miserable. During the fourth week or mid-basic training cycle of eight weeks, I contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized immediately. I pleaded with the army doctor to get me back in training or I would be recycled. Recycled meant sent back to the beginning to start over. Photo, Fort Hood, Texas , basic training, 1965.



The doctor showed mercy and had me packed in ice to break my high fever. He then sent in a sergeant, a medical technician, to inject me with three huge syringes of penicillin and sent me back to my barracks. I was really weak but my Appalachian heritage kicked in and I made up my mind, I might have to crawl, but I would make it and I did. From there I received orders to Fort Gordon, Georgia to complete Military Police School, another eight weeks



Photo, Military Police School, Fort Gordon, Georgia, 1966

Passing all requirements there, I was ordered to Presidio San Francisco, California and assigned to the 30th Military Police Battalion. Presidio was a military suburb that encompassed the headlands on the far side of the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco, city side of the bridge. Duties there included, base patrol in MP cars, corrections duty in the military stockade (prison) and taking prisoners out on work details while under my control as armed guard. Presidio was, in my opinion, the most beautiful army base anywhere. To this day, San Francisco is my most favored vacation spot.



Photo: Presidio San Francisco, California – 30<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion 1966

Late December 1966, I received orders taking me to the Republic of South Vietnam. I came home for leave December 1, assigned to arrive at Oakland, California to depart for and arrive at Saigon, Vietnam on January 1, 1967.

I had to tell my Mother where I was going next and it was extremely difficult to do. She held up when I told her. When it came time for me to leave, she cried and cried and wouldn't let go of me. It was very trying. However, having my own children now, I clearly understand how she must have felt.

My Dad came in and said in very soft words, "Margueritte, you have to let him go – he has to leave." My Dad then took her hands and loosened them from me. As I left the house, I could hear her crying and it terribly distressing to me as well as her.

Flying from Dayton to Oakland, California processing out of CONUS – Continental United States, I boarded a Constellation Airplane, that's right, propeller-driven and flew off over the Great Pacific Ocean. Landings for refueling occurred at Honolulu, Hawaii, Wake Island, Guam, Philippines and finally Saigon, South Vietnam. This trip required a total of forty-two hours flying time.

I was shipped North to the coastal city of Nha Trang, a relatively secure city for Military Police Patrol throughout the area. There was a contingent of "ROK – (Republic of Korea) Korean Army troops there. So my patrol jeep was kind of crowded. It contained a Korean MP, South Vietnamese Army MP and finally a South Vietnamese Constable (police officer). This was an amazing set of experiences for the two months I did this job.

I then received new orders moving me further north to a field assignment in Binh Dinh Province, Bong Son. This was a whole new ball game. This was road patrol in a gun-jeep, a typical jeep with an M-60 machine gun mounted on a pylon, mid vehicle. This was in enemy territory, escorting truck convoys that kept the entire military front supplied. This was really scary duty and I suddenly realized there was no way I could survive ten months of this. I would surely be killed and there was nothing I could do about it.



Photo: Republic of South Vietnam 1967

My greatest fear was the scene played out in my head, over and over, of the military sedan arriving at my parent's house and delivering the terrible news to them that I had been killed. I was absolutely sure that would kill my Mother. Now what? I can't control my destiny here in this war zone. You can't be "careful" in a war. Well, I can write every chance I get so at least there will be some extra letters to be remembered by. Oh, yes, those people I want say goodbye to and the those I may want to apologize to

for some errant remark or deed that they most likely won't even remember or care about. One letter in particular I sent home was to Roscius C. Doan, MD, thanking him for delivering me on July 1, 1946. As it would turn out, he sent me a reply which I have to this day.

I continued to fight that scenario and I was more concerned about my Mother than I was myself. Ok – I have to make it until November 17<sup>th</sup>. That would take me down to ten days before I rotate back to CONUS. Ten days from rotation, soldiers are removed from field assignments and moved to the rear, secure to process out of the war zone.

The other round and round thought in my head was, who would write my obituary and what would it say? There really isn't much to say, so, will it be just a few lines? I hope they put my picture in it!!

I sent my brother money to buy my parents a color television set because they didn't have one. He did that. I sent him money to buy them a large air conditioner for their home. He did that. I had absolutely no use for my pay, \$270 per month and that included \$50 extra for combat pay.

Now comes more bad news. The First Cavalry Division to which I was assigned had a terrific helicopter force. The crews were being injured and killed at an alarming rate. Machine gunners were lost faster than they could be replaced. The result of that was to conscript individuals from other, local, military companies to serve as machine gunners until actual trained replacement could arrive from Fort Walters, Texas or Fort Rucker, Alabama.

I was assigned to the 229<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion as a Huey helicopter gunner from June 1 to June 23, 1967. This assignment was like wearing a shirt with a target painted on it. I survived that only by a couple of God-given miracles. Now, back to my MP unit just in time to go to Tokyo, Japan for R & R, rest and recuperation for seven days. I would turn 21 there on July 1. Tokyo was a gigantic, magnificent city. There were so many sights to see, it was so liberating to be free of the toils of combat.



Photo: June 1967 Republic of Vietnam – Huey Helicopter – 229<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion – First Cavalry Division

I went with a fellow trooper and we had a great time. One unique experience I had occurred on a public train. I was seated and in front of me, was an older Japanese woman, standing, holding on to a suspended ceiling handle to keep her from falling. I stood up to offer her my seat. Almost instantly, I was yanked backwards into my seat by a Japanese man, seated next to me. He, in broken English, said to me, "This is not the United States, she can stand." I took great offense to this aggression towards me and thought about telling him how I felt about what had just happened. Until, that is, I realized that every man in that train car was giving me the evil-eye. So, I kept quiet and enjoyed the rest of my train ride.

R & R completed, I returned to my road patrol and convoy escort duties. The convoys were prime targets for the enemy forces, especially the mogas (motor vehicle fuel) and JP4 (jet aircraft fuel). JP4 is Jet Propulsion Fuel 4, made up of 35% light petroleum distillates (kerosene) and 65% gasoline. Needless to say, this was perilous duty but was made somewhat safer around the end of my tour. JP4 was the fuel that supplied the Huey helicopters, mobility. Huey gunships began covering the flanks of the roads on which the convoys traveled. Also evenly spaced throughout the convoy were 2 and ½ ton trucks carrying carrying a set of quad 50's, meaning four 50 caliber machine guns on a rotating pedestal. A convoy might be 50 trucks or more, on a dirt road, rolling at considerable speed. Day after day and so, on, the same dirty, dangerous work. Again, some amazing experiences.

Photo: Landing Zone, "English" Vietnam 1967 - 229<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion – Chinook helicopter



Time's up and I get to go home. Home, where the heart is, where family is, where everything is that makes us who we are. Those are the elements of life as we know it. Few realize what it mean, what it feels like to actually **touch** those you love and care for so much. That separation causes a void in your chest where your heart should be.

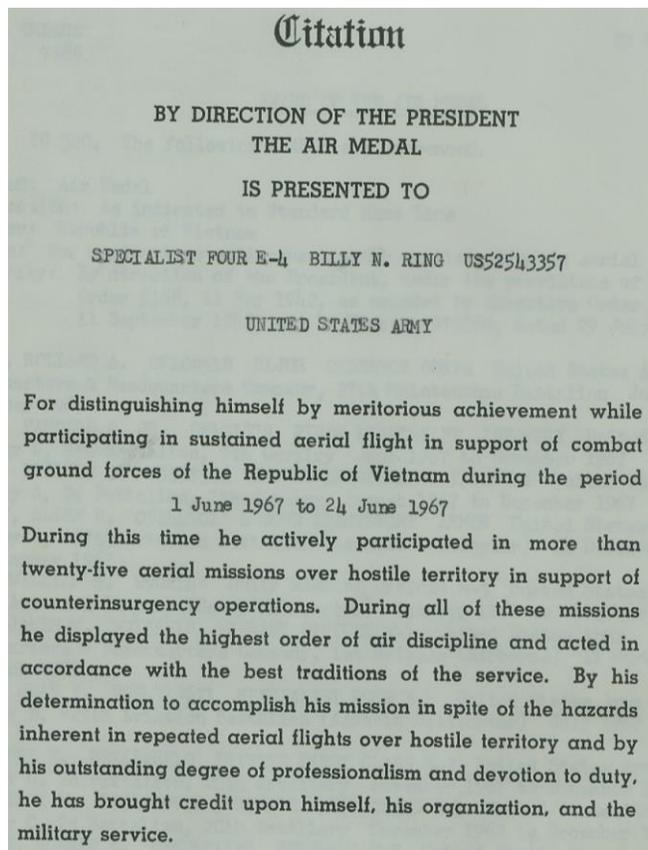
I don't believe I made it! I'm almost home – just make it to the US soil – which would be Fort Lewis, Washington. Discharge and on my way home – home – home. Oh my God, home where the people I know and love are, my home, my car, my job I will be a human again. Think of it, running water, HOT,

running water, clean! Safety – safety – safety. Food and drink, friends, everything I never imagined I would do without for so long.

As the huge jet plane, known as, “*Freedom Bird*”, lifted off the runway at Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam, a gigantic cheer arose and went on for some time until everyone on board just ran out of breath.

It was then, right then at that exact moment that I realized all the great things that life in Miamisburg, Ohio had given me. Home, family, education, work, fun and on and on went the list. There can be no feeling, no emotion, nothing on this earth can begin to compare with my seeing my hometown after all that time. My smile lasted for a month, my heart raced continually, I hugged people all the time until I could tell some grew tired of it. Too bad for them!

About a year after my Army discharge, I received in the mail, an Air Medal for the combat missions I had flown. I had no idea I was even eligible but the citation clearly states....



I used my GI bill benefits to attend Sinclair College in Fire Science Technology education, buy a new home, marry and raise a family. My children prospered from their roots here just as I have and continue to do. Thank you, Miamisburg, for giving me so much.

How much better can any life story be, I served my country in the military and my town and it's citizen's as a firefighter. Every day I worked, I was serving those in my community and all who passed through.

Even after forty-five years, I still say, "Thank you" every single day that I was able to return home in one piece. When I see the news where the troops are coming home from war to loved ones, even today, it still brings tears to my eyes because I know how it feels.

My eternal promise, both throughout my lifetime, and still to this day has been and will continue to be, I will never leave Miamisburg because I love my town.

Sincerely, to all who may care to read these writings,

*Billy Nelson Ring*

Note: I did my best to ensure accuracy throughout this writing.

Note: My apologies for the curse words, they were only added to illustrate the moment of the circumstances.

6,961 words

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"Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you are right."  
*Henry Ford*