

## Dorothy Graves

### *Miss Victory Lost Her Son When I Lost My Brother*



DOMESTICITY—Mrs. Dorothy Shay reveals the same deft touch in her kitchen as that which won her title in war work as MISS VICTORY of Northern California.



Photos with captions: San Francisco Examiner, November 30, 1942

'IT'S RIGHT HERE!'—Mrs. Shay, her daughter and her son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William Graves, read glad news of the judges' decision.

The effect of war was not just on those in the service. My mother and I lived in Burlingame, California on property we owned jointly. When Dad, a veteran of World War I, died in 1936, Mom was faced with the necessity of going to work for the first time in her life to support herself and my sixteen-year-old brother, Walter. I already was working. Together she and I bought the property and paid the mortgage.

On July 4, 1940, Bill Graves, the man I planned to marry, started building our house on the property. Bill and I learned to work together. I also learned to saw wood, square corners, and hammer nails straight. He did the heavy things and I did the lighter things. We worked every weekend until the next May to build our home, a two-and-a-half-room cottage with an attached tandem garage. That style of garage was two cars long and one car wide; the second car had to back up to let the first car out. When we were married, Bill set up a small machine shop in the garage.

My brother, Walter E. Shay, joined the Air Corps in September, 1941. When Mom heard that he would be sent overseas, she with no war work experience but she had a burning desire to help the cause. She began to train herself as a drill-press operator. Bill took her to the shop in our garage and with his help my petite Mom taught herself to run

a drill press and lathe. Bill then recommended her for a job at the plant where he worked as a maintenance welder. She gave up her clerk job at the bakery, where she worked for six years, to be a drill-press operator at a defense plant with approximately 200 men and women employees. Her first day on the job she beat the record of some of the plant's oldest employees.

Bill and I were thrilled when Mrs. Dorothy Shay, my gray-haired mother, at age forty-eight became Miss Victory of Northern California. Her plant's personnel manager had entered her in a contest to interest women in war work. She was chosen out of hundreds of war workers from more than fifty plants in the northern California area because she was a widow of a World War I veteran. Her only son was fighting in World War II. She'd been a member of the American Legion Auxiliary since 1922—working in her spare time at veteran's hospitals. She quit her bakery job to go into war work and she was good at the new job.

Newspapers that sponsored the contest treated her like a celebrity. *The San Francisco Examiner* on Monday November 30, 1942 announced the contest winner with photographs of Mom at work and Walter in his uniform. During a broadcast which KPO Radio engineers set up at the plant, Mom received a \$1000 War Bond—the first she'd ever seen, a diamond solitaire ring, and her first orchid, a gift from San Francisco's mayor who made the presentations. She was cheered and feted at luncheons where she was commended for her tremendous spirit and sterling example.

As Miss Victory of Northern California, Mom won a trip to Chicago to compete for the national title. She and the winner from southern California took a train and were accompanied by a woman reporter for the *Los Angeles Examiner* who wrote:

“And in an interview here today, Mrs. Shay predicted that American women will leave the factories and return to their homes after victory is won, despite the advantage of earning extra money.

‘Love of home is so inherent in a woman,’ she said, ‘that there will be no problem of married women clinging to their wartime jobs after the war ends. Love of home is strong and the modern woman knows that home is where her heart is.’”

Her predictions and reasoning are interesting now in light of current views of women in the work force. The Miss Victory of the United States contest was held on December 7, 1942 at Chicago Stadium and Mom didn't win, but she was happy that she got to meet the other regional winners and singer-dancer Buddy Ebsen.

Walter was scheduled to come home after training, but the Japanese attack on December 7 changed all plans and he never received a furlough. My family had not seen him since he enlisted in the Army Air Corps, September 1941. He regularly sent his allotment check to Mom and she put the money into War Bonds. Walter went overseas to England in July 1942. In November he was with the Flying Fortress unit in the invasion of North Africa and fought through the entire Tunisian campaign. He wrote his last letter to us from Italy where he was grounded due to a sinus infection.

It was April 1944. Bill and I still lived on the same property with my mother. Her house was next to our cottage. I was at home because I quit work at the aircraft plant when I became pregnant with our first child. Our baby girl was a month old and I was nursing her. Mom was at work so the telegram was delivered to me next door. I remember dropping the telegram after I read the “We regret to inform you” message. I sat in a rocking chair and fed the baby and cried and cried.

Walter E. Shay, twenty-five year-old son of World War I veteran Walter W. Shay and Miss Victory of Northern California, was killed while stationed in Italy. He was on motorcycle courier duty, delivering a message, when he was hit by a truck and killed. At the same time I lost my brother, Miss Victory lost her son. Our family was never the same. An atmosphere of sadness affected all of us, even the baby during her first years.

Mother chose not to have Walter's body brought back to California for burial. He had fallen in Italy and she felt that he should stay there. He is buried in a military cemetery near Anzio, a main battle area. Later, a family friend during her tour of Italy stopped at the cemetery and took a photograph of Walter's grave for my mother.

I regret not getting to know Walter better. He was four years younger than I. Younger brothers are not always good company. He was just getting mature enough to be tolerable when he went off to war. We never had the chance to connect and have an adult life together. Losing a loved one carries over for years.



Walter E. Shay, age 22 in 1942, killed on duty in Italy, 1945

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