Ray Anderson: Autobiography

Raymond (Ray) (Bud) Vernon Anderson was born October 6, 1922, in Newfolden, Minnesota, the second of three sons of Pearly and Tillie Anderson. He attended schools in Thief River Falls and Newfolden and graduated from Newfolden High School in 1940. (See my book Second Generation Americans, Pearly Julius Anderson (1899-1964) and Otilia (Tillie) Amanda Ostmo (1895-1996) that was completed September 2008 for a description of life growing up in those communities). All three sons were star basketball players. In 1939 my older brother Myran as a senior scored more points than any other basketball player in the state of Minnesota. I especially remember the Zoo Line Basketball Tournament when we defeated Karlstad by a score of 60 to 24 in the championship game. Myran scored 27 points and I made 19. Myran was recruited by the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The following year as a senior I scored more points than any other player in the district basketball tournament and named to the all district team. I was recruited by Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and awarded an allowance of $5 a month. But after receiving the catalog and seeing the high cost of tuition which I felt the family could not afford I decided to attend Moorhead State University, Moorhead, Minnesota, where the tuition was only $17 a quarter. I played on the freshman team but later preferred to play on a number of independent basketball teams in the Fargo-Moorhead area. My younger brother Lowell, although the shortest of the three brothers but perhaps the best basketball player, was a starting guard on the Moorhead State University basketball team for three years. All 3 brothers were the first to be inducted into the Nordic Athletic Hall of Fame at the Marshall County Community High School (formerly Newfolden High School).

In the fall of 1943 World War II interrupted my education and I enlisted in an officers V-7 Navy Training Program in my senior year. After induction into service in 1943. I was sent to a V-12 Navy training program at Minot State College, Minot, North Dakota for one semester after which I was transferred to Midshipman School at Columbia University in New York City where I received my commission as Ensign USNR October 1944. I was assigned to the amphibious forces and received orders to go to the Naval Amphibious Base in Solomons, Maryland, where after further training I was assigned as Executive Officer on a LCI(L) (Landing Craft Infantry) where we were trained to escort troops to the beach.

The next assignment was to go to to Orange, Texas, where our ship the LCI(L) was built. Our ship was changed into a LCI(M) gunboat type with three army mortars installed on the main deck and the two ramps on each side of the ship originally designed to land troops were removed and numerous rockets launchers were installed in their place.

While traveling with our crew by train through the south I was introduced to Jim Crow and the racially segregated south where drinking fountains, restrooms, hotels, barbershops, restaurants and public transportation were marked either “White” or “Colored” with “Niggers didn’t vote” signs everywhere. The armed forces were almost as segregated as the south and in the Navy blacks either loaded or unloaded cargo on ships and boats or when on a ship served as a steward mate for
officers. After Frank Knox became Secretary of the Navy he vowed that “the Navy would remain lily-white.” It was an experience for me that I have no words to describe and sometimes I wondered if this actually was a country I was fighting for. Prior to enlisting in the Navy I was taught to respect people by their character rather than their ethnicity or the color of their skin.

I recall leaving the Naval Base with our steward mate one afternoon. I was going downtown to meet several friends and he was meeting his friends. As soon as we left the base he said, “Mr. Anderson, you can’t walk with me.” I said, “Why not?” He replied, “Sir, you don’t understand. Texas is part of a very segregated south. They won’t do anything to you but whites will beat me up.” When we reached the first corner he dashed to the opposite side of the street.

After assembling the crew on the LCI(M) 975 we went through the Panama Canal, a lock type canal across Panama that connects the Atlantic from Colon to the Pacific at Panama City, thus connecting the two oceans and reducing the long voyage around Cape Horn by about 7,000 miles. A French company started to build a sea level canal between the two oceans after securing rights from Columbia which originally had control over the area. The French company failed for a number of setbacks that included tropical diseases. The U.S. then bought the rights and holdings for $40 million dollars from the French Co. and negotiated a treaty with Columbia to build a canal. The treaty easily passed the U.S. Senate but failed in the Columbia Senate because they wanted more money. President Theodore Roosevelt exploded, saying “Those contemptible little creatures in Bogata, Columbia will not thwart the progress of our great country.” The result was revolt in 1903 in the territory that originally was part of Columbia but today is Panama. An impenetrable jungle in the southern part of Panama forced Columbia to bring troops by sea to put down the rebellion. They met units of the U.S. Navy who threatened to blow them out of the water so they had to return to Columbia. The U.S. then immediately recognized the new country of Panama in 1904 and Panama became in effect a protectorate of the U.S. The U.S. then negotiated a treaty on our terms with their government to build a canal connecting the two oceans. The new canal was not a sea level canal but a lock canal that has three sets of double locks with steel gates that swing shut to raise water levels to take ships up from the Atlantic to Gatun Lake and then two chambers with steel gates that lower ships to the Pacific. Construction started in 1904 and after ten years was completed in 1914. The U.S. also tamed a jungle and stamped out yellow fever and malaria. It was the greatest construction project the world had ever seen. Our crew was fascinated watching water levels in the locks go up from the Atlantic and then sailing 51.2 miles through a channel on Gatun Lake to the locks on the other side which lowered water levels to the Pacific Ocean.

We gave our crew liberty on both sides of the canal in Colon and Panama City. I remember trying to act as a translator between officers and beautiful women at our table in nightclubs with my limited knowledge of Spanish (two years at Moorhead State College)

The basic treaty with the Republic of Panama, with annual payments, gave the U.S. exclusive control over a strip of land 10 miles wide which we operated as a “non-self governing territory”, the same as Guam or the Virgin Islands. But over the years
problems rose and Panama insisted that “sovereignty” over the Canal Zone had never been transferred to the U.S. After increasing anti-American riots resulting in many deaths we negotiated a treaty with Panama in 1979 that gradually transferred possession of the canal to Panama. They took control on December 31, 1999, and tolls for ships going through the canal now is a major source of revenue for the country.

We left Panama City and went north to San Diego, California where we received additional training before sailing to the Pearl Harbor, a first-class naval base near Honolulu on the island of Oahu, the third largest of the Hawaiian Islands. That was the site of the Japanese surprise aircraft attack December 7, 1941, that started the war in the Pacific. On liberty we went to the US Arizona Memorial, the battleship that was sunk with hundreds of sailors still entombed in it. We visited Honolulu, swam in Waikiki, Honolulu’s famous ocean beach resort area, watched graceful hula dancers perform on the grounds of the adjoining elegant Royal Hawaiian Hotel, and spent several nights in the cheaper adjoining Mauna Hotel. The engineering officer and I also rented a car to tour the island visiting famous Diamond Head, fields of pineapple and sugarcane, and staying for several days at a resort on the other side of the island. When Zora and I visited the island years later there were scores of high-rise hotels and hordes of tourists and shops in the Waikiki Beach area that totally ruined the primitive character of Honolulu that I knew. The newly developed area now resembled Miami Beach in Florida.

Our ship then joined a huge task force of 700 ships and for 38 days we were underway almost continuously. I can still remember the day that we left Pearl Harbor on September 11 to our first invasion. The ship was made ready for sea and all hands tried on their life jackets, helmets and gas masks. With painstaking care we took every precaution to see that gas masks fit exactly. Our objective was Yap and for a week we carefully studied all the top secret material and poured over maps, pictures and intelligence reports until we were familiar with every part of Yap and knew our job thoroughly.

We arrived at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands on the 25th of September, refueled, took on water and other provisions. The next day we pulled out and started on a southerly course. No one could understand why we were on this course. It would never take us to Yap. Had our objective been changed? All over the ship the scuttlebutt was that our objective had been changed and that we would invade the Philippine Islands instead. Upon our arrival in Manus in the Admiralty Islands our suspicions were confirmed. Our new objective was Leyte in the Philippine Islands.

The only war news that we received en route to the P.I.’s was that 1000 planes from Admiral Halsey’s task force had raided Formosa. That would reduce the Jap’s capacity to resist our seizure of Leyte. Days later as we lay at anchor in San Pedro we listened to Tokyo Rose who claimed that the Japs had sunk 8 battleships, 7 carriers, and downed 800 of our planes.

On October 19th we remained at our battle stations all day long and went to condition 2 watches (Port and Starboard), four hours on and four hours off. At dawn on October 20th we could see the Island of Leyte - our objective - and we passed
between two islands to go into the gulf. Rangers had landed on Homonhom and Dingagat Islands two days earlier at the height of a typhoon and seized the land areas commanding the entrance into the gulf. The Japs had fled taking only their rifles with them. At midnight we passed through the entrance into the gulf. The convoy kept changing speed and course and made it very difficult to keep in station. We almost rammed the ship ahead of us once. For three days previously larger ships in our convoy had begun the initial bombardment and fleet minesweepers swept the gulf. We could see tracer shells from battleships, cruisers and destroyers blasting away at the beach. When the sun came over the horizon our planes started coming overhead en route to the beach on bombing missions. The naval bombardment and aircraft bombing became heavier and heavier. The noise was terrific. At 0900 we headed toward the beach escorting numerous landing crafts that were loaded with our invasion troops and amphibious vehicles. We also were firing our mortars and rockets on the beach and further inland for 15 minutes after the first wave hit the beach. As we neared the beach we began firing 20MM shells strafing the beach and soon from this combined firing the beach was covered by a cloud of smoke. Despite the terrific concentration of fire power evidently there were a few Japs left alive (dug in) and our troops promptly killed them. After we ceased firing we followed our troops as they pushed ahead on the beach. Naval bombardment continued all day and troops kept pouring ashore and LST’s (Landing Ships Tanks) beached and unloaded their supplies. Tacloban Airfield and Catmon Hill, the main objectives, were captured that day. Filipinos were running toward the troops waving their arms so our soldiers wouldn’t shoot them. We were about 1000 yards from the beach and ready to give our troops fire support when they needed it.

Our crew was very tired and the men were lying all over the decks trying to get some rest. At sunset we anchored off the beach between the enemy line and ours to prevent enemy filtration by small boats, etc. We kept watch armed with Springfield’s, Carbines and Thompson sub-machine guns looking for Jap swimmers, suicide boats and midget subs. No Japs were sighted. Just as we anchored I looked up and saw four Jap bombers flying overhead, almost directly over our ship. They dropped their bombs and I’ll never forget that feeling as I watched the bombs coming down. I stood up when I saw the planes but as I watched those bombs coming down I got so weak that I sat down again. Luckily, the bombs fell in the water about 100 yards off our fantail – too darn close for comfort!

The bombardment kept on all night. Destroyers behind us were blasting away with their 5”38’s and the noise was terrible. We could hear the shells swishing through the air overhead. Huge balls of fire shot out from our battleships and cruisers as their 16”, 14” and 6” guns kept firing all night but the noise was nothing compared to the sharp banging of the destroyers with their 5”38’s. Red and white tracer shells kept pouring on the beach and star shells and flares lit up whole areas. Occasionally we could see tracers from machine guns and hear rifle fire from our troops ashore. Tacloban airfield was all lit up as soldiers worked on the airstrip all night.

We went to General Quarters at daybreak and watched numerous ships firing toward the sky but saw no Jap planes. Two 5”38’ shells burst on the water very close to our ship. We were afraid that we would get hit by fire from our ships. We were sent on a
firing mission at 1020 and fired at a target area for several hours expending 600 rounds (3 mortar rounds per minute). The surf was high and our ship kept broaching so it was necessary to go out and then go in for another run firing out mortars. Our target was a Japanese infantry concentration. We had good results and no Japs were left in the target area.

Everyone was ready to drop from lack of sleep except the Captain who lay in his sack reading the New Testament while the rest of us stood watch. October 23rd was the first night since the 18th that I took my clothes off and went to bed. We usually got only 3 to 5 hours of sleep each night and that was split into several shifts so it was no use to undress and go to bed. We just lay in our sacks with our shoes off.

I participated in 5 invasions. My first invasion was Leyte in the Philippine Islands where General MacArthur waded ashore announcing that he had returned. The pompous general had to wade ashore three times before he finally approved the photography. (See my “First Invasion of Philippines – Leyte Gulf”)

(No detailed diary was kept for subsequent invasions)

The second invasion was January 9th when an invasion force of more than 850 vessels entered Lingayen Gulf north of Manila. (See my “Second Invasion of the Philippines – Lingayen Gulf”). Several days later our sister ship the LCI(M) was sunk by a Japanese suicide torpedo boat. There were 29 survivors including Captain Brown with a broken back. One day we were lying to about 2500 yards from the beach near the Cruiser Nashville, the one that took MacArthur to the invasion of Leyte, when two Jap fighters came out of the sun with machine guns blazing away. We opened fire and believed that we hit one plane which then turned and went into a suicide dive hitting the Cruiser Nashville exploding in a great billow of flame. It was a horrible sight. The Nashville’s flag went down to half mast indicating that personnel had been killed.

The third invasion was Okinawa, a large island south of Japan. That was the largest amphibious invasion of the war. I especially remember the “turkey shoot” one afternoon when 69 Jap kamikazes (suicide aircraft named for the “divine wind” that had thwarted the last attempted invasion of Japan in the 13th century) flew into the harbor where our fleet was anchored. We exhausted all our ammunition firing our guns at them. Their targets were larger ships such as battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers and they succeeded in inflicting major damage to our fleet. A shell probably fired by one of our destroyers exploded on our gun deck with shrapnel hitting our ready boxes, ventilator and wounding five of the crew who were temporarily evacuated to a hospital ship for treatment.

The fourth invasion was the small island of ie Shima off the coast of Okinawa where Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent, was killed by a sniper bullet when he was on the front line looking out of a foxhole.

Later when we were patrolling off the north shore of Okinawa a single Jap Kamikaze suicide plane spotted our ship and flew at us. Firing our guns we hit the plane so the pilot barely missed the mast of our ship and flew about ten feet over my head where I was stationed with my gun crew in the bow of the ship, exploding in the sea about 50
yards from the ship and lifting the bow of our ship partially out of the water leaving me soaking wet from water that came over us. Petrified I thought that I would be killed and my life was about to end. Hundreds of beautiful tropical fish floated to the surface. When I wrote to my parents in my home town of Newfolden, Minnesota, I received a letter from my mother in which she wrote that she woke in the middle of that night and heard me screaming “Mother, Mother!” Convinced that I had been killed she was unable to go back to sleep and was emotionally upset until my parents received a letter from me several weeks later that described the incident.

When we returned to the anchorage at Ie Shima our captain was summoned to the flagship where he was awarded a bronze star for heroism in battle. Our entire crew knew that he was a coward who had deserted his battle station in the conning tower and fled for protection behind it. Crew members who stayed at their battle stations firing guns and hitting the Jap plane with our 20MM and 50 caliber machine guns which made the pilot miss the mast of our ship were the real heroes.

Several days later as I was walking through the crew mess hall I spotted a glass jar on the bookshelf. They explained that the dead pilot had floated to the surface and they fished him out of the sea, cut off his ears, threw his body back into the sea then put his ears in a bottle with medical alcohol. That was their victory trophy. Incensed, I threw the contents of the bottle into the sea, assembled the crew at General Quarters and delivered one of my more passionate lectures condemning their barbaric act.

One night we were ordered to anchor close to a cargo ship that was loaded with ammunition. Several Jap Kamikaze planes came into the harbor and we knew that if they succeeding in hitting the cargo ship which was their target the resulting massive explosion would have blown our ship out of the water. I was so frightened that I collapsed and fell down on the deck. Our radioman, a young man with a wife and two small children back in the states, couldn’t stand the tension and became hysterical. We had to strap on a bunk and assign several crew members to hold him down during the night trying to calm him until we were able to transfer him to a hospital ship the next morning.

Our fifth and final invasion was the bloody battle of Iwo Jima February 9th. It was supposed to be a 3-or-4 day battle, but the capture of Iwo Jima ended up in a bloody struggle that took 36 days of hell by soldiers, sailors and airmen who endured the worst fighting imaginable in just 8 square miles to overcome the fanatical Japanese defense. For the assault troops who landed it meant an ugly death to many of them. It has been called the toughest battle of World War II. The commander of our LCI group, a chronic alcoholic, was drunk the third day of the invasion and maneuvered his ship so close to the beach that propellers were kicking up mud and sniper bullets were hitting the conning tower and mast where he was sitting in a drunken stupor unaware of the danger. The Executive Office placed him under arrest, confiscated his liquor supply and confined him to his cabin under guard until he was sufficiently sober to resume command.

After the island was secured we sailed back to Pearl Harbor to have our ship reconditioned for the final invasion of Japan. During that long journey I remember
two significant events. The first was receiving news that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. Since he was the only president I knew and also my Commander-in-Chief whom I adored I couldn't help but shed a few tears. The second event was news on August 6th that we had dropped an atomic bomb that exploded at 2,000 feet and destroyed 4.7 square miles of Hiroshima with more than 71,000 persons dead or missing. The second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki August 9th. It was difficult for me to imagine the damage inflicted on those two cities that also killed thousands of people. It was difficult for me to comprehend the magnitude of the damage done to those two cities. It marked the beginning of the nuclear bomb age.

We returned to Pearl Harbor to plan for the invasion of Japan in November. However, Emperor Hirohito forced his government to end hostilities and surrender on August 14th. Fortunately that made it unnecessary to conduct a costly and hazardous undertaking. When we received that news all hell broke lose in that vast harbor resulting in a wild celebration. All the ships fired their entire arsenal of red and white tracer shells, star shells and flares into the sky making the darkness look like a Fourth of July celebration and turning the night into day. Our ship was tied to the pier about 100 yards from the officers club which normally closed at midnight but stayed open all night to celebrate the end of the war. It was a night to remember (the part that I can remember) with a raging headache for several days. We had won a victory and THE WAR ENDED in the Pacific.

During the time that I was in the Pacific I was promoted to Lt(jg) USNR in 1945. My ship also had the opportunity to visit numerous islands in the Pacific such as Guam, Saipan and several Mariana and Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific Area. It was a journey for a small-town youth from Northwestern Minnesota to dangerous battles in the middle of the Pacific Ocean at which I still marvel today almost 70 years later. What I went through helped to profoundly change the course of history in this country. I also traveled to part of the world that I hardly knew existed. I remember how awed I was when we crossed the Equator and International Date line.

The greatest military machine that the world had known started to pass out of existence and I was released from active duty May 1946 in the Navy. I returned to Moorhead State College that summer where I received my B.S. degree after the Fall Quarter in November 1946. My education after being released from the Navy was financed by the GI Bill of Rights, one of the greatest pieces of legislation ever enacted which enabled millions of veterans to go to college. The government paid my tuition and books and I received $90 a month ($120 after I was married). I then accepted a teaching position January 1947 at Aneta, North Dakota, when I replaced Leroy Holen who had resigned. That was the beginning of my teaching career. I still vividly remember the teachers on the staff, students in my high school classes, coaching my great basketball team which won the consolation championship at the state tournament, field and track events, starting a six-man football team, and the cold winters. I especially remember the Easter blizzard when our car got stuck in a huge snowdrift on the highway north of Aneta. We had to spend several days in a nearby farmhouse sleeping on the floor before an airplane with skis flew us to Grand Forks. My basketball team won the Class C consolation championship at the state
tournament. I also played on many independent basketball teams in Aneta and the Fargo-Moorhead area.

After 1 1/2 years at Aneta I resigned in June and went to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and enrolled in Graduate School where I received my M.A. degree in 1949 and continued to work on a PhD program. During graduate school I had a temporary teaching appointment for one semester at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. In January 1951 I accepted a teaching position at the State Teachers College in Mayville, North Dakota, where I was on the faculty for 10 and 1/2 years. I met Zora Houkom, a graduate of Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where she taught music at Portland High School (2 miles from Mayville) for one year prior to our marriage June 2, 1953. We had three children - Denise in 1954, Barbara in 1957, and Gregory in 1959.

I also began my lifelong association as a liberal Democrat by being elected to the 16-member North Dakota delegation to the Democratic convention in Los Angeles that nominated JFK for president in 1960. Zora and I left Mayville for one month on what amounted to our second honeymoon. Since we didn't have much money I drove the entire distance and we slept in a pup tent spending nights at various parks en route to LA where we stayed in the St. Paul Hotel (our room was paid by the North Dakota DFL party). I continued to be active in the Democratic Party until my death. Since moving to Wisconsin I have been involved in the Democratic Party at the county, congressional district, and state levels.

In 1961 I accepted a position in the Political Science Department at Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois. During the time that I was on the staff at WIU I completed writing my doctoral dissertation ("The Adoption and Operation of the Initiative and Referendum in North Dakota") and I finally received my PhD degree in political science from the University of Minnesota in 1962.

In 1963 I accepted a position as professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and the family moved to River Falls, Wisconsin. I taught there until I retired in 1990 after a 41 1/2 year teaching career. During that time I was elected to the Faculty Senate at UW-River Falls for 7 years, served as president for 2 years and was a member of many university committees. In 1967 I was elected state president of the Association of University of Wisconsin Faculties, Inc., and as a registered lobbyist made numerous trips to the state capitol in Madison.

In 1974 I also was elected to the Pierce County Board of Supervisors (called County Commissioners in many states), reelected 13 times and served as vice chair and on many committees until retiring from the Board in 2000. My favorite committee was the Agriculture and Extension Committee, which I chaired. In 1974 I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Association of County Extension Committees, Inc., served as state president for 5 years and as a registered lobbyist made numerous trips to Madison lobbying for funds for Cooperative Extension. I was elected President of the North Central Extension Advisory Council (16 states) in 1979, President of the National Extension Advisory Council in 1980, and represented

All four statewide organizations representing Wisconsin professionals have given me awards as the “Friend of Extension.” Other professional honors and awards include Who’s Who in the Midwest, Personalities of the West and Midwest, Wisconsin Men of Achievement, Who’s Who in Society, Who’s Who in American, and several others.

Other public service included serving as a member of the Governor’s Task Force on Voter Registration and Elections, 1971-1972, president of the Board of Directors of the Western Wisconsin Health Systems Agency, Inc. (16 counties) from 1980 to 1982 which was instrumental in holding down health care costs. I was chair in 1980 when President Reagan was elected president and withdrew federal funding for health agencies in the U.S. I angrily denounced that action which I maintained would result in an increase in cost for health care and especially hurt people in lower income brackets. I also was a member of the St. Croix Basin Water Quality Task Force, NW Regional Planning Commission, 1980, member of the Youth Commission, Wisconsin Land Conservation Association, 1982-1990, and River Country Resources Conservation and Development Council, 1992-2000. I was a lifetime member of the American Legion and VFW.

My hobbies included cross country skiing, golf, camping, canoeing, bridge, gardening, viticulture and especially traveling with the family. Zora, Greg and I have gone to all 50 states on more than 58 trips abroad to countries in six continents of the world. We lived in a large 10-room 127 year old Greek Revival house which is located ½ block north of the University. We purchased the house in 1964 and arefully restored it with additions of a deck & screen porch. I also purchased 20 acres of land three miles south of River Falls where starting in 1974 we planted more than 7,000 red and white pine and white cedar trees on 19 acres with a large assortment of wild crabapples and various berries for migratory birds beside the long driveway leading to the remaining acre on the northern part of the land. On that one remaining acre Greg and I planted a small apple orchard, crabapple, apricot, pear and plum trees, a large grape vineyard, blueberries, several varieties of red and golden raspberries, red, white, and black currants, rhubarb and hundreds of tulips and daffodils, and grape vines and high bush cranberries. That was our “Garden of Eden” where we retreated to work. I usually relaxed sitting at the picnic table under an umbrella and a fireplace in front, listening to a portable radio, writing “letters to the editor” and sipping a vodka and tonic. Greg did most of the work. Zora and Greg made jelly or jam and I made gallons of wine or fruit juice each year using my Finnish Mehu-Maija juice-extractor and steamer.

During summers prior to retirement our family traveled extensively in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Zora and I also spent many Christmas and Easter vacations at our daughter’s home at Desert Highlands near Pinnacle Peak in Scottsdale and at their condo on the ocean in Boca Raton, Florida. After I retired in 1990 Zora and I traveled to all 50 states in the U.S. and overseas to numerous countries in all seven continents of the world. We took at least two trips each year, 30 total, to various parts of the world including most European countries, Turkey,
Morocco, the Canary Islands, Madiera, Palma de Majorca, Australia, Fiji Islands, with cruises to Jamaica (and a flight to Cuba), the Bahamas, Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, most of the islands in the Caribbean, a trans-Atlantic cruise, a month long cruise around South America stopping at the Falkland Islands, and a cruise from Singapore, stopping at Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Nagasaki, Japan, before disembarking in China where we flew to Beijing and toured Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace and the Great Wall of China.

On March 30, 1994, Zora and I flew to Europe for three weeks - one week each in the beautiful cities of Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. Since that was the 36th Anniversary Trip for Inner Circle Members (frequent travelers) of the Grand Circle Travel Agency, we stayed in the best hotels and had many special programs planned for our group. Highlights included a typical Czech dinner at the Karlstejn Castle where we danced the polka, a visit to the magnificent Hungarian Parliament, a Danube River cruise, a visit to the Baroque City of Ager and the village of Holloka which is the only village on UNESCO's World Heritage List, a private Strauss waltz concert, attended a training session of the Spanish Riding School featuring the famous Lippizaner horses, and a private performance by the Vienna Boys Choir. In December we went on an 11-day cruise aboard the Celebrity's Five-Star Meridian in the Caribbean. We flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico to board the ship which was billed as the “jewel of liners” operating in the Caribbean. Then we sailed directly to Aruba off the coast of Venezuela, the next day to Venezuela’s leading port city of La Guaira where we rode a bus to Caracas, the capitol. On the return voyage to San Juan we stopped at Grenada, Barbados, St. Lucia, Martinique, St. Maarten and St. Thomas. We would dock in the morning and depart from each island late in the afternoon. On board ship we enjoyed the ultimate in style with a comfortable stateroom, lavish meals, numerous activities and entertainment that included great shows and musical revues, a casino, swimming pools, duty-free shopping (for Zora), and dancing to great music before and after dinner and again after the evening show until the club closed. It was a wonderful trip but returning home made rather our preparations for Christmas that included two dinners at our house.

In November Greg and I on our annual father-son trip traveled to St. Maarten’s Island in the Caribbean where we boarded the Star Flyer, a remarkable four-mast 360 foot clipper ship that had been meticulously built in Belgium to resemble the 19th century vessels that first circled the globe. Modern comforts had been added such as air conditioned cabins, two swimming pools, cocktail bars, piano-bar lounge, a boutique and five-course meals. The 7-day cruise took us to seven unspoiled Caribbean Islands, a majority in the British Virgin Islands, where most large ships can't approach. Tender boats took us to villages, beaches and nearby atolls where we swam at great beaches and snorkeled over colorful reefs. Of the 80 passengers only 25 were from the U.S. and the rest were from Western European countries. The crew of 72 represented 20 different nationalities who spoke 10 different languages. We also extended our vacation by staying several days at the Great Bay Beach Hotel in Philipsburg, the capitol of St. Maartens. That trip was an experience of a lifetime for both of us.
During winters after spending Xmas with our family Zora and I went to either Arizona or Florida for three months.

Each summer for the past 27 years my son Greg, who is my best and closest friend, and I took special father-son trips on my “list of things to do.” We tent camped in Northern Minnesota or Wisconsin, canoeing, kayaking or sailing, and also took longer trips on the four mast Star Flying sailing vessel in the Caribbean, white water rafting 190 miles down the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, 100 miles down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho, canoeing and portaging 50 miles in the wilderness of Canada, twice to Equador (first year in the Amazon jungle and the second touring the Galapagos Islands), to Peru (Cuzco, Machu Pachu, and a jungle lodge on the Amazon) and Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize and Panama in Central America, the Copper Canyon in northern Mexico, Ireland and our last trip was to Argentina in the winter of 2013-14.

After Zora got Parkinson’s Disease she could no longer travel and as I aged needing some assistance, I depended on Greg, the youngest of our children, as a traveling partner. We traveled 28 times to various parts of the U.S. and overseas to a number of countries developing a close father-son relationship.

My daughter Denise, who lives in Wayzata MN was married to Max McGee, former wide receiver for the Green Bay Packers who had the distinction of scoring the first touchdown in Super Bowl history. Max died in 2007 in a fall from the roof of their home. She owns 3 Original Pancake House restaurants in the Minneapolis suburbs, 2 of which she took over after Max passed away. In October 2013 she opened a third Original Pancake House in Roseville, the first one on her own. Denise has a significant other of 5 years, Doug Kratz, a successful businessman. They spent the winter and spring months in Scottsdale AZ, where they met. Denise’s son, Maxwell, who has Down syndrome, is employed and lives in a group home just a mile from Denise’s home. Denise’s youngest son, Dallas graduated from DePaul University in Chicago, and attended graduate school there also. He and 2 others started a production company called Pink Hippo Productions in Chicago. My other daughter Barbara graduated from UW-River Falls and is the Regional Manager for Sales at Nor-Lake for 25 years, a commercial refrigerator manufacturing company in Hudson, Wisconsin. Her husband Jeff worked at 3M until he retired September 2013 after 40 years of working for the company. Her son, Matthew graduated from River Falls HS, and started a landscape and snow removal company, MEM Lawncare, in River Falls. My son Gregory graduated from UW-Stout with a degree in hotel and restaurant management and is employed at the Hotel Sofitel in Bloomington, Minnesota. He and his two dogs enjoy spending time at our 3 acre parcel of land 3 miles south of River Falls. Since all of our family lived either in River Falls or in the Twin Cities Metro area we were able to get together for birthdays, holidays and special events.