William A. Ruf

Professor
English
(1947-1974)

Army Air Corps
WWII

Like so many others of the "Greatest Generation," Dr. Ruf served his country during World War II. Called to service while on his honeymoon, he entered the Army Air Corps as a Buck Private in 1942 and rose to the rank of Warrant Officer until his honorable discharge in 1946. During his years in the military, he supervised weather forecasts, instructed aircrews in weather observations and interpretations and commanded weather detachments in Nevada and California. After returning to teaching from military service, Dr. Ruf accepted a position in the English Department at SUNY Brockport in 1948.

[Bill Ruf graced this world by his presence from March 4, 1912 to February 25, 2005]

[Following is additional information shared by daughter Betsy upon the passing of her mother.]

Bette's young adulthood was indelibly marked by World War II. Her older brother William (Bill) served as a Navy Commander on a ship in the Pacific and then again during the Korean War. Bette's younger brother Robert (Bob) served as a pilot in the Army Air Forces. He was killed in a training exercise at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1942 and is buried in the island's famous Punchbowl Cemetery. Bette's husband, Bill Ruf, was called to service on their honeymoon in 1942 and entered the Army Air Force as a Private. To assist in the war effort, Bette studied nursing at Western Reserve University and served as a nurse's aide at bases in Tonapah, Nevada, and Bishop, California, where her husband was stationed. Her first daughter, Betsy, was born in San Francisco in 1945.

In 1948 Bette and Bill moved to Brockport, NY, where they lived for the next twenty-six years. Their second daughter, Carolyn, was born in 1950. Bette continued her work as a nurse's aide at the Brockport Memorial Hospital for the next decade and also taught life-saving courses. She was an avid supporter of the Girl Scouts and led several troops. Bill was a Professor of English at SUNY Brockport, and Bette volunteered at the college library. During their years in Brockport, Bette and Bill hosted dozens of Sunday open houses for the faculty of SUNY Brockport. Bette was a charter member of the Morgan-Manning House Restoration Guild. Her daughter Betsy's wedding reception was the first event to be held in the newly-restored historic mansion in 1967. After Bill's retirement in 1973, the two moved to Andover, MA, to enjoy the cultural wealth of Boston in their golden years.

Carolyn shared the following letter submitted by her dad to the July/August Yale Alumni Magazine and I thought it was interesting and should be shared.

Frogs and the language barrier

At a recent gathering of friends, *including at least one Eli (not me), the conversation turned to Aristophanes' Frogs. I recalled that when I taught a drama course, students often questioned the words of the chorus, which became the "greatest college cheer": "Brek-ek-ek-ex, ko-ax, ko-ax" ("Old Yale," May). The students always complained that frogs say "jug-a-rum."*

I had been unable to respond, until one evening in the town of Joanina, or Yanina, in northern Greece. We had strolled from our hotel to a park along the shore of the lake, and we were astounded at the noise, which drowned out even the roar of the motor scooters racing along the lakefront boulevard. Thousands of frogs were cheering for Yale: "Brek-ek-ek-ex, ko-ax, ko-ax."

I rushed to the hotel, retrieved my tape recorder, and made a tape of the original chorus of The Frogs! Aristophanes had it right! The tape became a regular feature of my course in Greek Literature.

Of course, the Yale cheer inspired the universal nonsense words of cheers all over the country, and thus preserved a vestige, however unrecognized, of Greek study in American Academia.

William A. Ruf North Andover, MA