

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Four minutes

Four minutes.

That was the average life span.

That was what he prepared for because it was what he was told, and it was what he believed.

He headed back home to Rochester for one last visit, because our government allowed the Army boys who were about to become machine gunners in the Philippines one last chance to see their families.

Four minutes was the average, mind you. That means a lot of people lasted far less than four minutes in battle, and some lasted far more.

At the very least, they let him come home, come back to Rochester. Unfortunately — since his parents had passed away, and his siblings apparently didn't get the message — when he arrived at the train station there was no one there to greet him.

I can only imagine what that must have felt like. Actually, I don't want to imagine what that felt like. It is too painful.

I don't want to think about what it must have been like to be told, "This is your next assignment," any more than I want to contemplate how unbelievably long four minutes must have seemed to those poor souls trapped under rubble.

No one had to spell out the fact that it would be his last assignment. That much was understood.

It took them about four minutes to die. It takes many people less than four minutes to make love. The two acts are inextricably intertwined, death and the creation of life — a dilemma of testament, and destiny. One, then the other, then the other, *ad infinitum*.

So he headed back to Rochester on the train, alone, with more than enough time to contemplate his fate.

He was no less determined, however, to go into battle, to do what his country needed and demanded of him, which

was everything. That's what was right, so that's what he would do.

At least he had the chance to go home one more time. That's the moment I have trouble forgetting, even though I never lived it. Maybe my genetic memory is encoded with the trauma. Maybe memories can be passed down from generation to generation in our genetic code, ultimately changed by life's experiences then passed down to the next generation. It seems incredible.

Maybe his story just shakes me so deeply, that I think of it now even though he's been dead for more than 20 years.

The *ad infinitum* could have been *finitum*, then I would never have been an item.

My father, it seems, was destined for the Philippines, destined to be a machine gunner. When he returned to Rochester and saw the empty train station, he still found a way to visit his brothers and sisters before he was deployed — before returning to the Pacific — in the service of his country.

Lt. Dan might have said my father went to his "destiny." But those soldiers' destinies changed. It was a quirk of fate that his orders were changed when he returned, before he was sent into battle. Perhaps if they hadn't, my life wouldn't be. You wouldn't be reading this column. You'd be doing something else.

Change one tiny grain of sand, they say.

It probably took you less than four minutes to read this column. They also say, "All's well that ends well."

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