



And I Knew It Belonged to Me

By the time I was four years of age, I was pretty good at noticing things. I was the tail end of six children. Our house was small. We slept four girls in one room, two boys in another, upstairs. When I became aware that the boys room was empty, an explanation was given that I did not understand at the time. It was 1945. I don't remember the boys leaving but noticed when they came home, of course. I was five then.

They came home from military service, all strong and handsome in their uniforms. They were so tall. I did not know them, yet I knew they belonged to me.

While standing in my usual position, looking upward into the circle of adults and near adults gathered round in our tiny kitchen, I noticed the abundance of laughter. Whatever the source or cause, did not matter for I knew somehow, it belonged to me too.

On occasion, I'd be hoisted up to their level. At close range I could examine their smiles, their hair, the lapels, the medals, whiskers,

the smell of shaving cream. It was a marvelous new world to me watching them interact with my sisters, my mom, and dad. Aunts and uncles were dropping in. There were stories, drinks, meals, and more laughter. Not just ours, but many families were showing up at church proudly seated with uniformed men at their sides.

Sixty-two years later [2008], I know the joy of that year was preceded by many years of tension, sorrow, and hard times. If you've noticed, we happen to be in those times now, ...again. Our world is at war on many fronts. Brothers and sisters are away. Spouses are absent. Children are deprived of normality. Populations are on the move. Refugee camps are cramped and inadequate. Countries willing to take them are few. There are food shortages and diseases untreated. Shall we look farther? Shall we look away?

Politicians struggle to communicate. Diplomacy is bartered. Allies are purchased. Prices rise.

Ethics and compassion and justice are compromised. Military budgets are out of control.

Service men and women come and go. People, polar bears, and penguins cry out for mercy. Does everyone notice? Are we really asking, "What, in the name of God, has gone wrong? What, what, what, do we do to heal the world upset?" Does this belong to me?

Okay, I will light my candle and pray. I'll give a contribution to provide a free phone card to a service person. I will watch and inform myself and vote for my candidates. I'll sign petitions to stop destruction of natural habitats. I'll volunteer. I'll give to relief drives. I will recycle, reuse, plant a tree, drive less and slower, adopt an animal, speak up. I'll cry. I'll get angry. I'll write. I will wait. I'll hope and pray until all boys and girls are home; until all families can gather in joy and share a meal with laughter abundant. Somehow, I know it belongs to me.

