

Westminster jewelry store only part of Hurwitz family's rich history, last of 4 brothers – March 10, 2024

Melvin Hurwitz, 99 years old on March 12, grew up in Westminster with three brothers—all reaching military age during World War II.

Their parents, Rae and Benjamin Hurwitz, had come to America from Russia in the early 1900s. Benjamin (known as Ben), learned clockmaking as a 14-year-old in Russia and then became a skilled watchmaker in America. In 1920, the Hurwitz family founded Colonial Jewelry on West Main Street in Westminster.

Four boys were born to Rae and Ben: Albert (1920), William (1923), Melvin (1925), and Gerald (1926). All four brothers attended Westminster High School (Albert, class of 1938; Willy, class of 1941; Melvin, class of 1942). The youngest son, Jerry, graduated in 1944 from Park School in Baltimore. During WWII, all four sons reached draft age.

Albert, a talented artist, had dreamed of becoming a Marine, and when he graduated from Peabody College (Nashville, TN) in 1942, he immediately joined the Marine Corps. Assigned to the 1st Marine Division in the Pacific, Albert (also a graduate of the Maryland Institute of Art) became a combat artist. With his unit, he saw action in the campaigns of Guadalcanal, Okinawa and Peleliu.

Willy, class valedictorian at WHS and recipient of the prestigious Rotary Award, joined the Navy in 1943, after completing his first year at Peabody College in Nashville. Willy took accelerated training at Carson-Newman College and was assigned as a naval officer aboard the USS *Tregoning* in the Pacific.

Melvin, described in his high school yearbook as vivacious and zestful, was a drummer in the Boy Scouts and college orchestra, a talent that would serve him well in the military. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps, after turning 18 in his freshman year at Peabody College. In aptitude tests, Melvin showed unusual skill in Morse code (which he attributes to his drumming), so he trained as a radio operator and gunner. He served on a B-17 bomber in the 8th Air Force, 493rd Bomb Group, based in England.

The intellectual and youngest son, Jerry, graduated from a private high school in 1944, as the war was moving toward Allied victory. Jerry joined the Army, giving the Hurwitz family four different branches of service to worry over.

Always close, the brothers stayed in touch during their service. Melvin and Albert shared a weekend in North Carolina when Albert was stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC, and Melvin was training in Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC.

Later an amazing reunion took place on a Pacific island. Willy's ship docked in Okinawa, where Willy believed his brother Al was stationed. Willy searched through multiple camps on the island, asking for his brother. Albert wrote, "A jeep driver in the Army was so moved by Willy's efforts, he volunteered to serve as his private chauffeur, shlepping him around" until they found

Albert. “Everyone was sincerely moved by the idea of two brothers enjoying an accidental reunion in the vastness of the Pacific theatre of war.”

Yet all their meetings were not rosy. Melvin recalls the day he learned that his mother, Rae, was ill. Melvin was in gunnery school in Arizona, when a Red Cross official gave him leave to go home to Maryland because his mother was suffering a breakdown after the last of her sons was drafted. Melvin flew across the country to comfort her, before returning to his base. Thinking back on that experience, Melvin says, “I was young and full of excitement, and I didn’t have the maturity to realize what my parents were facing.”

Melvin went on to fly missions over Germany, Czechoslovakia, France, and Holland, serving in the 8th Air Force through the end of the war.

The four brothers all survived the war, and their parents wanted a photograph of them in their uniforms. That photo tells a rich story.

After the war, brothers Albert and Jerry became academics, teaching and writing. Albert taught art and published the classic book, *Children and Their Art*. Jerry became a professor of philosophy. Brothers Will and Melvin opened branches of Colonial Jewelers in Frederick and Annapolis. Today, the Colonial Jewelers in Frederick, MD is run by Will’s granddaughter, Sarah Hurwitz Robey. The business that Ben Hurwitz opened in 1920 has now passed its 100th birthday and is still family-run.

Melvin is the last surviving brother, and he lives in Frederick, traveling with the Best Defense Foundation to WWII reunions around the world where he speaks of his war-time experiences. He can also be found occasionally in Colonial Jewelers in Frederick, greeting customers and keeping the family stories alive.

For an in-depth interview with Melvin Hurwitz, visit the YouTube channel for the Historical Society of Carroll County, for a video entitled “Hurwitz Brothers WWII.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igflnCD26BI>

On Tuesday, March 19, there will be a joint Box Lunch Talk at Grace Lutheran Church, 21 Carroll Street, Westminster, hosted by the Historical Society of Carroll County. Steve Bowersox will speak about Westminster High alumni in World War II. Galen Roop will present Westminster High School — “Auld Lang Syne.” The first talk will begin at noon. Admission is \$3.00 for Historical Society members and \$7.00 for non-members.

Guest columnist Antigoni L. Ladd is CEO of Tigrett Leadership Academy in Gettysburg and a Board member of the Adams County Historical Society.

Image 1: Credit: Melvin Hurwitz Caption: The Hurwitz Family - Left to right: Gerald (kneeling); William (seated); Rae; Albert (standing behind his father); Benjamin (seated); Melvin.

*Image 2: Credit: Frederick News Post
Jewelers in Frederick, MD.*

Caption: Melvin Hurwitz at the family's Colonial