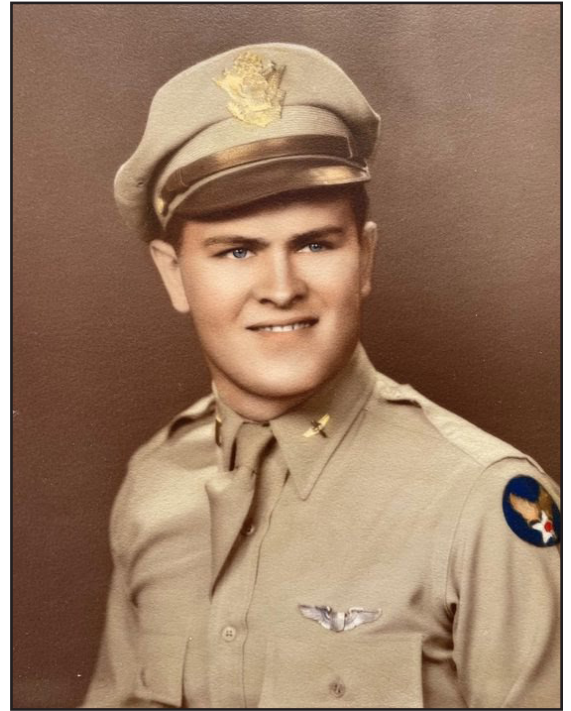


Stories Of Service: Carl J. Estersohn

By Elio Estersohn, May 28, 2022

This story was submitted as a part of our ongoing Stories of Service project. Have a story of a veteran to share? Send us a story today!

My grandfather was a 1st Lieutenant during WWII, in what is now the Air Force. Carl J. Estersohn was a fascinating guy. He was a splendid father, spouse, brother, and grandpa. He lived to the age of 93. The aforementioned was healthy and joyful for 92 and a half of those years. During the last several months of his life, however, he had some health issues with his heart and his arteries, and was in and out of hospitals during that time. In his final two weeks we brought him back home because we knew he would not live for much longer, so we wanted him to expire in the comfort of his own home. The morning before he passed he couldn't communicate that well, which was worrisome. He passed during the halftime show of the Super Bowl. It was a coincidence, but felt very calculated, since he was a big fan of football. My grandfather changed the lives of so many, including my own. He was a war hero, an orthodontic surgeon, an entrepreneur, and a family man. He was and always will be a role-model.



My grandfather grew up in a home of immigrants. His mother moved to the US from Russia at three, and his father moved to the US as a child. Both of them escaped Russia due to the persecution they were facing for being Jewish. My grandfather had a younger sister, Gladys, who is thriving at ninety-one years old. The two of them were raised in Brooklyn during the Great Depression. He grew up in a lower middle-class Russian Jewish household. His father was an auditor, and his mother was a stay-at-home mom.



When my grandfather was eighteen, he applied to the Army to become a pilot. During his time as an aviator in WWII, he became a distinguished war hero who earned many medals and rose in the ranks quickly for his acts of heroism. I remember, when I was six years old,

a town historian from that town in Belgium, flew all the way to New York City just to meet my grandfather, and I remember how he looked at my grandfather with such admiration. This memory made an incredible impact on my life because I realized how significant my grandfather was to the survival of many people in that small town in Belgium. A year before he died, Reddit invited my grandfather to take part in an interview online, where he discussed his experiences as a WWII bomber pilot. The interview was published in a book several months later titled "Ask Me Anything". His fellow participants were President Barack Obama, Spike Lee, and Buzz Aldrin. In this interview my grandfather discussed the thirty-five missions he piloted for the US, including successful missions in Germany where he came under heavy oppositional fire and returned to home base in England, most missions with minimal damage done to his B-17 bomber.

He was the man I want to be like. He was brave, smart, funny, caring, and thoughtful. He never compromises his values for anything. My grandfather never gave up and always fought for what he thought was right. He lived by these values for all 93 years of his life.

My grandfather was married for fifty-three years to my grandmother, Betty Humbert Estersohn. They had a son, my dad, Pieter Estersohn. Betty died from breast cancer when I was two-years-old, my first memory was when she died. Even after her early passing, my grandfather stayed loyal to her because he felt like nobody could compare. My grandfather slowed down with his increasing age, he still was happy and healthy, he traveled and spent time with friends.

During his last several days, it was hard to see him in his condition, it took me a bit but we spoke and I told him how much he meant to me.



I am thankful for the time I got to spend with him, it still feels like our time was cut short, even though he lived for a long-ass time, I still wished I could have gotten to spend more time with him, so I could continue to model my citizenship after him and for him to see me grow further into adulthood. It is very important for you to spend time with your loved ones and to make sure that they know what they mean to you. Thank you.

Soon after he moved to Red Hook in his late 80s, Carl Estersohn had a chance to relive his memories aboard a refurbished B-17 flown into Poughkeepsie Airport by the Collings Foundation in 2015. John Vincent filmed his interview with Chris Klose. Then Carl, joined by his son, Pieter, grandson Elio, and Chris, took off for a low-level flight up the Hudson River -- Carl's first time in a 17 since his last mission in the spring of 1945. Watch the interview here: youtu.be/T3uhs8V33H0



From left to right: Christopher Klose, Carl J. Estersohn, and Elio Estersohn