

## Earth Day 2013 & Tribute to Eugene Ivers

Good afternoon. We are gathered here today on Earth Day, to replace a tree which was knocked down during Hurricane Sandy. This new tree will provide much oxygen for us and a home for birds to nest. The tree that fell during Hurricane Sandy isn't an ordinary tree. It's a tree that was planted in 1944 by a mom for her special son. This is the story of Mrs. Iver's son, Eugene.

Eugene A. Ivers was born in Allendale in 1922. His nickname was Gene. As a child he loved to frolic through the streams and meadows of Allendale. He especially enjoyed animals, and even had a pet goat named Gandy. Gandy was a fine pet who helped Eugene with his chores by eating the high grass on the Iver's property. All the children in the neighborhood worshiped Eugene's goat. They even had a funeral for Gandy after he ate some moldy hay.

Eugene treasured working with his hands. He loved snuggling up next to his dad, Charles, and learning about car mechanics. Mr. Ivers was the owner of the Franklin Garage in town. Charles Ivers was a courageous and loving man. He fought for our country in Europe in 1918. Despite suffering from heart and lung problems from Mustard gas in World War I, he returned home, married, had two children and ran a successful garage.

Sadly, his battle with the war injuries finally gave out and Charles died when Eugene was only 12 years old. Although devastated, young Eugene pushed on. He became the "Man of the house" helping his mom and younger sister, 10 year old, Evelyn. He helped his family by working as a car mechanic. He was a real whiz with cars, and always wanted to make his customers happy.

One day a man left his broken down car with Eugene. Although Eugene was struck with a bad cold he wanted to get the job done. However, his cold became worse and turned into pneumonia. The doctor ordered him to bed. Despite his illness, Eugene was concerned that his customer needed his car back, and so he asked his mom to send his buddies to his bedroom.

From his bed, Eugene gave his friends step- by- step instructions on how to put the broken down car back together. His devoted friends listened carefully to Eugene's directions. They then went to the garage, took the parts out of metal coffee cans, and incredibly put the car back together. After he beat his illness, Eugene's honesty and skill were in high demand.

His reputation for excellence quickly spread and many of Allendale's residents went to him for his services. His love of mechanics also gave this teenager cash flow. Recently, his sister Evelyn, stated, *"This enabled Eugene to earn every penny he needed and to never ask our mom for any money."* His mom often said, *"Eugene did everything right."*

After graduating from Ramsey High School in 1938, Eugene's love for mechanics led him to get a job at Wright Aeronauticals. The Wright Corporation was a leader in making engines for airplanes. These engines played a big part in helping America in World War II. Eugene quickly impressed his bosses and was promoted to "Ace Mechanic."

On December 7, 1941, America changed. Suddenly young Americans had to go overseas to fight in World War II. At 19 years old, Eugene was one of ten million men to be drafted. However, Eugene's bosses wanted him to stay with the company. One morning, the boss approached Eugene and said, "We can use you here. The government will allow you to stay in America and avoid fighting overseas."

After a few moments, Eugene said, "If I stay here how many others will also look to avoid fighting? I'm going to sign up to protect our country." Eugene signed up for the United States Air Force. His expert skills soon found him in an important role as a gunner on one of the famous B-24's. He was assigned to the War in the Pacific and was on a team of 13 crewmen. The name of his bomber was the *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

Eugene loved carrying on the patriotic tradition of his family and enjoyed the friendship of his fellow airmen. Stationed halfway around the world, near Australia, Eugene even bumped into a few men from Bergen County. One of them was Edward Hamilton, his former classmate at Allendale elementary school. Sadly, Edward Hamilton was one of eight Allendale men who died in World War II. Likewise, the Iver's family was soon to receive a telegram.

On Wednesday, April 12, 1944, the *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was on its 102<sup>nd</sup> mission. The plane fell behind the formation and was hit with anti-aircraft fire and attacked by 3 fighter planes. Gravely wounded, the plane went into a flat spiral. Incredibly, eyewitnesses report that two to four parachutes managed to escape the falling fortress. One of the parachutes held Eugene. He had escaped. However, eyewitnesses claim that the fighter planes returned and strafed him.

Eugene's remains were found by natives on the beach of New Guinea. Part of this group included a priest from Ho Ho Kus. Recognizing Eugene's hometown on his dog tag, the priest made sure his remains were protected. After the war Eugene's remains were brought home and he was interred next to his dad in the Paramus Church cemetery.

And so today, Earth Day 2013, we, Girl Scout Troop, 4128, are here to be sure that Mrs. Iver's wishes of carrying on Eugene's legacy continues. The way the new tree will provide oxygen for us, and a home for the birds to nest, let us be inspired by the sacrifices *all* our service men and women made for us. Let us repeat Abraham Lincoln's message at Gettysburg:

"It is for us the living, to be dedicated to the unfinished work of our military... that we here, highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain--- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom --- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

*Pete LaBarbiera*

### Sources of Information

Joanne Hart & Family

Evelyn Caffrey (Eugene's sister)

Pacific Wrecks. com