

“Being Chicken Little,”
by Stephen J. Schlegel

Good evening.

It is nice to see you all, to be together to enjoy the close of the season.

I thank professor Klapper for the kind introduction. I give him special commendation for a steady and kind hand in leading us through a remarkable season of fine papers (and poems) that have made this season most enjoyable. I thank each of you who created, presented, attended, and listened to the programs. They all reflected positively on our members and those who came and went through the years since 1874. I thank the Committee on Arrangements and Exercises, most ably led by Michael Koenigsknecht for the confidence it has shown me with the opportunity to present this evening. I am humbled.

At closing exercises last year Jim Thompson explained advertising and media impacts during our lives. His fine paper helped me to recognize I might be able to make some sense out of various circumstances, events, and individuals that have shaped our life experiences. I thank him for that. I hope I was right.

We all experienced the events of September 11, 2001. Individually our experiences of these events are unique. I had spent years working part time in the Wall Street area and days amounting to weeks in the towers that fell. At the time of the first attack in the garage in 1993, I was working at my former firm's office three blocks away. I ran from the office and was at the scene before many of the first responders. Our law firm ended up with some of the work for insurance companies that resulted from that attack. We came to have a photographic record in our office of every square inch of every room in both Towers. It amounted to quite a photo album of mostly mundane

office interiors, but shots of the blast area were dramatically revealing of the power involved. I'm sure some of these shots are still hanging in the attorney's offices there. They are very compelling.

In 1995 it was proposed that we merge our New York office with a firm which had space on the 85th floor of Tower One. Although some in our firm supported the idea, for various business reasons I felt we should not accept the proposition. Through the grace of God, as is said, the board of the firm decided against the merger proposition and we took space at Chase Plaza, a short block away at the Chase Plaza building.

On 9-11, I was in Chicago. My partners and associates on the 39th floor of Chase Plaza all survived the attacks. Everyone at the securities firm that occupied the 85th floor of Tower One did not.

In the next few years, like most, I became engrossed and involved in the great debates, fueled by cable T.V. and other media as well as the major political parties. I found myself arguing with old friends, and some family, about the proper responses, based upon so-called facts we knew nothing about except for the pronouncements of the media pundits and politicians, all of whom were severely conflicted by profit motives, either ratings and income, or the wish to raise enough money to continue elected positions.

A few years ago I turned off cable news. I feel I should have done it before they hooked me almost to the point of addiction. It remains to be seen whether the politics of fear and/or media of advertising ratings prove a positive or negative forces but I just got tired and negatively affected by it. So, I started to attend more Monday night meetings of this club, and I didn't need the cable fix and my attitude began to improve.

Writer Anne Lamott is applauded for honesty and humor. Her self-deprecating humor belies an incredible talent to turn a phrase. While struggling with her experiences at a funeral of a child of a friend, she wrote, “Some aching beauty comes with huge loss, although maybe not right away, when it would be helpful. Life is a very powerful force, despite the constant discouragement. So if you’re a person with connections to life, full tendrils eventually break through the sidewalk of loss.”¹ Lamott, a faith-based writer, chronicles her history as a single mother, an admitted recovering addict and a sometimes confused soul. She has written a series of books describing in humorous terms the two movie theaters of her mind, theater A, and theater B. Many of us, like Lamott, have at least two theaters in the movie houses of our minds. I know I do. Theater A, is a place where films express the positive and peaceful side. Theater B shows films of fear, anger, and destruction backed up by soundtracks of death. Today we now proceed to our local theaters and we have twenty-one theaters to choose from. On any given day it is likely that only one or two of those twenty-one will be “Theater As,” if any at all. Lamott essentially describes her two theaters and her struggles with her “raggedy” faith to bridge between the two. She uses faith and spirituality. Others use different methods.

In 1998 newsman Tom Brokaw published his “Our Greatest Generation.” Those short biographies included pieces on a few people that I either knew or had worked for to some degree. However, all affected all of our lives somewhat.

My folks, their brothers, cousins, co-workers and friends, were part of that generation. Most of them lived through two world wars, a few other wars, the greatest period of rapid advance of technology in history, the great depression, great inflation, and

¹ Lamott, Anne, “A Journal of My Son’s First Son,” Riverhead Books, NY, 2012, pg. 78.

a couple of very deep and long recessions. Many lived long enough to experience 9-11 and its following wars. They started without planes, most without cars, telephones, or modern medicine. A year before she died, mother revealed that because of various flus and diseases we have eliminated or controlled today, half the children she started elementary school with died before her graduation in 1929.

Dad was born in Peoria 1914 the same year Wrigley Field and Fourth Presbyterian Churches were opened. He had two brothers, one older and one younger. All were born on the dining room table in a home in Peoria that his mother required her fiancé to build for her as a condition of her agreement to marry him. She was pretty tough. Family lore has it that she announced that she would have three boys and that they would each occupy a bed in the same dormer room across the hall from her bedroom on the second floor. That's exactly what happened.

Mother was born in 1915 on the south side of Peoria. She had two older brothers. She graduated high school in 1933 and a year later came to Chicago. She never met dad until they were both in Chicago in their early 20s. The depression was particularly hard on mother's family. She related to me a few months before she died that her father started a poultry business when she was a little girl, financed it with a mortgage on their new family home, failed in business and lost the home to the bank. Through her elementary school years they relied on her mother's efforts taking in sewing and laundry. Her father never recovered and had long periods of unemployment. Mother shocked me with the revelation that there were many days when they went without food. She had never mentioned this to me before.

One year later again, in 1916, Ed Alexander was born in the Cincinnati area. He came to be known as "Alex," grew up and attended the University of Cincinnati. After World War II, Alex became a co-worker with dad here in Chicago. Alex, his wife and son became some of our family's "best friends."

On the north side of Peoria, in dad's home, things were somewhat better. That same family legend has it that his mother required her husband to work either two full-time factory jobs as a machine repairman or at least double shifts at one company.

Grandma would never consider borrowing a dime or letting her boys leave home until they had worked their way through Bradley which is situated high on the bluff looking down on their family home. After graduation all three boys struck out for Chicago.

Grandpa returned home for dinner between shifts one night, went upstairs to wash up, and asked his wife to call him when dinner was ready. He laid down for a few minutes rest, and never woke up. He was 74.

On the south-side of Peoria mother completed her high school in three and a half years, survived the depression by babysitting for 50 cents a night and working like a nanny taking care of another family's kids, cooking all their meals for \$5.00 a week. She described her excitement after graduation in 1933 when she came to Chicago with a girl friend to see the World's Fair. She then worked in Peoria for about a year and made her way to Chicago to attend dress-designing school, took a class to learn how to operate a comptometer, and got a job working in the office of the shoe buyer at Montgomery Wards while she attended design school. She made many girl friends at Wards. Notes she made that I discovered after she died describe, and I quote, "One by one we girls got married and had families. We kept together meeting every other month having dinner

parties.” When she was at design school she met dad who had graduated from Bradley. As she wrote, “Norm had played in dance bands working himself through school. He had played in bands that a friend of mine had played in. My friend suggested Norm look me up at school if he wanted to take a girl out. He apparently did because he called and we dated for three years and were married October 28, 1939.”² They danced together, sometimes every night for 69 years.

A week ago today I was listening to the radio and heard an interview with Rick Atkinson, author of the newly released “Guns at Last Light: A history of the War in Western Europe during 1944 and 1945.” Then last Tuesday I learned that Mr. Atkinson was to appear Friday on his book tour at the Author’s Group at the Union League Club. The following day, last Wednesday, I attended a panel discussion concerning questions of public safety versus the potential loss of personal freedoms in the Constitutional context and in light of the Transportation Safety Agency’s role as part of so-called “War on Terror.”

I was involved in editing this paper at the time. Mr. Atkinson remarked during his radio interview that his now three volume history of World War II was motivated by his belief that the events of World War II were still the greatest influence on American society, culture, and hence each of our life’s experiences, and of our collective and individual psyches. I found myself yelling at the radio that he could not have known that I had written this paper and I wished him to please wait another week before he let that particular cat out of the bag.

² Brief personal history composed by Elizabeth A. Schlegel; record of marriage, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, October 28, 1939.

At the time of my parent's marriage in 1939, the Japanese had invaded Southwestern China, occupied Nanjing, and committed the so-called rape of Nanjing, torturing, raping, and killing over 100,000 civilians.

Hitler's war machine had marched into Austria and set the stage for the war in Europe, the Holocaust, and all of the events that followed in World War II in Europe.

My father's older brother was commissioned in the navy as a Lieutenant J.G. He went on to make a career at the navy rising to be the highest ranked lawyer in Navy history. He had attended Northwestern Law School just before the war and despite that the Navy tried to make him an officer on a gun boat, training in Lake Michigan out of Great Lakes. Lucky for him, he became violently sea sick the minute he ever stepped on a boat so he was relegated to shore duty and did not see battle.

Dad's younger brother enlisted in the Army Air corps. He wanted to fly. He was most disappointed to be found unfit to fly by reason of vision problems and he ended up on mechanical duty primarily at bomber bases in India through the course of the war.

Dad had worked for a man who knew the regional director of the War Department here in Chicago. He gave dad the highest recommendation as a young business man who would be able to organize and manage munitions manufacture and distribution needs of America's rapidly growing war machine. In 1942 he was appointed as an assistant director of the war department for the Midwest region where he served with highest commendation until the end of the war. He was a 27 year old with responsibility for making sure the bombs and bullets got to the places they needed to get. He wasn't a fan of Harry Truman, but sometimes wore the Presidential seal he was given for his service, proud of the emblem and of dad's service.

Back in Cincinnati, Ed Alexander graduated from the University of Cincinnati, married his college sweetheart and attempted to enlist in the navy to become a fighter pilot. The navy however “4F-ed him out” because of eye problems and a deviated septum which had resulted from years of competitive football and baseball at both collegiate and semi-pro levels. After the Navy wouldn’t take him and while working a couple of jobs to make ends meet he learned that the Army Air Corps not only needed thousands of intelligent men but was paying one and a half times, essentially a major’s pay which was more than he could earn at home. He served as a bombardier and navigator in squadrons flying bombing missions over Germany until the end of the war.³

At the end of November in 1944 mom and dad apparently decided to consummate their marriage, and I was conceived. I guess they were tired of waiting for the end of a war that seemed would never come. Another couple in Texas had the same idea at about the same time. On August 14th, 1945 I was born here in Chicago. About the same time on the same morning another boy named Stephen was born in Waco, Texas. A few hours later, emperor Hirohito threw his hands in the air and in his best impression of Roberto Duran but in Japanese of course, said, “No mas, no mas,” and indicated surrender. My mother always claimed that it was my screaming at birth that caused the surrender, V. J. Day, and dancing in the streets throughout America. She had a tendency to overstate her joy. I’ve always liked the thought that the comedian Steve Martin’s mother must have felt the same way in Texas. Although I have never met or spoken with him, I have felt a kinship to Martin and his work since learning the circumstance.

³ Video interview, 2002, The Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum, Savannah Georgia. Correspondences, April 17 and June 3, 2003 confirming interviews, copies thereof, and Deed of gift of Wartime Memorabilia to the Museum.

The Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper from the next morning, August 15th was among some old papers mom had saved. The headline in 4 inch type was PEACE, sub-headed "Truman Announces Jap Surrender," etc. Somehow dad had another sub-headline printed, "Emperor says Birth of Schlegel 'the last straw.'" Their sense of joy, relief and humor notwithstanding, it may be a clue to some personality traits I developed. But, that's all for a different venue.

My folks and their friends were far from complainers. They rarely dwelt on unfortunate occurrences and always talked in terms of positive opportunities for both hard work and play. The older I get the more I marvel at their positive attitudes considering some of the tough times they lived through.

Alex and his son began taking fishing trips with dad and I to Canada in 1957. Those trips went on for nearly 20 years. From the late 60's until Alex retired and moved to Florida, I played golf with him most Saturdays each summer until he was in his mid 70s, retired, and moved to Florida. Every day that I've seen the man, he's come up to me with a big grin, said how great it was to see me, and remarked that it was another bonus day, wasn't it?.

One very rainy Saturday morning about 1985, I was to play golf with dad, Alex, and another friend. I met dad and our fourth for coffee at the golf course and they remarked that they wondered where Alex was just before tee time. There was no way dad and our fourth were going to play considering the rain. I knew where Alex was and I was going to walk around the golf course with him in the rain. Sure enough, I walked out to the first tee and Alex, in full bright yellow rain gear, plastic covers over his clubs, was

standing there with a big, wide grin and greeted me as he always did. We didn't have to talk about whether the others were going to play. We knew we would.

After a few holes, I asked him just how he came to have such a positive attitude, especially on such miserable days. Through the rest of the round, he told me some of his wartime experiences. Historians have since interviewed him for military archives and museums. Books have been written about the squadrons he served in. I have related his story many times, once to Tony Batko, who suggested I might make a paper of it. For a lot of reasons I dedicate this to Tony.

In late 1944 and early 1945, the period of my own personal gestation, World War II was raging in both the Pacific and European theaters.

On the Pacific side, B 29 bombers engaged in thousands of nightly bombing raids over the cities of Japan. In March of 1945 on one evening alone, U.S. forces were documented to have killed over 100,000 civilians in Tokyo alone. By all accounts, from the time that I was conceived until the time that I was born so many civilians in Japanese cities were killed by U.S. conventional and incendiary bombs that a third of the populations of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and of a dozen other cities in the United States would have been lost if the shoes were on the other feet.⁴

During the same period of time the 788th bombardment squadron had absorbed the survivors from the 859th, and flew 89 bombing missions over Germany. My friend Alex was a bombardier and sometimes navigator on 29 of those extremely dangerous missions. The B 24 bombers from numerous bases, carrying crews of 10 would meet at pre-assigned points and in formation proceed to their intended targets. Sometimes as

⁴ "The Fog of War" an Errol Morris film, Sony Pictures, 2003, comments of former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara

many as 1,000 planes at a time would fly into intense flak and German fighter defenses. Much of the time 50% of the planes were shot down and lost. Figure 1,000 planes with crews of 10. Ten-thousand men took off and only 5,000 returned. Two-thousand men flew in these squadrons. Less than 100 survived. The highest casualty rate of any service branch.

On March 18, 1945, crew number 92 from the 788th bombersquadron led by pilot first lieutenant William R. Chapman led a second squadron of another bomb group on a bombing mission to Berlin. About 25 miles from the target, they encountered a barrage of heavy flak, but went through with apparently no damage. Alex was the pilotage navigator and reported they were coming right in on target. About 20 seconds before bombs away, the plane was hit directly by heavy flak just forward of the bomb bay. Just prior to the hit they were at 19,800 feet and the first thing the pilot noticed after the explosion was the they were at 16,500 feet in a tight, right turn. He had a severe jolt under his seat and his left leg went numb, but with the co-pilot's help, they managed to right the ship. A white fire was burning beneath the flight deck. A molten piece of flak landed between the co-pilot's legs who stomped on it without thinking and the molten flak bore through the steel and dropped out the bottom of the airplane as the pilot later said, "with the ease of an ash burning through paper". Half of the oxygen outlets had no pressure. Flak was bursting all around. The pilot looked up, saw the bomber stream turning left away from the target and turned left to follow them out. The first navigator had been killed by a piece of flack which went through his helmet and out the other side. The pilot learned that the engineer standing by the bomb bay to hold the control panel open at bombs away had been blown out of the airplane. There was a large hole in the

ship about the size of the forward bomb bay where the engineer had been standing but the bombs were still in the ship. The bombardier and the pilot both tried but it was impossible to release them.

They were still over the center of Berlin with a lot of flack bursting around them. Unable to control the ship very well, the pilot and co-pilot decided to head for the Russian lines to the east. Alex told them to take a heading of 90 degrees. The fire was out and the pilot reported that the bombardier's glass had been blown out by the concussion and that the air rushing through the huge hole probably helped blow out the fire below the flight deck. The co-pilot called the leader to tell him they were heading for Russia. There was no answer. The liaison transmitter and the so called mickey sets had been shattered. The catwalk was all that was holding the ship together. It was impossible to release the bombs as the releases were blown off and the shackles were twisted and distorted. The co-pilot had released the arming wire from the shackles.

They cleared the eastern suburbs of Berlin, found it would be impossible to land, but the pilot tried to get across the lines to bail out the crew. At 11,000 feet they were losing altitude at about 800 feet a minute. Number 3 and number 4 engines had no manifold pressure. The pilot's left leg felt dead and without the co-pilot's help they could have not made it to the eastern battle lines where the Russians and Germans infantries were engaged.

A German fighter passed them from 7 o'clock and knocked out the tail guns. Three Russian Yak fighter planes came up and chased the German away. The pilot dipped the bomber's left wing when he noticed the red star on the Russian planes. He reported that they looked the bombers over and turned back towards the tail and that a

minute or two later a rain of slugs slammed through the waist and bomb bay. He thought each Russian fighter made one pass, as they were raked over three times. They were now over the Russian lines. He kept dipping the left wing hoping they would recognize them. They were now at 6,500 feet and flack had been following them all the way from Berlin.

After the second Yak made a pass at them, the pilot told the co-pilot to order the crew to bail out. After the bailout order was confirmed to be received and the co-pilot called again and received no acknowledgement. He tapped the captain on the shoulder, left and bailed out. The captain watched them go. He stopped a minute and looked at the navigator who was laying across his table with blood all over the flight deck. There was a large hole in his head and part of his brains lay on the table. The pilot said it was "awfully quiet, then I heard the slugs from the third Yak ripping through the ship and I got down on the station 5 bulkhead." He said it was difficult to recognize the ship from that position as everything was twisted and covered with oil. He then went out the bomb bay himself.

He reported that he went into a cloud right after leaving the ship, so he opened his chute. His first sensation was like being suspended in air seeming very natural to be floating down. He saw two chutes about 3,000 feet below and then a Yak fighter came in and made a pass at him. He could see tracers streaking by him and hear the fighter's guns as he fired. The first two passes he made were while he was too dazed to think and just hung there and watched. However, on the third and fourth pass he had remembered what he'd been told about "slipping a chute" and pulled on the right risers so hard he nearly collapsed it. As he did this he saw another Yak making passes at two chutes below him.

About 500 feet from the ground he heard rifles and machine guns firing from the ground so he kept up the evasive action slipping his chute. Some of the slugs whistled by him pretty close. As he neared the ground he turned the chute so he was facing downwind and the jolt was not as much as he had suspected. He reported that maybe he was too scared to have much feeling. As he collapsed his chute on the ground he saw a Yak turning to make another pass and he seemed to take a long time to unfasten his chute. He rolled on the ground about 20 feet away from his chute and lay still as the fighter passed over. The Yak did not fire this time.

Men were running down the hill towards him firing overhead and he stood up and held his hands up. He first thought maybe he had landed in German held territory but as they came closer he saw some of the cossack hats with the Russian star on them. He shouted, "Ya Americanets" over and over. They had him walk in front with his hands overhead to a truck where they had the radio operator and the tail gunner. As they were driving off a Russian soldier rode up on a horse waving a revolver, which he swung at the tail gunner a couple of times and pointed the revolver at his head and snapped it off several times. Luckily, it did not go off. When they were about 50 yards away some of the other soldiers stopped him.

The pilot and the other members of the crew had been separated from Alex. In a taped interview in 2002 for a military history museum Alex related his experiences during his bailout in much the same terms as the pilot. Passes by Yak fighters fired at him. He slipped his chute. Reportedly, he landed in an area where Russian infantryman and German infantryman were converging. Upon landing the Russians who were holding the Germans at bay came upon Alex who like his pilot, followed survival training

and shouted, “Ya Americanets”! One of the Russian soldiers hit Alex in the head with the butt of his gun knocking him out on the ground. When he came to, however, there was no further abuse. He was taken to a home not far away, reunited with the rest of his crew in the next day or two. The entire crew eventually found its way back to their base in England, but with stops at Lublin, Poland, Poltava, Ukraine, Bari, Italy, London, and finally Norwich.

Weeks had passed since their departure on the 18th of March. The navigator and the bombardier were killed. The bombardier was given a funeral by the Russians on March 19, 1945 which the rest of the rescued crew attended. Upon arrival in London, Alex sent a cable to his wife in the states. It was April 28th and he simply stated, “I’m in good shape, Love, Edwin J. Alexander, Jr.”

On April 30th, Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun took their lives in Hitler’s bunker in Berlin. A week later, on May 8th, V.E. Day was declared. Alex didn’t have to fly another bombing mission again, returned to the U.S. and was discharged with honors a few weeks after being reunited with his wife.

During all of this time the American bombings in Japan continued relentlessly. On August 6th the Enola Gay dropped the Atom bomb on Hiroshima, killing at least 78,000 people. Three days later on August 9th, 35,000 people were reported killed on Nagasaki by the second atomic bomb.

A week after September 11, 2001 a full fifty-six years later, I called my friend Alex at his new home in Florida to check in and see how he was doing. After acknowledging my call with his usual reference of happiness to hear from me and his assurance that he was fine and happy with yet another bonus day, I asked him about his

reaction to the events of September 11th. He said that he was very sad for all of the victims but more than that. He expressed that he had been hoping that he would never see the United States at war again. He said that the war he fought in was necessary because he knew Hitler had to be stopped at all cost. But he didn't feel that any of the wars that we had engaged in subsequently were necessary.

He said he felt sorry for all the wonderful young people who would be convinced by our government "sure as can be," as he said, to go off and go to war again. Alex felt that the armed forces used propaganda and fear to excess to get the young men that he served with to take more risks than were necessary and to kill more people than were necessary.

It happens that the last President who served in WWII was Bush, the Elder, as I sometimes call him. It also happens that the last Supreme Court Justice to have served in World War II was Justice Stevens. The loss of perspective in those offices as to what may be "necessary" from time to time should be of concern to us all.

In 2003 President George W. Bush's campaign manager and advisor, Karen Hughes, presented on her book tour at the Union League Club. Nearly 300 mostly professional women attended. So, I was there as well. The last statement the author made brought chills. She stated that everyone had to understand that there were over 100,000 well armed, well trained organized assassins whose sole purpose was to destroy America so that we had to back the President and stop them at all costs. The audience jumped to their feet and gave her a cheering ovation. I knew how Master Little must have felt when Foxy Loxy convinced him to round up all the other barnyard animals and to bring them to the fox to be saved from the falling sky.

Just three weeks ago, I spent two days with Alex at his home in Florida. He's 96, living independently in his retirement community, and still plays golf three or four days a week. When I arrived in his driveway, he came out of his home, with a huge grin on his face gave me a big hug and told me how glad he was to see me on yet another bonus day for us both.

Years ago on that golf course in Wilmette on that very rainy day I asked Alex how he developed such a positive attitude. With a smile he looked at me and told me it was very simple. He said that when he was slipping his chute and trying to avoid the planes that were firing at him and just about at the time he landed on the ground, he was so scared that he made a deal with his God that if he were allowed to live to see his wife again, he would never complain about a day on this earth again. He turned to me with a smile on his face and said, "And I've kept that deal and I'm not going to break it, ever."

Alex and his own personal God tie together Anne Lamott's use of her raggedy faith to help her spend as much time as possible in theater A. When I think of my friend Alex and I read Lamott, they both help me stay in my theater A. It's tough to have enough faith to connect oneself all the time to the movies that are playing in the peaceful theater of one's mind but it is every bit as helpful as any tool in the box.

Finally, let me express the hope that for a moment before our heads hit the pillows tonight we say a little 'thanks' for another bonus day and that if we are lucky enough to wake up tomorrow morning, we remember my friend Alex and greet the day as an adventure and each person with a smile. The rest of the details will work themselves out. Thank you and good night.

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