



This Life Matters

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Walter Zywan is a man of many great qualities. You can tell that by his focused gaze, soft spoken words and keen intelligence. All his stories will never be captured but we strain to hear them for they are well worth the telling. There is history, challenges, risk taking, innovation, creative genius and steadfast love. He was born on April 13, 1920 in Bayside, Long Island. He has a sister by the name of Grace Marie. Walter and his wife Marylyn married August 4, 1946 at St. Margaret's Church in Wilmington. For three years they lived on the Fox Farm Road in Wilmington running a Service Station. Dr. Webster delivered their oldest daughter, Catherine, on June 1, 1947 in the Physician's Hospital in Plattsburgh, NY. Gloria was born on December 19, 1953 in the Flushing Hospital in Flushing, NY. Walter and Marylyn were both raised in Bayside, Long Island, spent time in the North Country and have returned to the quiet and peace of Wilmington to spend their last days near family.



Walter's earliest memories are of music, dancing side by side and special foods: Kibasa, Bobka. His Grandparents had a bakery in Austria that pandered to the rich. One day a customer looked through the glass case at the wonderful baked good and exclaimed "There's a fly in there!" Walter's Grandmother quickly put her hand on the self picked up the object in question popping it in her mouth saying "That is the sweetest raisin I have ever tasted."

Both his mother and father came from Austria Hungary when it was under the rule of Franz Joseph. They came to the United States just before World War I. It was here they met and married. His mother was 16 at the time.

His parents owned Joseph Painting, Decorating and Painting on Long Island as Walter was growing up. He spent time in the store under the watchful eyes of his parents and even slept under the counter when a nap was needed.

When he was three years old, during the depression, he started making money for the family. He gathered up the paint cards at the store and with the help of his mother and took his red wagon to the train station. There he sold the cards to people coming off the train for 5 cents a piece. That was a significant amount in the 1920s but there were always people who wanted to "help a kid out."

Walter attended Bayside Elementary School. His ambitious spirit was evident there. Wanamaker's, a well known department store had a coloring contest. There were many entrants but it was Walter who won. He can still remember his rendition of an "Indian and trees."



As a young man Walter worked in the archery range next to the golf range.

Walter's favorite music continues to be Marching Bands and orchestral works. He played the drum in the orchestra and the band. Today he listens to the Glen Miller and Benny Goodman classics. This past year he attended a Glen Miller concert in Lake Placid.

In 1941 three young men walked down Whitehall Street to enlist in the service. One dropped out to go to work. One decided at the last minute that he should get a job. Walter walked alone and joined the service that day. Rudy and Lew would join later.

Walter tracked each turn in his military career: He was Staff Sergeant Walter N. Zywan 12026731. His service spanned the days from March 11, 1941 to July 19, 1945. His first station was Mitchel Field in the 33rd Pursuit Group the 59th Pursuit Squadron or the World War II Nomads. His listing of dates and locations only whispers of the events that he experienced.

December 13, 1941 – October 12, 1942 – Philadelphia
October 12, 1942 – November 2, 1942 – Enroute Overseas
November 2, 1941 – November 10, 1942 – At Sea
North Africa Invasion
November 10, 1942 – November 15, 1942 – Port Lyavtey French Morocco
November 15, 1942 – January 5, 1943 – Cazes AirDome Casablanca French Morocco
December 10, 1942 – January 5, 1943 – Hospital Casablanca for a bout with malaria
January 5, 1943 – January 12, 1943 – Tried to catch up with his outfit
January 12, 1943 – February 8, 1943 – Thelepte, Tunisia
February 8, 1943 – February 20, 1943 – Youks-Les-Bains (rest camp)
February 20, 1943 – April 14, 1943 – Berteaux, Algeria
April 14, 1943 – May 20, 1943 – Ebba Ksour, Tunisia
May 20, 1943 – June 9, 1943 – Menzel Temine, Tunisia
June 9, 1943 – June 18, 1943 – Sousse, Tunisia
June 18, 1943 – June 19, 1943 – Invasion of Pantelleria
June 19, 1943 – June 23, 1943 – Pantelleria Island
June 23, 1943 – September 9, 1943 – Licata, Sicily
September 10, 1943 – September 11, 1943 – Invasion of Italy
September 13, 1943 – November 18, 1943 – Pasetum, Italy
November 18, 1943 – January 1, 1944 – Santa Maria (Only Control Tower)
January 2, 1944 – February 5, 1944 - Cercola, Italy
February 5, 1944 – February 20, 1944 – Air Echelone enroute to India
February 20, 1944 – March 10, 1944 – India, Karachi Air Base
March 10, 1944 – January 11, 1945 – Fungwhelshan, China
January 11, 1945 – January 30, 1945 – India
January 30, 1945 – March 1, 1945 – Left Bombay by ship for U.S.A.
July 19, 1945 – Honorable Discharge on Points

The 33rd Fighter Group ranks as one of the most outstanding fighter organizations of the United States Air Force. During combat operations in World War II the unit distinguished itself on many different occasions. From the sands of the African desert to the jungles of Burma, the men of the 33rd were known for their skill, determination, courage and fighting spirit. Overcoming tremendous obstacles, they were always prepared for whatever task was put before them. The 33rd Group holds the distinction of being one of the first air force fighter groups in Morocco, the first in Tunisia, the only one on Pantelleria, the second in Sicily (by a few hours), and the first to land in the Salerno area of Italy. Fighting in both the Mediterranean and China-Burma-India Theaters the organization received credit for participating in seven campaigns, and was awarded one Distinguished Unit Citation.

The unit, originally known as the 33rd Pursuit Group (interceptor), was activated at Mitchel Field, NY, on January 15, 1941. Personnel for the outfit were supplied by its parent organization, the 8th Pursuit

Group. Besides the Headquarters Squadron, the 33rd was composed of the 58th, 59th, and 60th Pursuit Squadrons (Interceptor). During the ten month period following its activation the Group was engaged primarily in routine training activities.

On January 15, 1943, when nine enemy bombers, escorted by fighters, attacked our base at Thelepthe, pilots of the 33rd Group scored one of their greatest victories. Although outnumbered, they destroyed eight of the JU 88 bombers, the other having been shot down by antiaircraft fire. It was reported that Captain Boone of the 59th Squadron destroyed four of that number, and when his ammunition was exhausted he attempted, by using his airplane as a weapon, to force the leading enemy bomber to crash. That mission, for which the unit received a Distinguished Unit Citation, was one of the most outstanding it had completed up until that time. However, it must be remembered that the outfit, usually outnumbered in aerial combat, also had its bad days. For example, on one particular mission six aircraft were dispatched but only one returned to base after the formation was attacked by a far superior number of enemy fighters.

Walter was a Radio man. His love of radios started when he had a paper route. One of his customers had thrown out a radio. Walter picked it up and brought it to his uncle, Bill, who did the necessary repairs to get it working again. He received disciplined and dedicated radio training during his 4 year tour of duty in the Army/Air Corp. They sent him to Radio School at the Melville Institute on 45th Street in New York City. There he learned about the electronics, tubes, # 80 grids, and how to reduce electrons as they passed through the grids. He was the radio man for his squadron. His creative genius showed itself at work one day when he worked the radios on the ground but had no communication with the planes. One day on the runway he saw a plane set down and in a flash of inspiration he ran to get a radio and carried it to the plane. Once inside the air and ground could communicate with each other. Walter was a 2nd Class radio operator. During his time with the service he worked the transmitter in Japan.



Walter, it seems is able to sleep anywhere when necessary. One place he chose was the back of a blacked out truck. Many of the men slept in the ditches around the perimeter. Then, came the rains. The ditches filled with water and Walter heard a knock on the truck's door. That night he had company in the truck.

Adventure accompanied Walter throughout his tour of duty. On one occasion at the end of his time in the Army Air Corp he went "AWOL". The tradition was to have draw for leave. There were ten men all pulling for that leave but it was Walter who marched out of camp that day. His first leg was made on an empty C54 headed for Calcutta. Over the Himalayas the plane started to drift. Walter headed back from the cockpit to find an oxygen mask. The plane went from 12,000 feet to 11,000 feet. It began to get very cold and was traveling over enemy territory. They made it down safely. The commander at the base told him to be back by 4:00. Walter's plan was to get to see his cousin Fred who was stationed 100 miles north. Fred's father had just died and Walter was determined to see him. When he got to Fred's unit he spoke with the Lieutenant in command. He was taken to Fred's bunk and shook and shook the bunk. His cousin wasn't easily disturbed. Walter was to be gone for 2- 3 hours. Instead he was gone 8 days.



Souvenirs of the war: Well, there was a specially made German gun that Walter wanted to bring home. The German P38 was a 9 millimeter gun. Walter dug a hole, buried the gun and replaced the grass.

The final gun inspection came in Bombay just before he was to leave for the U.S.A. After the official inspection the gun was retrieved. Back home Walter filled out the proper papers so that others with ulterior plans couldn't take his possession.

When he left the service he started his own radio repair company with his cousin. J & Z Radio Repair was located on Long Island. When Walter heard that Republic Aviation in Farmingdale, Long Island had some open positions he answered the challenge and was one of 125 people who tried out for 10 positions. Part of the selection process was an aptitude test: a one question aptitude test. If a train is going around a curve and falls off the track, what way does it fall? Walter knew the answer. It falls to the right not the left. Walter was one of the ten chosen for the position. It was a union job. He never liked working for Republic Aviation for that reason. The only way he could raise in grade was if the Union Steward rose in grade. That stopped him time after time.



His next change in position and advancement was a mile away at Grumman. Grumman was also an aircraft manufacturer. Walter worked for Grumman for 26 years. It was an time full of innovations, creation and excitement. He tested airplane models in wind tunnels to check the flow of air. He eventually worked as a Manager in the Space division. He assisted with the training of the astronauts among whom was George "Pinky" Nelson. He worked with the astronauts of Apollo 13 and Christa McAuliffe's team of the Challenger. Walter's place was up in the top of "mock" shuttle directing the astronauts as they engaged in simulation exercises.



It wasn't only hard work and striving for perfection that kept Walter busy. His quick intellect made room for fun. There was one particular picnic for the astronauts that he and Lyn attended that happened to fall on their anniversary, August 4th. The picnic was at the home of his boss. His estate was located in Huntington. As people gathered, Walter announced, "I'm so glad to have you all over on my anniversary." Lyn also made the most of every opportunity. On another anniversary, she donned a space suit and stood by the shuttle to have her picture taken. Feeling adventurous she stooped down and crawled into the aircraft breaking all national security rules.

Walter and his daughters spent time on the ski slopes in Wilmington. They worked their way to season's ski passes. Walter's favorite way of skiing: backwards.

Walter worked with Francis "Gabby Gabreski", America's greatest ace pilot. There was a time when Walter and Lyn were in Las Vegas for a convention and in the lobby were Gabby Gabreski and Chuck Yeager. Walter walked up and asked to have his picture taken with them. Gabby whispered "You know, I get paid to have my picture taken."

Not all of Walter's suggestions were taken. Walter looked at the stabilization for the landing gear of the space ships sent to the moon. He suggested a tri-pod design. He remembered the stable feel of a milking stool. There had been too much money and time in the present design so Walter's suggestion never made it to construction. If you look at the pictures of the first Space ships on the moon you will see them slightly off kilter. Walter has "common sense to an uncommon degree."



Walter served for 21 years as the Treasurer of the NYS Air Force Association. His position took him to Washington and around the nation. He became a member of the Air Force

Association after the “Operation Wing Ding”, at Madison Square Garden in New York on September 25, 1948. He remained a regular member until July 22, 1980 when Walt became a “Life Member”. Walter held the office of Treasurer for the Suffolk Chapter #339 and held the office as the NYSAFA Treasurer for the past nineteen years. He also serves on the Advisory Board for the Downstate AFA. Serving in this way has given Walter great satisfaction. He was their Man of the Year in 1984. Walter distinguished himself through the Air Force Association and received the following awards.

June 26, 1982 – Certificate of Appreciation for outstanding attendance and participation at the state board meetings throughout the year

1982 – Outstanding Service Citation – Treasurer of NYSAFA

August 13, 1983 – Certificate of Appreciation – Treasurer of NYSAFA

September 1984 – Certificate of Appreciation – Treasurer of NYSAFA

September 1984 – Certificate of Appreciation – Co-Chair for the State Convention

1984 – Man of the Year

1987 – Medal of Merit, for distinguished service to the AFA

1989 – Special Citation for continuous support to the NYSAFA

1991 – Certificate of Appreciation of significant contributions to the NYSAFA

1993 – Exceptional Service Award in grateful appreciation of significant contributions to the AFA

Life is an opportunity, benefit from it.

Life is beauty, admire it.

Life is bliss, taste it.

Life is a dream, realize it.

Life is a challenge, meet it.

Life is a duty, complete it.

Life is a game, play it.

Life is a promise, fulfill it.

Life is sorrow, overcome it.

Life is a song, sing it.

Life is a struggle, accept it.

Life is a tragedy, confront it.

Life is an adventure, dare it.

Life is luck, make it.

Life is too precious, do not destroy it.

Life is life, fight for it.

Mother Teresa

Walter has lived his dreams. He has lived ours.

Family Tree

Michall Perherenetz
Anna Monstra

Harry Yasinsky Cahterina Bilek
Yasinsky

Techla Perherenetz
Yasinsky

Philip Yasinsky

Anna Steve Zywachevsky

Catherine Yasinsky
Zywan

Nicholas Zywachevsky
Zywan

Joe Zywachevsky
Zevens

Wm. Bill Yasinsky Mary Palanski
Jasen Jasen

Anna, Steve & Olive
Agnes

Michael Dorothee Bill Jr. Phyllis

Steve Richard
Zevens

Marylyn Golding & Walter Zywan

Grace Zywan William Knox
Knox

Douglas Anna & Steve Isamone
Knox

Anthony & Michael Steve & Douglas
Figliola Isamone

Bruce Ward & Catherine Zywan
Ward

Gloria Zywan & Mark Driscoll
Driscoll

Bryce Devin

Nicholas Driscoll Terese Cerna
Driscoll

Nicholas Quinn Driscoll