

Cup of Kindness, a story by Len Abram

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.*

- Robert Burns

Andy McGrath dreaded the call from Aunt Florence. In April, newspapers alerted local New Englanders to the first Red Sox game of the season. With the team world champions at last, the story was often above the fold on the sports page. There was little chance that Aunt Flo in Naples, Florida, missed it.

As they aged, his father's siblings fled Massachusetts like migratory birds. Florida got two, including Aunt Florence, Arizona two more, and Andy's father, with his mother, went to North Carolina, a retirement community in Asheville. All except Uncle Jack. Ever since a stroke a decade ago, he was in elderly housing outside of Great Barrington in the Berkshires. He was a retired school principal, a widower with two kids settled in Michigan and Nevada. Except for Andy, he was the last of the family in their home state.

Twice a year, fall and spring, Andy's parents made sure they visited Uncle Jack. In their absence, Flo appointed Andy delegate. Andy complained to his wife about the choice. He was always busy. The drive was long, about six hours round trip, and once there, he had little in common with his uncle. Andy carried a calendar binder, fluttering with post-its like little yellow wings, his cell phone going off into the evening. He had expanded his father's insurance company and competed against the big guys, as he called them, with personal service. Success had its price, he often told his family, and the price was time.

Aunt Flo called twice. "Andrew, call me back. Uncle Jack," was her message, with unconscious rhyme. He knew her shaky voice, which sometimes rose to a shout to bridge the distance. She was well over 90, the oldest of the family, an exile from snow-belt Worcester. Along with a husband in nursing home nearby, she had kids, retired themselves. For years, she wintered in Florida, escaping frosted windows and glazed sidewalks. Now she stayed year round in Gatorland, as she called it with mild contempt. She missed New England. Its stony soil was part of family history.

"You let me know how he is," she said when he called. "He don't sound so great." She corrected herself. "Since the shock, it's hard to know."

"Why is the April visit so important? Opening day for the Red Sox?," asked Andy.

"Something to do with the war. That's what he said. We learned never to ask after that."

"Weren't you curious about what sets him off?"

"Jack's had a tendency toward sadness, depression, whatever you call it, since a kid. It's his nature."

"So no one really knows."

"He's private about his life, although kind hearted. He loaned your father the money to start the insurance agency."

"Really? Dad never told me."

"In World War II, Jack was in the Army and your Dad, the Navy. Do you know, Jack was supposed to go to Normandy, the invasion, but broke his leg? After the war, all those boys came back restless. The war took years from them and worse. Jack went to college on the GI Bill.

"Your father wanted to go into business right away. Selling insurance was fine after three years on an aircraft carrier. Your father paid him back, no interest of course."

"We did go up to see Jack this Thanksgiving," said Andy. "Liz and I took Gerry, our teenager. Turkey at the Red Robin Inn in Stockbridge."

"How nice. Jack loves kids. Too bad his own and the grandkids live so far."

"And the last time Dad and Mom went up, in April," added Andy, "I tagged along. I hadn't seen Uncle Jack in years."

"How was he then?"

"He seemed sad. We cheered him up some. Hard to tell because Dad told him about North Carolina. They said goodbye like it was the last time."

"I wish I was nearer," said Flo. "Why April and baseball make him sad, like I said, I don't know. Especially now, World champions. Reason not the need, somebody said."

Andy looked through his calendar. He complained again to Liz about the long drive. He mentioned the beige bottles of pills on Uncle Jack's nightstand that seemed to reproduce themselves, there were so many. Liz said, "Andy, there are couple on your dresser too. Honey, you're afraid of growing old. We all are."

Andy left on a bright Saturday morning. He listened to radio shows about the economy and gardening on the ride up. With traffic light, he made good time. Spring in the Berkshires, he noted, is fickle: the winds from the mountains, gullies still packed with snow, feel like winter, but the sun warmed the car like a greenhouse. Andy stopped at the senior center gate and signed in for the day. Uncle Jack lived in a complex of one bedroom, assisted living apartments, with ramps up to the front door. Uncle Jack called it assistant living since he depended on a large Haitian woman, Matilde, called Mattie, to look after him a few hours a day. Mattie helped Jack get ready and then left for the day.

Uncle Jack had a new blue walker with hand brakes, a basket, and a seat when he got tired. Jack maneuvered himself into the car, while Andy put the walker in the trunk. Jack spoke carefully, making sure his mouth made the sound his mind commanded. When he walked with a cane, he pulled his left side along to keep up with the rest of his body.

They drove to Stockbridge, through the street made famous by Norman Rockwell paintings, and ate at an American restaurant; the area was full of Asian or continental restaurants for the summer crowds, but this one served one of Uncle Jack's favorites: franks and beans, brown bread, coleslaw, hot mustard, and beer. Andy cut up his own franks first and exchanged dishes with Jack. They didn't talk while they ate. Uncle Jack had a hard enough time chewing and swallowing. There was a large TV over the bar with 24-hour news. The diners paid little attention to the catastrophes and politics in the background.

On the way back, Jack handed Andy a list of things he needed. While Jack waited, Andy stopped at the hardware store to get a new shade for the bedroom. He next went to the grocery. Jack liked canned soups, special ones with less salt. Andy added a large bag of popcorn, a half gallon of harlequin ice cream and a large bottle of Coke. He wouldn't take any money from Jack, who protested.

"I really don't like it when you pay. Take this," Jack said, putting a bill in his hand. "You're good boy, Andy."

"Uncle Jack, you're the last person on the planet who thinks I'm a boy."

They laughed. Andy wedged the ice cream into the Jack's small freezer, poured the Cokes, and opened the popcorn. They watched a baseball game and snacked. The Sox were not playing, so they watched another team, Baltimore.

Around the sixth inning, Andy prepared his exit. He was feeling good. He had cheered the old man up, it seemed, and could report so to Flo and his parents. The sun was setting through the living room window, the rays sliced by the venetian blinds. He was about to look at his watch, say how quick the afternoon had gone, and mention the three hour ride back to Arlington, until Uncle Jack spoke.

"Andy. I appreciate you coming up here. And your family for Thanksgiving. It gets a little lonely out here. I'd be mad as hell at winter if she weren't so beautiful."

"Flo always reminds me just in case. She told me about you and Dad in the war."

"It's one of the reasons," said Uncle Jack with a sigh, "I looked forward to seeing you. I've been thinking about the war lately, well, more than usual. Something I have to do."

"Flo said you were hurt in the war."

"Yes," said Uncle Jack. "Nothing much. We were training for the invasion. I broke an ankle jumping off the back of a truck in England. In the dark, I didn't see the drop. May 1944. Maybe saved my life."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because my unit never got off Omaha beach," Uncle Jack shook his head. "Most were killed or wounded. Do you know about Normandy?"

"I grew up in the 1950s. We had streets named for Normandy, St. Lo, and Pointe du Hoc."

"Were you in the army, Andy?"

"Low score on the draft lottery. No, sir."

"Have you seen this movie? *Saving Ryan*?"

"*Saving Private Ryan*, Uncle Jack? Yes." said Andy.

"Sorry. *Private*. Yes. Lots of vets here went to see it. I didn't. They had nightmares. A few weeks ago, it was on the TV. I stayed up and watched. I couldn't sleep neither."

Andy surprised himself with the intrusion: "You mind my asking? The battle was in June. Why is April hard on you?"

Uncle Jack took his time. He pointed to pictures on the living room table. Among the family photos was one of a young Uncle Jack in Stuttgart, Germany, an MP in front of rubble. The date was October 1945. A larger picture showed a dozen soldiers in fatigues, rifles and gear. They looked exhausted. The names were in small white letters under each man. The date was February 1944. Andy had seen the picture before, he realized. He had just not wondered how many were alive after June.

Uncle Jack was up and pointing at this picture. In the center of the soldiers was a tall, lean soldier with long, powerful arms and an assuring smile.

“That’s Earl Royce. The best baseball player I ever saw. I went to grade school with Earl,” said Uncle Jack, joining Andy at the table. “When the family lived near Orient Heights in East Boston. I liked to play ball too, fancied myself a pitcher. Earl of course could play everything.

“Even as kids, we loved to watch him. He practiced hitting until his hands bled. The tips of his fingers were as hard as knobs on a bureau. He ran bases *after* practice until dark. He had great eyesight too. Something like an eagle’s, they said. He could get a piece of any fast ball. They compared him to the great Ted Williams.

“He played one season with a farm club for the Red Sox, in Pennsylvania. The Class A Scranton Red Sox. He got called up to the Boston Red Sox in June 1943, around when he got his draft notice. I got mine too. I went down to Fenway Park to see that one game. He came up to the third base line to talk between innings. He flied out once, a single and a double, as I remember. Two hits at Fenway Park. First time. He’d made it to the big leagues.

“A few weeks later, we went into the Army and basic training at Fort Devens, up in Ayer. We were on the same Liberty ship to England, where we trained more. By the way, with that eyesight, Earl was a great marksman,” said Uncle Jack, chuckling. “I made money betting on his shooting.

“It’s hard to explain. The closeness of a combat unit. Except for the enemy, these guys might be the last we’d see or would see us. We practiced night and day. Earl was used to hard training and took it in stride. I struggled. One exercise, we landed on the English coast. I stepped off the landing craft into a wave and seven foot of water and started going to the bottom. Felt like I swallowed half the North Sea. Earl grabbed my belt and dragged me to shore. Many, many guys drowned.”

“I remember the opening scene of the movie. That happened too,” said Andy.

“I made up my mind that I’d back Earl up the way he looked out for me. And there I was in the barracks on D-Day where they left me, with my crutches and cast. I thought I’d feel relief, but I felt I let my buddies down.”

“What happened to them, the guys and Earl?”

“At Normandy? When the ramp of the Higgins boat dropped on the beach, a shell opened its side like a can of coffee. That’s what one survivor said. A German machine gunner on a hill raked the boat; out of 36 men, nine lived, wounded. Eddie Talbot and I were the only ones in that picture to survive the war.

“Andy, I know you got to get going. One more favor: in that closet there, check the top shelf. Cardboard box with ‘Royce, E.’ on the side.”

Andy took the box down with the faded stencil and put it on the coffee table. His finger tips were plastered with dust.

“I stayed in touch with Earl’s folks,” said Uncle Jack. “When they died, they left the carton to me. I’d hate to see this tossed out if something happened to me. I want you and Liz to take it.”

Andy opened the box and peeled away crumpled yellowed newspapers. He took out a sheet of cardboard covered in waxed paper and found a small burlap bag. In it, cracked and flattened was a Rawlings Playmakers Fielder’s glove, 1940.

“Not much padding,” said Andy pushing his hand into the stiff leather. “In fact, none.”

“No webbing between the fingers either,” said Uncle Jack. “Earl oiled this glove every couple of days.”

Stacked below the Rawlings were years of yellowed clippings, covering Royce's baseball excellence, as high schooler, amateur and professional. From the 1943 Boston *Herald*, Royce's parents had circled the praise of a sports writer about Earl's first appearance as a Boston Red Sox. In the bottom of the carton, Andy also felt a round object.

“What's this? A baseball?” he asked.

Andy unwrapped an 8-ounce glass jar of Maxwell House instant coffee, with a rusty metal lid. It looked like sawdust inside.

“Earl told me,” said Uncle Jack, sitting down, out of breath. “He scooped a cup of Fenway Park dirt before he left the field. Figured he'd always have that.”

Andy got home late, with the box on the seat beside him. He told Liz about the visit and showed Gerry the glove. Liz sealed the newspaper articles and the baseball glove in plastic bags and repacked the box, which Andy put in the den. He showed Liz the jar of dirt from Fenway.

“This reminds me. Right after the Sox won the World Series,” said Liz, “people visited graves with pennants and hats to celebrate the victory with fans, long gone. And Earl Royce never saw them win it either.”

Andy was back at work the next day and from there called Aunt Flo and his father to let them know about Uncle Jack. His father remembered Earl Royce some, but not Aunt Flo. When Andy called Uncle Jack later that morning, Mattie told him that Jack was still sleeping. All the talking wore him out.

One evening, Andy read through all the Earl Royce clippings, some of them flaking into dust. He decided to copy them all on the office printer before they disintegrated further. Then he put the originals back into the plastic bags and stored the box in the front hall closet. Andy had saddle soap for his winter boots. With a soft cloth, he cleaned and polished Royce's fielder's glove until it shone.

Andy got busier at work. He kept his current clients and then added a builder with 25 employees. His company provided all kinds of insurance and services for them, including annuities and even dental. Andy had teamed with a national financial services company, which lent him a web user interface for his customers under the McGrath logo, Personal Service. The extra income would come in handy. Gerry was looking at colleges.

Andy called Uncle Jack every week. One weekend in August, Liz and he took Gerry to look at schools in the western part of the state. They had lunch with Jack at the Red Robin Inn and took Mattie along. They talked about the Red Sox making another bid for the pennant and the cool summer they were having in spite of global warming. Neither mentioned Earl Royce or the box in Andy's closet.

In September, Liz asked Andy to go with her to their HMO. She had had a second mammogram to confirm what the first discovered, a small mass on her left breast. Liz was a nurse, and worked at an elementary school nearby. She knew not to get too worried about a biopsy. The size of a pea, that's what the doctor said, more likely a calcification, and not a tumor, but if a tumor, more likely benign. Andy caught himself looking at his wife the way he appraised a car or property. She was hardly ever sick and played tennis with women half her age. She could still fit into her clothes from a decade ago. She quit smoking when she got pregnant with Gerry. It was hard for him to think of her ill – and she wasn't yet, she reminded him.

She cried when they got the diagnosis. He nearly did too. They contained their fears at home not to spook their son. Andy went with Liz to the surgeon, Dr. Lessing, a tall handsome man with a thatch of white hair. He could have stepped out of a hospital brochure. Dr. Lessing operated on Liz week later, the tumor itself and the nearest lymph nodes. He stopped by the waiting room to tell Andy that the lymph nodes looked good, but Liz needed further therapy. Her prognosis was excellent.

"Statistics," said Dr. Lessing, shaking Andy's hand again. "Radiation improves outcome. We just have to check the margins."

"What that?" asked Andy.

"We look around the tumor for bad cells. We keep at it until they're gone."

Liz had two follow-up surgeries before the margins were clear. She was sore around the incisions and her left arm was swollen, but she went back to work. By November, she was ready for the radiation, 30 treatments, the target area tattooed with plus signs by Dr. Lessing. Andy called Uncle Jack to let him know that his family would not visit this Thanksgiving, but he would drive up to see him, as it turned out, for Veterans Day. Liz insisted that he go and sent Uncle Jack a pie she baked.

After lunch, Andy and Uncle Jack went back to Uncle Jack's home for coffee and Liz's apple pie. Andy talked about Liz's recovery and treatment. Jack's wife had not done so well with the cancer, but that was many years ago, he explained, where treatment had improved so much. Andy changed the subject back to Earl Royce.

He didn't realize that his son Gerry would take such interest in Earl Royce, his career and life. Gerry, now 16 and as tall as Andy, had been a Red Sox fan for years and played center field for the Arlington High baseball team. He batted .310 last season. Andy discovered that Gerry had placed Earl Royce's mitt, in its plastic bag, on his bureau. Somewhere on the Internet, the boy had also found a newspaper picture of Earl Royce in a Scranton Red Sox uniform. Andy gave Uncle Jack a copy.

Uncle Jack remembered more details about Earl Royce. He had a girlfriend, Marie Aubuchon. They were engaged or going to get engaged before Earl went overseas. Jack thought he remembered a ring Earl had given her, a diamond chip lost in its setting. After the war, Marie married a returning vet, a guy in the neighborhood, and had lots of kids. They moved out west later, California maybe. Then he lost touch with her.

"I'll be back in April, Uncle Jack," said Andy.

"You thank Liz and Gerry for me. And you are a good boy, Andy."

On the way back, Andy thought about his father's generation, Uncle Jack, Earl Royce, and the girl who loved him. He also thought about Liz, about a way to celebrate the end of her treatment. When he got home, he suggested a party, for Christmas or New Year's. Liz had another idea.

"Paris. Never been there and always wanted to. Paris for New Year's."

"Paris? What about Christmas? We always have it here," said Andy.

"We'll leave the day after Christmas and be back in time for Gerry's school. It's just four or five days. Andy, I've been through a lot." Liz stopped, and then she finished her sentence.

"Not as much as some, but a lot. Please make it happen."

Right there, Andy called their travel agent and left phone mail about a trip for three.

"Thanks," she said. "Very nice of you not to bring up work, the exchange rate, the long flight, and any other reason not to go. Sometimes," she smiled at him, "you just have to go."

"Of course," he said. He always was amazed of how well she knew him.

"And another thing."

"Yes, Liz?"

"Earl Royce. You and Gerry can visit him in Normandy."

As usual, Liz packed for them all. Along with books about visiting France, Liz noticed Andy reading about World War II and the Normandy battle and taking notes on an index card. It was cold in Paris, Gerry informed them. He calculated from Centigrade to Fahrenheit for them. He also asked if he could bring his Red Sox World Series Pennant and Earl's glove for visiting the grave. They could not leave anything like a pennant, said a guide book. It was against cemetery rules.

Andy called Uncle Jack about the trip. He said, "Say hello for me, Andy," and hung up.

The day after Christmas they left, flying out of Boston. They planned their trip on the plane, while Gerry watched a movie on Andy's laptop. Their hotel was in Montmartre, with a large down feather bed for them and a cot for Gerry, to sleep off their jet lag. The windows ran from the floor to the ceiling and looked out onto a courtyard with shrubs and white stone chips raked into swirls.

For two days, they walked the city, back and forth across the Seine, and covered every open museum. They ate large breakfasts with the hotel restaurant half empty, so close to Christmas. They enjoyed the solitude of the city on holiday. They snacked during the afternoon, but at night found a bistro or restaurant for a full meal. One night they caught an American movie, Gerry's choice, with French subtitles. Liz left Andy and Gerry for shopping by herself one evening. She'd shop more while Gerry and Andy went to Normandy.

For December 31, their last full day in France, Andy made reservations for a van with a driver, also their guide, to the Normandy beaches and the American Cemetery at Colleville-Sur-Mer. With any luck, they'd be back to share New Year's Eve with Liz. The family went to bed earlier, although Andy never slept well away from home and was restless.

He woke with one ring from the hotel operator. It was still dark. He saw a sliver of light under the bathroom door and heard Liz in the shower. She came out in her robe, drying her hair.

"Why are you up? Aren't you shopping along the Champs-Elysees today? "

"I decided to go with you," she said. "I can shop at the airport. Besides, the van has room. Let's wake Gerry. He's sure to be hungry. Always is."

The van, with seats for eight, had only five, Andy, Liz and Gerry, along with a couple from Toledo, Ohio, Bert and Adele Pellegrini. The last seat was empty. Gerry sprawled there with his backpack for a pillow. The two couples introduced themselves, as did Henri, the driver and guide.

"*Il faut du vent, par grand vent,*" said Henri. "Normandy is very windy. It is also raining. Conditions are not good, but we will see much. We'll be there in about three hours, with a few stops."

Once they slipped Paris traffic and the sun was up, Andy saw the countryside stretch out, winter brown fields, light industry, power plants, orchards and rivers. Gerry was sleeping. Liz nodded off too, something she did often since her treatment. Andy rolled up his extra sweater and put it under her head. The van stopped in the city Caen and the group visited its war museum, and then continued toward the beaches and the cemetery.

"It looks pretty new around here. I mean newer," said Gerry from the back.

"Much of Caen was destroyed and rebuilt," said the guide. "Thousands of civilians killed. The British and Canadians fought the Germans here, but the Americans were held back. The hedges, we will see."

The windshield wipers worked hard to keep the view from smearing. The Normandy dairy farms were green even in winter, with black-and-white cattle as large as sheds. They grazed, swishing their tails against the annoying rain. Farmers in rubber boots and slickers drove tractors, making furrows in fields for winter wheat, Andy guessed.

Andy smelled the sea first and tapped Liz on the arm. "We're here," he said. He was glad she decided to come.

"The hedgerows and sunken roads you see were not far from the beach," said the guide. "The Germans took away the farmers for factory work. No one cut the hedges. Some grew to two or three meters thick and even five meters high. They became fortifications for the defenders. In July, after more than a month, the Americans broke out. There are 9,378 at the Cemetery, but three times that died to liberate Normandy."

The parking lot ahead of them was nearly empty because of the holiday and weather. Henri parked under an apple tree bent back by the wind. He marched the group toward the Cemetery. When they saw the expanse of blue ocean and beige beach, they stopped.

Henri spoke above the wind. "*Attendez*. No cover for hundreds of meters for the soldiers."

They turned to follow him down a chipped set of stairs into a German bunker, covered with grass and bushes with shell craters on either side. The wind howled through cement casements. The floor was slick and the walls had decades of graffiti. Andy grabbed a rusted rebar for balance and held Liz's hand. The Pellegrinis held onto each other. Gerry was moving around the enclosed area taking pictures. The group took turns looking out of the firing slit. Its field of fire was the beach.

"One machine gunner fired 12,000 rounds that day," said Henri.

Henri walked the group out of the bunker, down the path to the gate for the American Cemetery. He stopped.

"By the evening of June 6," Henri concluded, "the Americans fought to where you are standing. The people of France gave this land to the American people. Down that path, you will find the office for the Cemetery. Stay as long as you like. But I would like to get back in Paris before New Year's."

The Pellegrinis, their second time at the Cemetery, already knew where they were going and left. Andy and Liz walked toward the office. Gerry was up ahead with the camera. On either side of the path were rows and rows of Latin crosses, along with Jewish stars. "I'm getting cold," said Liz. "Let's find Earl soon."

They warmed up in the office. The person behind the desk gave them a map and circled where to find the grave of Private Earl Royce. It was a nice spot, she said, and not too far.

“Are you up for this, Liz? You can stay in the office. We'll take a picture for you.”

“I'm fine, Andy. My arm gets sore if I walk a lot. You know, I can't shake this feeling that I am meeting a living person after hearing about him for so long. Strange.”

Gerry walked ahead of them snapping pictures. “Gerry, wait up,” said Andy. “We take a right here. It's at the edge of the cemetery.”

Gerry hadn't said much since the bunker.

Andy jogged up to his son. “How are feeling?” asked Andy.

“OK. It's a lot, Dad. All these people.”

“Yes, it's a lot. You're right.”

Gerry opened his backpack. He took out Earl's baseball mitt and slipped his hand into it. He hit the pocket with his fist to open it up. With his other hand, he reached into his backpack for the Red Sox Pennant. Then he shouldered the pack.

Earl's grave was at the end of a row, close enough to the beach to hear the tide coming in. The three of them stood around the cross.

“He was only 19,” said Liz.

“What do we do next?” asked Gerry.

“Just tell him about the Sox, sweetie,” said Liz.

“It feels weird. He's not really here, is he?” asked Gerry.

“We don't know that, for sure,” said Andy. “Something of him is. We know why we are here. I think that's enough.”

Gerry leaned the pennant against the cross and held the glove up.

“Private Earl Royce, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division,” Gerry read off the cross. “This pennant means that your team, the Boston Red Sox, won the World Series. It took a long time. And this here is your glove. I will always keep it and tell folks you were a great player and what you did here. That's all.”

Liz hugged Gerry. “Nice job, son.” She turned to Andy. “One thing more: we should leave this,” said Liz.

She opened her purse and handed Andy a plastic bag. In it was the jar of dirt Earl Royce collected from Fenway Park.

“What good is it doing in our closet?” Liz asked.

Andy pocketed the bag and gripped the jar. The lid was rusted shut. Andy's face reddened as he tried to twist off the lid. The light rain did not help his grasp. Liz and Gerry tried too. Andy finally took it back. He knelt on the grass and tapped the lid of the jar lightly on the base of the cross. Then again. The old glass split like a diamond, scattering the dirt. Andy scooped as much as he could in the wind.

“Your hand, Andy,” said Liz.

He nicked his palm on the broken jar and hadn't noticed. Andy wrapped it in his handkerchief, its white blotched red.

“Dad, you're wounded,” said Gerry. The three looked at each other, wet and cold, and laughed.

“I hear Earl had a great sense of humor,” said Andy.

Liz got down to help Andy spread the rest of the dirt on the grave. In the rain, the dirt washed away.

Andy got up and took an index card from his jacket pocket. He noticed Gerry standing at attention. He and Liz did too.

“Earl,” said Andy, “your friend Jack McGrath from East Boston says hello. He remembers you to this day. Your parents missed you the rest of their lives. They were always proud of your accomplishments and character. Marie Aubuchon, your girlfriend, after the war, she got married. She had a big family. She named her first son after you.

“You helped win the battle, Earl. Others took this hill. But you and your unit led them to it.

“History and this war stepped in front of your generation, the way the Civil War must have stepped in front of Lincoln's. It's not something ordinary people in democracies want – to face dangers for principles.

“There you were – on your way to play baseball, or fix cars, or teach kids, or sell insurance --”

“Or get married,” added Liz.

“Yes, get married and watch your kids grow,” said Andy. “The normal things. History interrupted all that and brought you here.

“And you never left. This is what I learned today: Your life stopped so we could go on with ours.

“Thanks, Earl, and to all you others, from us citizens, well done.”

On the ride back to Paris, Henri put the heat and the air conditioner on high to dry their jackets and shoes and warm them up. In the van first aid kit, Liz found Andy peroxide and a band aid for his hand. Andy, Liz and Gerry sat wedged on the back seat. Gerry sat between them with his camera on to show the pictures he had taken that day. Uncle Jack would love to see them, thought Andy. He'd visit his uncle the first weekend after they got back.

The Pellegrinis used their cell phone to wish their family back home a Happy New Year. Andy realized that he had left his own cell back at the hotel. Bert Pellegrini had not noticed that Paris was about six hours ahead of Ohio, where it was mid-afternoon, December 31, but he wished them a good year anyway.

At a rest stop an hour from Paris, Andy bought a bottle of champagne with enough plastic cups for the group, Gerry too. Even Henri, had a little, *un peu, s'il vous plait*. On the radio, Henri found the BBC playing traditional New Year's music. Along with the singers and bagpipes, the group joined in with “Auld Lang Syne.” Ahead of them were the lights of Paris. They lifted their plastic cups to toast the newest year.

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