

# MY LIFE, MY WORDS



Provided photo

Donald Keohane lived through 32 flying missions in World War II and was most proud of his last one, when his crew dropped supplies to hungry French citizens.

## War years shaped her father's life

FRANCES M. TOPOREK

My father, Donald Keohane, was viewed by many as a war hero. To me, he was simply my hero.

He was a first-generation American in a city home of Irish immigrants; his childhood was lacking in material necessities, but not family love. Lessons learned early in life meant he took nothing for granted. Maybe because of his humble beginnings, or living through 32 flying missions in World War II, he just never cared to impress people. Even his many war medals, which his brother, Jerry, nicely framed under glass, were hung inconspicuously. When the front door to our home opened, the medals were hidden.

For years, my father never talked about the war. But you somehow knew the experience made him who he



Frances Toporek

was. Later in life, he began to write about his wartime experiences in short articles. Focusing on the accomplishments of others, one published story was a tribute to the mechanics who kept the B-17s flying. In another article, he said his most satisfying mission was the last one, when his crew dropped supplies to the hungry French partisans.

Having been in the war, my father appreciated our democracy. He believed in the voice of the working class. He wrote letters to political officials, passed around petitions for local causes and encouraged 18-year-olds to register to vote at our high school graduation parties. He even had a clipboard, pen and forms with him to sign them up then and there.

My father believed America was the land of opportunity and instilled this belief in his six children. When Geraldine Ferraro was running for vice president, we went to hear her speak at a rally and he kept saying to me, "This is history, Frannie Mari!"

I was always proud to say he was my father, expect perhaps when he wore his red and white saddle shoes as he ushered at our summer chapel. He sure had a sense of humor and could laugh at himself, and taught us the same. Once we went to lunch at McDonald's and he told me he was getting surf and turf. He really felt lucky to be ordering a Filet-O-Fish and a hamburger.

He relished life's simple tasks. He changed diapers and attempted to cook at a time when most men would not consider doing such tasks. He was the Santa at the local fire hall Christmas bazaar.

My father taught us by love, example and hard work all of his life. He encouraged and assisted, but did not push us in any direction — always wanting what was best for us and would make us happy. The final years were not easy for him, but he endured without bitterness or complaint. Teaching by example as usual, this was his final lesson to us all.

During calling hours, a woman arrived and asked to see our mother. She handed her a \$5 bill and said she was a local city judge. The \$5 had come from my father in a letter he wrote when she first ran for the position a number of years ago. She kept the bill in her desk to remember who she worked for: the common man.

I wish this type of man was more common. We know he is at peace now, but miss his gentle presence immeasurably. □

*Donald Keohane died Nov. 13, 2008. Frances M. Toporek is his third of six children, five daughters and one son, with wife Joan. Toporek lives in Irondequoit with her husband, Paul, and daughter, Allyse. For several years, she was a family and consumer science teacher in various school districts and now works part-time for her husband's physical therapy offices.*

**TELL YOUR STORY:** "My Life, My Words" is a weekly feature written by our readers. To participate, send us 600 words or less about a person, place or event that has touched your life or made you who you are today. Include a short biography, your daytime phone number (not for publication) and a photograph of yourself. Submissions cannot be returned. Send it all to [Roc-Info@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:Roc-Info@DemocratandChronicle.com) or My Life, *Democrat and Chronicle*, 55 Exchange Blvd., Rochester, NY 14614.