

An excerpt from "Living History"

Grandpa would also tell me stories of his time as a City of Somerville police officer in the 1930s. One story, which I forgot a lot of over the years, was later retold to me by Dad, so it's pretty fresh now.

One night Grandpa had been ordered by the captain to go check out a report of a monster. A woman had called the stationhouse, claiming that there was a monster in her tenement. She had begged for an officer to come out, so Grandpa and his partner got the job.

They drove into Somerville, looking for the tenement. They didn't have far to look, because the woman was waiting for them. Somerville had a large population of Italian immigrants at the time, most of which only spoke Italian, with maybe a smattering of English. The woman ran up to the car, practically in hysterics, going on and on in Italian. Grandpa didn't understand a word she said, nor did his partner. Eventually they got her calmed down enough that she was able to explain, in broken English, that she was the landlady of this tenement and that she'd heard a monster in the third floor apartment, and she was positive it was going to eat her. Grandpa and his partner looked at each other and shrugged, then got out of the car and headed into the tenement, service revolvers drawn.

They headed up to the third floor, and the lady let them in. She didn't go in herself, as she was still terrified. They checked everywhere: the living area, the bedroom, the bathroom. There were no monsters there.



Grandpa in uniform (mid-1930s)

Then they went out onto the porch. Every floor had a porch, almost like a balcony in the case of the upper floors. They didn't see anything, and figured that whatever it was, it must have jumped off the porch and scurried away. They were about to leave when Grandpa heard a noise coming from behind the curtains covering the French doors leading onto the porch. He raised his revolver, and pulled the doors closed.

There, hiding in the corner, was a tiny little ball of dark fur. Grandpa looked at it for a moment, then holstered his revolver. With a grin, he bent over and scooped the little ball of fur up. Two tiny little eyes stared back at him, and a little tail began to wag.



The "monster," ladies and gentlemen.

"I found our monster," he said with a chuckle as he showed his partner. His partner laughed as he realized what Grandpa was holding. "Come on, let's go show her this 'monster.'"

As they emerged from the apartment, the lady stood there, nervously waiting for news. "I found your monster," Grandpa said, as he held out the ball of fur.

The woman shrieked like she was being skinned alive, then bolted for the stairs. The last they saw of her, she'd entered her own apartment and slammed the door behind her. They could hear a faint click as she locked the door. They looked at each other, and shook their heads, then left the tenement.

The "monster" stayed at the station house for several days, but no one ever claimed it. Finally, the lieutenant on duty took Grandpa aside one night, as his shift was ending.

"George, you have kids, don't you?" he asked.

"Yeah, four of them."

"No one's going to claim that puppy. Why don't you take it home, surprise the kids?"

That's exactly what Grandpa did. Of course, the kids loved her. They named her Queenie, and she grew very attached to Uncle George. Dad was only a baby at the time, and as Queenie grew, she established herself as his personal watch dog.

Then World War II broke out, and Uncle George enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Queenie was never quite able to deal with the fact that he was gone. He came back on leave once, but then got his orders to ship out to the Pacific front. After he left, every time she heard a car pass by, or a car stopped in their driveway, she immediately ran out to the window, hoping it would be Uncle George. But the years went by, and Uncle George didn't come home.

Towards the end of the war, Queenie was not well. She was getting older, and one day Dad found her sprawled out on the floor of the garage. In his opinion, Queenie hadn't died of an illness, or old age, but rather, she died of a broken heart.

Uncle George did make it back to the States, although not unscathed. A Japanese shell had taken out a turret on the ship he was on, and he'd been peppered with shrapnel. It didn't kill him, but it was enough to take him out for the remainder of the war. Of course, by the time he made it back to Massachusetts, it was too late for Queenie.

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