



# OWEN D. SOUTH

## Fighting For Peace

BY JENNA CAPUTO

PHOTOS BY ANGELA MIA PHOTOGRAPHY

Owen D. South was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1932 to immigrant parents from Ireland and England. Their family moved to Queens, and along with his two brothers and five sisters, Owen enjoyed spending time outside, always loving to bike, camp, and hang out with the guys. "There was never a dull moment," he says.

He decided to quit school at 16 years old so he could be outdoors more often. He first took a job delivering telegrams on a bicycle for Western Union. About a year later, he read an article in *Readers Digest* about a farm school in Wappingers Falls, NY. After about 4-6 months of training, the farm students were then placed in a paying job at a dairy farm. Owen enjoyed the farm work, but as one of eight kids, he was used to being around a lot of people, and he began to feel lonely—especially come Christmas time. He knew he needed a change that would allow him to be surrounded with people. The military came to mind.

His oldest brother became a paratrooper when he had turned 17, so Owen thought that could work for him, too. He went down to the Army office but made the mistake of admitting to having had Rheumatic Fever at 15 years old. Even though he'd been checked out, the Army was worried that he had a heart murmur as a result and gave him an official card thanking him for

volunteering but turning him down.

The next day, however, he met his "guardian angel," who told him to go down to the Navy and tell them only that he'd had whooping cough or the measles, chicken pox—anything other than Rheumatic Fever. "The Navy? But I get sunburned!" Owen had exclaimed. So the Marines it was!

He was sent to Parris Island for Bootcamp, but then the Korean War broke out, and off he went to the other side of the world. He enjoyed being with the guys and with people in general again. During his time in the military, he even boxed as a welterweight. He almost got to Madison Square Garden in Golden Gloves but was eliminated by a guy who already had pro fights under his belt.

Once, while he was on leave and visiting home, he was out with his brother, who pointed out a girl named Nancy Visser. He had her number and thought Owen should call her if he was interested. Owen called, but she brushed him off. He tried again, and this time she accepted. He took her out to Broadway and caught *South Pacific*. Then they had dinner in Manhattan at the Brass Rail. The whole date cost him a month's salary, but it was worth it since they've been together ever since.

Coming home after the war, he continued to court Nancy while



he went back to evening high school. He worked full time, first as a truck driver for Wonder Bread, then as a laborer in road and building construction, before becoming a pier guard for the NYC Waterfront Commission. He then decided to attend the Syracuse College of Forestry full time.

The Baby Boomer generation hit school age, and they couldn't build—or staff—schools fast enough. The Assistant Dean of the School of Education came to talk to the students to try to recruit some new teachers. Most of the kids walked out when they heard the low starting salary. But by now, Owen had already met Nancy and knew she didn't love the idea of living out in the "boonies." Teaching seemed like it would be more conducive to family living. So, he came home to work on his bachelor's and master's degrees in education from St. John's

University. While there, he dipped his toe in theater, acting in four major dramatic productions, playing the male lead in two of them. He made the *Who's Who* as an undergraduate and did a Vonnegut play at Civic Theater. (Theater runs in his family—years later, his granddaughter played Annie in Shreveport, LA.)

After finishing college, he began his teaching career at New Rochelle High School in NY. While chatting with the other staff in the teachers' room, he listened as one girl talked often about two things—a provincial town in upstate NY, and Peter, whom she knew from community theater at the time.

"Come to find out, the provincial town was Gloversville, and Peter ended up being Peter Falk, otherwise known as Columbo on the TV detective series," says Owen. "After my first year of teaching, I asked her where this provincial town was. She said, 'You're not thinking of going there?' Well, yeah. We had four kids then—who knew about the future?"

They moved to Gloversville and Owen taught there for five years. By this time, they were up to seven kids and needed more money. He heard about an opening in Niskayuna and got the job. He worked there for 24 years before retiring in 1987. In the meantime, he had also been ordained to the Diaconate and helped out at multiple churches in the area. Up until COVID hit, he continued to volunteer at Kings Way Arms.

Owen and Nancy's children are all now grown and working in their own careers—Patricia, a lawyer; Marie, a doctor; Daniel, a former oil worker; Christine, fundraiser for LSU; Judith, science teacher for Kent School in CT; and twins Peter and Paul are Executives for the EPA and FDA respectively.

After things with the pandemic settle down, Owen is looking forward to getting together with the family again as well as heading out to ride their tandem bicycles and maybe even cross-country ski.

He hopes for peace in the future and urges us all to remember his own motto to not only love God, but to see Him more in the world in order to achieve that peace. "God is love," he says. "Love God more and you'll love people more. That's a big step towards peace."

# Home For Christmas

BY OWEN SOUTH, AT 19 YEARS OLD

"Home for Christmas, home for Christmas,  
Home for Christmas," was the cry.  
So with hardly weary curse or sigh  
"Yes," our leader assured us, "for liberty,  
To set this impoverished people free.  
You, Marines, can do it quite easily,  
And be home for Christmas, you'll see."

Had not our first Brigade,  
Fought bravely, never been swayed.  
Fought and the Pusan perimeter saved.  
Fought and caused the enemy to flee.  
Theirs, time after time, never to ask why,  
Theirs determinedly but to go and die.  
And be home for Christmas, you'll see.

Then, we, enemy to right of us, enemy to  
left of us  
Enemy in front of us,  
Boldly assaulted with full division.  
Sea walls, tides of forty-foot height.  
T-34 tanks of invincible might  
Did not affright; before we had a mission;  
We were Marines who did not know how  
to flee.  
And be home for Christmas, you'll see.

From the mudflats of Inchon to the hills  
of Seoul,  
To the mine-infested roads of Uijongbu,  
We pressed on wearily, drearily, thru heat  
of sun  
Hoping always, this task soon to be done.

Casualties taken, lives "wasted," and, always  
suffering refugee.  
But of all, we hoped the cry of "Corpsman"  
would not be  
A cry for you (my friend) or a cry for me.  
But we would be home for Christmas,  
you see.

So went our battalion, all twelve  
hundred forth  
Into that "frozen Chosin," into that  
howling north.  
Bravely we fought and well in that frigid hell.  
But Chinese here, Chinese there, Chinese  
everywhere.  
Mortars, grenades, frostbite, trench

foot, gangrene  
Took its toll and left us barely two  
hundred Marine.  
Shattered and sundered now, hardly able  
to flee  
How many'll be home for Christmas,  
you'll see!

What was the "liberty" made? Impoverished  
people "saved?"  
War and its suffering is frightfully great.  
I (and you) should ask its direction and fate.  
Honor the dead they said. Yes, honor but  
don't forget  
Those who'll never be home for Christmas,  
you see.

## A Few War Memories, As Told by Owen D. South

I signed up for the Marines, and they took me. Off to Parris Island for Boot Camp. Three quarters of the way through, the Korean War broke out. And off we go. Amphibious landing at city of Inchon, took Seoul up to the 38-degree Parallel (border between North and South Korea). Stopped, waited. Thought we were going home—Police Action was over; we had come and done what we were told to do. But General MacArthur decided we were going up into North Korea. He didn't want the North Korean Army to reform, regroup, and be a problem again.

(Probably a good idea.)

Another amphibious landing—only this time we were in enemy territory heading north into Manchuria and the worse winter they had in ten years.

North Korea. Good God, what a country! Darkness everywhere. Signs (propaganda) telling kids to turn in their parents if they weren't following Party Line. We pushed on and on to the Yalu River (border between North Korea and Chinese Manchuria). Weather got worse and worse. Then we

ran into the Chinese. 120,000 of them and about 15,000 of us. Results are about what you would expect. We had to get out of there. And there were about 100,000 North Koreans who wanted out, too. This was their native country. Refugees—really refugees. Thus, the evacuation began—we first, and then the North Koreans. A truly good and healthy evacuation. They were lined up as we were leaving. North Korean port of Hungnam on the docks waiting for the ships to return from the 1–2-day trip to Pusan in South Korea and safety.