The Long Road To Lighthouse Love
By Norman G. Andersen

My story begins a long way from the land of lighthouses. As a teenage boy in Nebraska I spent a lot of my time sailing the model boats my Danish father had made for me on the sandpit lakes near my home. I would dig out a harbor on the shore and using the wet sand build a lighthouse to mark the harbor entrance. Then the trick was to try to sail the boat across the lake so it would come close to the harbor. This probably accounted for my choice of a story when my high school English teacher assigned us to write a short story for class assignment. My story was about a New England fisherman who was caught in a terrible storm and thought he was lost until he saw a lighthouse on the end of an island. (I got an A on that assignment.) Then in June of 1940 with the storm clouds of war looming, I joined the Coast Guard where I spent the next year and a half patrolling along the East Coast.

One week after Pearl Harbor I was transferred to a new (??) Coast Guard ship that turned out to be an old rusty freighter that had been built in 1914. The Coast Guard had turned it into a weather patrol ship. We left out of New York for our first wartime patrol expecting to never see land again. Sixty days later as we were returning headed for Boston I was on watch early one morning when I saw a light in the distance and as we got closer it turned out to be a lighthouse on the end of an island. I thanked God, knowing that now we were safe again. A year and half later after many patrols around Greenland I was transferred to shore duty at the Coast Guard station on Cuttyhunk Island.

Our liberties were three days liberty and twelve of duty on the island. I always went to New Bedford and one day met and fell in love with a beautiful girl. After courting her several months I proposed and when she accepted I asked where I could meet her parents. She said that was easy because they were at the lighthouse on Cuttyhunk out at the end of the island. I was shocked because this was the lighthouse I had seen. I went out there and met Octave and Emma and little Seamond and was welcomed into the family. Bette and I were married February 1944 and spent our honeymoon at the lighthouse.

After the 1944 hurricane I was assigned to help Octave repair the storm damage at the lighthouse and used the Coast Guard patrol boat to recover some of the bodies of the crew of the Vineyard Lightship, which had sunk with all in the storm.

In December 1944 I was transferred to the Watch Hill Lighthouse in Rhode Island. My duties there were to reactivate the light because it had been shut down early in the war. The Army Coast Artillery had used the keeper's quarters as a barracks and the place was a mess but the equipment in good order. The first order of business was to learn all I could about the equipment and then order all the supplies needed for the coming year. This I did with the help of the CO of the nearby Coast Guard station. At first my wife and I had no furniture so we set up housekeeping with a few

boxes and cots the Chief let us have. Since it was Christmastime I was only able to buy a small lighted metal cross to hang in the window. Shortly after Christmas, the CO of the Coast Guard station loaned me a seaman and the one and half-ton stake bed truck so I could go to New Bedford and get my furniture, etc.

Then on February 3, 1945 about 9 p.m. my wife, who was soaking in the bathtub, called out to me that she heard someone cry out in pain. I told her it was probably just a seagull but just then the phone rang and it was the Coast Guard station asking if I had any visitors. I told them no and they told me that two men had just run by from my direction. They sent out search parties and I started to check out the area around the lighthouse. Since it had been snowing that night it wasn't long before I found two sets of footprints leading from the seawall toward the road leading to the Coast Guard station. They were unable to find the men but the next day we were swamped with FBI and Naval Intelligence people who told us that they had known that these people were coming but not when or where, also there had been reports of a German submarine out in Block Island Sound that night.

The next exciting thing that happened was the birth of our first child, a beautiful girl named Sonya Ann. Sadly in May of that year she caught a deadly virus and passed away. We took her to Cuttyhunk where she lies today.

By this time the Coast Guard had sent another man and his family to help out at the lighthouse. It was about time because it was only with the help of my wife that I had been able to stand those 24 hour + 24 hour watches. At one time I had to keep the fog signal going for 33 days straight, that meant having to rotate the two electric diaphragm horns and the two motor generators every two hours. This led to a mistake that could have been serious. The controls were on two separate panels, each with knife switches and rheostats that when you got everything synchronized you would grab two big knife switches one on each panel and quickly pull one off and close the other. The only problem was I missed my timing and blew every fuse on both panels. Knowing that there were not enough fuses handy I rushed to start the standby fog signal. Now that was a compressed air reed type that depended on an old DeLeverne kerosene engine to pump up air pressure. To start this engine you first had to light an alcohol torch, which preheated a kerosene blowtorch that then heated the hot spot so the engine would fire when turned over using a pull handle on the flywheel. The fastest time I had ever done this was about 15 min. but this time I made it in 8 min. While the compressor was building pressure I started making up fuses out of anything I could find. Despite all the trouble the fog signal was off for only 15 minutes and I finally got the electric back on line and was able to shut off the reed horn.

Finally at the end of June 1946 my enlistment was up and I decided to leave the service since by now we had another child on the way and I didn't want to chance trying to raise another one in the service.

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