

Kelsey Cavanagh
Granddaughter of Edward (Ed) Brown, Survivor
2008 Recipient of USS Indianapolis/Gwinn “Angel” Scholarship

Q. 1. How has being a child/grandchild/great-grandchild of a USS Indianapolis Survivor (or LAS) affected your life? Please include details of your specific Survivor’s experience that you can obtain through a person interview with either him or another relative (his wife, siblings, etc.).

As a result of being the grandchild of USS Indianapolis Survivor, I have grown up being instilled with strong values and virtues of Patriotism. Many memories I have of my grandfather involve long talks at the dinner table with him telling us stories of his experiences during WWII. Being a soldier in WWII at the young age of 18 strongly affected who he became as a person and in turn has had an impact on our family generations down. He is now an advocate to many veteran organizations and is very forthcoming about sharing his experiences and opinions pertaining to WWII. Being the grandchild of a WWII survivor has instilled a great deal of pride in myself as well as my family. We realize the sacrifices made and the love of country showed by troops who serve in any war. There is no greater gift to give your country than your service and putting your life on the line. Through my grandfather’s experiences we have been taught a great deal of respect to veteran’s and current troops. My younger brother hopes to serve in an armed force for the United States when he is of age and I attribute his desire much to the pride that my grandfather has showed over the years to have been a survivor of the USS Indianapolis. My grandfather was attending his senior year of High School in South Dakota, playing football and looking forward to his years to come, when he was drafted to serve in WWII. Within a very short time he had to leave high school to join boot camp to be trained for war. With two older brothers already serving in the war he was not technically required to serve. His father informed him that he was not required to go, but as quoted in *In Harm’s Way*, my grandfather told his dad, “Dad, there is a war to be won out there, and I’m going to get this thing cleaned up. I’ll be back shortly.” He was then drafted as a seaman, first class. Once he completed his training he was sent to San Francisco in May. They lived there for the summer months and were under the impression that they would be there for a few more weeks while maintenance was done on the ship. After one night of being on shore the sailors came back to discover that they needed to prepare for deployment the next morning due to surprise orders, because the ship originally meant to go (The USS Pensacola) had failed its sea trials. The Indy began steaming to open ocean, the crew unaware of what the orders entailed, simply complying with them. This was just the beginning of what is now history of the USS Indianapolis, each sailor with his own personal tales and experiences. I have been extremely enlightened by being able to hear first hand from someone who was there, which is more than any text book in history class can convey. I have seen my grandfather’s quotes in numerous published books, seen his face on interviews for local and national news channels, and even on the discovery channel. My mother, aunts, and uncles never got the history of his experiences until about the same time that I did because my grandfather had tried so hard for so many years to put those memories behind him. The memories of watching their ship sink, seeing him and his friends stranded in the open ocean, watching his fellow soldiers get attacked by sharks and fade away from starvation. Keeping hope alive was extremely difficult for him and upon rescue the experience still seemed somewhat surreal, like a nightmare that played over and over. Putting those

thoughts out of his mind took lots of effort and it wasn't until he was about 70 years old that he discovered that opening up about his experiences and sharing his knowledge can only bring good from what was a very bad and unfortunate situation. He is now extremely passionate about his patriotism and shows great amounts of pride in what was accomplished through those lives that were lost. He makes the most of the days he has spent alive because he realizes that most were not as fortunate as him. He now shows a great exuberance for life and brings joy and kindness to everyone he has come across. He often would turn down promotions and opportunities that people today would jump at, telling his children that those aren't the important things in life and that the extra time he would spend working away from his family and friends would be time wasted. I definitely attribute his positive attitude and wise outlook on life to his experiences in WWII and because he is a survivor of the USS Indianapolis. I like to think that I try and maintain a similar outlook on life because of the impact that he has had on me. We live on opposite coasts, he in California and myself in Maine, so our time spent together may not be as much as we both had hoped, but the time that we have spent together is very memorable and cherished. I consider myself lucky that he would take so much time to tell me about such personal events in his life and be so willing to answer all of my questions. I really hope that there will be more opportunities in the near future for us to visit and for him to share things that I may have not heard in the past. I am very proud to be the grandchild of a survivor because while other grandparents do have wisdom and life experience, I feel that the life experience that my grandfather has to share far surpasses that of most grandparents I know.

Q. 2. *Understanding the miraculous and heroic story of the USS Indianapolis and its crew is one way to ensure that the service and sacrifices made by the men of the ship will not be forgotten. Please choose one of the following themes: miracle of the sighting, heroism, loyalty and brotherhood, service to country, forgiveness, righting a wrong, survival against all odds. In approximately 500 words, share your understanding of the tale of the USS Indianapolis.*

Three hundred seventeen men survived, after the torpedo struck the hull of the USS Indianapolis, on July 30, 1945. The war in Europe had ended in 1944. The US was still in the South Pacific. The crew of the U.S.S. Indianapolis had left San Francisco abruptly from what had promised to be an extended stay. Just before the bomb struck, my grandfather Edward Brown, seaman first class was sitting atop a crate. The contents of which no one on deck seemed to know or care. It was the first atomic bomb and unbeknownst to the Indy crew it would be dropped on Hiroshima to end the fighting and show the Japanese the US would remain the world super power. There were 1196 men aboard the Indy when a Japanese submarine torpedo tore through the hull of this city on the sea. The blast was horrific, men were trapped inside the ship as they slept, fire, smoke, water flooding in on the lower decks the scene must have been pandemonium. The crew was truly living a nightmare as men jumped overboard and the Captain was searching for a ray of hope for his ship and crew who were on a secret mission, which meant no one was looking for them! My Grandfather grew up underprivileged in South Dakota. He was high school football player and one of seven children in a very traditional mid western family. Being eighteen years old myself, I am sure his life thus far had not prepared him for what the future would usher in. Now without a ship and no signal of distress and far too few life vests for all who were adrift in the Pacific ocean. The vests were only designed to work for a mere two days and these sailors would be floating for four. After the first night men began hallucinating. These hallucinations resulted in many

drinking salt water doused with fuel oil. They would drift off to sleep and drowned. Dead and wounded bodies acted as bait to attract sharks. The sharks attacked before their eyes. They would wonder when it would be them. Many of them, including my grandfather prayed. My Grandfather said the men who survived never thought of them dying out there, despite their body temperatures of 85 degrees. They held onto the dream that they would return to their homes, their families and their lives. These brave and faithful men were rescued and survived against all odds. They went on to have meaningful productive lives and to honor the soldiers that have gone before them, despite their harrowing experiences.

November 1968 the Ship's Captain gave into years of depression, guilt and hate mail from the lost at sea sailors families, yet these courageous men lived on through sorrow and loss, still they have their lives. And they have told their stories and honored their country and all who serve us today in the name of peace for their grandchildren and their children.

Kelsey resides in Phippsburg, ME. She plans on attending Simmons College in Boston, MA in the fall, majoring in Business and Finance/Management.