

Tina Simpson
Granddaughter of Andre Sospizio, 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.).*

I grew up with the stories of my grandfather’s traumatic experience with the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis. I’ve been to the reunions for the surviving crew members. I have watched my grandfather, Andre Sospizio, relive the nightmare time and time again. I have seen him tremble and shake with the memories still fresh in his mind. His strength and courage makes my heart stand still. His zest for life, positive attitude, and constant cheerfulness humbles me, and inspires me to be a better person. My grandfather is proof to me that the human spirit can always prevail. Hell manifested here on earth on July 30, 1945. My grandfather did not cower and surrender to the face of evil. He handled himself like a survivor, and still does in all that he does today. He has every right to be bruised and bitter towards mankind for the physical and mental pain he has endured, but not my grandfather. Every time I see him, I am greeted with a warm smile, and a gleam of magic in his eyes. My Grandfather grew up very poor in Grenoble, France. I think he had it instilled in him from childhood how to be a survivor which guided him through the chaos of the attack. He served as an electrician on the ship. He was below deck working while the ship was hit. The sound was near deafening, and threw him from his feet. He said he had no idea what was ahead of him, but knew he had to remain calm. I’ve heard several stories from my Grandfather about the many men he came across who stood frozen in shock as he was making his way to the top deck. “Come on, we have to go,” he said taking their arms and guiding them up to abandon ship. I recall being extremely proud of my Grandfather at a reunion in Indianapolis when one of these men came up to shake his hand. He said, “I wouldn’t be here is it wasn’t for you, Frenchy.” Frenchy was his nickname on the ship. Witnessing this gave me goose bumps and made me want to dedicate my life to serving others in a huge way. This is one of the main reasons why I am pursuing Professional Writing at Columbia College Chicago. I want my words to spread positive messages on important world issues. I want to unite as many people as possible with compassion and understanding of one another. I am hoping to do this through a career in writing, with my grandfather’s spirit as a constant reminder to never give up on my dreams. My Grandfather tells many stories about his childhood, joining the Navy, and his experiences prior to the sinking. But when it comes down to those days actually spent in the water, he is still quite reserved. Even though it has been almost sixty-five years since those days, talking about them is still like a dark den he would rather not enter. My Grandfather suffered a few burns and severe fatigue after the sinking. When he was released from the hospital he went to Chicago to stay with his sister, my Great Aunt Stella. He had several nightmares the first few months, the desperate screams of his shipmates jerking him awake in terror. Emotional trauma wasn’t treated in 1945 as it would be today. To me, those wounds are the deepest and most effecting. So it astounds me how my Grandfather got on his feet right away. He got a job as an electrician, met my Grandmother, and continued pursuing the beautiful life. My Grandfather has been featured in many newspaper

interviews, and live interviews, including the Oprah show. I think this is great because it is very important to spread awareness of these courageous men. Each time he recalls his experiences involved with the sinking, tears fill up in his eyes and sometimes he chokes on his words. I can not even begin to imagine being eighteen years old and having to fight off sharks in the ocean, or having one of my best friends turn against me out of delirium because he thinks I am a Japanese enemy. His bravery and steadiness throughout it all was incredible. I asked my Grandfather if there were moments when he thought there was no hope, and amazingly he said that giving up never crossed his mind. He explained that an instinct to hold on came over him. I began to imagine myself on a raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, covered in black sticky oil under the scorching sun, with no end in sight. My Grandfather is a shining example of humanity prevailing against all odds, and I am extremely proud of him. I truly believe his positive, warm-hearted spirit carried him throughout this tragedy. Even more incredible is his modesty and unwillingness to accept too much praise. Whenever I share how touched I am by his heroism, he simply smiles and responds, "Oh, I was just doing my job." My Grandfather, Andre Sospizio, is a survivor not only of the USS Indianapolis sinking, but of life in general. He is a role model to my entire family, and stands for the hope and faith I carry in all that I pursue.

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.

The U.S.S. Indianapolis Cruiser holds a very significant place in World War Two. On July 26, 1945, secret cargo containing components for the atomic bomb destined for Hiroshima were put aboard the ship and delivered to the island of Tinian for further preparation. Other precious cargo aboard this ship were twelve hundred young sailors, and their captain, Charles Butler McVay. There was no suspicion that the U.S.S. Indianapolis was being watched. On the evening of July 30, 1945, Japanese submarine I-58, under the command of Mochitsura Hashimoto, torpedoed the ship in a series of three blasts that became responsible for the worst single at-sea loss of life in U.S. Naval history. The ocean swallowed the strong, beautiful Portland class heavy cruiser in less than twelve minutes. Nine hundred of the original twelve hundred sailors survived the blasts and made a fleeing jump into the great Pacific Ocean. Most did not have time to put on life jackets, and rafts were few and far between. U.S. Naval bases were not even aware that the ship had been sunk. The remaining survivors were found by accident five days after the ship disappeared. At this point, the shark infested waters, oil burns, and exhaustion claimed approximately six hundred more lives. The remaining survivors were discovered by Lt. Chuck Gwinn who was flying over the Pacific Ocean on antisubmarine patrol and spotted the wreckage. He radioed a military base on the island of Palau. Three hours later, a flying boat and three destroyers arrived to rescue the weary heroes. Lt. Gwinn is referred to as an "Angel" by the rescued crew of the U.S.S. Indianapolis. Herbert H. Hickman, a member of Gwinn's crew, recently addressed the survivors in at a reunion ceremony in Gwinn's honor. He stated, "Lt. Gwinn, your Angel, came back and knelt at the tunnel window to take a look at the situation. While doing so, he suddenly jumped up and headed for the front of the aircraft. I shouted to Gwinn

above the noise of the air craft asking, 'What's the matter?' And he said, 'Look down and you will see.' At that moment your rescue started." One can only imagine the relief that consumed these courageous men when they were spotted. Countless airplanes had passed above the wreckage site before Gwinn's finally took notice. The crew used their last ounces of strength to scream and violently splash about when they heard the roaring plane engines above. Their hope and willingness to hold on was diminishing with each passing flight that did not take notice. It is no wonder why the men refer to Lt. Gwinn as their Angel and answer to their prayers.

Tina lives in Frankfort, Illinois. She plans on attending Columbia College in Chicago, majoring in Creative Writing/Non-fiction with a minor in Professional Writing.