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About "Change of Subject."
 "Change of Subject" by Chicago Tribune metro columnist Eric Zorn contains observations, reports, tips, referrals and tirades, though not necessarily in that order. Links will tend to expire, so seize the day. For an archive of Zorn's latest Tribune columns [click here](#). An explanation of the title of this blog is [here](#). For other archival links including an extended bio, speeches and supplementary information about all sorts of stuff, [click here](#). If you have other questions, suggestions or comments, send e-mail to ericzorn@gmail.com.

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Originally posted: October 18, 2007

A dear diary: Son invites us along as he gets to know his mom

The annotated diary of Dorothy Zboyan for Thursday, Oct. 18, 1945:

Today was a nice day.

Actually, most days were pretty nice days for Dorothy (*pictured here in 1946*), a 17-year-old senior at Englewood High School when she wrote this entry in her diary exactly 62 years ago.



She saw a lot of movies in 1945, kissed a lot of boys, broke a couple of hearts and drank a lot of Coca Cola.

"What a life!" she wrote several times that year in the chronicle that her son, Chicago graphic artist [David Hunter](#), is rolling out day-by-day on a massive, multi-media Web site called "[Dorothy's Diary](#)."

In the evening, I was supposed to meet Earl in Parnell at 8:00

Earl was a "a cute guy" Dorothy had met at a party in late September, one of numerous boys who at least briefly sought her attention that year.

Parnell's Restaurant was a South Side soda-fountain joint at 528 W. 63rd St., just three blocks from where Dorothy lived with her parents and two younger siblings.

It's long gone, now, as are nearly all Dorothy's old hangouts, but Hunter has exhaustively researched nearly every reference in the diary and links readers to background information that turns each entry into a historical document.

At 7:45, Herb called up and asked if he could come over. I said sure, and so I didn't see Earl.



Dorothy loved Herb (*left*), she loved him not. He proposed at least twice to her that year and she turned him down.

As flighty as she was about boys, she was also canny. 1945 was a turbulent year in history – President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, World War II was coming to a dramatic close – and a sense of urgency pervaded the mating dances she described.

But she held back. It would not be until the next year that she met her future husband, a returning serviceman.

Hal came around and we all had a gay old time.

Part of the charm of "Dorothy's Diary" is the language. Many things are "keen" or "swell." Horny young men are "wolfy." An annoying boy "gripes" her.

Which Scion would you take on a road trip with your friends?

xD tC
 xB

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Later, Earl and Dave came around for Sis and I, and then Jim.

“Sis” is Louise Zboyan (*right*), one year younger than Dorothy and her frequent companion.



Dorothy died of cancer at age 35 when her son was just 14. The diary didn't surface until nearly 20 years later, and before “Sis” died in 2002 she helped Hunter decode references and put events into context with an extensive set of footnotes that are now part of the online package.

Boy, I had a swell old time, but really. Herb was wonderfully sweet.

Dorothy has few harsh words for anyone and seems mostly untroubled about all the drama taking place overseas – the February, 1945, death aboard a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier of her pen-pal and former boyfriend George Geis, for instance, rates only a few lines.

He said that the reason he didn't come around for awhile was because the last time we were together (*I la fait tres chaud*).

The pidgin French in this final line of the entry for October 18 seems to be a reference to Dorothy making Herb hot in the amorous but still somewhat wholesome sense.

With supplementary photos as well as archival video and newspaper stories, Hunter, now 58, has created what he calls “a sort of virtual time machine” to help him and some 200 regular readers get to know the mother he himself never really knew.

“I get to spend a year or so in that time machine,” he said in a [lengthy e-mail interview](#). “She's telling me lots of things. They are not necessarily the answers to questions I'd have, but it doesn't matter. It's her, and I'm there with her for a short while.”

So check out [the diary](#) and [the interview](#).

Trust me, they're swell.

An edited transcript of an online exchange with David Hunter:

ERIC ZORN: What have you learned about your mother through reading her diary?

DAVID HUNTER: At age 17 she seems very wise to me. She already knows her own mind. She's not naive -- or not as naive as I was at that age anyway—and she speaks her mind.

Dot's brother, Lou, told me that one time, some neighborhood kids had been bullying him. Without hesitating, she found the kids, told them they'd have to deal with her if they continued. They stopped.

Herb asks her twice to marry him. Without missing a beat she gives him a flat-out, level-headed “no”, both times. There's none of what we'd call now an “internal debate”. I believe she would have said yes had she thought Herb could settle down.

EZ: What has surprised you?

DH: The energy my mother, Sis and her friends had. They'd go to Jackson Park beach in the morning, see a double feature matinee, take the L downtown, see another double feature, and then walk home from the L station or bus stop at 1 a.m. and stay up until 3 a.m.

And how popular they were.

She seldom mentions the war. A friend of mine shrewdly pointed out that folks could be very stoic during the war, and maybe that's the reason.

She has hardly anything critical to say about anyone. And not one negative word about her mom and dad. Even though I always felt my grandparents were the nicest people I'd ever known, that was still surprising.

I was also surprised by the number of movies she saw. Three or four double-features, plus five vaudeville acts at some of them, all in a week. They even managed once or twice to have seen everything all up and down 63rd and Halsted--all seven theaters--there was nothing left.

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I wasn't expecting the apartment building on Normal Boulevard, where my mother lived, to still be standing.

And finally I hadn't really understood what a truly momentous year 1945 was. Not only the war's end, but the beginnings of the Atomic Age, Communist influences, the Cold War, trouble in Vietnam, "expressways" for the city, and a new passenger airport (named after Butch O'Hare--a pilot who died in 1945) near Park Ridge. Then of course there's the Cubs in the World Series, and the infamous origins of the Curse of the Billy Goat.

EZ: Were you struck by the late hours these teenagers kept?

DH: Yes! I admire how they could do that and go to school the next morning. They were often up until 1, 2 or 3 a.m., sitting on the front steps with friends--on school nights. I don't know how she did it. She remained a "night person" later on, too.

Sunny, my mother's good friend, reminds me of how relatively safe it was (compared to today) to walk around or ride the trains and buses late at night back then. That, and a lot of freedom given to Dot & Sis by her parents, accounts for the late hours, too. And, also, they spent many of those late nights sitting on the front steps, by the front door, just talking and "goofing around," as they'd say.

But Sis told me that she and Dot did help around the house quite a bit, laundry, cleaning and so forth, because their mom worked as well, at a factory, I think.

They were good kids, very innocent and they had the utmost respect for mom and dad. I don't think they were much trouble in that regard, as you can tell from reading.

EZ: What did her father – your grandfather – do for a living that had him on such an odd schedule that allowed Dorothy to stay up so late?

DH: He was a bus driver. As best I know, he worked for both a private bus line that shuttled between hotels and trains stations, and also for the Chicago Surface Lines, which later became the CTA. He was a great guy. And, legend has it, a great pinochle player.

EZ: And what's pleased you about what you've read in the diaries?

DH: That she was making the most of her time, without of course knowing that her life was already half over. I think that's just how she was.

I mean, I don't think she made a concerted effort at doing it. But as you can see, she was almost always busy. With friends, at the movies, at the beach, going for long walks, out for Cokes at "Parnell" or Minuet Grill--the local diners.

I really appreciate that she listed the titles of nearly every movie she saw, and where she saw it. Sometimes even a review: "so-so," "terrific," "corny."

I was happy to locate and visit Hal -- my mother's good friend and next door neighbor. He's still living in the area.

I'm pleased at the kind of therapeutic effect doing this has had on me. It is the closest I will ever get to knowing her better.

Someone once asked me where I'd go if time travel were possible. He wanted to go to the future, but I said I wanted to go back to the 30s or 40s, to see my mother growing up.

And so I suppose that's what I've tried to create here for myself--a sort of virtual time machine. Given how the days of the week match 2007, it's also become a sort of parallel universe.

EZ: Has anything about what you've read disappointed you?

DH: I can't say that I'm disappointed at all with what she wrote, just that I wish there were more diaries from more years. All I have is '45 and an incomplete '46. I suspect she kept a diary in 1944. But if so, it's gone.

Also, all the neighborhood places are now gone. Englewood gradually and sadly became a sort of ground zero for the city's racial conflicts (to which there were advance clues in 1945). Englewood High--a beautiful, huge old "Castle" building, the great movie palaces like the Southtown, Stratford, Linden, Ace, Englewood, and Englewood Hospital, where I was born, just to mention a few, are all gone. All places

where my mom and her friends spent their days in 1945.

I'm disappointed that I didn't start this project sooner, when I could have talked to more of my mother's friends. On the other hand, I'm lucky now to have access to online resources, like the Tribune's archives. Putting the diary entries into context through pictures and the news of the day has really helped bring it to life, and I enjoy doing the research.

EZ: Have you edited anything out of the diaries as you've gone along?

DH: I've had to do hardly any editing. Where I have, it's almost always been to add a word or two for clarity. For example, she wrote that she walked to "59th", and so, assuming not everyone would know what she meant, I've added "[St.]". Or in another case, I placed "[aunt]" before "Dell".

I thought about omitting Dot's "...tres chaud" and two or three other things, like "Wow--that man", but didn't because I feel it's quite innocent (especially compared to what one might read or hear nowadays), and phrases like that are about as steamy as things ever get in the diary.

I edited out a few last names here and there, but I haven't been very consistent about it. I've never made up my mind whether I should include them or not.

EZ: What were the mechanics of doing this project? When did you transfer the longhand diary into a computer file?

DH: I typed it all up about 15 years ago. But then lost everything in a hard drive crash. I had printouts, though, and of course I have the diary itself. So now I re-transcribe the entries, the comments from Sis, and enter the "news" items a few days in advance usually.

Finding and preparing the photos of family, friends and places took some time at first.

I originally didn't include much in the way of "news". But as it went on I started to realize how much current events added to getting the sense of place and time. So since about May or June, I've combed thru every day of the 1945 Tribune archives to find relevant and interesting items. Or weather reports.

It takes time, but it never ever has felt like "work" at all. I'll be sad when it's over.

EZ: Tell me a bit more about yourself and your extended family.

DH: I'm a graphic artist. I've always lived in the Chicago area, mostly on the South Side, but currently in the west loop. I love the city and am glad I stayed here. I'm a Vietnam vet. I was Dot's only child.

Sis passed away in 2002 at age 74. I was hesitant to ask her to do the commentaries initially, thinking that she might not want to revisit the past. And I was concerned she might do it out of obligation, and I didn't want that.

But when I did ask, she was very enthusiastic and I believe she truly enjoyed it, and I think it comes through in her comments. I would mail her about three months worth of entries, and a month or two later, she'd mail them back with her notes. She was helpful identifying people in photos and giving background information about the neighborhood, too.

Sis' three kids are my cousins, but are more like brothers and sisters to me. Dot's brother, Lou, who was 7 in 1945, is 69. He's a teacher and lives in the suburbs.

EZ: What about your dad?

DH: His name was also David Hunter. His early life in particular was very hard. He came from a big family and they struggled day-to-day.

He went to Tilden High School but dropped out so that he could work. Then in 1943, even though he was too young at 16, he joined the army (his mom helped him fib about his age). He answered a call for volunteers to enroll in some special training, which turned out to be for the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

In 1944 he was parachuting into Burma and into the thick of things. It was December of '45 when he came back to Chicago, only 18 and already a WWII combat veteran.

He was introduced to my mother in the summer of '46 by his friend (who later became my godfather). One of their first dates was a Lake Michigan cruise. They got married in 1947. She worked for Illinois Bell for a short time after high school. I came along in

'49. He became an electrician. We lived at first in a temporary G.I. housing development near what is now Ford City.

At first he wanted to be a lab technician, but he got into the electrical business. First as a union electrician and later owner or part-owner of several local electrical supply stores, one of them in the Englewood neighborhood. Finally he was an electrical inspector in Westmont. He retired in 1986 to Brown County in Indiana. He was living there with his third wife, Mary, when he died of congestive heart failure in December, 2000, at age 73.

EZ: Tell me more about the circumstances of your mother's death.

DH: My mother died of cancer at age 35.

A hot, late-June afternoon in 1963 was the last "normal" day we had. It was my grammar school graduation ceremony. I have a vivid memory of my mother in a bright yellow flower print dress. We took some photos – slides -- in our back yard afterwards. I remember that my dad and I did something, but she didn't join us. She stayed in, which was very unusual for her.

As I found out later, the pain in her knee had kept getting worse, until she began having a problem going up stairs. Then around that time, she found out it wasn't arthritis, like the doctor had first said, but bone cancer.

My dad told me that she'd wanted to see me graduate before going to the hospital.

There were radiation treatments over that summer. Talk of drastic surgery. Crutches. Bad days and relapses during when she was her old self for awhile. A live-in nurse. Oxygen tanks.

They didn't tell me very much. I had no clue that it was so bad. I thought she would get better. I started high school. Then Dot's mom--Pauline-my grandmother--who herself was only in her late 50s-died of breast cancer.

I don't have any memory of visiting my mother in the hospital. It might have been her wish to have it that way—I wish I knew; I wish I could have visited her.

I have a pretty clear memory of the last time I saw her. She was confined to a bed in the rec room, on oxygen, and had lost a lot of weight. I was about to leave for a weekend at Sis' house.

Looking back, I am sure she knew how bad it was, and that it would be the last time. I can't begin to imagine what she was feeling and thinking. She cried. I wish I'd comprehended what was happening.

On March 13, 1964 I came home from school, and received the news.

I knew her as my mother, but I didn't really know her as a real person, if you know what I mean.

She'd been like the sun rising and setting. Something I just knew, and took for granted, would always be there, forever.

And so although I can never be around her again, and ask her all that I wish I could, I do have this and am very grateful for it. I get to spend a year or so in that time machine. She's telling me lots of things. They are not necessarily the answers to questions I'd have, but it doesn't matter. It's her, and I'm there with her for a short while.

EZ: What else do you know about Herb, the hapless and persistent suitor? What happened to him?

DH: I wish I knew or could find out. I regret not trying to track him down years ago. I haven't exhausted all my resources, but he has a pretty common last name (Martin). I'd love to hear from him.

EZ: Are you going to publish an online version of Dorothy's 1946 diary?

DH: I wasn't going to at first, but now I'm pretty certain I will. It's not a complete year; she stops writing in late summer.

MORE BACKGROUND INFORMATION FROM THE WEB SITE:

Some time around 1980, my late father sent me a few items he'd saved over the years after my mother's death. Among them were my mother's diaries from 1945 and '46, which I had no idea existed until then.

Regrettably, I have no films or audio recordings of my mother except for a one-minute souvenir record she and my father made in about 1946, before they were married.

Since I was only 14 when she passed away, my memories of her are of a very general nature, and so the diaries were, and are a wonderful, unexpected gift.

1945 has the same calendar as the current year, 2007, and so each day's entry is available in "real-time" as the year progresses. A new day will be posted every day during the year 2007, until every day of the 1945 diary is online.

What I am left with now is, of course, very meaningful to me. Whether there will be interest for a casual reader I don't know, although the diary may be interesting to local history buffs: places and things within the Englewood neighborhood—restaurants, theatres, transportation, schools, etc., many of which have long since vanished and are now all but forgotten.

More than anything, this is a labor of love for me, Dot's son.

Dot—my mother, Dorothy—was born in Chicago in 1928. She was the first of Pauline and Louis' three children. They lived on Brighton Place, near 40th Street, on the first floor of a brick two-flat. Dot attended Shields Elementary School and then Kelly High School. Dot would always be close to her sister Louise (Sis) who was a year younger. Their brother, Lou (Son), was born in 1937.

Dot developed a talent for painting. She loved music, learning to play her accordion, and once marched with it at Soldier Field. In about 1943, the family moved from Brighton Place into a large apartment at 61st and Normal Boulevard, in the Englewood neighborhood. At the start of her diary, she is 16 years old and a junior at Englewood High School.

Dot graduated from Englewood in 1946, got a job, and married my father in 1947. They lived with Dot's folks on Normal Blvd. for awhile, got a tiny place of their own above a tavern, and then I was born. We had a duplex in a post-war housing development where what is now the Ford City shopping area. Dot worked for the telephone company. In about 1953, we moved into a nice, two-story house, with a yard and garage, in the Mount Greenwood neighborhood.

Sis had also gotten married, and had three children, Dan, Ken and Nancy. Dot and Sis would continue over the coming years to spend lots of happy times together and also as couples. They'd go dancing at the Boulevard Ballroom, or have pinochle parties (and highballs) at their homes or at Pauline & Louis' place. Sis' kids were, and still are, like brothers and sisters to me.

What I remember most about my mother is that she really and truly loved life and laughter, and loved her family and friends. Her cares and woes rolled off; she knew how to be genuinely optimistic and upbeat, to not take life too seriously, and how to joke in the face of trouble. Once, when for some reason I went off by myself during a party, she sought me out and said, "C'mon and have some fun; life is short."

She and I would always be very good, close comrades. She was my understanding ally in my constant, tense clash with a temperamental, disciplinarian father. She was a sympathetic partner during all my school woes.

But I was too young to really get to know her well.

And all of a sudden, she was gone, and there wasn't any time left.

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Comments

I found reading the diary of David Hunter's mother, well, utterly swell.

The language of teenage girls was like that of any era, peculiar to its era, and a diary of a teenage girl today would sound quite different in its language sixty years from now.

Dot fortunately had a rich high school social life, and what comes through is how often and how many movies she saw, before the era of television. She also saw a lot of live stage shows.

I only looked at about a month and a half, but I will be going back again and again.

Posted by: Robert Pruter | Oct 18, 2007 8:49:33 AM

This touches home for me. My grandfather had the concession under the EL at 63rd and Halsted after the war. I'm talking WWI here, though. He lost it in the depression. My mother used to live nearby and go to all those same theaters on Halsted St. She saw Bob Hope at the Stratford Theater back in the 1920's. I will be following this diary. Thanks for sharing this with your readers.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/images/vc17.jpg>

I believe this is the Stratford

Posted by: Jack O'B | Oct 18, 2007 9:53:33 AM

I've been enjoying this diary since the beginning of the year. It's particularly striking how many movies they go to - in a time before television, that must have been their main source of entertainment.

I also enjoy the asides about news stories of the time, and the birthdays - for example, October 9, 1945, was John Lennon's fifth birthday. Dave has obviously put a lot of work into this and it shows. I hope he continues this project into 1946.

Posted by: Becky | Oct 18, 2007 10:11:14 AM

Besides having the same first name and being born the same year as your Dorothy, I lived through most of her experiences growing up in those years only living a bit south in Chicago. Even going to high school during WWII I still had good times including walking to many movies and not having to worry about walking home at night. Brought back many memories, but that your Dorothy's life ended so early was very sad leaving a young son who never got to know her longer.

Posted by: Dorothy Caldwell | Oct 18, 2007 10:52:26 AM

Interesting that we have a fascination of how life was like for our parents growing up. Since seeing Back the the Future, I've always wondered how it felt growing up in the 50s, 60s and early 70s and the terror of being drafted (My mom and Dad's time).

Posted by: Michele | Oct 18, 2007 11:52:53 AM

My mom was a few years older than Dorothy, but they looked alike and just the few items I've read so far bring back memories of stories she told of her teens.

Thanks for bringing this to our attention, Eric. Projects like this are one of the best things about how the Internet's given regular people the chance to reach global audiences.

Posted by: jk | Oct 18, 2007 12:23:30 PM

Jack O'B @ 9:53:

That's a great view of the Stratford theatre, and you can also see the Englewood theatre across the street. Thanks. -D.

Posted by: Dave H. | Oct 18, 2007 2:20:29 PM

I often hear people say, "If only I could only go back and ask them the many questions which will forever be unanswered." I feel that way about my grandparents. Fortunately for me, the girl referred to in this diary, Sis, is my grandmother. I will be forever grateful to Dave for providing me the opportunity to learn a little more about my grandmother and the life she lived.

As I read Sis' comments, I can hear her reading them to me. I truly feel many people will be touched by this website. It may give people the motivation to ask their relatives to tell the stories which often go untold.

Posted by: Brenda Strutzenberg | Oct 18, 2007 2:21:48 PM

Dorothy Caldwell: thank you. Did they call you "Dot" or "Dottie", too?

Posted by: Dave H. | Oct 18, 2007 2:22:39 PM

This article was very timely for me. My father's WW2 diary has sat in a bookshelf for the last decade or so and I had never taken time to read. My parents divorced when I was in first grade and my father died when I was eleven. I knew he served in the Navy but didn't know he saw action during the war.

I started watching Ken Burn's "The War" and it sparked curiosity in my father's war efforts. What followed was a journey for me - learning about a man I never got a chance to know well enough. He was only twenty years old, witnessing history (Battle of Peleliu, Battle of Leyte Gulf, Kamikaze attacks, Typhoon Cobra, Battle of Iwo Jima, Battle of Okinawa and the Surrender of Japan in Tokyo Bay) and hoping to survive through it.

I finally finished transcribing his diary and scanning pages of the diary a few days ago. I have posted it online in pdf form with links to all pertinent references:

<http://davidcihla.com/georgecihla.pdf>

I am considering donating the diary to the Library of Congress as they are accepting these items as described on their web site:

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/>

Posted by: | Oct 18, 2007 4:07:33 PM

My father's grandparents lived in Englewood. My great grandfather had a junk yard at Halsted and 57th. He went to jail for year in 1903 for receiving stolen property (trolley wire stolen from the streetcar company). It was a big scandal because he had apparently been paying off cops.

The Tribune carried several articles about it which I discovered in the archives. (No one in the family had ever known about it). Unfortunately, there were no pictures.

Posted by: S. Sherman | Oct 18, 2007 5:06:45 PM

I learned about this diary when Dave left me a message on another Englewood related website. I've read it from then on. I lived in Englewood and hearing about it from the pages of Dot's diary gives me a totally different prospective. Teenage girls were really busy back then. They were always going places. I remember some places, (the shopping center and some of the movies theaters - especially the beautiful Southtown)and others I don't. It's like taking a step back, a little before my time. Enjoyable and facinating! I wish I had a diary to give me some insight to what my own mother did and felt as a teenager. THANKS DAVE.

Posted by: kay s. | Oct 20, 2007 2:01:05 AM

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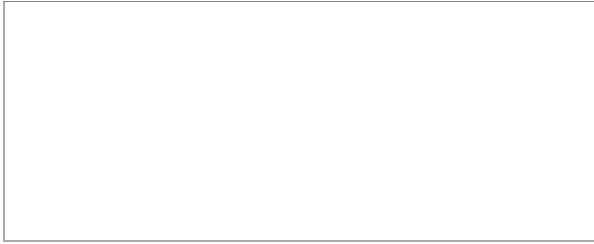
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