

“I’m Not So Worried About COVID-19”

Pandemic reflections of John Robotto (1923-2021), Oakland Street, Manchester, September 2020.

As told to Town Historian, Susan Barlow.

I was born on May 1, 1923. Today, at the age of 97, I’m coping with macular degeneration, COPD, and this COVID-19 virus. But our small business, DJ’s Dog Grooming, has been open throughout this pandemic. We are an “essential business,” isn’t that something? Liquor stores, too, are classified as “essential.”

My wife, Doris, and I made some changes in the grooming business’s procedures, keeping the door locked, and opening for only one customer at a time. We never closed down. And we are careful about the virus – when Doris goes shopping, I just stay in the car, and if we go out for a meal, we stay apart from others.

We’re in a weird world. I’m sorry for the kids who can’t have their normal activities – school and sports.

Putting the pandemic into perspective – I’m a World War II veteran. I went into the Navy Air Corps in 1943 at the age of 19. I had wanted to enlist earlier, but my parents wouldn’t sign for me; my father said he needed me on the family farm. When I entered the service, during our training, we were always lined up alphabetically, and after a while, there were fewer and fewer guys with the last name starting with “R.” They were killed during their pilot training. It was disturbing.

I served in the North Atlantic Theater, on a carrier doing anti-submarine duty – search and destroy. I was a Petty Officer, Aviation Ordnance Man 2nd Class, similar to a staff sergeant. I was 18 months at sea, and it was very cold in the North Atlantic, but we had good chow and nice clean bunks, and we were treated OK. But many ships were destroyed and lives lost through German attacks. Living like that, far away from home and safety, it was an anxious time. You never knew what might happen. I got out of the service in 1946. Many of the men had what they used to call “shell shock” in World War I, and “combat fatigue” or “PTSD” as it’s also called. There was no treatment for us veterans back in the 1940s, at least I didn’t know about any treatment. We just learned to cope.

In 2007, I had open-heart surgery and got MRSA. I was in the hospital for seven months. They told my wife several times, “he’s not going to make it.” And that’s why, compared to other things in life, I’m not so worried about COVID-19.



Left, 2007 photo of John Robotto at a 2007 veteran panel discussion at the Manchester Historical Society. John served in the Navy Air Corps from 1942 to 1946. For many years, he ran a floor covering business in Manchester. He served as Commander of the VFW for three years, and still attends veteran events when he can.
Photo by Susan Barlow

Right, 2020 photo of John at Oakland St. *Photo by Paul Ofria.*

