

TELEGRAMS MARKED IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN OUR LIVES

She Who Laughs Last...

BACK IN 1968, the baseball season ended with the Detroit Tigers facing the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series.

Our house was for Detroit all the way, while our niece, Sue, an Indiana resident, was all for the Cardinals.

During those few days of plays, we exchanged a lot of good-natured phone calls about what was going to happen to the teams each day.

Well, Detroit won, but Sue sent us the last word, via telegram:

**“CARDINAL FAN NEEDS LESSON ON HOW TO LOSE
GRACEFULLY FROM TIGER FANS WITH MORE EXPERIENCE!”**

—Bea R., Remus, Michigan

Oh, No!

AT OUR wedding reception, in 1946, a uniformed delivery boy handed me a telegram. Thinking it was congratulating us, I was happy to open it.

To my surprise, it had a startling “revelation” . It read: **DOUBLE
CROSSER SEND LAST THREE MONTHS ALIMONY OR WILL
CALL POLICE. FIRST WIFE.**

My trembling hands and fluttering heart got to me pretty quick, but

very soon my new husband came to my rescue. He read the message and burst out in a fit of laughter.

Soon a crowd of relatives and friends joined us, and we have had many years of laughter ever since. At ages 91-1/2 and 82, my husband and I need all the laughter we can get.

The telegram was sent by a cousin as a joke.

—Jeanette R., Kankakee, Illinois

Message Received

IN 1944, my husband was drafted and I was expecting our first baby. Before he left, we decided on the name Gary for a boy.

After I had a baby boy, I sent my husband this telegram:

“I ARRIVED SAFELY. MOTHER IS FINE (signed) GARY.”

—Imogene S., Orlando, Florida

The What Department?

DURING WWII, my grandmother Rose Margaret Sawyer had three sons serving in the war—Jim (Navy), Charles (Marines) and Tom (Army).

When a uniformed man with paper in hand knocked at the door, my grandma heard the words “I’m from the War Department” and promptly fainted.

When she was revived, she was relieved to hear he was from the Water Department.

—Kay B., Greenville, South Carolina

Short and Sweet

MY FIANCE, Jack Palmer, and I were engaged to be married in 1951. He was drafted in February and went to basic training, then finance school at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana.

I got this telegram: “DEAR HONEY GRADUATION IS SEPTEMBER 21ST HOME ON 22ND MARRY ME 23RD OR 24TH LOVE (signed) PVT JACK PALMER.”

We were married September 23, and he left immediately for Korea for the next year and a half.

—Iris P., Whiting, New Jersey

Even Shorter

IN MARCH 1947, I was in a hospital recovering from giving birth to my son.

I received this telegram from my beloved father: THANKS (signed) DAD.

—Ethel N., Oxnard, California

Grief Visited Twice

DECEMBER 20, 1952, was a cold, snowy day at our Kansas home. Mom was told there was a telegram awaiting her, and she and I went to pick it up after she finished working at a kitchen in town. In those days, telegrams usually meant bad news.

As she read the message, she started to cry; her mother's brother had died at his home in rural Oklahoma.

As Mom and I started for home, I was rereading the telegram and asked my mother if you always got two copies. She said no.

The second copy had been sent to my father, informing him that his father had died.

A major snowstorm had dumped 2 feet of snow in the area, and our small town, Stafford, was at a standstill because of snowdrifts and closed roads. As a result, we could not get to either funeral.

—Ann W., Scottsville, Kentucky

He Delivered Those Telegrams

FROM 1947 TO 1951, I worked for Western Union, delivering telegrams by pedaling my bicycle all over Mitchell, South Dakota. I started at age 16 and continued working even after I'd married and had a daughter.

Back then, a straight telegram consisted of 10 words or less. A day letter was 25 words or less and could be delivered whenever I was in that particular area of town on that day. Hotel reservations, automobile identification numbers and orders for flowers made up the majority of the telegrams.

Every day, I delivered 50 to 200 telegrams, except when the State B Basketball Tournament at the Corn Palace skyrocketed the number as fans sent support to their home teams.

I quickly learned the location of every address in town, and I could usually tell anyone who asked what color the house at any

address was.

A man named Stransky was a 31-year-old successful businessman who rented out the entire fourth floor of the Western Building downtown. He was one of the friendliest guys I ever met and always spoke to me.

I had to deliver a telegram to his parents to notify them late one afternoon that he had been killed in action while in the service. I delivered the same message the next morning to his wife and children.

When I was 21, a well-dressed clerk at a local clothing store asked me if I was getting a little old to be delivering telegrams on my bicycle.

I told her that every 4-week month I earned \$120, and every 5-week month, I earned \$150.

“No wonder you’re delivering telegrams!” she said. “My boss expects me to dress in expensive clothes and wear nylon stockings every day, and I make only \$80 a month!”

—Denis K., Vernal, Utah

Messenger Delivered to Her Heart

ON SEPTEMBER 20, 1948, I was on my first morning working for the city attorney. My boss received a telegram while he was in court and I was anxious, not knowing what to do about the telegram.

The good-looking Western Union messenger assured me it would be fine to give my boss the telegram when he returned to the office.

My anxiety over that telegram wasn't the only thing that had my blood pumping. That messenger was the most handsome guy I ever laid eyes on.

I was so taken with him that I asked my girlfriend what his name was.

Several weeks later, I received another telegram from my boss and delivered by that messenger.

"I have a telegram for you, Marjorie," he said.

"Thank you, Denis," I replied.

"The telegram is for you, Marjorie, but how did you know my name?" he asked.

I admitted that my girlfriend was a friend of a Western Union operator and that's how I found out his name. Of course, he knew I was very interested in him.

We've been happily married for nearly 57 years.

—Marjorie K., Vernal, Utah

Winning Was Only the First Step

THE 1950s were good years for contests, and I entered many of them, hoping to win a big one.

In May 1955, I bought a box of Kirkman detergent and noticed an ad for a mink-a-month contest. I sent in two entries and promptly forgot about the contest

Two weeks later, I got a phone call from a man who requested a surprising amount of personal information. He wouldn't say too much but he did say I was one of eight people in the running for the grand prize. I would be notified of the winner in a week.

Tension increased daily until I got a telegram with congratulations. Further notification was coming, but I had won the grand prize, a \$3,500 mink coat. I'd finally hit the jackpot.

Soon, a Kirkman representative came to escort me around to visit the local newspapers and radio stations for publicity (above). He used a fur- coat facsimile.

When I finally received my mink coat, I realized that I'd have to pay taxes on it—far more than I could handle as a single secretary and partial supporter of my mother.

I eventually was able to sell the coat for \$1,000, its actual value, and paid taxes on that.

I had about \$600 left and never tried for a big prize like that again.

—Norma L., East Pembroke, New York

Handling of Notices Has Changed

MY PARENTS and I both received telegrams in September 1943

telling us that my brother, Arthur, had been listed as missing in action.

Later, we learned that he and more than 100 of his shipmates had died on the USS Savannah at Salerno, Italy.

The telegram about his death came on what would have been Arthur's 22nd birthday, November 5.

Thank goodness they don't send telegrams anymore; they send military officers.

—Helen G., Tucson, Arizona

That's Why They Call It Boot Camp

AFTER BEING MARRIED for 3 years, my husband Ed was drafted into the Army, in 1960. After basic training, I agreed to go from our home in Montrose, Iowa back with him to Fort Ord, California, where he was to undergo more training.

We rented a small apartment on the first day, 3 miles from camp.

Later that evening, there was a knock on the door with a telegram from my husband: "I LEFT MY COMBAT BOOTS IN THE TRUNK. MY SERGEANT SAYS THAT IF I DON'T HAVE THEM BY MORNING I WILL BE IN BIG TROUBLE. PLEASE COME BRING THEM TO ME. (signed) ED."

I did. He got his boots and didn't get in trouble.

—Phyllis B., Keokuk, Iowa

It Even Rhymes

MY DEAR FRIEND Rita was downsizing from house to trailer and couldn't bring all her precious memories. She asked me if I would like to have this Valentine's Day greeting from a dear friend of hers.

Every Valentine's Day, I display it on a small easel on my dining room table and think what a wonderful treasure she gave me.

It read:

"This is sent in your direction
With all my love and my affection.

—Judy M., Inverness, Florida

Western Union lines Connected the U.S. and Its People

THE CIVIL WAR provided the first real test of the transcontinental telegraph line that was cobbled together by Western Union through acquisition of former competitors.

In 1866, Western Union introduced the first stock ticker, giving stockbrokers rapid access to New York Stock Exchange quotes. Four years later, the company launched a time service, helping standardize the time around the country.

The telegram business grew in popularity through the 1920s and '30s, quickly sending good news and bad. In 1929, some

200 million telegrams were sent. In those years, a telegram was much cheaper than a long-distance telephone call.

Mother's Day and Valentine's Day were the two biggest days for telegrams years ago.

On those two days, it was a treat to see a brown-uniformed messenger, perhaps on a bicycle, approach your front door. On other days, there was often concern at what the message in the pale-colored envelope said.

The primary business was, however, the company's money-transfer system, where anyone could send money, via telegraph lines, to any Western Union location in the U.S. and later around the world.

As time progressed, Western Union introduced teletypewriter and facsimile service, Mailgrams and transcontinental microwave radio beam service to replace all those poles and lines and communications satellites. It became the first company to have five satellites in orbit.

But as technology evolved, telephones of all sorts and E-mail reduced the role of the telegram.

In January 2006, Western Union discontinued telegram services, marking the end of a storied era.

Born Too Late, He Was a Renaissance Man

THE SON of a prominent minister, Samuel F.B. Morse graduated from Yale University in 1810 and pursued a career as a painter.

While his paintings are now recognized as some of the most accomplished of the 1800s, he also was a pioneer in daguerreotype photography.

While perfecting his art in Europe, Morse became acquainted with scientists studying electricity. His interest in the telegraph grew, and he devised his famous series of dots and dashes—standing for letters of the alphabet, numbers and punctuation—to send via the telegraph

He obtained \$10,000 in 1843 to run an experimental line from Baltimore, Maryland to Washington, D.C. to transmit his coded messages. The first was from the Bible, “What hath God wrought!”

His invention revolutionized the way, and the speed with which, information could be sent.

Within 10 years, 2,300 miles of telegraph lines connected the United States, offering a path to almost anywhere for those simple dots and dashes.