**On behalf of our family, I would like to thank you for coming today. I would like to introduce the honorary pall bearers to you at this time.**

**Clifford Plett—a longtime friend and fishing buddy.**

**Darrell Morrow—longtime friend and fellow gardener.**

**Howard Ray—longtime friend and basketball fan.**

**We have listed the Collinsville Cardettes as honorary pall bearers. We would like to ask these ladies to please stand and be recognized. You see before you a vast array of ladies—each of them very special to our family.**

**Daddy was the youngest of five boys—Harold, Guy, Wayne, and Benjamin. His parents absolutely adored him. He was their baby. My grandmother called him Baby Ray till her last day here on earth. Daddy had a very happy childhood despite living during the Great Depression. He was always outside—either hunting rabbits, ducks, or prairie chickens or fishing. He always lied about the size of the fish he caught—no matter if they were caught in a local farm pond or in a lake in Canada. Somehow the fish always got bigger each time he told his stories.**

**My grandfather had several different jobs. He bought the first school bus for Collinsville. At that time, many districts could not afford to own and operate a school bus. My grandfather bought a hay truck. They bolted down the school bus frame to the truck bed. He picked up all the children living in rural areas around Collinsville. Often Daddy would ride along with him to pick up or drop off the children. Still today people will tell me that my grandfather was their bus driver when they went to school.**

**Daddy was able to attend all the away baseball, football, and basketball games because his father owned the bus. This was his “Get out of School Free” pass and he used it often. The baseball and football games were played during the day because the schools did not have lights to play at night at that time. Often Daddy and his father were the only people from Collinsville at the away games. They were a small but mighty cheering section for the Collinsville Cardinals. He also loved riding with the basketball teams to the away games. I think these experiences helped to make him a lifelong sports fan.**

**In December of 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Both of my parents were high school seniors. This was the beginning of a life changing experience for my father.**

**He always said that the United States military took everyone out of their momma’s kitchens and ran them through an assembly line. Someone shaved their heads. Doctors were on either side putting shots in both arms. At the end of the assembly line, someone said, “Welcome to the U. S. Navy”.**

**Daddy set sail for the Pacific on Thanksgiving Day, 1943. At first all the sailors were sea sick. That was small potatoes compared to what happened next. They met the Japanese Navy. Daddy was assigned to the U.S.S. Warren—APA 53. This was an attack transport ship. They carried Marines on the ship, along with many Higgins boats. When the battle began, the Marines would climb down the side of the ship on a series of ropes. They would get into the Higgins boats. One of the Navy men would lower the boat into the water and drive them two or three or four miles to the beaches. The front of the Higgins boats would open and the Marines would jump off and hit the beaches. Shells were flying everywhere. Sometimes the shells hit the Higgins boats. Several times Daddy drove the boats to the beaches. Luckily he returned safely.**

**It was at Leyte in the Philippines where they saw the first kamikazes. The sailors could not believe that airplanes would fly into the sides of ships. After that battle, the sailors were told about the kamikaze pilots. They would come at dawn from the east flying just above the water. The reflection of the sun on the water was blinding. You could not see them until they were right at the ships. The kamikazes would also come at dusk from the west as the sun was setting and it was impossible to see them at that time also. They were treacherous.**

**Daddy received two Philippine Liberation medals for his service at the battles of Leyte and Luzon. He also received five battle medals for his service in the battles in the Asiatic Pacific Campaign—places my sister and I could not find on a map or pronounce—such as Kwajalein or Majuro, Guam or Palau. He was in the Marshall Islands, the Carolina Islands, the Solomon Islands, and the Mariana Islands, and New Guinea. One year he was at Port Moresby on the south side of New Guinea on Christmas Day one year. It was 110° there. Everyone was freezing in December that year in Collinsville.**

**Daddy was trained as a quartermaster. He could read all the maps and help with the navigation. He knew the coordinates where he was at all times. When he wrote letters home to Mother and his parents. They all lived in the same house at 15th and Main. He knew the street address very well. However, when he addressed the letters, he used the coordinates of where he was rather than the correct street address. The mailman always delivered the letters to their home. My grandfather was able to keep track of him by checking the information on the envelope with his maps at home. Mother and my grandmother read the letters. Mother never knew that he was using the coordinates as the street numbers. He told that story about sixty-five years later. She wasn’t angry. She was just happy to get a letter from him.**

**The war changed Daddy for the better. He worked hard—he retired when he was ninety-one years old. He also played harder than he worked! He enjoyed life to the fullest every day for the rest of his life. Mother always said that if he came home from the war safely, he could do anything he wanted to do—and he did.**

**One summer he started leaving the house at 5:00 each morning. He told Mother that he was going duck hunting. It was not duck season. He never brought home any ducks. Finally he told her the truth—he was taking ground school to learn to fly an airplane.**

**He bought a small Piper Cub. The family would take Sunday afternoon flights. We’d take some bottles of pop and fly into a pasture in the Osage Hills. We’d fish at someone’s farm pond, and then get back in the airplane and head for home. I did not realize how fortunate we were. I thought everyone’s father flew airplanes.**

**Daddy would close up the store and drive out of town to the air field. If he saw a kid walking on the side walk or riding their bike, he’d stop and ask them if they wanted to go flying. Every kid in Collinsville for many years had their first airplane ride in Daddy’s plane. Today, he’d be sued or put in jail. Back then it was part of life in a small town.**

**In the fall of 1947 Daddy started refereeing basketball games. His very first game was at Owasso against Catoosa. The superintendent of Owasso came by his store to visit with him. He hired him to officiate that game. Daddy would be the only referee. They only had one per game back then. As the years progressed and the schools used two officials, my father would referee with gentlemen who had refereed games on dirt. The schools did not have the luxury of a gymnasium. They marked off the court on dirt. I do not know if the players wore coats over their uniforms. It would only seem right playing basketball in December, January, and February in Oklahoma. I thought everyone’s Daddy ran up and down the basketball court refereeing basketball games.**

**Daddy refereed for 31 years. He started each season with schools that did not have football teams. They always started their seasons early. He knew everyone at those small towns. The same people worked the score table, took the admission money, and worked the concession stands each year. It was like a family reunion each time he went to those small towns. Daddy would get his legs ready for the bigger schools and college games that would follow. He refereed at the state tournaments in Oklahoma City for many years. He knew famous Oklahoma Hall of Fame coaches such as Bertha Teague and Bull Iba very well.**

**One coach that caught his attention was a gentleman who coached at the small town of Burbank. This man had a great work ethic and won all of his games. He ran various offences that Daddy had never seen, and he was officiating all over the state. This man’s defense was always exceptional. When Daddy was on the School Board, he was able to recommend hiring Howard Ray to coach girls’ basketball here in Collinsville. And the rest, as they say, is history. Mr. Ray helped to create a dynasty of winning seasons for the Collinsville Cardettes.**

**Daddy volunteered to coach summer baseball and softball teams. If someone needed a ball or glove, Daddy bought it for them. If a girl needed knee pads or new basketball shoes, Daddy bought them. The students’ parents probably thought the school bought these things for their children. My father always set kids from Collinsville up for success. He wanted them to have the best possible advantages in life as well as in sports.**

**My father and I traveled together to Washington, D. C. on the Oklahoma Honor Flights on June 6 a few summers ago. He loved visiting with the other veterans on the trip. Everywhere we would go, there were crowds of people clapping and cheering for all the veterans. There were several groups of young school children who had made large banners expressing their appreciation for the veterans’ service to our country. Each veteran on the trip received a large envelope filled with thank you letters from school children from Oklahoma. It was a great day that lasted from 3:00 A.M. till 3:00 A.M. the next morning. We flew out of Oklahoma City so I had to drive us home after we landed. When we got home, our entire family was there to surprise Daddy. One of the great grandchildren played Anchors Aweigh as he walked into the house. Everyone clapped and cheered. We had not been born when he returned from World War II in 1945, but we celebrated 70 years later.**

**Daddy was a great ambassador for the town of Collinsville. He was born here. He died here. He lived his entire life here except for his time in the Asiatic Pacific Campaign during World War II. If person's true wealth is the good he or she does in the world, then Daddy was the richest man in town.**

**He took the time to volunteer within the community. He took his time to volunteer with children and youth. He invested in people. At the end of the movie, It’s a Wonderful Life, George Bailey’s brother makes a toast to George. He says “Here’s to George Bailey, the richest man in town”. My father was the richest man in Collinsville. He knew everyone and their parents and their grandparents. He invested his time to make this community a better place. He invested his time to help kids become better prepared to become good citizens of our great nation.**

**I’ve mentioned how Daddy enjoyed flying. One year he flew some fishing buddies to Canada for a fishing trip. When they came home, they ran into bad weather which delayed them a bit. He called Mother to ask her to call several people to bring their cars out to the air strip. He would need them to form two lines on the edges of the air strip with both lines facing each other. When we saw the plane coming near dusk, everyone would turn on their car lights. Daddy would be able to see the lights and the run way. He would be able to land safely.**

**Just at sundown we saw the tiny speck of the plane coming from the north. Everyone turned on their car lights. It seemed like everyone from the entire town of Collinsville was there that night. As the plane approached, the landing was easy. Everyone honked their horns and cheered. Mother, Carol, and I waited till the plane shut down. We then ran as fast as we could to hug and kiss Daddy. We were so happy to have him home with us again.**

**I believe this was how it was when Daddy entered heaven. He could see the bright lights of heaven ahead of him, just like he saw those car lights on the run way when he flew home from Canada. There were some people cheering and clapping like the people did on our Honor Flight. I believe his parents and his brothers ran to greet him. They hugged and kissed him. The boy was home at last—in his eternal home.**

**My grandmother probably had been cooking for days. She always did. She had the banquet table ready. She used the good china and the good sterling silver in heaven. She had invited the entire town to this special banquet. All the brothers are now seated together around the table once again. The circle is unbroken.**

**May God continue to bless our great nation. May our Lord continue to bless our state of Oklahoma. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless Collinsville, Oklahoma—the best community in the world!**