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Veterans Spotlight—Eliot Sklar

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Eliot Sklar, Seaman 1st Class

It was a true honor to interview this week's featured guest. At 93 years of age, Eliot Sklar personifies the meaning of true American hero. As we sat back and talked for almost two hours in the conference room at Atria, I was so impressed with his kindness, humility and powerful love of family.

Mr. Sklar enjoyed a bit of celebrity at the age of 9 when he saved a young girl from being viciously attacked by a dog at a park in Boston. Somehow, the story caught the attention of actor Cary Grant's publicist, who notified Grant while he was in Boston to promote his new movie "Gunga Din." The young Sklar received the Cary Grant Medal of Valor from the legendary actor for his bravery.

A graduate of Roxbury Memorial High School he went on to Northeastern University. He enlisted in the Navy after dropping out and was sent to basic training in Sampson, New York. He commented that his enlistment was prompted by his anger and hatred of the Nazis and the murder of Jews and other atrocities that were taking place in Germany at the time. He was soon posted on the USS Hambleton.

The Navy Destroyer received seven battle stars for WWII service and was one of a few ships selected to lead the Navy in a victory lap in Tokyo Bay following the Japanese surrender in August of 1945.

Seaman 1st Class Sklar was involved in four major invasions: The Normandy Invasion, The Battle of Cherbourg, The Invasion of Southern France and The Battle of Okinawa.

Seaman Sklar is haunted by the bad memories from his military service. "I was constantly around death, destruction and unspeakable horror." he recalled. "I was the youngest on the ship. Watching our guys parachute out of planes only to be gunned down by enemy kamikaze's, seeing men in water, whose ship had been sunk by torpedoes drowning and screaming for help ... we couldn't get to them because we were being attacked ourselves. I can close my eyes even now and still see it. I was so hardened by death when I was discharged" he said.

He floundered for over a year, then his life changed dramatically when he attended a dance in Quincy. There, he met a beautiful, 16-year-old girl named Claire. They married two years later. "She was the ultimate source of my healing" he said.

In 1952, Seamen Sklar began a long and successful career with Cummings Junior Fashions and retired as an executive vice president with the company. Seamen Sklar has numerous awards for his bravery, however there is one that stands out: In 2013, he received a letter from the French Ambassador to the United States, notifying him that then-French President Francois Hollande had appointed him as a Chevalier (Knight) of the French Legion of Honor. The award was "a sign of France's infinite gratitude and appreciation for your personal and precious contribution to the United States' decisive role in the liberation of our country during World War II."

In typical fashion, Seamen Sklar was "honored and humbled" by this special honor. I can confidently state from our time spent together that Seamen Sklar's most-prized joy in life is his family.

"My daughter-in-law is like my daughter and calls me frequently, my three sons call on a regular basis and my grandchildren phone often" he boasted with pride. In an effort to help other veterans battling PTSD, Seamen Sklar has been writing poetry for years.

Having read some of his work personally, I can attest to their quality and profound impact. Seamen 1st class Eliot Sklar, our country thanks you for your outstanding and distinguished service to the United States of America.

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As many of us lay our heads down at night and dream of pleasant things, please try to remember these dreams would not be possible if not for our brave men and women who have so proudly served our country... God bless them all!

