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OUR TOWN, OUR TIME: Long Beach, L.I., in the 1930s and WWII

Paul Jackson

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This Long Beach, NY, book begins in the 1930s when the children of the Great Depression were growing up and continues through World War II when the young men and women of the forties went to war. The book describes what the people of Long Beach went through during the Great Depression, when the Long Beach Trust Company on Park Avenue failed. (The bank's empty building was turned into the Long Beach Public Library.) It's a nostalgic look at Long Beach, Long Island, New York, and a social history of the time, with recollections of the people and the neighborhoods (center of town, West End, East End and Canals; of Long Beach High School and the West, East and Central schools; stores on Park Avenue and Beech Street; the Laurel, Lido and West End movie theaters; Temple Israel, Temple Beth-El, St. Ignatius, St. Mary of the Isle and the People's Church; boardwalk amusements and bathhouses; the Nassau and other hotels; Orphan's Day; Senator William H. Reynolds, founder and first mayor of Long Beach, who brought two elephants from India (and their handler) to help construct the original concrete boardwalk in Long Beach in 1907, and how it was replaced by a wooden boardwalk in 1937 using funds provided by the WPA; the trolley that ran in the middle of Park Avenue and up to Beech Street in the West End; Vernon and Irene Castle, the husband-and-wife dancing team who opened a dance pavillion on the Long Beach boardwalk and left a legacy in its place of the Castle Baths, Castle Pool and Castle Theater; the rum-running on the beach during Prohibition and political shenanigans for which Long Beach became famous; Eleanor Holm (whose family spent the summers on Pennsylvania Avenue in the West End), Johnny Weissmuller and Gertrude Ederle who swam and competed in the old Olympia pool on the boardwalk; Firemen's Field; speedboat races in Reynolds Channel with Guy Lombardo, the band leader, who was the most prominent racer of the time; the mystery surrounding the death of Starr Faithfull, the young Manhattan socialite whose body washed up on the beach at Minnesota Avenue; the big bank robbery of 1939, called by The New York Times the most daring daylight holdup ever staged on Long Island; and the murder of Mayor Louis F. Edwards by Long Beach cop Alvin Dooley. The book recalls how teacher Skip Walrath was elected to a seat on the City Council. Skip's victory was the first crack in Democratic leader Phil Kohut's hold over the city. It looks back on the home front in Long Beach with the city's scrap drives, rationing, blackouts and dim-outs, air raid wardens, victory gardens and war bond drives. The book describes how Long Beach became a Navy town overnight when the Lido Hotel in Lido Beach was turned into a Naval base. And the Masonic Temple on National Boulevard became a USO. Our Town, Our Time contains letters from Long Beach GI's, accounts of Long Beach servicemen who were POW's, thumbnail sketches of the service records of some 250 Long Beach GI's, stories of 30 of the young men from Long Beach who were killed in WWII, their Gold Star Mothers, and the complete list (the honor roll in front of City Hall) of everyone from Long Beach who served in the armed forces during the Second World War. The last chapter, If They Could See It Now, tells about the changes in Long Beach from the smalltown of the 1930s (pop. 5,817), when it was America's Healthiest City, to today's City-by-the-Sea (pop. 35,000). Long Beach, designed as a summer colony for the moneyed class, in the 1930s became a year-round community for the middle class. Even if the 1930s and WWII were not your time, then the book describes your parent's or grandparent's life in Long Beach.

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