



BARBARA GARRINGER OLSEN
USNR, YEOMAN 1/c

The date was September 29, 1922, on a farm outside the small town of Daleville, Indiana; Barbara Phyllis arrived to join the family of Thelma Marie and Dallas Corwin Garringer and two older brothers.

In 1926, at the age of five, Dad Garringer, with his pioneering spirit, shocked all of the Indiana relatives by announcing, "We are moving to Arizona!" After many experiences as a youngster on a farm outside Phoenix, during the depression years, Dad Garringer called the family together again to announce his decision. "We are moving on!" The hogs were dying of cholera and he was sick of the hot summers and getting up at all hours to catch the irrigation waters to keep farming. It was 1938, I was a freshman at the only high school in Phoenix and with Mother, four teenagers, an old secondhand car and house trailer, we took to the road. Traveling north through California, Oregon, and finally to the Colville Valley in Washington state, Dad found his Shangri-la. He bought a small, run down farm a few miles from Colville and we settled in to hard work and few pleasures.

After graduation from high school, I was shy, but ambitious and had been accepted for employment at the Office of Agricultural Adjustment Agency in downtown Colville. World War II had started in the early 40's and many young men were drafted or enlisting to serve. My friend, Mary Ellen (Gilbert) Harrison, and I - during our lunch hour - began to joke about joining the Navy and getting stationed where our boy friends were serving. In addition, my Father had announced, that since my brothers had been called into service, now my sister and I would have to milk the cows. That did it! I said, "No way!"

Mary and I traveled down to Spokane in late 1942 to the Recruiting Station to join the Navy. She was accepted - I was rejected! They said I was too lightweight and my heartbeat was too rapid. Disappointed and upset, I suggested that we go to lunch over at Newberry's. I loaded up on a giant milk shake and other fattening "fare," psyched myself down, announced to Mary, "I'm going to try again!"

They accepted me!

Mary Ellen and I were the first recruits from the area to leave for the WAVES in March 1943 - she to Iowa and me to Boot Camp, Hunter College, New York City. The three months of discipline and training far outweighed anything I had experienced in my 20 years. Now it was time to grow up.

My next assignment was for three months training at Oklahoma A & M College, Stillwater, Oklahoma, to learn the Navy way to work in an office. At the end of this informative tour of duty we were allowed three choices as possible stations for permanent duty. When my orders arrived to report to Bureau of Personnel, Washington, D.C. - I wasn't a bit thrilled. Being stationed in our nation's capital, however, living in California Hall, housing just down the hill from BuPers on the Potomac, was indeed a challenge. My greatest surprise came when I was ushered into a huge office with dozens of desks and three desks away was my friend from home, Mary Ellen Gilbert

After more than a year at the Bureau, sporting a Yeoman 2nd Class rating, and becoming increasingly bored, I decided to ask for a transfer. My co-workers were sure I had lost my mind. They changed their tunes when I announced my orders to Todd Pacific Shipyards, Supervisor of Shipbuilding Office, Seattle, WA. Only destroyers were being built and 20 government and navy personnel were responsible for handling the paper work involved in each compliment of men boarding these ships when commissioned. Since no quarters were available, all of us lived out on subsistence and quarters. I studied and received my First Class Yeoman stripes. Enjoying my colleagues, a new sense of freedom and exploring all the way to Vancouver, B.C. cannot be easily forgotten.

Early in January 1945, I met a handsome Navy Pilot, Ensign Harry Olsen, from Milwaukee, WI., who was stationed on Whidby Island. We dated often and in June he surprised me with an engagement ring. The war was beginning to wind down and by VJ Day we had planned to be married. We were married in a formal ceremony at Denny Park Lutheran Church, just a block from the now Space Needle landmark.

After our discharges in December 1945, we headed for Wisconsin with very little money and a new set of dreams. We both enrolled as freshmen at the University of Wisconsin under the G.I. Bill - sharing the same English 101 class.

Having joined the Navy WAVES at age 20 opened a whole new world that became one of the most rewarding and exciting experience of my early life.