**Janis Thornton is an Indiana writer who loves writing about the people she meets and reporting the outstanding achievements they attain. She has been a staff writer, editor, and communications director for St. Luke's United Methodist Church of Indianapolis, The Frankfort (Ind.) Times and Purdue University. This will not be the last book she will write about ordinary people and their extraordinary lives.**

JANIS THORNTON

Call her a late bloomer. Call her a single mother with tremendous determination. Call her a woman whose life experience is wide and diverse. And call her a writer with great, wide-ranging talent who carved out a career in journalism later in life.

Janis Thornton is all of these things and more as shown in these pages that contain articles she wrote for the Frankfort (Ind.) *Times* during her eight years there as reporter, news editor and managing editor.

The people she wrote about are worth the price alone. There's Kathryn Caldwell, who doesn't talk to the horses she rescues. She speaks boldly, as if the equines are her babies. There's talented watercolor artist Alma Welcher, who loved to bake, but decided she needed a new hobby. There are the Lanums, whose love affair began after they met in an unusual way at an Indiana high school basketball game.

This book is a portrait of life — stories packed with an assortment of emotions and thoughts and vividly captured with verve by Thornton. And this is a book that, after you read it, you will want to pass on to a friend and insist that you get it back for future re-reading.

RAYMOND MOSCOWITZ
*Author of "Mosco: Life of a Grassroots Journalist,"*
*Celebrated Hoosier journalist and inductee of the*
*Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame*

LIFE SENTENCES • ORDINARY PEOPLE WRITING EXTRAORDINARY LIVES • JANIS THORNTON

# LIFE SENTENCES

ORDINARY PEOPLE
WRITING EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
SENTENCE BY SENTENCE

REPORTED BY
JANIS THORNTON

# Life Sentences

Ordinary People
Writing Extraordinary Lives
Sentence by Sentence

Reported By
Janis Thornton

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printed in the u.s.a.

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# FOREWORD

WRITING FOR A SMALL-TOWN NEWSPAPER WAS MY LIFE-LONG DREAM. That's why in 2000, when I joined the editorial staff of *The Times* in Frankfort, Ind., I hit the jackpot. It didn't take me long to realize that very best part of my writing career would be writing regular people's personal stories — their accomplishments, how they overcame a hardship, how they excelled in an unusual hobby or job, about places they've been, history they've seen, famous people they had known, wars they fought and even how they fell in love.

During my years in Frankfort, I became acquainted with a great many *Times*' readers, who granted me the privilege of hearing and writing about some of their most personal experiences, joys, disappointments, triumphs, losses, and achievements. Even though my many news-writing assignments took me to courtrooms, crime scenes, fires, political rallies, art exhibits, theatrical performances, county fairs, and adventures of all sorts, absolutely nothing stoked my sense of satisfaction more than hearing and then writing a fascinating, first-hand story told to me by a member of the Frankfort-area community.

I have written hundreds of such stories, and like a doting, devoted mother, consider all of them my favorite. However, the 40 stories that appear on the following pages represent a cross-section of the whole: good

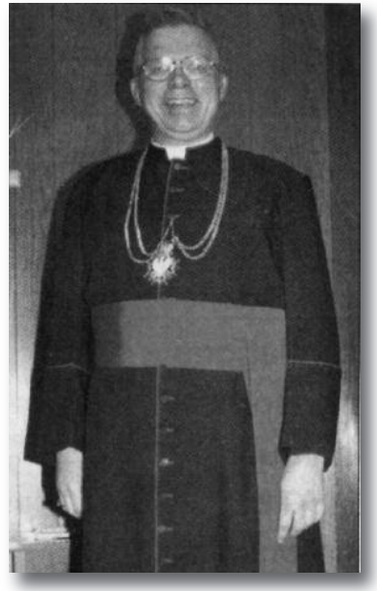
citizens, hobbyists, folks with unusual jobs, achievers of dreams, milestoneans and veterans. The people featured in these stories range in age from 12 to 101. They are students, housewives, activists, entertainers, factory workers and clergy. They are real people, and like everyone, they had a story to tell. They may be regular, ordinary people, but they are living extraordinary lives.

I hope you enjoy reading their stories half as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Janis Thornton



# GOOD CITIZENS



**Father Gerald Borawski**

# Frankfort Priest Honored as Canon

WITH A 30-ROUNDS-A-SECOND MACHINE GUN poised inches from his head, the young American priest watched helplessly as the East German Customs officer searched his suitcase.

"I'm a dead man," the priest thought.

The Customs officer ruffled through the bag, fingering the forbidden church supplies for several seconds. Finally, without expression, he announced, "Close your suitcase."

The priest feared he would be ordered to follow the officer for a more intense inspection, possibly jail — or worse. Instead, the German sealed the suitcase, turned to the American and said, "Nobody else will open your bag."

The Customs officer motioned the guards to move on, and when he was alone with the priest, he lowered his voice and said, "I'm a believer too."

The year was 1969, and the just-ordained priest named Gerald Borawski entered Poland smuggling religious goods in his bags. It was one of many such trips he would make, which ultimately would bring him an honor seldom bestowed on American priests — that of canon.

The telephone call Borawski, the now 58-year-old pastor of Frankfort's St. Mary's Catholic Church, long awaited came just before he sat down for dinner on Wednesday of Holy Week.

On the line was the bishop of Lomza, a small diocese in northeastern Poland. He was calling to confer the honor of canon upon Borawski.

"It's a great honor," Borawski said, relaxing in an easy chair in his rectory.

But don't confuse the honor of canon with being canonized.

"Canonized means you become a saint," he said laughing, "and with one condition: You have to be dead."

The Catholic Church's honorary position of canon, Borawski explained, is primarily given in European and Latin countries to priests with some type of official position or rank as bishop's assistant.

Originally, he said, priests were conferred canons because they built the church or performed great work, were leaders of the church or had contributed a great service.

Borawski's early years in the priesthood — between 1968 and the early 1980s — figured in to the recent honor bestowed on him. That was the period when he risked his freedom, perhaps even his life, journeying frequently to his grandparents' homeland and serving the Polish Catholic Church as it struggled under Communist domination.





The first time he made the trip, Borawski said, friends asked him to carry along a few supplies for the diocese he would visit.

"After I got over, somebody asked me if I knew it was against the law," he said, "and I said 'No.' And the next time I went back, I did it again. I thought 'I'm helping the church in distress.'

"I took service books — we called them missals — for the priests. I took some of the robes they needed. Mostly medicine and money. I would literally smuggle them in."

It was a practice that was at once admirable and dangerous.

"You had to be Cool Hand Luke to get by some of those guards," he said, "I mean, they were armed with submachine guns."

In 1972, Borawski became acquainted with Walter Archaki, a much older priest serving the Polish diocese of Borawski's heritage.

"He retired about 10 years after I met him," Borawski said, "and a lot of times the government would cut off his medicine and pension. A lot of times I would send money to help him make it."

When the bishop telephoned Borawski, he said the honor of canon was bestowed in large part because of Borawski's help to this retired priest.

At the bishop's request, this summer Borawski will make his 13th trip to his grandparents' Polish village of Myszyniec, about 100 miles northeast of Warsaw. During the visit, he will meet with the bishop and the priests of the church to which he's assigned — The Collegiate Church of the Most Holy Trinity.

Afterward he will visit relatives.

"I still have a lot of relatives over there," he said. "Probably more there than here."

He already is planning a 2003 pilgrimage to Poland and hopes a number of St. Mary's parishioners will join him. During their journey, he will likely share his appreciation for the Polish people's will to overcome adversity.

"Those people, when they were threatened, their churches were packed," he said. "I admire them because they stood firm for their convic-

tions, and they didn't give in to pressures of the regime."

With the honor of "Very Reverend Canon" comes corresponding documentation from the bishop and the privilege of wearing the distinguishing robe, which Borawski already proudly dons with little prodding.

Of the revered distinction, Borawski said simply being considered is reward enough.

"What it means to me is a deeper union with the church universal, not just the church here," he said, elaborating. "It means a greater union with the church from which my grandparents came.

"The most important thing about it, whether you get the honor or not, you are a good priest. If the bishop recognizes that — count that your blessing."

*This story appeared in The Times on April 8, 2002.*

**Kathryn Caldwell and rescue favorite, Lucy**

# Woman Rescues Horses Destined for Dark Demise

SHE TALKS TO HORSES LIKE THEY'RE BABIES.

She coos, "Mama's here. I love you," and cradles their immense faces in her hands. She kisses them too — smack on their fleshy, curled lips.

Sometimes they kiss her back.

Under brighter circumstances, she might be called Frankfort's horse whisperer. But when Kathryn Caldwell talks about what she does for horses, she does not whisper. Her voice is strong. She wants to be heard.

"She's a rescue," Caldwell said as she stroked Lucy's long, sleek neck.

Lucy, a gentle, well-behaved and nearly blind white mare, had been herded into the kill pen at the Shipshewana Auction one Friday about two years ago. Lucky for Lucy, Kathryn and her husband, Tony, outbid the kill buyers and brought her home.

About 40 horses of varying ages, breeds, health and life histories live on Kathryn and Tony Caldwell's 29 acres near the city limits west of Frankfort. Some of their equines are boarded, some are personal pets and the rest are rescues.

Caldwell professes her unbridled love for them all, but it's the rescues that provoke her tears. They are the ones that, if not for the Caldwells' intervention, would have died — slaughtered for their meat to satisfy a growing market in Europe and Japan, where panic over mad cow and foot-and-mouth diseases have driven up the demand and, ultimately, the price for horsemeat.

Strolling through the stable, where no fewer than 20 horses focus their attention toward Caldwell, she stops to greet them by name — Princess, Tex, Amber, Cricket, Lizzie and Thunder. She gives each a pat and a smooch.

"The rescued horses are different," Caldwell asserts in a softened tone. "They know they've been rescued. It's like once they understand what has happened, they're twice as loving. You can see it in their eyes."

**Horses used for human consumption**

Caldwell believes most Americans are appalled to learn that horses are routinely slaughtered for human consumption. She claims the majority of Hoosiers are unaware that every week in Indiana, as many as 100 horses — including the old, the feeble, the blind, the lame and the untrained — are sold at kill auctions to buyers who value them only for their meat.

Selling to a kill buyer saves the horse's owner the expense of having it euthanized and disposed of, which may cost upwards of $250, and may even reap a modest profit.





The Shipshewana public auction every Friday in northern Indiana's Amish area attracts several kill buyers. They come from Indiana, its surrounding states and beyond, according to a spokesman for the auction house who refused to give his name.

"What would we do if we didn't slaughter them?" he said. "If they weren't used for meat, wow, we'd have a real problem. Where would we put them? ... But this is life. They're treated as humanely as they can be."

Not so, counters Caldwell.

"I saw horses that shouldn't be there," Caldwell said of her visits to the Shipshewana sale, "and horses that needed to be euthanized, horses that were laying down or had broken legs, bleeding. And no matter what, they couldn't make them get up."

According to Caldwell, after the bidding, horses designated for slaughter are crammed aboard double-deck trailers destined for slaughterhouses in Illinois, Iowa, Texas and Canada. No provision is made for the horses' food, water or comfort, Caldwell contends, even though the journey could take as long as 28 hours.

In Caldwell's opinion, the entire procedure is inhumane and should be illegal.

"Horses are pets," she insists. "Can you imagine what people would do if they were taking our dogs and cats and shipping them to wherever they eat dogs and cats? They would not allow it to happen."

The Indiana Horse Council Foundation, an Indianapolis-based trade association representing equine-related interests, opposes abusive or inhumane treatment of horses under any circumstances. However, it does not support a ban on horse slaughter, according to Lucinda Davis-Griesey, the organization's executive director.

The group's position on equine slaughter states that, while sending a horse to slaughter may not be desirable, slaughter is one way of disposing of horses that cannot be cared for or no longer have a viable use. Taking the slaughter option away from individuals could make conditions worse for some horses.

"The issue is really about an unwanted horse," Davis-Griesey said. "Although finding a second career for it is the best option, there may be cases where humane slaughter is the only option, rather than the horse dying a slow, lingering death in the pasture."

**Human safety is concern, too**

Besides the horses' wellbeing, Caldwell also is concerned for the people who eat horsemeat, which she claims may be tainted with hormones and other drugs unsuitable for human ingestion. As an example, she points to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's strict regulation of cattle and pigs.

"If they worm a cow," she said, "they have to wait, say, 60 days before they can take it to slaughter."

But the horses sold at kill sales generally are slaughtered within 48 hours, Caldwell said reaching into a bag containing prescription drugs for the horses. She extracted several small medicine bottles, sorted through them and picked out one.

"This is a drug used for multiple purposes," she said, "Any big horse-farm has it on hand."

She read the bottle's label aloud: "Not for use in horses intended for food." She scanned the printing on the other bottles as she returned them to her case. "Every one of these says it: 'Not for use in horses intended for food.'"

**Adoption is the goal**

Caldwell, 44, recuperating from a hysterectomy in August, has modified her normal strenuous routine. She walks through the stable with deliberate, measured steps. Her doctor has temporarily forbidden her to ride, which may be more painful to her than the lingering effects of the surgery.

"I'm not an expert rider," she said, "but I love to ride. Tony promised me a horse when our kids were 5. But after nine years of marriage, there were no children. So we went out and bought four horses — and five, six, seven. And it was 12, and then it was 20."

Her soft laughter strikes a contrast to her mission.





In rescuing horses from the kill auctions, the Caldwells' goal is rehabilitation for the animals and, ultimately, their adoption. To that end, the couple started Indiana Horse Rescue, an endeavor for which they're filling out reams of paperwork with hopes of attaining non-profit status.

In the five years since the Caldwells acquired their first rescue horse, they have adopted out no fewer than 100. Prospective owners are screened and required to sign a contract stating they will never sell the horse for slaughter. They also are asked to make a donation based on the highest current average kill price, plus 10 percent.

"Out of love, we try to keep it realistic," Caldwell said of the fee. "We're not doing it to make money."

Caldwell pointed out the numerous expenses involved, such as veterinary bills, medications, the farrier and feed. But she added that she and her husband willingly make the necessary sacrifices, to which their mobile home and no-frills lifestyle serve as testimony.

"No sleep, no money. We don't go anywhere. We don't do anything. The horses come first," she admitted quickly with another laugh. "But the sacrifices seem so small compared to what we get back.

"When I talk to people, it's not the weather, it's the horses. Sometimes I forget there's a life outside of horses."

With 41 horses on the farm, empty stalls and none in the quarantine area, Caldwell was itching to make a trip to Shipshewana. When she drives up with the trailers, she said, she may come back with as many as four horses, depending on the price, which she says is down now — generally between $375 and $550.

As usual, deciding which ones to save will be difficult for her. She would bring them all home with her, she said, if she could.

After a pause, her eyes well with tears. Then she says with a sigh, "I can't save them all, so I have to tell myself, I saved this one. And I did save this one."

*This story appeared in The Times on Nov. 19, 2001.*

# VETERANS

**Pilot William Clark stands with his J-4 Sportster ultralight.**

# One-Time Fighter Pilot Finds Peace in the Air

WILLIAM CLARK STILL BELIEVES that during the 35 combat missions he piloted over German airspace during World War II, his crew's constant companion was a guardian angel perched on the wings of his B-17.

"There were too many co-incidents where we came close to getting shot down, but we didn't," said the former Army Air Corps pilot reminiscing in his comfortable living room decorated with dozens of framed family photos.

The white-haired veteran Second Lieutenant donned his pilot's cap and replicated brown, leather flight jacket. Onto the jacket were pinned the two ribbons and air medal his war service earned him.

"I don't think we ever had a mission when we didn't get hit," he





said. "I've seen planes get hit with flack and just turn into a ball of fire and explode. There wouldn't be nothing left but the falling debris."

Despite the hundreds of hits taken by his plane, all his crew members escaped serious injuries. Precipitating Clark's recollection of his U.S. military experiences was the 61st anniversary of Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor.

"I signed up right away afterward," he said. "A lot of guys enlisted after that."

In 1942, at the age of 24, Clark had his heart set on aviation cadet school. But at that time, all the classes were full. So he settled for training as a radio operator and was assigned to a B-26 crew in Tampa, Fla. Before he even set foot inside the plane, however, his papers for flight training came through.

Following pilot training in Lakeland, Fla., and Turner Field, Ga., Clark spent 10 months as a flight instructor before he was sent overseas as part of the 306th bomb group of the 369th squadron, under the command of famed General Jimmy Doolittle. The group was to fly in B-17s.

"I'd never been in B-17s before," he said chuckling.

But Clark flew, at first as co-pilot. When the transition to pilot came, no one was more surprised than he was.

"They checked me out as first pilot," he said. "I didn't even know I was first pilot until ... there was my name up there as first pilot. They gave me a new crew and I took them into combat."

During the 35 air combat missions he piloted, it was his B-17 — never his men — that took the flack, the bursting shells fired from anti-aircraft artillery.

"A piece of flack came through and hit (one man) on the leg," he said, recalling a flight over Berlin. "It bruised his leg. He said, 'I'll get a Purple Heart' for his. But they checked him out and all he had was a bruise. It didn't bleed."

Clark's shoulders shake as he pauses to laugh.

"If you don't bleed," he said, continuing, "you don't get a Purple

Heart."

As Clark tells more of his World War II combat experiences, one harrowing bombing mission over the oil refineries at Koln, Germany, stands out as perhaps his most dangerous.

"I got hit — a whole shell went through the right outboard engine gas tank," he says, growing solemn. "Gasoline was streaming out and a super charger was spouting blue flames right ahead of that.

"Had to be a miracle because it never caught fire, and flack was bursting all around. We had the bomb bay open, and that gasoline came down under those flaps and blew up into the bomb bay. Why some switch or something didn't spark that, I don't know. But it didn't. I know we had a guardian angel. Has to be."

The B-17 went from design board to flight test in fewer than 12 months, according to the Boeing Web site, in response to the Army's request for a large, multi-engine bomber. The low-wing monoplane was the first Boeing military aircraft with a flight deck instead of an open cockpit and armed with bombs. It fired .30-caliber machine guns mounted in clear "blisters."

The Fighting Fortresses, as the B-17s came to be called, were legendary for their ability to stay airborne following brutal poundings from enemy fire, the Web site states, and they sometimes limped back to their bases with large chunks of the fuselage shot off.

One of Clark's recollections confirms Boeing's claim.

"One time we got hit pretty bad," he said. "We had 79 flack holes in that airplane when we brought it back. They had to send it back and have a new set of wings put on."

Having completed 35 missions and chalking up 325 hours in a B-17 — 282 of which spent in combat — Clark's military career ended rather unexpectedly.

"When you did your 35 missions they sent you home for a 30-day leave," Clark explained. "I'd done my 35 and I was home when the war ended in Europe. I figured I'd go to the Pacific, but I didn't."





With the war behind him, Clark went back to farming and settled into family life with his wife, Mary. They had four children — three boys and a girl.

"A lot of guys said, 'Why didn't you go out and become an airline pilot?'" Clark said. "But I thought it was more important to raise my family."

But with his B-17 days behind him, Clark still managed to get in his flying time. Acquiring his first private plane in 1946, he's now on his third. It's a J-4 Sportster ultralight, which he keeps in the pole barn behind the house and within easy access to his private runway.

The yellow-and-white aircraft equipped with a one-seat, open cockpit weighs only 254 pounds, he said, and contains a gas tank accommodating a capacity of five gallons. It starkly contrasts the B-17s he commandeered over Germany some 50 years ago. But these days, his piloting needs are considerably simpler.

"I don't fly when it's too windy or too cold," he said.

Estimating that two months had passed since his last flight — long before temperatures had fallen below freezing, he shrugged and said, "I'm a fair-weather pilot."

*This story appeared in The Times on Dec. 6, 2002.*

**Bob Zurfas**

## *SEMPER FI:*

# Once a Marine, Always a Marine, Even 60 Years Later

SEATED IN HIS WESLEY MAJOR APARTMENT, BOB ZURFAS flips through the yellowed pages of a timeworn album. Stashed between its covers are faded snapshots of himself and other young Marines posing for an unseen shutterbug somewhere in the South Pacific during their World War II years.

"This guy was deserted on the beach at Saipan," said Zurfas, 82, pointing out one soldier. "After the battle was over, the battalion sergeant-major called me and another corporal into his office and sent us out looking for him. He said, 'You bring him back, and I don't care if he's dead or alive.'"

Turning a couple more pages, he is stopped by a cluster of fresh-





faced Marines smiling at him from their jungle setting. "I saw these two guys die," he said, tapping first on one young man and then another. "We had a job to do, and we did it. It wasn't pretty."

When talk turns to World War II, Zurfas is adamant: Don't call him a hero.

He was doing his job, he says, and that's all.

That job was activated on Thanksgiving Day 1943. That's when Zurfas and two of his buddies gave up their turkey dinners, drove to Indianapolis and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps.

At 19, the 1941 Kirklin High School graduate's entire life experience rarely stretched far from his family's Elizaville farm. But America's role in a new world war compelled him to fulfill his patriotic duty.

After boot camp in Southern California and eight more months' training in New Zealand as a rifleman, Zurfas' superiors deemed him battle-ready. In November, he shipped out for Tarawa, a series of barren South Pacific islets. To a sheltered Indiana farmboy, it was a destination that seemed a million miles from home.

U.S. strategists considered Tarawa the gateway to the Philippines, but they knew taking it from the 5,000 Japanese soldiers who occupied it would be problematic.

Storming Tarawa by sea, Zurfas was at the front of the fourth wave of naval transport boats to hit the beach amid a flurry of enemy gunfire.

"We got up at 2:30 that morning and boarded a troop transport," he recalls. "You know what the Navy gave us for breakfast? Hard boiled eggs and baked beans."

He snorts a soft laugh and goes on explaining that, because the Japanese were firing heavily on the troops, the Americans had to be moved out to sea.

"We were in those little flat-bottom boats, bouncing around out in the ocean for five hours," he continued. "Everybody got seasick and got the dry heaves. When we finally started in, I was glad. I was scared, but I was glad."

The battle lasted three days and four hours, he said, and it was bloody, claiming the lives of some 900 Americans and 5,000 Japanese.

"Our officers told us this was going to be a cakewalk," he said. "But it didn't turn out that way."

Noting that Tarawa lay only a few degrees north of the equator, he remarked, "It was hot. Dead bodies swelled up and turned black real quick. And the stench you never forget."

After a breather on the big island of Hawaii, Zurfas engaged in three more deadly battles — Saipan in June of 1944, Tinian in July, and finally Okinawa in April '45.

Except for suffering a severe bruising on Saipan, where an enemy's non-lethal, concussion grenade exploded near his feet, Zurfas had made it through three years of military service physically unscathed. His luck ended a few days after the battle on Okinawa, when a Japanese bullet ripped into the underside of his upper right arm.

"I got hit on patrol," he said. "I was kind of glad when I saw that little place on my arm. I wanted to go home. I was homesick for three years. To me, that was my ticket back home."

He was discharged Nov. 3, 1945. He had earned four battle stars, a purple heart, a purple heart star and a Presidential Unit Citation.

He had not set foot in Indiana since his induction three years before. During that time, his family had moved to Frankfort and become acquainted with a neighbor, a slim, attractive young woman named Wanda. She and Zurfas had exchanged letters for months, and he was eager to meet her.

The couple married June 15, 1946, in what is now Hope United Methodist Church.

Reaching into his wallet, Zurfas pulled out Wanda's photograph, the very one she had mailed him those many years ago.

Grinning wistfully, he says, "I cherish it."

Wanda suffered a stroke a few months back, and today she is recovering in the manor's health care center. Although dealing with a few





health problems of his own — emphysema, the residue of 56 years of smoking, and failing eyesight — Zurfas faithfully spends a good part of every day at her side.

Their daughter, Rebecca Welty of Frankfort, visits them often, he said. His son, Terry, made a career of the Air Force and lives in Panama City, Fla., and comes up as often as he can. The Zurfases also have four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Retired from Guide Lamp in the Anderson General Motors plant since 1989, Zurfas still thinks of himself as a Marine.

"Semper fi," he said, "always faithful; once a Marine, always a Marine."

Zurfas has long been a man of God, although he admits that, prior to his years as a Marine warrior, he couldn't have said that.

"The Lord blessed me abundantly," he said. "I wasn't religious before the war, but then, He hears sinners' prayers, I'll tell you that."

He reflects for a moment about former TV anchorman Tom Brokaw's assertion that people Zurfas' age are America's "Greatest Generation."

"In a way I can see that," Zurfas said, "but in a way, we're just normal people."

Strongly insisting again that he was no hero, Zurfas summed up his generation's war and that of all others'.

"A lot of fine young men gave their lives there," he said. "I think everybody loses in war."

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