

# The Island Reporter

## Telling Jacqueline's Story

By Betsy Judge

The only war story Jackie Minniti heard from her WWII veteran father, Bernardo Doganiero, was about Jacqueline, a young girl in France who befriended him as she clung desperately to a thread of hope that her own father, a pilot shot down fighting the Nazis, would someday return.

It took years of urging from her dad and finally a plea from a complete stranger before the retired teacher, journalist and author put her creative juices to work to capture the tale.

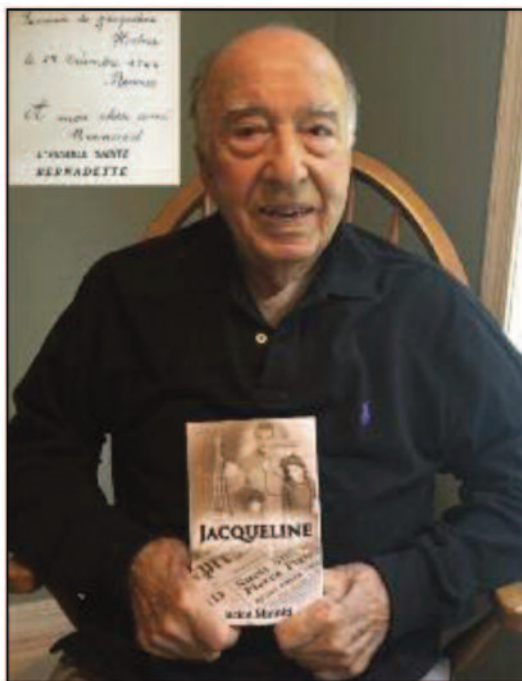
"It was like getting hit by a bolt of lightning," she says recalling the man who suggested she write it because his 6th grade daughter knew nothing of WWII and would love to read such a story. "Why it never entered my mind to write it for younger readers is still to me a mystery."

The details were sketchy: She knew Jacqueline had lost her father on Mar. 8, 1943; that she gave Bernardo a loaf of bread and a prized book – a gift from her father. Bernardo gave her his coat.

When she began to do research, she found the house where Jacqueline lived, the hospital where her dad was a pharmacist and his barracks.

She did extensive research on WWII during that specific period in that area of France. "The historical information is accurate to the day," she adds.

In the book, 10-year-old Jacqueline's world crumbles as she and her mother learn that her father has been shot down by German fighters. They eke out a meager existence as the Nazis ration food; terrify, capture and torture Jews; and make life almost unbearable. Even while drowning in sorrow, Jacqueline risks her safety to take care of a one-eyed alley cat and becomes a valuable companion to a bothersome, Jewish neighbor boy who moves in after the Nazis take his parents and toddler sister away. When her town is liberated, she meets Bernardo and becomes convinced he has been sent to reunite her with her father.



Bernardo Doganiero, almost 99, holds a copy of "Jacqueline," written by his daughter, Jackie Minniti, about his experience in France after being befriended by a young girl whose own father was shot down fighting the Nazis in WWII. Before Bernardo left, she presented him with her beloved copy of "L'Humble Sainte Bernadette," which she inscribed (inset) on Dec. 27, 1944. Her father had given the book to her sometime before he was killed.

Minniti came up with a timeline of events based on the information she had and then began to build the story to make specific points.

Children dealing with absent fathers is one sub-theme of the book. "So many kids today are growing up without fathers or in broken homes, I've seen the impact of it, and it's universal," she says. Deployed par-

ents also come into play. "That missing relationship is something many kids can relate to."

She added a Jewish boy to include the Holocaust. "I think there is some Holocaust denial, and they are not really teaching it in schools like they used to. I want kids to realize the Jews were mommies and daddies and babies and children - the evil didn't discriminate."

"I also wanted kids to understand that things weren't always like they are now. They are so blessed to be growing up in this country. I wanted to give them a sense of how suffocating it is when you live where the government has that much control over your life; where you can't eat what you want; you can't listen to certain things; you can't go outside after a certain time, and you're always afraid. I think even a lot of adults don't understand how that would be."

She doesn't know where the one-eyed cat came from but says it was there from the beginning. The part about Jacqueline visiting her dad's pharmacy in New Jersey as an adult is true.

"I have vague memories of seeing her. She had married an Italian architect and they were in America. It was a surprise; nobody knew she was coming."

The one question that plagues Minniti is, "Why?" "I wished he'd asked her why. There were a lot of Americans soldiers there, so it was weird that she just gravitated toward my dad. He said she was like a little puppy dog; she followed him everywhere, but because of the language barrier, they couldn't really communicate."

Minniti has put together a study guide for fourth to eighth grade teachers with pre-reading activities, post reading questions, vocabulary and projects all cross-referenced with the Common Core standards for language arts, literacy and history. There are printable worksheets too.

The book is available in bookstores and on amazon.com and anaiahpress.com.