

The Journey Continues— Author's Update 2015

In 2000, when I wrote “The Story Behind *One April in Boston*,” which appears at the back of the first edition of the book, there wasn’t enough room to include many fascinating details about the search for my ancestors. Over the past fifteen years, many remarkable things have occurred as well, so this serves as an update for readers.

The newspaper clipping containing Philip Edwards’ farewell letter from France had inspired me since childhood, but I had never taken the time to visit his marker in Naugatuck, Connecticut. Then, during the July 4th weekend in 1998, I decided to see if I could locate Philip Edwards’ marker at Grove Cemetery. I obtained directions to the cemetery at a local service station and drove through an iron gated entrance into a burial ground surrounded by forest. I was the only one visiting the grounds on a very hot day and just about to give up my search after a half an hour when I decided to walk to the far end of the rather large cemetery. Here, I threw up my hands and looked to the sky, realizing that I would have to come back and search again for the marker once I had gotten

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information about its precise location from relatives. At that very moment, I looked down to my right and spotted a small American flag waving in the breeze in front of a large gravestone bearing the name “Edwards” and, above, the words ...

Pvt. Philip Edwards
Co. H 102ND Regt. A.E.F.
Killed in Action July 21, 1918
Aged 23 Years

Here was the marker for Phil and his parents and just as I had elected to give up my search, I had walked directly to it. A few weeks later, on July 21, 1998, the 80th anniversary of Phil's death, I returned with a floral tribute and left a sheet of paper next to his marker. On that paper were the following items: the text of the farewell letter Phil had written to his parents before going into battle; a photo of Phil and his parents in 1905 (when he was 10) taken on the front porch of the family home; and a picture of a soldier in uniform who I felt was Phil. These photos, along with many others, were discovered in an attic by a relative in 1997. The back of the family photograph was clearly marked so I knew it was Phil and his parents, but the photo of the soldier had no identification on it. In 1999, as my research into Philip Edwards continued, I had the good fortune of locating and corresponding with a very knowledgeable military historian named Gilles Lagin of Marigny-en-Orxois, France. Gilles spent a significant amount of time tracing the route of Philip Edwards and the 2nd Battalion, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th Division. He supplied me with photographs, maps, a timeline, and regimental history tracking Phil's final days in France. From Gilles I learned

that Phil's name appears on a wall inside the 26th "Yankee" Division Memorial Church at the entrance to Belleau. The stone building is the only memorial in France dedicated to the men of the Yankee Division.

In March 2000, while I was writing *One April in Boston*, I met 70-year-old Fran Jenkins, the youngest child of Phil's best friend John Simmons, and 90-year-old Doris Wininger Harkins, the only living sibling of Phil's sweetheart Ella Wininger. This was mentioned in the first edition of the book but I wasn't able to provide additional details about those meetings. Fran lives just across the street from where her father grew up in the Millville section of Naugatuck, Connecticut. She shared her father's World War I diary with me (John and Phil were members of Company H, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th Division) along with other family photographs, letters, and memorabilia. From Fran I learned how close John and Phil were. John always wished he had been with Phil on that fateful day and could somehow have prevented his death. In the end, however, he realized that there wasn't much he could have done. As a tribute to his best friend, during his lifetime John kept a large full-length portrait of Phil and himself in uniform in the bedroom of his home. Fran told me that the colorized photograph was in the possession of a relative in Pennsylvania.

Several days after I met Fran Jenkins, we paid a visit to Ella Wininger's little sister Doris Wininger Harkins who lived in a nearby town. I soon learned that the 90-year-old had a remarkable memory. Her recollections took us right back to 1915. Doris recalled how, as a child, she used to hide when Phil visited their home to deliver groceries for the local market. Confirming stories I had heard from my 93-year-old grandmother Mildred

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Edwards, Doris remembered that Phil made his deliveries in a horse-drawn wagon and offered rides to the neighborhood children who all loved and admired him. She let me know that Ella's love for Phil was deep and sincere and she carried it in her heart her whole life. In fact, Phil had given Ella a locket before he went off to France. Ella kept his photo inside and always wore it. Ella died in 1992 at the age of 92.

Doris also looked at some photos I had brought—World War I era pictures from that same lot discovered in the attic in 1997. I believed some of them might contain Phil and Ella. One of these photographs was a copy of the one of a soldier in uniform I had left at his marker in 1998. Much to my surprise, Doris told me that neither Phil nor her sister appeared in ANY of the pictures. Yes. I had left the wrong soldier's photo at Phil's marker and was about to print it in my book! Thankfully, I was corrected by someone who had actually known him!

So, what did Phil and Ella look like? Doris didn't think she had any snapshots of them together, but as we concluded our talk, she asked if I would like to see a photo of her sister. I was anxious to see a picture of the girl Phil had left behind when he went off to fight in World War I. Doris stepped out of the room briefly and returned with a beautiful photo taken shortly after Ella had become a nurse in 1921. It was even signed "Lovingly Ella." Doris was so pleased that I had remembered her sister and had planned to include her in my book that she insisted I keep the photo. After this visit, Fran Jenkins contacted relatives in Pennsylvania and requested that they email me a photo of the portrait of Phil and John that her parents had kept in their room. When it arrived, I was finally able to see the face of the soldier whose farewell letter had inspired

me as a child. Another picture of Phil and John as young boys was also located, just in time for me to add it to my book.

A week after my visit with Doris, I received a letter from her thanking me for the flowers I sent her after my visit and letting me know there was one more important detail she had not mentioned during our talk. Doris explained that the farewell letter Phil wrote to his parents on July 19, 1918, was not the only one he penned that day. Ella received a farewell letter from Phil, too. Although that letter and its contents have been lost to time, I'll forever wonder what Philip wrote to her on that July day that kept their love alive for all those years. The knowledge that this letter existed had an impact on me as I wrote the ending of the story. The letter Doris sent me also noted, "so far I have not been able to locate any old snaps of Ella, Phil, John, and Ethel. If I do I'll send them to you." I hoped she might be able to keep that promise.

As *One April in Boston* neared completion, Ella Wininger's personal scrapbook was discovered in an attic by a relative. It contained many newspaper clippings of events that affected her life. Some of these clippings were about Philip Edwards. One of these articles was titled "A Real Hero." It read, in part, "We hope every reader of today's news will read the farewell letter written by Philip Edwards of Naugatuck to his parents just before he went over the top in what proved to be his last charge in the fight for democracy. A more truly patriotic letter could not be penned, and it shows that the writer was ready to do his bit to the last."

The article reviewed "the last written words of a clean, noble, heroic, patriotic young American, a boy who was every inch a hero, and one of millions of men ready to give their

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lives for the cause of democracy if necessary.” It concluded by saying, “There have been many acts of heroism performed by our soldiers in France, but of those who performed them, none was a greater hero than Philip Edwards, who wrote just before going over the top, ‘I do not fear death in the least. Remember we are fighting for a good cause.’”

Attached to the last page of the scrapbook was a colorful booklet reviewing the history of the American flag. It contained an image of the 13-star flag associated with the American Revolution and *One April in Boston*. The scrapbook also contained many poems about the war and soldiers who had died in France. Ella seems to have had a strong connection to these words as she dealt with the loss of Phil.

When *One April in Boston* was published in mid 2000, I was sure to get two of the first available copies to Fran and Doris. I again visited Grove Cemetery, this time placing a copy of the book at Phil’s marker and leaving behind a wood and metal spyglass, similar to the one passed down to him in *One April in Boston*. A short time later I mailed a copy of the book to Fran’s brother Bill Simmons who lived in Honolulu, Hawaii, and received a three-page typed letter from him in September. In it he gave some insight into his dad’s friendship with Phil, the kind of man his father was, and the bond all men who have faced combat share.

In late 2001, the audiobook for *One April in Boston* was produced and early the next year I relocated from Connecticut to Boston. It was the place four generations of my Edwards ancestors had once called home. I became the first family member to live in Boston in nearly 150 years. On a return trip to Connecticut, a year later, I visited Phil’s marker once again.

I was surprised to see that the spyglass I had left back in 2000 was still there. The wood had deteriorated and the metal had rusted but it was in the exact same spot. During this visit, I left a copy of the *One April in Boston* audiobook at the base of the marker as a lasting tribute to my childhood hero. A light rain started to fall and I took shelter under a group of trees and stood quietly, contemplating all that had taken place on my journey of discovery. What would Phil have thought about all this, I wondered to myself ... or Ella ... or any of the other people in my story who rest here?

In 2004, I started a private guided walking tour business in Boston where I share my knowledge of the historic sites and the story of my Edwards ancestors told in *One April in Boston*. Later that year I received the sad news that Doris Wininger Harkins had passed away at the age of 95 and learned that she was buried beside her family members at Grove Cemetery.

For the next two years I continued my business in Boston working with students on field trips and giving tours to families from across the country. I had all but forgotten about leaving the audiobook at Phil's marker in late 2002 or early 2003 when a remarkable email reached me on June 2, 2006. The subject line was "Philip Edwards."

Here is what it said:

Back in 1999, my grandmother passed away at the age of 101. I inherited her photo albums and found a picture of a man and woman with the handwritten caption: "Phil Edwards, died July 1918 in France." This led me to wonder who this young man was that died in France not too long before the end of the Great

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War. My grandmother was born and raised in the Millville section of Naugatuck, Connecticut and was a very popular person. Her mother was an immigrant from Switzerland and was the local mid-wife. I started searching through census records via Ancestry.com and found that Benjamin Edwards and his family lived not too far from my grandmother.

From the Connecticut State Library on-line I found that there was a record of Philip Edwards of Naugatuck that was submitted with a picture as part of a post war questionnaire sent to veterans looking for written stories of their experiences. I went to the library located in Hartford and requested the record pulled from storage and was able to view the contents and have copies made and sent to me. I have these scanned and in e-format.

Then last week while in the state library in Hartford on another family fact-finding trip, I looked up Philip Edwards in the Hale collection of headstone inscriptions to see if he was buried in Connecticut. The record only shows a marker for him stating his age and his service info, Co., H, 102nd Regt. in the Grove Cemetery in Naugatuck. This being the same cemetery where my grandmother rests, I decided to seek his marker out.

He is listed on the same marker as his mother and father with a U.S. flag. At the base of the headstone I noticed a CD case and out of curiosity I picked it up, brushed it off and found the "*One April In Boston*" audiobook. This was yesterday and I had to see if I could find its origin. Copyright info states a spyglassbooks.

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com but it seems that web address no longer exists. It gives a P.O. Box in Prospect, CT, which is the town where I now live. If you'd like to see the two pictures and questionnaire I have, I can email them to you.

Sincerely,

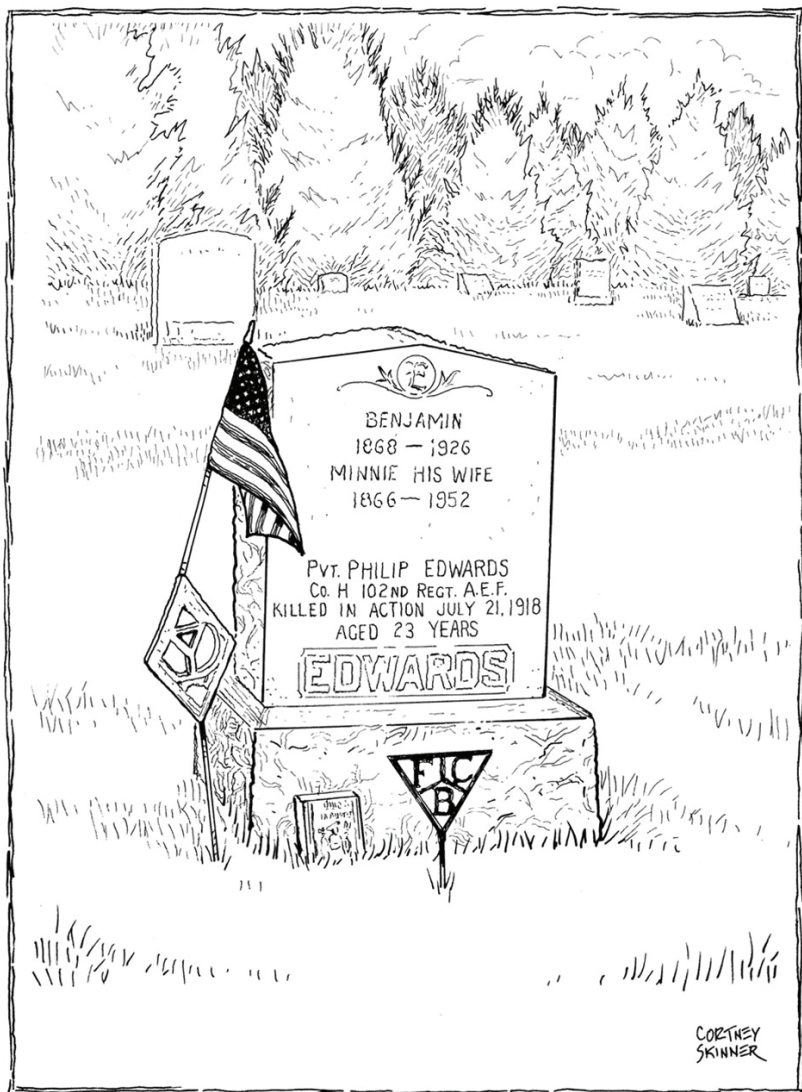
C. Michael Anderson

(Street Address Removed)

Prospect, CT 06712

A day later, Michael emailed me the picture of a man and woman that contained the Philip Edwards' caption. The complete handwritten caption read: "Phil Edwards killed July 1918 in France" and beneath that "Ella Wininger nurse Derby." Ella had indeed become a nurse at Griffin Hospital in Derby, Connecticut—coincidentally the same hospital where I was born. A photo of Phil and Ella was something I had always hoped to find and this one even had the year 1916 penned at the very bottom. I like to think that Doris somehow played a role in getting this snapshot to me, keeping the promise she had made six years earlier. When I first saw the photo of the happy couple it was as if Phil and Ella had been transported through time to express their love for one another and appreciation for the book that honors their memory. The original photo can be viewed in this section and you can listen to an audio recording of this incredible story at **TreasuredPhoto.com**.

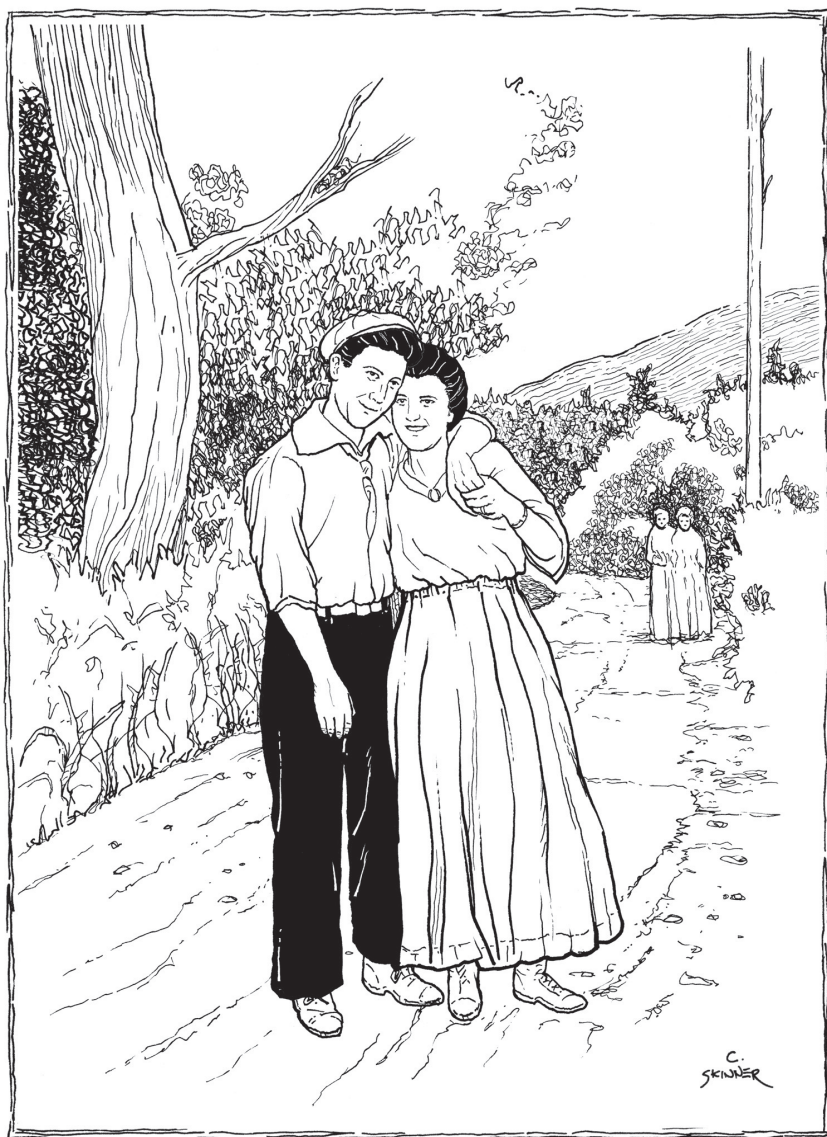
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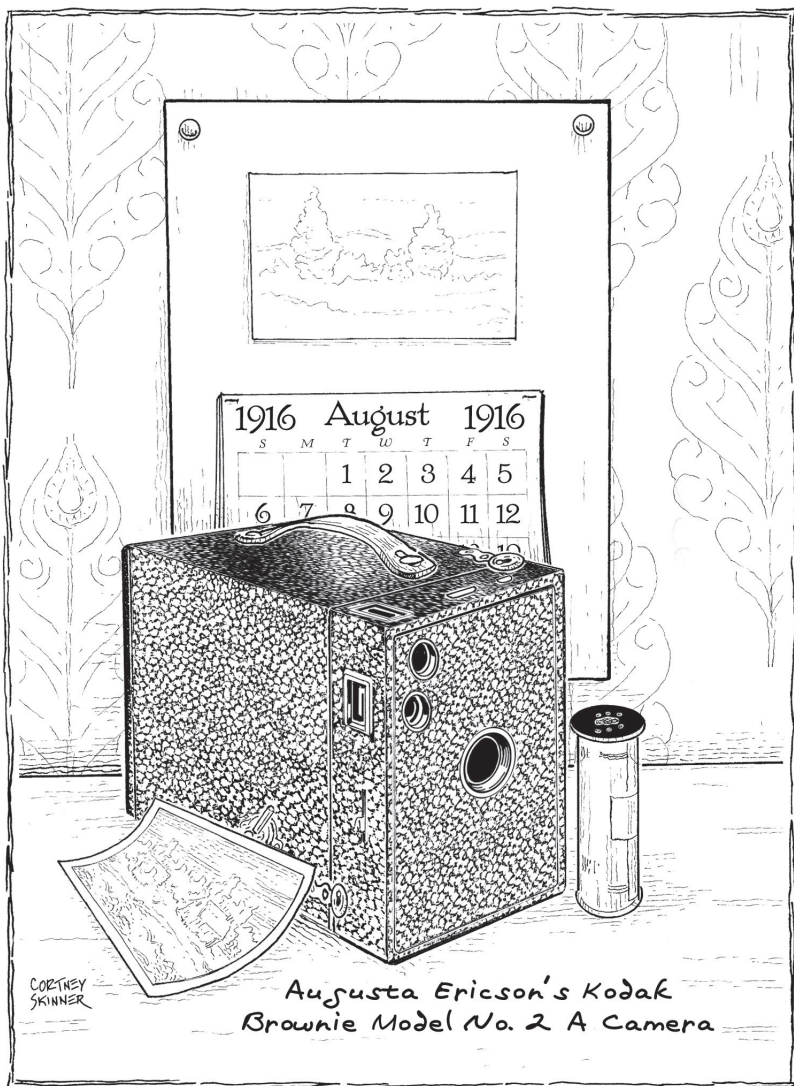




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Michael Anderson's grandmother Augusta Ericson, age 18, as she looked when she photographed Philip Edwards and Ella Wininger in 1916.



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In September 2011, after a tip from author James Carl Nelson (*The Remains of Company D*), I had a researcher visit the National Archives and obtain a copy of the World War I Burial Case File for Private Philip Edwards, U.S. Army Serial Number 65385. The file contained information about how he was killed and his burial. Fellow soldiers submitted first-hand accounts.

These included the following:

“We were at Château-Thierry, he was in Battalion Headquarters at the time. Edwards was a runner. He was killed instantly while taking a message. Men in the company gave the report of this to me.”

Informant: Fred T. Kochler (no rank given)
Company H, 102nd Infantry
West Haven, Connecticut

“We were being shelled heavily by the Germans at Epieds, in the Château-Thierry Sector when Private Edwards was hit by shrapnel in the right chest. He is buried near Epieds with several other men. He was a company runner, about 5 ft. 5 in. tall and weighed about 120 pounds with light hair and complexion. I had known him about fourteen months. His home is in Conn. and he was well liked by all the men.”

Informant: Pvt. Francis Gagon
Company H, 102nd Infantry
Killingly, Connecticut

“Private Edwards was killed at Château-Thierry, and buried by hill 204, the grave was marked. They were

marching into a new position, and did so successfully. Stoddard saw Edwards after his death. He said Edwards was killed by concussion, that he had a slight hole in the right side of his chest but that the doctors said that it was not enough to kill him. He was “tiny” good natured, freckled, about 21 or 22, a good kid. Stoddard knew him well.”

Informant: Pvt. William Stoddard
Company H, 102nd Infantry
West Haven, Connecticut

“Was killed in Trugny Woods, July 21st, 1918, while the company was advancing on the town of Epieds. Shrapnel thru heart. Burial place: 330 paces east of road from Breteuil Farm to Trugny, 50 feet south of trail, leading east thru woods from above road. Coordinates about 186.5 – 262.8 Map Conde-en-Brie, scale 1/20000.”

Informant: Cpl. Howard S. Correll
Company H, 102nd Infantry
West Granby, Connecticut

In the spring of 2012, I contacted military historian Gilles Lagin who had performed research for my book over 10 years earlier. Using the new and detailed information found in Philip Edwards' Burial Case File housed at the National Archives, and original battlefield maps, Gilles planned a trip that summer to see if he could find the precise location where Phil's company had fought and where he had died. On July 22, 2012, almost 94 years to the day that Phil was killed in action, Gilles found the fighting position of Phil's company in the

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forest, some U.S. WWI cartridge cases, and even the shell hole where Phil had initially been buried with three other American soldiers. Gilles took numerous photos around the place and the view of Trugny from that area noting that the wheat had not yet been harvested, so the fields were much like those Phil would have seen in July 1918.

In 2012 and again in 2014 Gilles made trips to the 26th Division Memorial Church, as he had done at my request many years earlier. During these visits he took beautiful photos (with better camera equipment) inside and outside the church including Philip Edwards' name carved on the honor wall with other members of Boston's 26th Division who made the supreme sacrifice for their country. These photos, as well as his earlier pictures, can be viewed on the website for the book: **OneAprilinBoston.com**.

Today, in 2015, I often think of Philip Edwards. As a child, Phil spent a lot of time fishing with his friends. I did the very same thing. A clipping from 1917 in Ella's scrapbook noted that he was a member of the Company H 102nd Regiment football team. I played youth football myself as a child. Phil's U.S. Army serial number was 65385. If you add those numbers up it comes to 27. Coincidentally, as a 10-year-old, my first number in Pop Warner football was 27. It was at that age that I first read the yellowed newspaper clipping about Philip Edwards and was so moved by his farewell letter. The walking tour I offer to school children and families begins on Tremont Street by Boston Common—along the same route Phil would have marched, had he survived the war, with other members of the 26th "Yankee" Division during their "Welcome Home" parade in Boston on April 25, 1919.

Although I don’t have a horse-drawn wagon like Phil, I do have my own modern day version of “children from the neighborhood” as a captive audience. Following in his tradition, I serve as the latest generation of storytellers in the Edwards family. My story is one of a small child who became intrigued by his early Boston ancestors and was determined to learn as much about them as he could. I wanted their stories to survive. Little could I have imagined back then how a newspaper clipping about a World War I soldier named Philip Edwards would change my life. I’m currently pitching *One April in Boston: The Gift of the Spyglass* as a feature film or made-for-TV movie and want to thank my friend Dan Kruse for his encouragement in this endeavor. It is indeed a lofty goal, but aren’t those the ones most worth pursuing?

It is my hope that Phil’s story and the message he passes along through *One April in Boston* will inspire generations of school children to use their imaginations, set goals, take action toward their achievement each day, and NEVER give up on them.

One April in Boston: The Gift of the Spyglass is available for free, as an eBook, at the Amazon Kindle Store and at Apple Books. This is in keeping with the story and Phil’s goal of passing “the gift of the spyglass” on to not only the neighborhood children, but to every child who believes in it.

In 2022, I began donating up to 500 copies of *One April in Boston* to the Paul Revere House annually for sale in its gift shop. One hundred percent of the retail price is used to support educational programs for children at the Revere House.