

TIME PASSING

It was around eight thirty at night when I lay in bed thinking of what I would be doing at school tomorrow, my thoughts were broken by the rumbling noise far away, then the wailing sound of the sirens split the night air and I knew tomorrow may never come.

‘Quickly children.’ mother shouted. ‘We must hurry to the shelter’

We picked our favourite things, the things we used to take with us for comfort, if you could call it comfort; we also took with us our trusty gas mask packaged in a cardboard box courtesy of the British government. When we put them on we all looked like frogs and talked as if we were underwater. I took my comic’s Paul took his books on engineering mother took her knitting and Lucy of course took her makeup I mean, if we were ever invaded, she had to look her best, We had done this on many occasions; it had all become just a matter of course, so we all had to retreat to the air-raid shelter. The year was 1941, the war in Europe was at its height, and there was death and destruction everywhere. The radio and newspapers reported the war and all that was going on in Europe and North Africa, and gave us the daily ritual of the horrors of war, no one really believed what he or she read anyway as the truth if there was any was all too secret. They the newspapers on pain of death from the government only wrote what they wanted you to know, on a need to know basis as it were, and we didn’t need to know, and at this moment in time no one was safe, Hitler’s troops were trampling on everything in Europe and it seemed no one or nothing could stop the tide of death, these air raids

became common place and something we had to live with. My family
and I lived on a council estate, and we were called the Connor's
Brother Paul, me Kevin, my sister Lucy, and of course our mother
Josie.

Our father, Bernard was an airman, based in North Africa, in some air corps
not many knew the name, and if the truth was known did not really
care.

He had been called up as they say as so many men were, it did not matter if
you had a family or not, but they did draw the line at old men and
boys,

When I mean boys, I mean young boys of sixteen and seventeen, there were
some who lied about their age and got killed for their stupidity, as
they did in the Great War ww1 how they can call war great is beyond
me.

But as the saying goes England expects every man to do his duty, our father
never really put up much of a resistance so off he went to war.

Not that it made much difference you had to go and that was that, he left us
one day dressed in his uniform and carrying his kit bag. Funny
though, just the week before he had another uniform on, that of a bus
driver, he just traded one uniform for another as easy as that, but you
don't get shot at being a bus driver, well not in them days these days
it's a different story. It is strange how they take ordinary men like my
father and the butcher down the street, and the coal man, and sends
them off to war to become killers, what a strange world we lived in.
Our mother, Josie didn't cry much she just gave a slight whimper as

he kissed us all good-bye, then he kissed her, and that was that. He was away two years before we ever saw him again; he came home on leave for just two days, seems hardly worth it, to travel all that way for just two days, he was home and then gone again. The house seemed very empty without him and meal times became very strange with one chair vacant. Our mother did not mention him our father very often, and this seemed not at all right, but who knows they may have had their own reasons for not telling us. My father wrote to my mother, but the letters got less and less, it got that way in the end it all got a bit too much, what with all the secrets and the censored letters and trying to cope in a war with little food and clothing. And in the end it never really mattered, and if we had asked, no one was going to tell us anyway, but to the shelter, we had to go, I remember the shelters so well, the smell of damp and the strange echo of people talking.

The memory has lived with me all my life and is a time I will never forget, today I can still smell the damp air, seems strange how we hold onto memories in our mind.

We all had to sleep in bunk beds set out down one wall that were two beds, high with a small ladder fastened to the end, for the person who had to sleep on the top bunk and had to climb up every time we were down there in some air raid that was in itself an adventure. It was usually me who had to scale the heights, as I was the youngest of the family, good job I did not have vertigo, still who would have listened if I had,

but from that advantage you could watch the reaction of people as
the bombs fell.

It was a very trying time for all of us and having to go down to the air raid shelter, every time Hitler and his boys thought it was a good idea to drop a few bombs on us, was in itself a pain in the backside. So here we all were in this underground tunnel, grouped together like a lot of moles in hibernation. The Red Cross tried to make things bearable, well as bearable as could be expected in the circumstance, by bringing round soup and bread and saying, it can only get better, better than what I never did really find out. Then of course we had our secret weapon, Charlie bass the local pub singer 'Right come on you lot let's have a singsong.'

Did you know that all life in Britain in times of strife and war revolves around a singsong and a cup of tea, India must be on overtime trying to cope with the tea situation, I often wondered where they thought all their tea was going and to whom.

'Right come on you lot roll out the barrel.'

Charlie started to sing and in time the rest slowly but surely joined in one by one you could see their mouths start to move.

I suppose looking back on those times it was a spirit of comradeship and caring that gave them the strength to carry on and made them sing.

But to us children who had nothing and did not understand, it was boring to say the least, but I suppose you have to be happy with your lot, when you haven't got a lot. There was this dark man I remember so well who was always on his own and had no family that I saw, and

played a mouth organ and a guitar. The tunes he played were very slow and mournful, but they had a strange hypnotic sadness about them. I once asked him why he played sad tunes, and he replied 'What is there to be happy about young man?'

I guess putting it that way I had to agree with him on that point.

He told me that the music was called the blues, and originated in the American Deep South, when the people of Africa were brought over to America as slaves, it is called Negro music, and they used to sing to make them happy, seems like us but maybe they never had tea.

I said 'What's a Negro.' He replied.

'You are down here because someone wants what you have a Negro has had this kind of treatment for two hundred years.'

'Wow' I said. 'That must have been some war.'

He just laughed and carried on playing, and then he said.

'One day when you grow up you may ask questions and I hope you get a true answer, but until then just be happy to be a child because it is the best time of your life and it will soon be gone, so hold onto it.'

So I went back to my family not knowing what the hell he was talking about but would find out many years later in a very strange way.

'Who was that man you were talking to Kevin.' Paul asked.

'I don't know, but he seems to be down here whenever there is an air raid, mind you, where else would he be in an air raid. He does not seem to have any family he is always on his own he said he learned to sing from some Negro who went to war for two hundred years.' I knew I

would get the story wrong

