Margaret's Memories – Wartime

Wartime Liverpool

Life was very difficult as it was in most cities. In 1938 barrage balloons were hoisted and we were all issued with gas masks. When the war started in 1939 we had Anderson Shelters – my father put ours in – the ground had to be dug several feet down – it was an enormous great hole. Then it was sandbagged all round the front – the earth was piled on top of it with only a small vent pipe for air. Dad made bunks to go inside – we would spend sometimes 12 hours down there – only Paraffin heaters and candles. In 1941 we had many raids – the city was bombed to bits – thousands of lives were lost. Beautiful buildings were gone. Dad had to do fire fighting – usually on the roof of the Liver Building. Everywhere was blacked out – we had shutters in the downstairs windows which also helped in case of blast. The toilet window was very small so that was painted black! Everywhere else the curtains were lined with thick black material. No street lights and what few cars there were had to drive with dipped lights. The 'Escapism' then was the cinema – although the sirens would go off very few people ever left cinemas. Rationing was extremely hard – my Mother would queue for hours if they heard there would be fish! We again were lucky as we received many food parcels from Canada. I gave up sugar at that time so as my mother could have my share.

Clothes were hard to get – sometimes we had to go without stockings in the winter or the ones we wore would be darned over and over. There were no nylons then. Most people that could grew vegetables instead of flowers.

All the railings were taken from the parks supposedly to be melted down for munitions but I don't know if that happened. The Black Market operated then – people would be able to get certain things then sell them on at a very high price so a

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lot of people made money. These were usually people who somehow managed to escape the call up.

Starting work and running away

My mother insisted that I leave school when I was 14 [November 1939] – I remember that day so well – crying all the way home. When I did get home I was told I was starting work on the Monday in a sweet shop in the city – my mother had arranged this. I was broken hearted – my Dad asked Mother to let me have a couple of weeks at home but she said no. I didn't have any idea what to do in the shop – I didn't even try I was so unhappy. After about 6 weeks I was told she had found me a 'better job' – this was in a laundry – we started at 7 and worked until 5.30 – it was hot and steamy and I would be exhausted. I ran away from home and stayed with a cousin for 2 weeks. Eventually my Dad came and took me home. He had spoken to one of the shipping offices – Henry Tyler – and I went to work there in the office – I had typing lessons – my time there was much happier. This office was my first contact with a switchboard – they said I was so good answering the phone that they would like me to have that job – I had an increase in pay to 10 shillings a week – out of that my mother took 7/6 – the 2/6 had to cover my fares etc. During this time my Dad died [1942] – this was such a blow to me. I was determined then to join up as soon as I possibly could.

Joining up

If I hadn't joined up I would have had to go into a munitions factory which scared me to death. First of all I joined the Land Army when I was 17 – I filled in the forms and walked away then thought about the sort of place I would be sent to. I went back and asked them and they said it could be anywhere doing any job. I told them I could not go anywhere near poultry as I was frightened of birds – they could not guarantee that so they tore up my form.

Then I went to the WRNS recruiting office – you had to be 18 which I wasn't then but told them I was. At that time there were only volunteers for the WRNS – no-one was called up. I had to sit an examination which I did at the Midland Bank Chambers in Old Hall St. – hoping I would remember my English, Maths etc and General Knowledge. Needless to say I walked it and was accepted much to my Mother's

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disapproval but then she didn't think I would pass the medical which I did. I went in the May and would be 18 the following November [1943]. After my Dad died although it was hard for Mother I had to get away as I was stifled and had no life. First I went to London as a Pro Wren – that meant after 6 weeks if I did not like it or they didn't like me I would leave.

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