

A Tale From My Childhood.

Once many, many years ago my mother said to me one day: “You’re five now; you need to go to school.”

The school was a small private one held in rooms above a café near the village station. The station was a little way out from the village; but I did not mind. I enjoyed the daily walk and it was always interesting: along the High Street, then a footpath through the churchyard, past a pond and then by fields till the final bit by the road down towards the station.

What I liked was that from the schoolroom I could see the railway signal box and the level crossing just before the station. I liked watching the large level-crossing gates slowly swing open for the train but closing the road to any traffic.

Every so often, when the air raid siren wailed in the village, the signalman hung a sign with a black arrow on it outside his box. When this happened, I had to walk with the other children down the stairs and take shelter under a large sturdy table. There we stayed until the the siren in the village signalled the all-clear.

But it was not raids by enemy planes that we sheltered from. Such air raids were a thing of the past by this time. What the siren signalled was a threat from V1 flying bombs that people called “doodlebugs.” They were being launched from north west France and from the Netherlands towards London, but they were not accurate and sometimes went into a steep nose dive before reaching London.

My father was serving in the Royal Air Force and I hardly ever saw him. I and my mother and my younger brother lived with my grandparents. One day the siren started wailing when we were all at home. We went into the scullery off the kitchen-cum-living room and crouched beneath a table there. A few moments later, we were all startled by a loud explosion which shook the house. Plaster fell from the scullery ceiling; fortunately we were protected by the table. Also, fortunately, the doodlebug had landed and exploded in a field on the opposite side of the road. No one was injured or killed.

Some people in the village who saw the doodlebug come down said it only just missed the roof of my grandparents’ house.

This was too much for my mother; she decided to take my brother and me to stay with my uncle and aunt who lived in Dorchester in Dorset. This was a long way away from any doodlebugs.

That autumn I went to a new school. This was much bigger than the little school above the café in the village where my grandparents lived. It also had a kindergarten which took children from the age of three; so I went to this school each day with my younger brother.

We stayed in Dorchester for more than a year. I was there for VE day when war ended in Europe; I was excited when I saw the huge bonfire at the crossroads near the square where my uncle and aunt lived. I had never seen a bonfire before, and this one was huge. A week or so later there was a street party in the square. My mother and aunt made patchwork suits for my brother and me to wear at the party. We were ‘Make-do’ and ‘Mend’.

That summer was just like paradise for my brother and me. We liked the walks along the River Frome with my uncle and his two spaniels; if we were lucky we would catch sight of kingfishers , swooping down to get fish.

For my young brother and me who had never been to the seaside before, the frequent trips to Weymouth were wonderful. We loved playing in the sea, and we especially liked the Punch and Judy shows. There was a clock face outside the Punch and Judy booth which gave the time of the next performance and my brother and I hardly ever missed a performance. There were two different versions which alternated; I soon knew each of them off by heart and back at my aunt and uncle’s house in Dorchester, I would go through them, imitating the voices.

I liked walking in the park gardens in the evening at Dorchester. That summer Britain had 'double summer time' - that means that instead of the clocks being put forward an hour for the summer, they were put forward two hours so it was light until very late in the evening. It was never dark when my brother and I went to bed that summer.

But all good things come to an end. My father came back from serving in the Royal Airforce and my mother, my young brother and I said good-bye to my aunt and uncle and went back to join my father in our home village. But that is another story.

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