

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

I Can't Explain

by Sue Hitchcock

I can't explain why I did these things, I was so hopeful, so optimistic, believing I had the power to change things.

They say your earliest memories are from your third birthday and in my case that was 1945. No memories of the war haunt my mind, I am unharmed. Apart from a memory of a visit to my maternal grandmother's earth-floored cottage, when she gave me a tiny, lead hippopotamus, I have two significant images. The first was of a man being burnt on the bomb site just over the road. I ran in to tell my mother, who explained that it was just made of wood, which was why it was burned black and that the white cross, a swastika, on its back was to show it represented the enemy. We had won the war. The other memory, more vague, was of the jubilation in the street, when Clement Attlee won the election. In our poor, working-class part of London Churchill was not loved and any Conservative voters would have had to be very secret about it.

My father had left his home in a mining village in Wales in 1926 to find work, had met my mother, married and moved to London, where he found a permanent job, only in 1936, on the railway. As such he was always a Union man, though no activist, but the scene was set for my left-wing credentials. By the time I was fifteen I was going to Communist meetings at St. Pancras Town Hall and would have joined, had my father not warned me about the restrictions there would be to travel to the U.S.A.

Maybe I would never have been employed in the Civil Service, but there were Communists at the British Museum. They might steal secrets, but not treasures!

So all my life I have voted, always believing that the majority would prevail. I can't explain why I did, why I had such faith, such optimism. Why didn't people trust such obviously well-intentioned, intelligent M.P.s, such as David Owen? I joined the S.D.P. but left when it was hijacked by David Steel. My priorities were now Ecology, Feminism, pacifism and no party suited me. Democracy still seemed worthwhile and I continued to vote at every opportunity for whichever candidate approximated my opinions, but in the last four years, despair has driven me towards a different, more radical solution - Assassination!