

Suspicion, Doubt, Jealousy

by Miriam Silver

A suspicion, doubt and jealousy grew in my mind even though I was considered too young to understand. All they ever talked about was that my eldest brother Tom would have to go, he'd just turned eighteen and Bill too apparently, he was only a year younger.

"Why, Oh! why? Can't bear it. Two sons," she moaned, forgetting about me.

I was meant to be a girl, my mum sort of puts up with me, the youngest, ten years after the other two. Although no one realises it, I can and do understand what all these grownups are talking about.

It's never about me, especially then, even though I too was involved, she didn't even look at the list I'd given her relating to my imminent evacuation. She just shoved it in her apron pocket. No one explained anything to me.

"Not now Andy, got too much on my mind," which left me feeling pushed out again.

Looking back I suppose I was jealous, I never had any of the attention Tom and Bill attracted.

Now of course I am aware that my parents were dreading another war, only 20 years had elapsed since the last one, and now someone called Hitler, was threatening to occupy Poland, the teacher told us, he pointed to the map of Europe and explained, England could not let him do that.

I also knew that my Dad's disability was due to the last war, way back in 1916, and here was their eldest trying to conceal his pride, he was going to join the RAF and learn to fly.

"You don't realise," they started to warn him only for Tom to respond airily,

"I'll learn on the latest aircraft, they're safe you know, be great."

I, of course did not realise that I might not see my brother ever again. Mum waved him a tearful goodbye, then reluctantly turned her attention to me.

“Where’s that list then?” as she found a small suitcase, losing interest almost immediately, “go on, you do it, you know what you want.”

Carefully I checked off each item on that list remembering to add my favourite book, *Black Beauty*, only vaguely understanding I was going somewhere without Mum or Dad and we had to assemble in the playground tomorrow.

All I could think about was if there would be a library, there, wherever ‘there’ might be, and hoped Mum would buy the food we had to take.

Mum and Dad walked me to my school’s playground in the bright September sun, joining the other parents who kept asking the accompanying teachers and helpers where we were going. No one knew apparently, we’d know when we arrived. That’s what the stamped addressed envelopes were for.

The coaches took us to the train station, some parents insisted on going there with their children, mine went back home, I waved them goodbye.

I do remember sitting in the train, anxious to be off so that I could eat my chocolate! I’d never had a whole bar all to myself before.

We were all tired and hungry when we arrived and had to walk a long way to the village hall where those locals with a spare bed had been forcibly volunteered and were assembled.

There, we were ‘picked’, now I know that was done by reluctant spare bed owners, or farmers who wanted some help.

I was lucky I was too small to be of much use, a lovely lady who I learnt to call Aunty took me home and gave me sausages for tea.

It was an idyllic Summer, hay making, picking apples. No school until the locals made room for us, thankfully part time.

There I stayed, enjoying my host’s orchard, farm and freedom developing a life long love of the countryside.