



VOICES FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Stories of War as Told to Children of Today

*A newspaper seller in London
on September 3, 1939,
the day Britain declared
war on Germany*



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*Members of London's Auxiliary
Fire Service taking part in a
training exercise in preparation
for the war, July 1939*



*German troops parade through
Warsaw, Poland, shortly
after invading the country
in September 1939.*





Contents

Foreword ix

*True Stories from the
Most Devastating War in History x*

*Some of the Children
Who Heard the Stories xii*

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR 1

FLEEING THE NAZIS 15

THE FALL OF WESTERN EUROPE 32

EVACUEES 46

BLITZED BRITAIN 53

THE BRITISH HOME FRONT 68

THE RESISTANCE 80

WOMEN AT WAR 113

A TRUE WORLD WAR 135

THE BOMBING OF GERMANY 158

THE FIGHT FOR FRANCE 176

THE BABY BLITZ 205

THE FALL OF GERMANY 215

THE HOLOCAUST 231

VE DAY 263

THE FALL OF JAPAN 271

Subject Index 292

Index of Interviewees 294

Glossary 296

Photography Credits 301

Acknowledgments 302



YOUR COURAGE
YOUR CHEERFULNESS
YOUR RESOLUTION
WILL BRING
US VICTORY



*A boy looks at a
propaganda poster
in London, 1939.*



Foreword by **JEREMY VINE**

I often wonder why the Second World War seems to get closer as time passes. I was born only twenty years after Hitler shot himself. During my childhood, movies like *A Bridge Too Far* made it all seem like ancient history. I assumed that becoming an adult and getting older would staple the war into a wooden frame like an old photograph — gradually yellowing, looked at less and less, eventually put away.

Time has done the opposite. Now that I am over fifty, I find myself crying at remembrance services. Is it because I understand what sacrifice is, now that I have more to lose? When we recorded a special program about D-day for BBC Radio at the Royal Albert Hall, a veteran of the landings sang a ballad he'd written about the day — an eyewitness account in song. When it ended, every person in the hall stood. At the end of the show, I thanked the audience, and a man near the rafters shouted back at me, "We will remember." And so we do.

When she was doing a report for the children's newspaper *First News*, my daughter Martha went to see Barbara Burgess, an elderly woman who lives a stone's throw from Martha's grandparents in Devon. The story of their encounter is in this book, so I won't spoil it by repeating the details here. But I accompanied Martha and listened as Barbara's tales of living during the Second World War poured out. And then it struck me: this was not a pensioner talking to a child; it was two nine-year-olds speaking to each other across the decades. Barbara told Martha about the bombs falling on her home in Manchester as if she had never left her hiding place in the cellar. Barbara will not always be here to tell that story. Yet, by listening, Martha and other young *First News* reporters have framed some precious, startling memories for decades to come. As that lone voice cried out in the Royal Albert Hall, we will remember.

TRUE STORIES FROM THE MOST DEVASTATING WAR IN HISTORY

The Second World War changed the course of history. Up to eighty million people died, families were torn apart, and whole cities were reduced to rubble. Now, more than seventy years after the war, survivors share their stories, passing on their memories so that their experiences are never forgotten. Many of the stories in this book were collected by children who interviewed relatives and family friends. Royal Air Force (RAF) rear gunner Harry Irons recounts his first bombing raid on Germany; Anita Lasker-Wallfisch explains how playing the cello in the orchestra

at Auschwitz-Birkenau saved her life; and Takashi Tanemori, who was playing hide-and-seek at school in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, describes what happened when the atomic bomb fell on his city.

So many people alive today have elderly relatives or ancestors who lived through the war. Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, explored her own family's story with *First News*. To find out more about it, she visited Bletchley Park, the center of intelligence gathering in Britain during the war, to meet Lady Marion Body, a veteran who had worked there alongside the



duchess's grandmother Valerie Glassborow. Valerie wasn't a code breaker, but had a crucial job in a small section responsible for managing the collection of enemy signals. The duchess learned that her grandmother had been one of the first to know that the war had ended, as she was working the day shift when a signal from Tokyo was intercepted, announcing that the Japanese were about to surrender.

This unique and moving collection of firsthand accounts of the war was first published in England in association with *First News*, the award-winning



Lady Marion Body tells the Duchess of Cambridge about her time working at Bletchley Park during the war.

children's newspaper, and the Silver Line, a confidential help line for older people established by Dame Esther Rantzen.



SOME OF THE CHILDREN WHO HEARD THE STORIES

Many of the stories in this book were collected by children, giving them the chance to learn about the Second World War from the people who were there.

“SIR NICHOLAS TAUGHT US MANY THINGS. HE EXPLAINED THAT WE SHOULD ALWAYS TRY TO PREVENT OTHER PEOPLE’S SUFFERING AND WALK AROUND WITH OUR EYES WIDE OPEN.”

Amélie Mitchell and Daniel McKeever interviewed Sir Nicholas Winton, who saved the lives of 669 Jewish children by helping to evacuate them from Czechoslovakia before Germany invaded.



“I brought Barbara an onion from my grandpa’s garden. She used it to explain to me what it was like during the Second World War. To show me how they used to cook it, she boiled it for half an hour. Then she tipped the saucepan, and the onion thudded onto the plate like a wet tennis ball. She covered it in salt and pepper, and spread butter on it. Normally I don’t like onions, but this one was different. The butter made it quite easy to eat. It made me realize that even though you think people ate quite disgusting things in the war, they had a way of making them taste nice. After hearing Barbara’s stories about the Blitz, I thought the onion tasted very good indeed.”

Martha Vine, pictured here with her father, Jeremy Vine, interviewed Barbara Burgess, who told her what it was like to live on rations during the German bombardment of Britain known as the Blitz.

“IT WAS AMAZING TO MEET DR. FRANKLAND AND HEAR HOW HE FELT ABOUT HIS LIFE AND THE THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM. I FEEL VERY LUCKY AND WOULD REALLY LIKE TO MEET HIM AGAIN TO HEAR MORE STORIES.”

Lucca Williams interviewed Dr. Bill Frankland, who told him about his experiences as a prisoner of war of Japan.



“I knew my grandma had been a girl during the war, but I had never spoken to her about it, so interviewing her gave me the chance to get to know her even better. I felt special, as she was sharing personal memories with me that would have been lost forever if I hadn’t had this opportunity to chat with her. I have seen many films and read lots of books about the war. Hearing my grandma’s memories makes those stories more real to me and helps me relate to them with more sympathy and understanding.”

Eleanor Boardman interviewed her grandmother Mary Boardman about life in Manchester, England, during the Blitz.

“MR. PETE IS A GOOD FAMILY FRIEND, AND I ENJOYED LEARNING ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES IN THE WAR. I FOUND IT SURPRISING THAT HE WAS MORE AFRAID OF LOSING THE RESPECT OF HIS CREW THAN OF BEING BOMBED BY THE JAPANESE.”

Noelle McDonald interviewed George Bressler (Mr. Pete) about his time in the U.S. Navy.



“I enjoyed doing this project with my grandfather, as otherwise I would not have known about his experiences. Grand-père was my age when France was at war. I can’t imagine what it is like worrying about not having enough food, and I can’t bear the thought of eating rabbits! I think I am lucky to live in a country at peace.”

Victor Ghose interviewed his grandfather Dr. François Conil-Lacoste, who lived in France during the German occupation.

“By interviewing my grandfather, I learned a lot about him as well as about the Second World War. I feel that now I understand what my grandpa and others went through.”

Islay Rose Van Dusen spoke to her grandfather William M. Breed about his experiences in the U.S. Navy.





“I was very lucky to be able to talk to Gramps about the war. It means that I understand what it was really like from someone who experienced it firsthand, rather than from a book by historians who weren’t there. I think that Gramps and the other Dambusters were extremely brave, and I am very proud to be part of his family.”

Ellen Gregory interviewed her great-grandfather George “Johnny” Johnson, a bomb aimer who took part in a British air attack on German dams called the Dambusters Raid.

“I FOUND IT FASCINATING TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO HAD ACTUALLY LIVED THROUGH THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN A COUNTRY WHICH WAS OCCUPIED BY THE NAZIS. I AM SO PROUD OF MY DUTCH GREAT-GRANDMOTHER FOR HELPING THE JEWS IN HIDING.”

Sasha Devereaux interviewed her grandmother Cornelia Manji, who was a child in the Netherlands during the war.



“I was extremely excited to write to Shirley Hughes. She’s been an idol of mine since I was very small, and I absolutely adore her books. If I were in the war, I’d try very hard to save my sweet rations.”

Bill Riley wrote to Shirley Hughes to ask her about life in Liverpool, England, during the Blitz.

“GREAT-GRANDMA WAS A FANTASTIC STORYTELLER, AND I REALLY ENJOYED HEARING ABOUT WHAT SHE GOT UP TO IN THE WAR. I’M SO GLAD THAT WE HAVE A VIDEO RECORDING OF IT, TOO, SO THAT WE CAN WATCH IT AGAIN ONE DAY.”

Jamie Brooks interviewed his great-grandmother Monica Miller, who was a sergeant in the British army during the war.



“It was a pleasure interviewing Micheline. She was so happy to talk about her childhood, and she even made some cakes (she is an amazing cook). I particularly enjoyed it because it made her smile.”

Lucy Poirrier interviewed Micheline Mura about her experiences as a child in German-occupied France.



**“IT WAS A FASCINATING EXPERIENCE,
AS I LOVE LEARNING ABOUT THE PAST.”**

*Elias Abdo and his classmates at Mile Oak Primary School interviewed
Fred Glover about his experiences in the U.K.’s Parachute Regiment.*

“Mr. Checketts was very nice, and interviewing him was really fun. He showed me lots of interesting things that were in a big old trunk, like photos and his navy uniform. I went back to school and told everyone about it. They were all really fascinated. I spent the whole day with Mr. Checketts and I enjoyed every moment of it. We went for a walk in the garden together.”

Carys Yates interviewed Harold Checketts, a naval meteorologist.



**“WE ARE GRATEFUL BECAUSE IF OUR GRANNY HADN’T
SURVIVED THE WAR, THEN OUR DAD WOULDN’T
HAVE BEEN BORN AND NEITHER WOULD WE!”**

*Wilf, Dora, and Chester Clapham interviewed their grandmother Margaret
Clapham, who went to England from Germany on a Kindertransport train.*

“I really felt very special hearing Granddad’s stories from when he was a little boy. They brought the time vividly to life for me, and I was able to understand how difficult it was for him in the war. You can read a book about the war, but when Granddad spoke to me about his own experiences, I could almost see what it was like through his child’s eyes. I love my granddad even more now.”

*Aylish Maclean interviewed her grandfather Ken Swain, who was
a child living in Portsmouth, England, during the Blitz.*



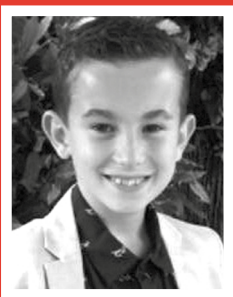


“WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT THE SECOND WORLD WAR AT SCHOOL, SO IT WAS REALLY INTERESTING TO FIND OUT ABOUT GREAT-GRANDMA’S EXPERIENCES AND TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO WAS ACTUALLY THERE.”

Jonathon Brooks interviewed his great-grandmother Monica Miller, who served in the British army during the war.

“It was very interesting meeting Fred Glover. I learned all about the Second World War and how much life has changed since then. It must have been terrifying! One thing I remember in particular is how he carried on even though his leg was injured. He was a very interesting and brave man, and it was a pleasure to hear his unforgettable stories. We should all really start listening to our elders. They have one or two things to tell us!”

Daniella Birchley and her classmates from Mile Oak Primary School interviewed Fred Glover, who took part in the D-day landings.



“IT WAS A GREAT HONOR AND EXPERIENCE TO INTERVIEW MR. FRED GLOVER, AS I HAVE ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST IN FINDING OUT ABOUT THE WAR AND THE INCREDIBLE STORIES OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT IN IT.”

Seb Dutton and his classmates from Mile Oak Primary School interviewed Fred Glover, who took part in the D-day landings.

“IT WAS AN ABSOLUTE PLEASURE TO INTERVIEW MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER. IT WAS FASCINATING TO FIND OUT ABOUT HER PLACE OF WORK AND HOW HER INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR HELPED SHAPE OUR WORLD TODAY.”

Chloe Stevens interviewed her great-grandmother Joy Hunter, who worked alongside Winston Churchill at the offices of the British War Cabinet.



“HEARING ABOUT MY GREAT-GRANDAD’S EXPERIENCES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR MADE ME REALIZE WHAT DIFFICULT CONDITIONS HE AND ALL THE OTHER SOLDIERS FOUGHT IN. IT ALSO MADE ME FEEL VERY PROUD OF HIM.”

Joseph Harrison interviewed his grandmother Gill Harrison. She told him what his great-grandfather Ivor Robert Phillips did in Burma during the war.



“I found it really interesting to interview my grandmother. I never really knew exactly what her role was in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, but I realized after interviewing her how proud she felt playing such a central part in the war effort. It is difficult to imagine being so very young, a teenager, and having such a heavy responsibility. There is always the very real possibility that I myself might be faced with a similar task in my life, but I hope that doesn’t happen. For her, the war was an opportunity to gain skills and a respectable job. Despite the circumstances, this gave her a sense of belonging and a real purpose, which she frequently talks about today.”

Millie Devereux interviewed her grandmother Margaret Neat, who worked as a radar operator on anti-aircraft guns.

“WE WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS OUR GREAT-GRANDFATHER HAD TO ENDURE. WE ARE VERY PROUD OF HIM FOR RISKING HIS OWN LIFE FOR OUR COUNTRY AND EXTREMELY THANKFUL HE SURVIVED.”

Samuel and Gemma Preston interviewed their great-grandfather Israel Hyams, who served in the Forty-Fourth Royal Tank Regiment.



“Interviewing Sir Harold Atcherley was a fantastic experience that opened my eyes to what it was really like to be held as a prisoner of war. I think it is very important for everybody to read about the war so they can see how hard it was for all the brave soldiers who fought.”

Seraphina Evans interviewed Sir Harold Atcherley about his time as a prisoner of war.



THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

During the 1930s, dictators rose to power in Italy, Russia, and Germany. The most notorious of these was Adolf Hitler, leader of the extreme right-wing Nazi Party, who became chancellor (equivalent to prime minister) of Germany on January 30, 1933, and president and *Führer* (leader) for life on August 19, 1934. He blamed Germany's problems on Jews and communists. In 1936, Hitler moved troops into the Rhineland—the region on Germany's borders that was supposed to be free of military forces—and in 1938, he claimed that the Sudetenland, a German-speaking area of Czechoslovakia, should be part of Germany.

Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, flew to Munich, Germany, on September 28, 1938, for a conference with the German, Italian, and French leaders. Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were not invited. At the conference, the leaders agreed to allow Germany to take the Sudetenland and signed a peace agreement known as the Munich Agreement, but Hitler had no intention of sticking to it: he was determined to take over Europe. In March 1939, Hitler occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. Then, on September first, Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began. Fighting between the two opposing forces, the Allies (including Britain, France, and the United States) and the Axis (including Germany and Japan), lasted until 1945.

Members of the Reichstag, the German parliament, saluting Hitler after his March 1938 announcement of Germany's takeover of Austria, which set the stage for the German occupation of the Sudetenland.