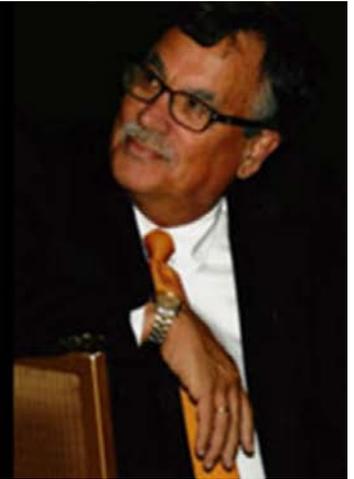


MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



BOMBS, RATIONS AND FEAR: HOW MY MOTHER DANCED HER WAY THROUGH WW2

My mother lived through the German invasion of England in WW2. She was in her late teens and lived in Manchester, England. For 6 years she lived with bombings, rationing, and death. My mother rarely talked to me about her experience, but she wrote extensively about it in “Looking Back On My Life” an autobiography she wrote at 80 years.

Of course, there are differences in the pandemic we are living through today and what my mother experienced in WW2. But there are many uncanny similarities between our experience of the pandemic and her experience during WW2. Back then, like now, survivors were exposed to a very unpredictable stressful environment; the pain persisted over a long period of time; death and the fear of death were everywhere; people were confined at home for long periods; fear was in the air; and everyone wore masks.

Although I read about my mother’s experience in the past, I re-read it recently with much more interest because of the pandemic we are experiencing. I was interested in the stressors my mother and others experienced; how they coped, how they kept hope alive over 6 years and what, if any, was the long-term psychological damage.

Below is my mother’s first-hand account of the stressors she as a civilian WW2 survivor endured and how she and others coped.

THE STRESSORS:

- *“One day at work I was called to the supervisors office and told that my fiancé Harold was killed in a bombing mission over Germany.”*
- *“Strict rationing soon began. Shops were allocated provisions based on what they had purchased the previous year. There were no fresh fruits or vegetables.”*
- *“Clothing was rationed; thus our clothing became threadbare requiring frequent mending. A radio show called Make Do and Mend had many ideas about repairing old clothes.”*

- *“Shoes were not only rationed but in short supply. One pair of my homemade shoes fell apart on my way to work, and I walked on one shoe.”*
- *“The blackout was strictly enforced. Windows had to be covered so not the faintest of light could be seen.”*
- *“The air raids were not long in coming. My family huddled under the stairs in the pantry, listening to the throb of bombers and wondering if we were going to be blown to bits.”*
- *“One night we all lay under the dining room table listening intently to each whine and crash of the bombs and waiting tensely in between.”*
- *“As I rounded the corner on my way to work, I saw the center of town on fire. Gaping faces of bystanders gazed up at the holocaust. For three days Manchester was a city of fire, smoke, black hoses and water.*

HOW SHE COPED:

- **IMPROVISING:** *“We bought pieces of leather and made our own shoes.”*
- **DETERMINATION:** *“After work the buses weren’t running. I was determined to walk home from work anyway. I walked 5 miles at 10 pm to get there. It was like walking through a ghost city, not a soul to be seen or heard.”*
- **FRIENDSHIP:** *“Despite the blackout, scarcity and rationing, my friends and I had lots of happy times. We were a happy group, glad of the freedom to walk paths through a wilderness coloured by yellow gorse and purple heather. Then we discovered weekly dances at the church. Dancing was a highly desirable activity for me and my friends.”*
- **SEEING THE SILVER LININGS:**
 - ❖ *“Because of the blackouts, on clear nights the sky was extraordinarily beautiful. The stars shone in all their beauty.”*
 - ❖ *“Public transportation was excellent. One block from our house you could go about anywhere in England.”*
 - ❖ *“We were cyclists. Wartime England was wonderful for cyclists because there were few vehicles allowed on the road.”*
- **GRATEFULNESS:** *“So it was that even in the midst of blackouts, air raids, shortages of almost everything, and the sadness of knowing our boys and men were away at war, we thoroughly enjoyed what pleasures and diversion we did have, perhaps more so. Being at war seemed to give simple pleasures greater value and intensity. **In a way, we sang, danced, hiked, cycled and socialized our way through the war.**”*
- **FOCUS ON THE PRESENT:** *“When circumstances threatened to demoralize us, we had a standard phrase that dissolved current problems. When the war ends. We convinced ourselves the end of the war would bring an end to all problems. None of us wanted to deal with post war problems. Time enough when they came.”*

When the war was over my mother met an American soldier (my father) moved to the US, married and had 6 children and several successful careers. She was psychologically unscathed by her war experience.

I came away from immersing myself in reading about my mother’s war experience amazed at her resilience and the resilience of her friends. As the bombs dropped and while they suffered loss and

prolonged stress, they found ways of not only coping but they also managed to enjoy life. I also came away fired up... if my mother and her friends could survive and thrive, by God, so can we! We are resilient too!

I have read many scary predictions about how most of us will be inevitably and permanently damaged by this pandemic...PTSD, anxiety and depression. But my mother's life story gives me hope.... hope that it doesn't have to be that way. I look at her post war satisfying and productive life as an example of how a life can be lived following a terrible ordeal. When I get discouraged and can't see my life at the end of the pandemic tunnel, I think of that 19-year-old girl and her friends in England with bombs exploding around them who when the war was over went on to live life to the fullest. That is my future hope for all of us.