

## Memories shared of VE Day

Many thanks to all those who shared with me their memories of VE Day. Some I've already mentioned. Here are some more:

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Coming up to my 13th birthday I was on my way home from school. Sitting in the front seat of the top floor of a 662 trolley bus at the Clock Tower, Harlesdon, in NW London, I spotted a news paper seller. I believe the P M announced it at 3.00 pm but the news must have been released to the press earlier as the paper man was carrying a crude poster, as they did in those days, proclaiming "WAR IN EUROPE OVER". There was some confusion as to what was going to happen next, but I think that later that evening the government announced that the next day was to be a Public Holiday. I've got a vague memory of hearing Chamberlain's speech at 11.00 am on the next day. My father, ever cautious and a veteran of WW 1, had collected our gas masks and put them on the dining table, presumably "just in case". Fortunately they were never needed although most people carried them around with them at least for the first part of the war. A few days later I distinctly remember a young lady, whose boyfriend was serving in the Far East, mildly complaining "yeah, but the war isn't over yet!"

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Another person was on holiday in Durban, in bed and asleep, and was awakened by a raucous party in the hotel bar immediately below her and her mother came up to tell what the fuss was all about.

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We can't remember the actual day but we can remember the street parties for the children. There were long trestle tables and benches down the middle of the next road - there were not enough children in my road to have one of our own. Consequently I didn't sit next to anybody I knew and I was very shy in those days. It must have been quite a challenge to provide enough food but I do remember having meat and fish paste sandwiches and jelly and blancmange. I don't remember cake but we had a weak orange drink. Apart from that I don't recall much else, whether we had games I don't know. The only other thing I remember is that everybody was smiling and happy.

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I have very vivid memories of VE Day. Grandpa Griffiths had just died and I was staying with our curate's family in Gedling, Notts., while my parents were in Grimsby for Grandpa's funeral and to clear out their house and bring Grandma back with them to stay with her sister in Bingham. We had by far the biggest garden among my school friends and I assured everybody, with the confidence of an almost 11 year old, that my parents would not mind us having a bonfire in our back garden.

Four families gathered, not on our bonfire patch but nearer the house round a pitifully small bonfire. Then my tired parents arrived home. We were used to garden bonfires. Daddy got back in the car to go to his shop (pharmacy) to search out some old show cards to add to the

flames. We ended up with such a big bonfire that a branch of next doors plum tree caught light. We put it out quickly with a hose and cut off the scorched branch. They never knew what had happened to that tree.

That night we did not have to put up the blackout shutters or draw bedroom curtains. The next day we were off to school without our gas masks. The war was over.

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I have no memories of VE Day as I was only 2yrs at the time . My Father in law was fighting on the frontline in Burma . After V E day he and his company were left there and not repatriated until 1947 , 2yrs later. I think they were known as the Forgotten Army. His son, my husband, was born in 1944 so didn't know his father when he returned home to Watton 3 yrs later. Being an only child the father son relationship was never one of harmony ! Years after his experience, Father in Law was left with dietary problem also not being able to talk about his experiences. One light in his Burma experience was that he came to faith fighting in the jungle and, as a great Christian man never lost it.

I met several veterans of war in my work whose memories were always locked away within themselves so I never learnt their traumatic experiences.

The population must have been jubilant that WW2 had ended . The following years were a trial for veterans, wives and families , some never settled back.

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My sister was born in 1938 with our father being in the TA going fulltime into uniform in September 1939, my mother and sister left the rented cottage and went to live with my fathers parents in Garverstone, subsequently moving on to an Aunt and Uncle (who brought my mother up from the age of 12) who lived in Watton. Father was sent to Singapore with the Royal Norfolk's and was reported missing after its fall and surrender in 1942 eventually confirmation came to say he was a prisoner of war (I have the paper cuttings from the EDP stating both missing and prisoner confirmation)with the Japanese.

So in that contact my sister who was five and a half in May 1945, confirmed she can not remember the family doing anything on VE day but on August 15<sup>th</sup> my sister, mother, Aunt and Uncle all went to stay with a relative in St Albans and went into London to celebrate VJ day.

I suppose it is understandable in May that year, like my family, many in Norfolk and the world were waiting for news that the War in the Far East had come to an end, and that their loved ones would be coming home from the Japanese prisoner of war camps.

Thank the Lord my father did come home, but without his three friends he served with from Garverstone (one his brother in law} who didn't. Although my father never spoke very much on this period of his life to me it was not until after both my parents deaths I was reading a letter he sent my mother from the slow boat journey home (to allow time to fatten them up) that I realised it would have been too painful and full of negativity for him to bring back the memories as he wrote the events which occurred whilst spent as a prisoner on the railway and back in Singapore are not to be spoken about.

For many the War was not over for them on VE Day in May 1945.

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I was born in September 1939 and was fortunate enough to live in a remote rural area surrounded by fields and woods. I never heard a bomb, slept in a shelter or suffered the privations experienced by many of my contemporaries. As I grew I remember parents talking about something called 'Before the war'. I was unable to go to a school as it was too far away when the time came and was taught by someone called 'Auntie Nans' who had been a Nanny at the Big House when there were children there. My mother always referred to my attendance at a Private School, I suppose it was as I was the only pupil. It didn't interfere with my making of mud pies; reading, which I seem to have been doing from the age of 3; working my way through a few childhood illnesses, caught from the occasional playmate or visiting cousin I imagine and breaking an arm from time to time. I remember my fourth birthday, convinced that overnight I would reach adult height (still waiting on that one).

One day my mother rushed in and took down all the blackout curtains and blinds, she had to put them up the following night it being summer and I could only sleep in the dark, a pattern for life I'm afraid. She then produced a huge red, white and blue rosette for me, made I presume from fabric hoarded for the purpose and told me the war was over and we were going to a big VE parade, I never did know how she knew this but in my innocence assumed it was a regular occurrence and anyway mothers knew everything. I swear that rosette was as big as a dinner plate.

My goodness what a parade that was for someone who'd never seen more than two or three people at any one time! I thought it would never end. That's where I saw Girl Guides in the old brimmed hats and long skirts and immediately wanted to be one, there was music, bands, singing and marching. My father had been in the War Emergency Police Force and took me in the police station and pretended to lock me in the cells, child psychology was never his strong point.

This was a golden day and there was never another like it. We moved soon afterwards, first to a war torn, bomb damaged London then just over the Norfolk Lincolnshire fenland border and life was just never the same.

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I remember we were living in Berkshire. We had an orchard at the bottom of the garden and an underground shelter which became a pretend camp. One day it filled with water. It was a frightening time. I remember the German planes firing overhead and them actually striking a Munitions Factory in Slough, which caught fire. That plane was caught itself before it escaped over the English Channel. One day I found a large piece of shrapnel and took it into my school for the teacher. I never saw it again. I have memories of my Father, who'd been a motor engineer before the war, working on Mosquito aircraft. One day I had the chance to go on to the airfield, but the military police came over and caught me with the person from the hangar who'd taken me. I did get the chance to put on some earphones once and hear the operator speaking to the pilots which was very interesting. I went into a Mosquito cockpit too. The propellers made a terrific roar. On VE Day there

were American and British Military troops and I was hoisted to see on my Father's shoulders. The public houses were all open.

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Being born in 1938, I was nearly 7yrs old so had experienced running to the air raid shelter many times with my mother and 2 younger sisters age 3yrs and 1yr. My Father was sometimes on Home guard duty, we shared a shelter with another family , who lived in the same street. VE day was very busy as my mother was making lot of jellies for the STREET PARTY also cakes and sandwiches, so my job was to put the jellies on the stone floor of our pantry so they would set in time for the celebration being careful not to spill any!! Lot of bunting put up all made by the families. Lots of tables arranged down the middle of the road filled with all the food and drinks, a lady played her piano so had lots of singing,dancing afterwards. It seems a very long time ago!!!