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Place of Birth: Perth, Western Australia

A DIFFERENT WAR

It is unusual to hear views from children and of what it felt like during WWII for them and how it affected their lives. I hope you may enjoy this story.

Before the war when mother had enough flour she made her own bread and to help feed us dad shot rabbits in the bush and fished with a rod from the beach. When dad was lucky we would stand by the wood stove to watch mum cook the whiting in a dollop of melted dripping. The smell from the old frying pan was heavenly. And we had fish and bread for tea. Dad used to say, "This was a bloody lovely country to starve in."

The depression years ended with the beginning of World War II and with bigger changes than anyone could anticipate. My twin sister and I were still at school. After many hard years, work was available. Money was coming into the homes and men were leaving them to go to war. Dad started work as a milkman and he had a big old horse with a cart.

"It's just as well the bloody horse knows where to stop, I can never remember," he would say. Milk was ladled from a large milk urn on the cart into the Billys that were left outside the houses. Before long dad had a different job, he worked as a guard on the Fremantle wharves. He had a truncheon in case of trouble, however the Military Police looked after their own. There was a lot of activity, which continued to increase. No one would talk about it. Careless talk kills, we were told and there were posters up to remind us.

Now it seemed everyone was busy. Our playground at school was dug up for trenches. We each had a Hessian cape, which had a pocket where we kept a few lollies.

Our capes hanging in line on the pegs in the school hall were a forlorn sight. We didn't mind the air raid practise; we missed a lesson and were allowed to eat a lolly or two.

The strongest lesson learnt was that you did not complain. Men were fighting and dying and everyone went without. Shoes and clothing were bought with ration cards. Foods like sugar, tea and coffee became scarce and some foods were rationed. Jobs were manpowered and spare time was spent doing war work. There were bandages to roll, socks to knit and mum and dad joined the V.A.D.

The city of Perth and the port of Fremantle had air raid shelters. There were sandbags everywhere. People were told to carry something white at night. This was so that we could easily be seen by the cars using dimmed headlights. Power

cuts were a regular occurrence, probably due to over loading. The 48-hour week could easily become 50 hours or more. You did not get paid because you were on the job.

Not far into the war mum went bush nursing at Nannup. This meant our big sister being ten years older was left in charge. Our sister was working of course. Everyone was needed for work and our Ellen decided we should go to work.

I remember my first day at work as the worst day of my life. My twin and I were 13 years old and our job was in a clothing factory. This factory like many others now made only soldiers' uniforms.

It must have been winter, it was dark when we left home and it was dark when we returned. The factory was on the first floor above the clothing shop.

It was a long dingy room full of passageways and strange heavy shapes. I was frightened when the machinery roared into life. The noise was deafening, workers used hand signals or yelled to each other. Being new we were placed at a table at the back of the room. The light was better and it needed to be as this was where all the hand sewing was done.

Six other women sat at this large table. Our job was to sew on buttons and finish any hand sewing on the trousers. The khaki material was heavy and prickly; it was not easy to work on. I learnt later that some of the girls would write a note and put it in the trouser pocket. There was much talk of the boys and of what they liked or didn't.

They managed to keep a lot of the talk from us. We thought we knew what they meant most of the time. Near our table were the steam pressing machines. The hissing and steam was like a wounded dragon trying to get away.

By afternoon my hands were painful from all the needle jabs. I longed to go outside, to play, and to go home. Finally the whistle blew and the noise ceased. We had finished our first day of work, the longest day of my life.

When we got home we were almost too tired to talk or to eat. Dad worried about us. We had our tea and went to bed. Before we knew it, it was time to get up and go to work. Never was anything more dreaded, but we went all the same.

Dad wrote to mum and she came home as soon as possible. We were all happy about this. There was a lot of family talk; at the end they included us. They asked us what we wanted to do? And then we all talked things over. It was decided to leave things as they were. No one wanted to admit a mistake and besides we were manpowered.

We could not understand the logic of grownups. It was good to have a few shillings on our pocket. Things got better, or as predicted we became used to it.