

Holly Richards

War, a crime against all humanity. On the 1st World War memorial in Stirling Square, Guildford are the names of two of my Uncles. Three of them went to war. The twins Victor and Harold, and Lionel. Harold was the only one to return. He had been gassed and had to go on the pension. Under all those names now are the names of boys who went to school with my brothers and myself.

My brother Eric Jones was a Sergeant Major in the army and fought on many fronts. His memorial plaque is in Karrakatta.

My Granny Jones lost two sons and a daughter Joanna who died when the bubonic plague swept the world, due to the blood soaked grounds. Joanna left a husband Charles Chadwick who was a baker and four children, three daughters and one son. An Aunt of the children helped to rear them.

When my husband was over in Victoria, he went to hospital to have his appendix out, and spent some weeks recuperating. When he finally returned to Base he found that the original group he was with had been sent to England and many of them had been killed in air raids.

When we returned to WA and my husband was based at Pearce, one dark night he and a Pilot were flying and as there were no street lights or visible land marks they got lost. As the Pilot was about to make a landing my husband yelled out to him to lift the plane up, as instead of being the runway it was the Bellevue Railway Station. Eventually they made their way back to base.

I returned from Victoria by boat with another airforce wife and her little daughter. No cigarettes or shiny watches were allowed on deck at night, and every now and then the boat would stop and they would have to fish underneath it for bombs. One dark night towards the South Pole we saw a ship on the horizon lit up like a Christmas tree. It turned out to be a hospital ship. We were all glad to reach Albany Harbour.

When the Prime Minister of England announced that England was at war with Germany, we realised that it would also deeply affect Australia. I was sitting at the breakfast table with my Granny Young, when there was a knock at the door. My boyfriend came in and told us that we are now at war. My boyfriends name was Neil Richards, and he was eventually to become my husband. He joined the army and for a time was stationed at Rottneest Island. After a while he decided to join the airforce, and that meant he had to go to Melbourne, Victoria. We were engaged by then, so we were married on the 27 April 1940 in the morning and in the early afternoon my husband left by train for Victoria, and I was to follow later. My husband was not a Pilot, but a mechanic, so when the plane was serviced he had to go up with the plane and the pilot. Over in Victoria the airforce men were referred to as the "Menzie's Blue Orchids".

When we were back in W.A we started our family. The war was still raging. All the railway signs were down, there were no streetlights and we were not allowed to have any lights visible through our windows. And when the sirens went off we were told to get under a strong table and stay there until the all clear was given. Darwin was bombed and my husband was working on the submarines in Fremantle Harbour which were manned by the Americans. He said that they were told that they were not to give out any information to their families about what they were doing. We all had ration books and the only icecream we could get was vanilla flavour, yet my husband said that the Americans were absolutely crazy about icecream and had every flavour imaginable available to them. On another occasion my husband said that something fierce was going on out there, perhaps it was the Battle of the Coral Sea maybe?

After the war and migrants had come to Australia, my daughter married a Slav man who was a boy at the time of the war, and he told of truckloads of German soldiers coming on to his grandfather's farm, demanding to be fed, and afterwards, stripping the farm of all it's food etc. He said his grandfather would go up into the forest at the back of his farm and dig a large hole in the frozen ground and fill it with food so that they would not starve in the future. He also told of how his uncle was a freedom fighter. He went out one night and never returned. His body was never found. I read where one family boarded up a window outside and planted a large shrub in front of it, and inside the room they would put all their valuables etc and then they would wallpaper over the door and put a large piece of furniture in front of it. After the war they would find all their valuables still in good condition.

When Fremantle Harbour was full of submarines they were sitting ducks for a bombing raid, so they went to Albany Harbour.