

THE JOURNEY

I had just become 12 when the terrible news came home. We lived in the ruins of London, and had endured one painful year of World War Two. The telegram said Dad had been shot down in the English Channel, and ever since, a continuous sadness hung in the air.

We had just sat down at our sweaty seats at the Picture Palace when the news came on. Images of Dad came back to me and I sobbed uncontrollably into my lap. Tears were streaming down my face as the piercing cry of the air raid siren filled the room. The screen went blank. I scrambled for my bag, then I tore through the crowds like a maniac as the roof collapsed behind me. I saw the underground coming closer... WHUMP... air was sucked from my lungs, smoke filled the air, and dust flew out of my mouth. Then, my vision went black.

When I woke up in my bed at home, I thought it had all been a dream. But I soon found out it wasn't. Two bulging suitcases were laid out on the kitchen table. My brother Cliff was running around the room excitedly. I tried to smile. After all, I would be safer in the countryside. If I were a mother, wouldn't it be the best decision? Yet when I waved a solemn goodbye to Mum on the platform, I wasn't feeling so sure.

After a monotonous train journey and an exhausting coach, we arrived at a small town in the middle of nowhere. We were given hot tomato soup and bread in the murky village hall, then we were assigned our host families. Me and Cliff stayed with a jolly old lighthouse keeper called Ephraim Pengilly. Our room had seven windows, and the sun streamed through them, filling every corner of the bedroom. The majestic light at the top kept a watchful eye on the sea at night. I couldn't be happier.

At the start of school, the children were nasty and unwelcoming. I was assaulted with names, drowned with nasty torments, and beaten up when the teachers weren't looking. Most of the time, all I could do was to sit alone feeling friendless. Lessons ended up being the best things in the entire day, although even old Mr Jenkins didn't seem to like me either. I could only agree on one thought: I wasn't smart enough.

After weeks of loneliness, I made friends with a shy girl called Esther, who had also lost both parents in the war. She was the only one who didn't join in when the others bullied me, and the only one that didn't hate me. One day, I overheard some boys whispering rude remarks behind her back. It was just then I noticed she was also suffering, just like me. I didn't know what to do. It was her who thought of an idea, a brilliant idea, a tremendous idea, a life-changing idea.

One grey and fuzzy day, I saw Esther walking up anxiously to the teacher. One second she was whispering in his ear, the other the classroom was quiet. Flabbergasted, dumbfounded, astounded, I watched as she told the class how hard it could be to lose a parent in the war. One by one, faces lit up with understanding. After that, I couldn't go anywhere without people staring at me in awe, or without being bombarded with questions about what London was like.

All of a sudden, evacuation didn't feel so bad after all. Being friends with Esther had been the best decision I had taken in my life, and what changed my experience from miserable to palatable. I couldn't believe how much I had learnt this year: from standing up to bullies, to trusting your best friends.

THE END