Lest We Forget

2011

Collector's Edition

Special Book of Remembrance

Published by Pages Of Stories, Inc.

Dedication

My father was a 7 year old child in the north east part of England when WW II started and a 14 year old young man when it ended. He and his younger sister were luckier than most children in that country. The town they lived in was and still is, a seaside resort and right next to it were some very big fishing docks. They were lucky because the Nazis did a minimal amount of bombing of his home town because those same docks were too strategically important to the Germans for access to Scandinavia. Once they invaded England that is.

They were lucky because schooling for them continued on, so my dad and my aunt continued to get an education where many others their age were just trying to stay alive.

They were lucky because their entire household was intact throughout the war. My grandfather had a very bad left arm and so wasn't useful as a soldier to the military. They made use of his truck though and didn't mind asking him to haul around all sorts of things. This meant my grandmother didn't have to worry about her husband on the front lines. Like so many other wives did that is.

A few years ago I bought my dad a book about children in England throughout the war. It centred around those children that were sent away and the pictures are heartbreaking. I'm grateful that my dad and aunt were never sent away. I'm so very sorry that the first few years of their lives were filled with war.

Some of the stories you're going to read about involve children; children who grew up knowing how far away a mortar shell was, children who saw a parent killed, children who had only read about what a father was but never actually experienced it until the war was over,children who should have been able to get passed childhood without knowing what the word 'genocide' meant.

This book is dedicated to those children that have had their childhood taken away from them because of war.

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Darlene Poier

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Publisher's Say

Hello Everyone!

For those of you familiar with the regular edition you'll know that this is where I like to connect with you, our reader. It gives me an opportunity to tell you about some of the fantastic stories you're going to read inside.

A year ago, I was sitting in my parents house two provinces over, attending my nephew's wedding. Remembrance Day was approaching and as it has always had a special meaning in my family, I'd wanted to do something to honour the meaning of the day. My parents, husband and I got talking about Remembrance Day and it was during this discussion that it finally dawned on me what it was I needed to do. I needed to help get those stories out before they went away forever.

When I first put out the call for war stories, I didn't really know what I was going to get. Never having been witness to a crisis like that, I wasn't sure if people would want to open up about it. Fortunately for us they did, and the stories they told will sadden you and yet make you cheer for the human spirit.

War can always be averted when dealing with reasonable and logical people. Sadly, it isn't always these reasonable and logical people that are in power. And it seems that the only way to get them to stop what they're doing is through some kind of military campaign.

Even though there are very few benefits to war, it has been known as a time when some of the best innovations and inventions have occurred. As Christine Sutton points out, if Florence Nightingale hadn't been witness to the deplorable conditions during the Crimean War, she might not have thought up some of the changes that she did.

While it is the illogical, irresponsible and generally unthinking individuals that are ultimately responsible for the outbreak of war, it is the brave individual citizen that can clean up the aftermath and help return the population to feelings of normalcy.

In this special edition, we have stories from Kenya, India, Lebanon, Turkey, Poland, England, Hungary and somewhere off the coast of Africa. These stories were written by both experienced authors, and those who just wanted to get their story out. These are the children of the war heroes, or were children at the time of war. Nestled in amongst these stories are two fantastic poems that say quite succinctly what I think many of us feel. Our authors hail from Canada, England, South Africa, Australia, Kenya and India. While each has a unique story and perspective, the underlying theme is the same. War is destructive and has a lifelong impact.

We made the definition of war fairly broad; it includes international declarations of war, revolutions, civilian uprisings and those vague "international incidents".

Our two poets - Sandy Bezanson and Xenia Gallardo - tell the story of one soldier determined to go to war and the other about a child who must grow up alone. Dana Haffar now lives in South Africa, but her early years were spent in Beirut, witness to the upheaval there. Rita Bozi gives us a little snippet of her parents story and their daring escape from a Communist Hungary. Barbara Janusz also tells us her father's phenomenal story. This was a man who was involved in WWII right from the day the Germans invaded Poland in 1939 until the Allies freed him from a concentration camp in 1945. He did everything in between from spying to fighting to just surviving the concentration camp.

We hear from Jackie Tritt as she shares her childhood memories intermingling them with the current news of the day. Sumit Chakrabarti gives us some new and fascinating detail about the Indo-Pakistan conflict of 1971. Many of us can probably remember the destruction and mayhem after the 2007 elections in Kenya. Elisha Otieno tells us his story of that time. Christine Sutton not only brings us Florence Nighitngale's story of the Crimean War but of her own father's incredible luck when his ship was torpedoed.

These are the stories of real people in their own words. I hope you enjoy their work.

Darlene Poier
Publisher
Pages Of Stories

Flag of Canada; courtesy Wikipedia

They Said

By Sandy Bezanson

Sandy Bezanson was born in Ottawa and grew up in different cities across southern Ontario. After graduating from Queen's University, she lived in Europe for fifteen years. The historical immediacy of WWII in Europe piqued her interest in Canada's participation in the war. This poem reflects her father's experiences during that time. It remains surprising to her, and somewhat of a gift, that his joie de vivre was unscathed by the harsh incidents which he faced as a young man.

Chett Chettleborough, Italy 1944; courtesy Sandy Bezanson

They said his parents never recovered from their sixteen year old son misrepresenting his age and enlisting.
They said he was so tall, well over six feet, that nobody questioned him that day in the fall of 1939.
They said he was overseas before Christmas.
They said he wrote to family often, tried to be cheerful, sent his pay home.
They said he had his 18th and then his 21st birthday in battle.
They said he loved his training in England, caught malaria in Italy, was wounded during the Battle of Pisciatello.

In a hushed voice t**hey said** his childhood friend died in his arms, his cousin in a Lancaster over Belgium.

They said during the assault landing in Sicily he pulled two men out of the deep water and towed them into shore when the landing craft couldn't get in close enough.
They said a scared young German soldier surrendered to him and later entrusted him with his ring and family photos.
They said his metal mirror saved a bullet from going through his chest, that he had shrapnel peppered over his body, had a toe shot off and permanent damage to his hearing.
(**They said** he was one of the lucky ones.)

They said he flirted with nurses in hospital, but the second wounding put him out of the war in '44 and onto a hospital ship home.
They said when he returned to Edmonton nearly six years after leaving, his youngest sister cried because he didn't recognize her.
They said he was one of the youngest Sergeants in the Canadian Army.

They said all this and more.

But all he ever said was, you do your duty.

In loving memory of my father L. F. "Chett" Chettleborough
Sandy Lynn Bezanson

Flag of Canada; courtesy Wikipedia

Seven O'clock News

By Jackie Tritt

Jackie Tritt spent her childhood years in London. She migrated to Australia in the 1960s, where she taught for many years before retiring and starting out as a writer. Her work has appeared in newspapers, anthologies, and children's magazines and she has won several short story competitions. She has a collection of stories with Ginninderra Press, and her novel, 'The Burning' was published with Australian and American publishers.

Air raid sirens still make her shiver.

*****

The woman on screen is running down the street and dragging a child behind her. Her feet flying through the air, freewheeling like a cartoon animal, though it's hard to find anything to laugh at here. Their fear is palpable. They are caught in the crossfire of opposing soldiers and they are eternally running, the same film clip shown over and over on the news bulletins, so we see only this brief moment of their lives, never knowing if they survive to run again. And I yell at the cameraman to get out from behind his bloody lens and help them.

*****

I know that fear. It is my feet that fly though the air, pedalling to a standstill, never getting away. I know those bombs, and the waiting without breathing while they are falling. I know those houses reduced to rubble. I know those sirens, their wails corkscrewing straight into my stomach. It is my mother who is running, with me flying behind her, my hand locked in hers, running to the station, to the Underground, through the unlit, blacked out city streets. And there she tries to sleep, with me cradled in her arms, crammed among the snoring, joking, spitting, groaning bodies of hundreds of East Enders, until the All Clear sounds and they struggle to their feet and emerge to inspect the damage. These are the memories that creep into my mind when I am overtired, that edge into the grey fuzz between consciousness and sleep.

*****

Russian women queue, babies in their arms, toddlers at their feet, waiting for hours in long, orderly lines for bread, for milk. And those without money try to sell their pathetic trinkets - snow domes and dolls - so they can join the lines too. Will a snow dome buy a loaf of rye bread for a toothless old babushka?

*****

I don't remember her crying when the bombs dropped, when houses crumpled and fires lit the night sky, but one day we queued for bananas, waited for hours for the enticing golden fruit. Before my mother reached the front of the line, they had run out. No more, Missus, sorry. She cried then, sobbed for the injustice of it all, for a world out of control, her own small world out of her control.

*****

Soldiers arrive at the airports, tour of duty over, for now. The grinning PM lauds them. Wives, girlfriends and mothers hug them, kiss them and thrust babies they've never seen before into their arms. And some of those babies eye their unknown fathers with suspicion, their small faces crumpling into rage at this stranger. Toddlers hug their daddies' legs.

*****

One morning, I woke up and there was a man in the kitchen. Then it was my turn to sob, because the kitchen was for Mum and me, not a man. He shouldn't be there. She laughed at me, she thought my tears were funny. I cried even more.

"This is your Daddy," she said. "He's come home for a little while. Have you got a cuddle for him?"

I knew what a Daddy was, from my story books, but this was a stranger in our space and I didn't want him there. I ignored him and thumbed through my books. He lit a pipe and filled the air with smoke. I didn't like the smell.

When it was over, when the war had finished and my father came home for good, I couldn't believe that the planes overhead weren't going to hurt me any more. I was even more terrified of the planes than I was of my father. He took me to an airfield and lifted me to touch the cool, smooth wings. See, they don't hurt you, do they? Nothing to be afraid of, is there? But I couldn't absorb that logic into my heart.

*****

I started school, and we stood in line by Mrs. Milligan's desk each morning for a spoonful of cod liver oil, which put me off fish for a lifetime, and for malt. Mouth after mouth closed around the same evil spoon, in what seemed even then, a strange notion of keeping us healthy. And on very special days there was a crate of apples from Australia. Huge, round, red apples smelling of sunshine and tasting of sweet, clean nectar. One apple each and yes, you can eat them now. And oh, the joy of juice trickling down my chin, in a time when orange juice was a bitter concentrate in a small glass bottle, when eggs were a yellow powder spooned from a tin, when mandarins were so special they merited an annual appearance in the Christmas stocking.

Australia was a long way away, Mrs. Milligan told us. A big country, far away, where apples and pears grew and there was plenty of room for sheep. I thought I'd like to go there.

*****

Women in hijabs stoop over the piles of rubble which used to be their houses, sorting through for something, anything, that survived. They search for family photos, for their mother's rings, for that special teapot with the long spout, for the reassurance that they had lived normal lives, were normal people, before the nightmare took over.

*****

On the way to my grandparents' house in the East End, we walked from the Mile End road through streets of terraced houses with random gaps like missing teeth. The windows and front wall of one house had disappeared, and the abandoned lives lay exposed. Green wallpaper with tiny pink rosebuds, a corner sink with shattered china on the draining board, clothes reduced to rags behind the splintered doors of wardrobes.

At the neighbouring house, a woman, her hair wrapped turban-style in a red spotted head scarf, scrubbed at the front step. She sang out to the world in a husky, smoky voice, about bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover.

*****

When the bomb sites were cleared, they opened up the sky and presented us with miniature patches of wilderness. Orange marigolds, pink willow herbs, tall goldenrod, all bringing colour to the grey streets of my childhood.

Jackie and Mum, 1945; courtesy Jackie Tritt

*****

After the war was over, I was given my first real present, a doll's pram. In it lay a doll covered in blankets. The pram was navy blue with white curly patterns. It had a hood that went up and down, and silver wheels. My doll had blue, staring eyes that were always open and thin black eyelashes drawn around them. Her hair was painted yellow on sculpted curls. Her dress was white.

I wheeled her down the long, dark corridor of my grandmother's house to the scullery, where my mother and her sisters gossiped while they cooked, their voices rising, one over the other, laughter spilling out, pans clattering. They admired the doll and returned to their conversation.

I pushed her into the dining room and showed her my favourite handles – shiny and smooth, on the big wooden dresser. There were twelve of them. I lifted each and let it fall and rattle, like a door knocker. Grandma yelled at me to leave them alone, I was driving her mad, she said.

I wheeled my doll into the dusty backyard to show her the hens. We didn't stay long. I was wary of those pointed beaks and toes, the small watchful eyes, the scratching and groaning. Aunt Sophie was at a wooden bench, cutting open a dead chicken, getting it ready to put in the pot. I didn't make the connection between the belligerent, pecking birds and this small body you could open up and see inside. She showed me the cluster of eggs in a cavity; round, soft, yellow balls. Grandma's hens laid real eggs, with smooth brown shells and slimy stuff inside them. I told her I preferred the yellow powder.

Aunt Sophie asked me if I'd ever eaten chicken feet. Just like butter, she said, but I didn't fancy the idea much. The skin of the chicken after she had pulled the feathers out of its leg was pale pink with small bumps on it, and little white tufts. A bit like an old man's neck, I thought, and why would I eat an old man's neck?

I wheeled my pram to show the men in the front room, my father, my grandfather, and my uncles. Their talk was low and slow and the air was filled with pipe smoke. I was tucking the blankets around my doll when disaster happened. First, there was a loud cracking noise and then the ceiling fell down. White chunks, white flakes, white powder, fell on me, on my sleek navy pram, in my doll's eyes and my eyes. The whiteness covered the floor, the furniture and the people. I coughed as the dust filled my nose and throat.

"It's a bomb!" I screamed. I threw myself under the table.

"It's all right," my father said. "It's not a bomb. The bombs have stopped now. The bombs that fell in the war made the ceiling weak and that's why it fell down. The war's over now." I loved my father, I was used to him by this time, but I didn't always believe what he told me.

*****

Across the road from my grandparents' house was the hospital. I watched from the window in fascination as sick people were carried on stretchers from the back of ambulances through the hospital's door. They were always covered in red blankets.

The blankets are red so you don't see the blood, Mrs. Milligan later assured me. I retreated to the Wendy House in the corner of the classroom, and the safe world of story books. Of Orlando, the Marmalade Cat. Orlando on a camping holiday. Orlando buying a farm. Camping holidays and farms seemed pleasant and remote from bloody red hospital blankets, and houses without front walls, and rooms with collapsing ceilings.

*****

A man sat opposite us on the trolley bus. He had no nose. I could see directly into the scrolls and hollows that are secret in the rest of us.

"Don't stare," Mum said. "He was injured in the war." He wore a greatcoat, its left sleeve empty and pinned at the shoulder.

There were men on crutches, one leg missing, or half a leg gone, and men in wheelchairs, with blankets covering where their legs should have been, and men with patches over unseeing eyes.

I started to read books on plastic surgery, instead of marmalade cats going on holiday, or toads driving sports cars.

*****

Years later, my family travelled Ireland in a small car with a large Australian flag in the rear window – just to be sure. The whistle-playing post mistress, the health inspector, bowing his fiddle, the mechanic on the bodhron, all welcomed our attempts at playing their music, and took us to

small, thatched cottages that masqueraded as inns, where reels and six-eight jigs flew from the arthritic fingers of ancient players. 'Would you like a drop of the Irish?' they'd say.

At festivals, under acres of canvas on muddy fields, Canadians and Germans, Dutch and Americans, English and Irish, joined in on the more familiar tunes, sang the old choruses. In unison, in harmony, and in peace. Torches and candles waved in the darkness, swaying from side to side when the lights went out, which was often.

Afterwards, we crossed the border, passing burnt out cars and buses, bumping over humps that were probably meant to set off any bombs we might be carrying. An English soldier stopped us and prodded his rifle through the car window towards my son. Feelings of bonhomie, of goodwill to all, evaporated in an instant.

"What have you got in that case, sonny?"

"A mandolin." His voice was small and croaky.

"Open it." The black snout of the gun intruded further.

Inside, the timber of the old Gibson gleamed gold, nestled against the blue velvet lining of its case.

"Just take it out and let me see underneath it."

I hated to see fear in my boy's eyes. He was concerned mainly for the welfare of his instrument, I knew that. He gently lifted it out and the soldier felt around in the case.

"Okay, son. You can put it back." He turned his attention to the adults.

"So, where have you been?"

"Sligo, …"

"Sligo? What were you doing there?"

"Playing music."

"I'll need to look in the boot."

Why? We didn't ask. He didn't find what he was looking for. He waved us through, but we didn't relax again until we were on the ferry.

It was later that day we bought a newspaper. Lord Mountbatten had been blown up in a boat off Sligo.

*****

Passenger planes fly through tall buildings, smoke and dust billowing in a familiar cloud. Flames burst out of the windows. Men, women and children run through the streets towards the cameras, away from the now falling buildings, and their clothes and faces are coated in white dust, their eyes staring out in horror. Spectators cry out in disbelief.

*****

Sorry, Dad, you were wrong and I could have told you that at the time. The bombs are still falling and planes can still kill, however cold and smooth their wings might be.

*****

In my nightmares I still walk and walk down those never ending tiled corridors of the London Underground and I never find my way out. The signs make no sense to me. There's no one to ask for help. I spent my childhood sheltering there, but there's no sense of safety or familiarity.

*****

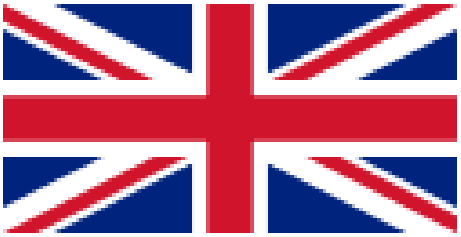
Londoners stagger past the cameras, the same figures emerging from the Underground, over and over again, faces masked in white dust or white cotton, bloodied, burned and bandaged. Ambulance crews lift stretchers and roll them into hospital doorways. These patients are wrapped in silver space-age blankets, but I doubt they show the blood. A double-decker bus lies peeled open and everted like a mango prepared for eating, the seats exposed to the world. A man sobs, revealing his sorrow to the global population for this terrible day he has witnessed.

Jackie and her kitten, 1944; courtesy Jackie Tritt

*****

Children are blown up in market places, tourists die in cafés and bars, lines of evacuees are bombed from the air, recruits die outside police stations. They are all on camera. Mobile phone camera, video camera, television camera. It's all there for our daily entertainment and my daily reminder of the past.

So, the bombs are still exploding, Dad. They're on the news every night at seven. And that little girl, her legs free-wheeling through the air, will live with her war forever.



Flag of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; courtesy Wikipedia

Flag of Kenya; courtesy Wikipedia

Dialogue Saves Kenya

By Elisha Otieno

Elisha was born in 1973 in Siaya District-Kenya. He joned Uyoma primary school in 1981 and sat for his K.C.P.E (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) in 1989. He joined Hono secondary school in 1990 and sat for his K.C.S.E in 1993. He worked as a primary school teacher from 1994 to 1999 and then decided to take a course in computer software management between 2000-2001. He joined Christian Children's Fund and worked as a social development activist from 2002 to 2005. Currently he is leading Ariba Technologies.

*****

The heat of the African sun gradually wanes. Groggy businessmen and women are busy offloading unsold wares from their stalls into sacks. Video halls surrounding Ndere market are packed with anxious citizens nagging Samuel Kivuitu (then Electoral Commission of Kenya Chairman, ECK) about delayed results and the bizarre narrowing of the gap between the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU) and his opponent Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

Seated on a sofa in Odero's residential house – one of the houses that surrounds the market centre – my eyes are fixed on the television. I'm dismayed by what I'm seeing. I click my tongue while shouts of anger aimed at Samuel pollute the air any time he reacts irresponsibly to frenzied politicians from both sides of the political divide. Both PNU and ODM supporters embroil him in the agony of divided loyalties. The PNU side pushes for the results to be announced and a winner declared while the ODM side protests over allegations of anomalies in the official results.

Contrary to Odinga's lead on the 28th of Dec. 2007, the day after the election and ODM's declaration of his victory on 29th, a wind of political turmoil swept the country on the morning of the 30th . Images of angry protesters in some parts of the country were already flashing across the screen. A troop of the General Service Unit soldiers already deployed to Kisumu City centre were busy battling looters. Odinga accused the government of fraud and ordered a recount of the votes on the same day. His lead shrank to only 38,000 votes.

Samuel lost his wits. He bragged and retorted. Uttering remarks that were utterly repugnant to Kenyan voters such as 'The media people must lie for them to eat. What will they eat if they don't cheat people?', 'You can kill me if you like',' The court is just a few steps from here, if you feel unsatisfied you can go there'.

For a few minutes the ECK chairman disappeared from the limelight. When his image resurfaced, he was composed, attending to a more dignified audience in a secluded venue away from the sea of warring political elites at the hall of Kenyatta International Conference Centre. His voice silenced the brawling listeners, and he proceeded:

"Fellow Kenyans!, the time has come that I as the chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya want to declare the winner of this presidential election lest another *fake* president comes in and swear before the legally elected president does it. The winner is Mwai Kibaki and he will be the president of the Republic of Kenya. If anybody has any complaint, he should take the case to Court."

I jumped onto my bicycle and rode across the bridge to the next shopping centre which is in my neighbourhood. Midway, shouts of frustrated supporters of ODM could be heard across the village. Lumps of speeding stones would sporadically land on the main road from unknown throwers making the ride more treacherous. I saw a group of vicious looking boys hovered near a radio at my next stop over. I sidled towards them and heard the voice of Kibaki being sworn in courtesy of the Chief Justice Evans Gicheru at the sunset hours of the 30th Dec.2007. It was generally perceived that electoral fraud occurred in favour of the president Kibaki, later confirmed by international observers.

PEAK OF THE MASSACRE

Frustrated by the smell of a fatal blow against their hopes, supporters of Odinga went on a rampage through the streets and news of a blood bath across the country dominated the media throughout the night. The opposition supporters clashed with government supporters who defended the declaration of the ECK. With the assumption that voting was done along ethnic lines, the fighting became ethnical putting those people residing in more culturally diverse settlements at the highest risk.

I woke up at dawn on the last day of the year to find the situation menacing at the village level, away from the prying eyes of news reporters. The main road leading to Siaya town where I work is about ten kilometres away and was impassable. There was barricade after barricade guarded by hostile village louts extorting money from travelers.

Just beyond the barricades there were flaming tiles and logs of wood. Half way to my destination, some armed drunken yobbos almost dismembered me for failing to plant a

green twig on my bicycle as a sign of airing my grievance.

The situation in town was worse. The few people from the town of Kikuyu who used to stay in Siaya, fled to the police station where they took refuge.

There were many violent incidences in other towns. Big buildings, posh cars and other properties worth billions of Kenya shillings became raging infernos. Sadist members of the outlawed Mungiki militia packed into the streets butchering perceived supporters of the opposition. Looters were breaking into shops, supermarkets, and wholesalers. The Kenya law enforcers were on their toes spraying tear gas on protesters, bludgeoning and worst of all, using live bullets which flung the victims to the ground leaving them either dead or seriously injured. The civilians pelted the brute government representatives with stones in reprisal. Scared by the sight of blood and gore which filled the streets, people staying in settlement areas dominated by rival tribes were busy packing and flying to join their ethnically compatible combatants.

Virginia Muthoni,an internally displaced person at Kasuku IDP camp in Olkalou tells her devastating story. A gang of about twenty men armed with assorted weapons stormed her home singing war songs and demanding the Kikuyus to vacate and go back to their ancestral land. At around 10 p.m they started destroying everything in sight, then the house was set on fire. They ignored David Ngugi's (Virginia's husband) plea to be spared and their leader stabbed him in the chest with a knife. The rest took their cue from him and in front of Virginia and their six children, they continued to stab him until he could not fight back anymore, and David was dead. Virginia was six months pregnant at the time.

Busia border is mainly dominated by Luhya. The Kikuyus who lived there escaped to the neighboring country-Uganda. In Naivasha, a town dominated by Kikuyus ,the politically incompatible tribes like Luos , Kalenjins and Luhya's fled back to their ancestral lands. It is one of the towns that recorded some of the worst violence. Members of the ODM supporting tribes were hacked to death. Their houses were set ablaze. According to International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo's investigations revelations, the massacres done by the infamous Mungiki militia was financed by elite leaders in Kibaki's government namely; Hon.Uhuru Kenyatta-currently the Minister for finance and Mr. Francis Muthaura- head of Civil Service. It's in Naivasha where a polygamous Luo man called Orinda lost both of his wives and all eight of their children. He escaped alone to his home of origin and recently, he started a new family.

The 2008 New Year day was celebrated with multiple nightmares all over the country. In Eldoret, some goons were buoyed by the spirit of victory on the sight of charred remains of about forty Kenyans, mostly Kikuyus, who had taken refuge in a church that they set ablaze. Some of the victims were innocent children under ten years old. This grisly scene recorded the highest single loss of life in the post election violence.

A number of International athletes and leaders lost their lives during the skirmishes; former Olympic athlete Lucas Sang died under unknown circumstances in a riot on the New Year day in Eldoret. Marathon runner Wesley Ngetich Kimutai died after he was short with an arrow on 19th January in Trans mara District. Politician G.G Njuguna Ngengi was hacked to death in Kuresoi near Molo on January 2. Former Basketball International star, Donald Odanga was fatally wounded by a stray police bullet on January 29th. That same day, Mugabe, an opposition member of parliament was shot dead on his driveway. David Kimutai Too, an opposition first time parliamentarian was shot by a policeman in disputed circumstances on January 31st.

For the first two days of political unrest, the local KTN television said that 124 people had died nation wide. In the opposition strong hold of Kisumu,a BBC reporter saw 43 bodies with gunshot wounds in a mortuary perceived to have been killed in a rally where armed police shot protesters according to a witness. The bloody season was rife with rape incidences and looting. Women were raped in front of their husbands and children and young girls were raped in front of their parents.

BEGINNING OF DIALOGUE

On January 3rd as the running battles continued, Kibaki said he was willing to engage in a dialogue once the country was calm. Odinga's attempts to hold a rally at Uhuru park to be declared "The people's president" was stunted by government's reactions and the coming of mediators.

When the Electoral Commission of Kenya Chairman Samuel finally admitted that his staff provided incorrect results, proved that the protests were genuine and a dialogue was required to merge the two opponents.

Odinga at first maintained his stance that he would not negotiate with Kibaki as the president and called for a transitional government while organizing for re-election. However, after his second meeting with the U.S Assistant secretary of States Jendayi Frazer, he accepted that he would negotiate in the presence of International mediators. The violence was reported to be decreasing in Nairobi but ODM ruled out that they would accept a coalition government with genuine power sharing.

Despite PNU's negative attitude towards international mediators, the violence was ended after a successful mediation by the former UN secretary Koffi Annan leading to the formation of the Coalition Government signed by the two principals on 28th February 2008.

Generally, the post election violence left more than 1000 people dead and 600,000 homeless. The dialogue contributed in large part to the restoration of peace and initiation of a number of development projects across the country. It is the Coalition government that has given Kenyans the New Constitution that they have yearned for, for years.

Despite the achievements of the coalition government, confirmation hearings are going on at The Hague to ensure justice is done to victims of the violence. Politically, six high profile suspects have regrouped against the prime minister over allegations that he is the man behind their woes at the ICC and are flexing their muscles to ensure he doesn't rise to the presidency in the next year's general election.

At War With Filth

By Christine Sutton

Ex-veterinary nurse Chris Sutton lives with her family in Essex, England. She has always loved writing, in her teens corresponding with over twenty pen-pals around the world. Her first published story, 'A Stranger Calls', appeared in Woman's Own *in 1993. A year later, 'What Am I', a poem for children co-written with her son, was accepted by BBC publication* Playdays. *Since then she's had hundreds of stories and articles published in magazines in the UK, America, Canada, S. Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Bahrain.*

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Today's young woman announcing her intention to become a nurse can expect smiles and hugs of approval from her family. Not so for Florence Nightingale. Back in 1845 nurses were considered disreputable women of low moral standards, more given to drunkenness than conscientious care of the sick. So when twenty-five-year-old Florence declared an interest in joining their ranks her parents were aghast. The idea of their well brought up daughter going into such a 'profession' was unthinkable and they strongly disapproved.

Florence was born on 12th May, 1820, during her parents' protracted honeymoon in Italy. After inheriting the estate of an affluent uncle, her father William had taken his new wife Frances traveling. In an echo of today's celebrity thinking, they named their children after the places of their birth. First to be born was Parthenope, who was given the historic Greek name for Naples. A year later, along came Florence.

The birth of their second child prompted the couple to return to England. The family led a privileged lifestyle, dividing their time between their summer residence, Lea Hurst, in the glorious Derbyshire countryside, and spending the winter months in their second home, the magnificent Embley, near Romsey, Hampshire.

Unusually for the time, Cambridge educated William took the decision to teach his daughters more than just the socially acceptable female subjects of music, art and needlework, instructing them in modern languages, Bible studies, Latin, and the classics. Florence went further, begging to be allowed to study mathematics instead of wasting her time doing '*worsted work and practising quadrilles*'. To this end William engaged acclaimed Jewish academic James Joseph Sylvester to tutor her. Such was her aptitude that Sylvester later declared Miss Nightingale one of his best students.

Bored by the constraints of her social position, young Florence often went walking near her Matlock home. Out strolling with a clergyman friend one day, she noticed a local shepherd at work in the fields without his sheepdog, Cap. Surprised, she asked where little Cap might be. Sadly the man recounted how, the day before, some boys had pelted the poor dog with stones. Believing that its leg was broken he had left the dog at home. If on his return he found no improvement, he said, he feared the animal would have to be put out of its misery.

Upset, Florence persuaded the clergyman to accompany her to the shepherd's cottage where they examined the dog. Deciding that the leg was only bruised the clergyman advised the application of hot compresses to help ease the swelling and pain. Florence immediately set to, heating water and tearing up old rags which she applied to the injured limb. She visited daily to repeat the process and Cap was soon sufficiently improved to be able to jump up at her in greeting. The grateful shepherd was delighted to have his companion fit and well again, and Florence had had an early taste of nursing.

Another account describes how, while working in her garden one day, she thought she heard the voice of God calling her to a mission. Though unclear as to what that mission might be, she felt strongly that there was some path she would eventually take. Her father's involvement in the anti-slavery campaign had given her a strong moral conscience and her visits to the estate workers' cottages meant that she was keenly aware of the need for social reform, particularly with regard to health care for the poor.

In 1845 she made her announcement; she wanted to train as a nurse. Her mother Frances was especially horrified. Florence was now in her mid-twenties and had already turned down numerous marriage proposals, most notably from Lord Houghton and the writer Richard Monckton Milnes. Frances was keen to see her increasingly headstrong younger daughter settled; a career in nursing was not what she had in mind.

Despite her parents' opposition, Florence continued to involve herself in matters medical. In 1849, while holidaying with friends Charles and Selina Bracebridge, she took the opportunity to visit hospitals in Germany and Egypt, comparing their methods to those used back in England. On her return she went to numerous hospitals to pass on her findings. At St Bartholomew's in London she met Elizabeth Blackwell, who had been the first woman in America to qualify as a doctor. Bristol-born Elizabeth had lived in the US since she was eleven and her uphill struggle to find a medical college to

accept her so echoed Florence's battle to be allowed to train as a nurse that the two became firm friends.

By the time she turned thirty, Florence was becoming deeply frustrated with her unproductive life. A diary entry, written in 1850, reveals her parlous state of mind.

'*In my thirty-first year I see nothing desirable but death*. *Everything has been tried, foreign travel, kind friends, everything. My God! What is to become of me?*'

Florence Nightingale

Finally, impressed by his daughter's unwavering resolve, William relented. He agreed to fund her training.

She returned to Egypt for instruction at the Catholic-run *Institute of St Vincent de Paul* in Alexandria. That same year she visited Pastor Theodor Fliedner's innovative, deaconess-run hospital in Kaiserwerth, near Dusseldorf, receiving further tuition at his *Institute of Protestant Deaconesses*. The regime required students to rise at 5am for breakfast and to attend lessons during the day and bible classes several nights a week. Far from complaining, an ecstatic Florence wrote to her mother, '*Now I know what it is to live and love life*'.

In 1853, after three months training in St Germain, Paris, she returned to England to seek work. With no paid employment on offer, she took an unpaid post as Superintendent at Lady Canning's rather quaintly named *Institution of Sick Gentlewomen in Distressed Circumstances* at 1, Harley Street. When Cholera broke out in London, Florence also helped nurse the sick in Middlesex Hospital. She was in the process of drawing up plans for her own school of nursing when Britain declared war on Russia.

For a year Britain and France had monitored the escalating hostilities between Russia and Turkey. Now, following the sinking of the Turkish fleet at Sinope, a fleet of Franco-British vessels was sent to the Black Sea. On September 20th, 1854, British forces engaged the Russians at the Battle of Alma River.

Though victorious, the number of casualties was high and the field hospitals quickly became overwhelmed. With doctors and surgeons powerless to cope with the sheer volume of the wounded, thousands were shipped out to the barrack hospital in Scutari, Turkey. Reporting in the Times, special correspondent William Howard Russell criticized the lack of ambulances, medical care and facilities.

'*The commonest accessories of a hospital are wanting*', he wrote, and '*men die without the least effort being made to save them*'.

The Siege of Sevastopol; 1854

His graphic, uncompromising accounts from the front, particularly his description of what came to be known as the Charge of the Light Brigade, revealed as never before the harsh reality of war and paved the way for changes in the care of soldiers injured in battle. However dismissive Queen Victoria might be about Russell's exposés, describing them as '*infamous attacks against the army which have disgraced our newspapers*', the British public were outraged.

With the shortage of care now beyond critical, Russell threw down a challenge to 'the daughters of England'. '*Are there no devoted women among us, able and willing to go forth to minister to the sick and suffering soldiers of the East in the hospitals of Scutari*?' Reading those words, Florence knew that at last, seventeen years after her 'calling from God', she had her mission. She immediately presented herself for service to War Secretary Sidney Herbert. With her experience and contacts, Herbert considered her the perfect choice to lead the volunteers and appointed her '*Superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment of the English General Hospitals in Turkey*'.

Florence quickly gathered together a team of 38 dependable people, including 18 nuns, plus old friends Charles and Selina Bracebridge and her aunt, Mai Smith. After a stormy crossing, the party arrived in Constantinople in early November to find conditions beyond their worst imaginings.

Even before they entered the wards, the stench was eye-watering. Crammed inside were thousands of men, lying in rat infested filth on closely packed pallets on the floor. Many still had on their gore-encrusted uniforms. Cleanliness was non-existent and infection inevitable. Provisions were scant, meaning patients' diets were poor, reducing the body's ability to fight infection. Shockingly, men in hospital were seven times more likely to die of

typhus, dysentery, cholera or scurvy than from injuries received on the battlefield.

From the outset Florence met with opposition, particularly from Chief Army Medical Officer Sir John Hall, who resented her interference and regarded her and her nursing team as fit only to clean. This they did with gusto, scouring away the filth and opening windows to let in light and air. They set up a laundry, using a local building to wash and iron bedding and clothes. The fact that the makeshift 'wards' lay directly over an antiquated cess-pit meant that they faced a daily battle against a rising tide of sewage. Still, they did what they could.

Florence next turned her attention to the patients' diets. Describing the food stocks, she wrote; '*We have not seen a drop of milk and the bread is extremely sour*. *The butter is most filthy... and the meat is more like moist leather than food*.' She began lobbying the British government for equipment, blankets, cleaning materials and food.

But when the fresh supplies were delivered they were locked in the stores, with orders from senior medical officers that they should not be touched without their say-so. Florence, though, would not be denied and simply broke in and took what was needed. When that ran out she used her own money to supplement rations. Despite all her efforts, the death toll continued to rise and she again wrote to the British government, this time decrying the hospital's dire sanitation system. In 1855, six months after her arrival, a team of engineers sanctioned by Lord Palmerston was dispatched to flush out the sewers. Mortality rates fell sharply.

Florence had by then introduced a record-keeping system, noting the treatment and progress, or lack of it, of each patient. Reviewing the data her mathematical instincts came to the fore and she created a series of pie-charts showing the correlation of factors such as cleanliness, nutrition and sanitation against the fluctuating mortality rate. This inspired use of statistics would eventually see her become the first female member of the Royal Statistical Society and her graphic illustrations are credited with improving hospital procedures worldwide.

Such time-consuming work necessarily kept Florence away from the wards, so, whilst her nurses slept she walked the darkened halls, the flickering light of a lantern heralding her approach. Soldiers welcomed these nocturnal visits, which gave them the opportunity of a few quiet words with the woman they held in such high regard. Some would ask her to write a message home, a few reassuring lines to let loved ones know that all was well. Many of those letters, along with hundreds of her notebooks, pamphlets and reports, are now housed in the British library.

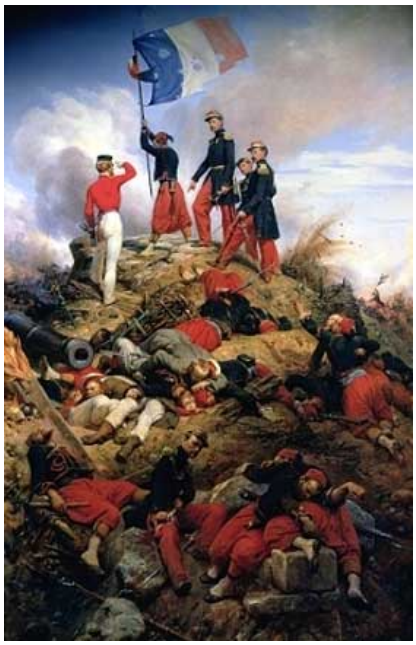
But such a punishing workload was bound to take its toll and in the spring of 1855 Florence collapsed. As she hovered near death, word spread amongst the patients that their 'Angel' was gravely ill and prayers were offered for her delivery. Little by little she came back from the brink and though never fully restored to health she continued to work at the hospital until war's end. In 1856 she sailed for home.

In England, newspaper reports of her selfless devotion had turned her into something of a celebrity. Florence, though, abhorred the '*ministering angel nonsense*' and traveled back as Miss Smith to avoid any fuss. Far from feeling proud of her achievements, she bitterly regretted her inability to do more to help the men in her care.

Determined to continue the fight, at a meeting with Queen Victoria she requested the setting up of a Royal Commission to look into the standard of care afforded the wounded soldiers. Its findings made uncomfortable reading. Far from having a lower death rate than other military hospitals, Scutari, the system Florence herself had presided over, had one of the highest. She didn't have to look far for answers; the foul leaks emanating from the antiquated sewers beneath the wards had provided a constant source of contamination, largely negating her team's efforts at cleanliness. As a result, she became a staunch advocate of the need for better sanitation in hospital design.

In 1860, helped by donations from wealthy friends and the public, Florence founded the Nightingale School for Nurses, based at St Thomas's Hospital in London. Its teachings and aims are still adhered to by nurses today.

By her mid-seventies Florence was blind, bedridden, and needing full-time care. In 1883, in recognition of her services to nursing and hospital reform, Queen Victoria awarded her the Royal Red Cross, a distinction followed in 1907 by the Order of Merit from King Edward V11. Florence died aged ninety on 13th August, 1910, and is buried in the family plot at East Wellow, Hampshire. One hundred years on, hospital patients everywhere can give thanks for those twenty months spent in Crimea by the woman who came to be known as the Lady with the Lamp.



Taking of the Malakoff - approx Sep 7, 1855

Destined to Survive

By Barbara Janusz

One man's survival of a Nazi death camp, as told by his daughter.

A graduate of the University of Alberta with Bachelors degrees in Arts and Laws, Barbara D. Janusz has published short stories, essays, editorials, poetry and travel destination articles in various literary journals, magazines, newspapers and anthologies across Canada. She attributes her appreciation of and respect for human rights and civil liberties to her parents, Mieczyslaw and Krystyna Janusz.

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Mieczyslaw never missed an episode of the television documentary, "Canada at War". Broadcast, by the CBC in 1962 and again the following year, it was comprised of original footage shot by Canadian war correspondents. Even though I was a young child, I still recall the haunting black and white images - of Hitler on the steps of the Reichstag in Berlin exhorting all Germans to rise up against the world to assume their rightful historical position as a ruling Aryan nation; of German tanks rolling across one European border after another; of emaciated concentration camp survivors liberated by Allied troops; of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, seated shoulder to shoulder at Yalta, deliberating upon the fate of millions of Europeans after Germany's ultimate defeat; of the Nuremberg trials that set a precedent for the prosecution of crimes against humanity. There are many stories of trials and tribulations, of suffering and overcoming the horrors of WWII, and my father was a man who lived through all of that, and then some. This is his story.

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Mieczyslaw was a professional soldier. Having graduated from a military academy on the eve of Hitler's Blitzkrieg against Poland, at the age of twenty-two years, he was deployed on September 1st, 1939 to the frontline as a foot soldier. Within hours he was wounded in combat and evacuated for medical treatment to a hospital in Lodz, the second largest city in Poland. Upon his discharge from the hospital he was ordered to report for further military service to the eastern part of Poland where Soviet occupation had been facilitated through the secret Ribentroff-Molotov Non-Aggression Pact. Hitler's war machine was advancing from the west, Stalin's Red Army from the east. Poland's fate was sealed within a matter of 17 days.

Mieczyslaw Janusz, 1939 graduation picture; courtesy Barbara Janusz

The only course of action that remained for patriots like Mieczyslaw, was to clandestinely subvert the Nazi occupation of Poland and Hitler's strategic plan to conquer all of Europe. Organizing a cell of resisters, he promptly assumed the alias of one Aleksander Dorski.

Aspiring to join the Allied forces in France by crossing the mountainous border into Slovakia, Mieczyslaw's cell carefully planned their exodus from Poland for the early part of spring 1940. Equipped with cross-country skis and carrying false identity papers, Mieczyslaw and three of his comrades were stopped in their tracks near the border, arrested and incarcerated in the local jail in the town of Jaslo. Having stuffed their jacket pockets with jewelry and U.S. dollars to feign the appearance that they were smugglers, when nine months later the charges for running contraband were dropped, Mieczyslaw, on January 1, 1944, was released from custody.

By this time, France, Belgium, Holland and other parts of continental Europe had succumbed to Nazi aggression. The Polish underground movement (also known as the Home Army) now shifted its objectives to gathering and disseminating information about the stalemated Nazi military action against the Soviet Union. Abandoning the alias of Aleksander Dorski, Mieczyslaw assumed the identity of his now deceased older brother Stanislaw – a pharmacist – and enrolled in a six-month crash course in milk products and cattle breeding, at the University of Poznan. Higher than expected German casualties on the eastern front, necessitated the relieving of any able-bodied German men from administrative positions in occupied Poland and accordingly, upon graduation, Mieczyslaw was hired as a dairy products controller. His new position entailed traveling by bicycle throughout the district of Wielkopolska Province to conduct agricultural inspections. It also strategically positioned him to act as a counterintelligence courier and facilitated communication with and the

supervision of his operatives.

As district commander of the resistance movement, one of Mieczyslaw's key official functions was to administer the oath of allegiance to a new recruit and then to train him or her in the intricacies of gathering counterintelligence. Each recruit was then assigned his or her own post. Women were also recruited as counterintelligence agents. My father recruited his own younger sister, Jadwiga, who at the time would have been only seventeen years old and Felicia, to whom he became engaged, after the couple met on the Poznan University campus.

In October of 1943, both Felicia and Jadwiga were arrested after a new recruit, assigned to the Kalisz post, leaked their names, along with others, as members of Mieczyslaw's cell. On October 28th, the Gestapo appeared at Mieczyslaw's workplace and arrested him on a charge of treason and he was confined to the Kalisz county jail.

The conditions were crowded and unsanitary and as several dozen prisoners were housed in one cell, they each took turns sleeping on the concrete floor. The anxiety that each prisoner endured awaiting his turn in being called for questioning or for processing of their charges by the Gestapo, was felt collectively by everyone. Questioning typically occurred at night when a prisoner was still disoriented from sleep and more susceptible to succumbing to the interrogation techniques applied to extract a confession or the disclosure of names of accessories.

The Nazis were masters at exerting control through terror. The screams of tortured prisoners echoed more resoundingly throughout the prison after nightfall. It was not uncommon, particularly as the war wore on, for two months to lapse before a prisoner was summonsed by the Gestapo to face the charges brought against him. The Nazis obviously not only abided by the old legal adage that justice delayed is justice denied, but used such delay tactics to wear down the prisoners and as a means of extracting more money from relatives anxious to secure the release of their loved ones.

After two months Mieczyslaw was transferred from the jail in Kalisz to a larger correctional facility in Lodz. In a twist of fate in the holding cell prior to his classification and processing, he spotted within the crowd of other inmates, his fiancé Felicia. The correctional staff at the Lodz penal institute had somehow failed to connect the dots that the two co-conspirators would be imprisoned at the same time in the same holding cell.

Mieczyslaw recognized that this chance encounter with his fiancé was both a blessing and a wake-up call. Learning that the Gestapo had managed to extract crucial information from Felicia that he was a Polish officer, he realized that he could no longer harbour any false hopes about the Nazis thinking that he was his brother – a pharmacist. Military officers were considered a threat to the Third Reich, as borne out by Mieczyslaw having assumed a leadership role in the resistance movement.

Polish Coat of Arms; courtesy Wikipedia

The mandatory minimum sentence for conspiring against the Third Reich was forced labour in a concentration camp. Mieczyslaw soon learned that he was to serve his life sentence in Mauthausen Concentration camp, near Linz, Austria. This was a Category 3 camp which meant that prisoners could expect the most brutal and harshest of treatment. The inmates themselves described Mauthausen as "*Rukkehr Unerwunscht*" – return not desired - and "*Vernichtung durch arbeit*" – extermination by work.

The conditions in the Lodz prison were as loathsome as those in Kalisz. It was impossible to stay clean and the inmates struggled incessantly against the spread of genital crabs and lice. Although most of the prisoners were already classified for transport to one of the concentration camps that dotted the landscapes of Germany, Poland, Austria and Czechoslavakia, there were random executions wherein an inmate would be called out of his cell, taken out to the yard and shot. The Nazis regularly used this terror method to help keep the rest of the prison population in line.

Another two months lapsed before Mieczyslaw was transferred to Poznan where, with hundreds of other prisoners, he was corralled into cattle cars for the long journey across two borders to Mauthausen. Forty to fifty prisoners were crammed into each car. There were no blankets, only straw, and because it was now February 1944, many prisoners died of exposure on the way. The only food rations that the inmates received once a day, consisted of a watery soup and some dark bread.

The convoy pulled into the railway station at night. As Mieczyslaw disembarked from the cattle car, he immediately smelled the scent of pine and he filled his lungs with the crisp mountain air. For the next fourteen months he would be dismayed by the irony of this death camp being juxtaposed against the backdrop of the exquisite natural beauty of the Austrian Alps.

From the railway station to the camp, the prisoners were required to walk a considerable distance uphill. Those who were in poor physical condition had to be helped by those more able-bodied to reach the camp gates. Such acts of kindness, unfortunately, proved to be pointless, as the infirm did not survive the quarantine that preceded every prisoner's eventual assignment to a bunkhouse.

The quarantine began upon arrival. The inmates were ordered to strip and to descend to the showers. The facility was not heated and no towels were provided. After exiting the shower, Mieczyslaw tried unsuccessfully to control his freezing, shivering body. Along with the other prisoners, he was required to queue up for issuance of a numbered identification bracelet and a pair of wooden clogs. Each prisoner received either an undershirt or a pair of cotton pants. Mieczyslaw, luckily, was issued a shirt that was long enough to cover his buttocks. The

inmates were then escorted under guard to the quarantine barracks where four prisoners were assigned to one bunk and issued one blanket to share.

By this time, many of the inmates became hysterical from the sheer exhaustion, the shock of the shower and the frigid temperatures. The guards commanded everyone to be quiet and threatened to open the windows if they didn't settle down. As the quarantine was designed to eliminate those inmates who were not physically strong enough to perform hard labour; overnight some of the prisoners died. Their remains were disposed of in the crematorium.

The following day Mieczyslaw's head was shaved and he was issued striped white and black prison garb with a red triangular crest, bearing the letter "P" for his Polish nationality and with his identification number printed alongside. The red colour distinguished him as a political prisoner; religious dissidents were issued purple crests, homosexuals, pink, and so on.

Officially, each prisoner was required to be quarantined for thirty days. That first night of shivering, the incessant screams of distressed and delusional inmates and the threatening commands of the prison guards to keep quiet, brought home to Mieczyslaw the hopelessness of his situation. He no longer felt afraid or terrorized. He felt only a daunting, morbid numbness and became resigned to the fact that, like so many others who'd preceded him, he would die there.

Fortune, however, intervened. The next day a transport from Italy arrived – a convoy of the Bagdolia army who'd resisted Mussolini's fascist regime. A backlog of administrative clerical work necessitated the recruitment of a prisoner with a working knowledge of German to assist in the processing of camp documentation. Mieczyslaw volunteered and was selected. He was immediately removed from quarantine and assigned to bunkhouse number 7. As he was delegated to fulfill the recordkeeping duties at night, he was able to sleep in relative peace during the day and started to regain his strength.

Everyone without exception was required to work. The main occupation, after construction of the camp was completed, was to work in the rock quarry. Many prisoners considered this work assignment a death sentence, not only because the food rations were insufficient to sustain a person relegated to such backbreaking hard labour, but also because of the quarry's location. Accessed by the steep approach of the infamous 186 "death steps", over the course of the war many prisoners lost their footing and plunged to their deaths while others were routinely crushed by falling boulders. The thinner alpine air likely also contributed to fatalities, although, some inmates were maliciously thrown by guards over the steep face of the quarry at the base of the steps. The Nazis sardonically called this ridge, the "parachutist's cliff".

After 1943, many prisoners were transferred to work in the larger Austrian munitions factories located near Mauthausen's sub-camps. In summer, reveille was at 4:45 am and working hours extended until 1700 hours with only an hour midday break to sustain them. In the winter, the prisoners rose an hour later and work in the quarry ended at dusk. Sundays were a day of rest, except for those who worked in the munitions factories.

A hierarchical form of self-government prevailed at Mauthausen. Each bunkhouse had a *capo*, who was typically of German and sometimes of Ukrainian descent. The Ukrainians had lost their right to self-determination as an ethnic state after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and some of their territories had become part of the new Polish state that emerged in 1918, after the First World War.

Following the Nazi occupation of Poland, many Ukrainians collaborated with the Germans against the Poles and were, accordingly, despised by Polish prisoners and the general prison population. If a prisoner failed to toe the line, it was not uncommon for the *capo* to simply submerge the head of the man in the large water barrel that was used for fire suppression purposes and was ensconced at the entrance of each bunkhouse. The *capo* would keep the recalcitrant's head in the barrel until he died from asphyxiation. Many of the most brutal acts of violence in the barracks occurred at night because most of the SS guards were housed outside the camp, except for those few manning the watchtowers. The electrically charged fence meant that escape from the camp was virtually impossible and the mobile searchlights within the watchtowers further ensured that there were no unplanned exits.

If the *capos* didn't deal directly with a rebellious prisoner they would report the inmate to the SS guards. At roll call, the following the morning the SS would – before the eyes of the entire demoralized prison population – brutally dispose of the man. Typically, the prisoner was chased to the encompassing electrical fence which was charged with a current of 380 volts. Random selections also took place during roll call to weed out those deemed by the camp SS physicians to be too infirm to work. A team of prisoners was assigned the grisly task of disposing of such deceased prisoners in the crematorium.

Mieczyslaw's education and gift for languages meant that he was able to continue on with administrative tasks. That first recordkeeping work assignment lasted for three months and forced him to gradually become psychologically hardened to the realities of the death camp culture. Once the administrative office backlog was cleared up, he was transferred to the bomb brigade. Working with a team of prisoners in the surrounding countryside, he was required to dig up bombs that had failed to detonate after being dropped by Allied forces' reconnaissance aircraft. The Allies were strategically targeting the munitions factories, located in the sub-camps. Ironically, it would have been through the counterintelligence of the resistance movement, in which Mieczyslaw had played such a critical role, that the Allied forces would have acquired knowledge about the munitions factories' existence and location. It was dangerous work, but not without its benefits. Many of the local farmers gave the inmates food and even wine, which they shared with the guards in exchange for the privilege of being able to secrete such treasures back to the camp for consumption or trade.

Near the end of Mieczyslaw's work assignment with the bomb brigade, and before being assigned to the fire brigade, providence again intervened when his work crew excavated a time bomb. He was taking a break and was far away when it detonated and killed

all those in the vicinity, otherwise he would have surely died along with the others in the explosion. It was at this seminal moment that he looked back at all the hardships he had endured since the beginning of the war and concluded that a higher power had propitiously and consistently intervened to save his life. He began fervently to believe that he was destined to survive.

Apart from providence, however, Mieczyslaw appreciated that his blue-eyes, fair, ruddy complexion, and tall, well built stature naturally endeared him to the SS guards who had been indoctrinated in the sinister philosophy of eugenics. Eugenics was the foundation for the macabre belief system that the German Aryan race was superior to all others. Darker skinned brunettes with brown eyes (typical Jewish physical characteristics) were considered to be inferior and were often treated more brutally by the SS guards. Some were even subjected to nefarious medical and pharmaceutical experiments. Mieczyslaw's fluency in German and proficiency with a typewriter had also played a hand in his survival.

He soon joined the fire brigade only to discover it was considered to be the choicest work assignment in the camp. As in the case of the bomb brigade, the inmates worked outside the camp boundaries and had the opportunity to receive food from the locals. The work had the added bonus of being much less dangerous. Since Mauthausen was in mountainous, forested terrain, forest fires were frequent, particularly in the spring of 1945 when allied forces aircraft intensified their bombings of Nazi strongholds.

By this time the Nazis were so outraged that they were losing the war and that one German city after another was being subjected to systematic bombing, that they took out their frustration on the American pilots who'd successfully parachuted out of downed aircraft bombers. The Nazis, throughout the war had routinely and flagrantly ignored the Geneva Convention of 1929. While the concentration camps themselves, constituted a violation of the Convention, the SS guards' maltreatment of the American POW's epitomized the Nazi desire to exact vengeance on the enemy. Trained to meticulously record incarceration and classification of every prisoner, the SS maliciously failed to record or process the detention of American pilots captured in the forest near Mauthausen. Assigned to hard labour in the rock quarry, the American POW's were forced to work until they collapsed from exhaustion. Their families, back in the United State were unable to later trace what happened to them after their aircraft had been downed by the enemy.

On the morning of May 5, 1945, Mieczyslaw and his crew were fighting a fire when they spotted a tank. From a distance they were unable to determine whether it belonged to the Western Allied forces or to the Soviets. Like Napoleon more than a century earlier, Hitler's troops had encountered a protracted stalemate on the eastern front. Through sheer perseverance and determination, not to mention horrific numbers of casualties, (which ultimately translated into more than one in ten Soviet citizens losing their life during the war), the Soviets managed to launch an offensive that culminated in a retreat of Hitler's troops. The Western Allies had done little to assist the Soviets in their struggle on the eastern front and now hungry for power, Stalin's Red Army pushed further westward, almost as far as Mauthausen Concentration camp.

Everyone in the camp knew beforehand that the war was finally drawing to a close. The sound of gunshots, particularly at night, when the echoing gunfire resounded in the surrounding mountainous landscape, seemed to draw closer day by day.

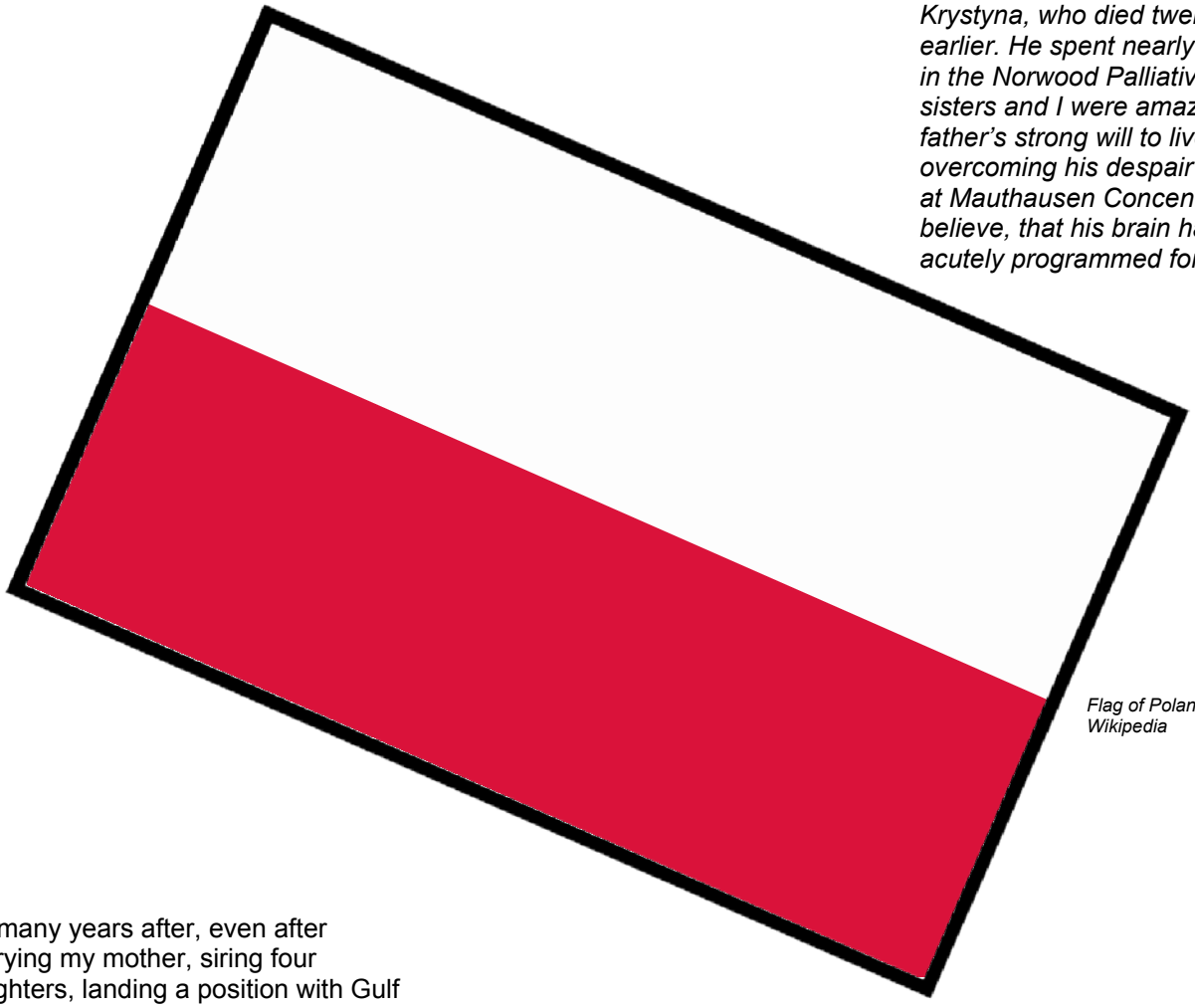
Fortunately for Mieczyslaw and the other inmates, the tank was manned by American soldiers. Tears of joy rolled down their soot covered faces. The war was finally over! The Americans ordered them to abandon their fire fighting and to return to the camp. Mieczyslaw's instincts told him that returning to the camp at this time might not be the wisest option. Having been forewarned through Nazi intelligence of the American advancement, the SS guards had already fled the camp. In those final days before the camp's liberation, the prisoners couldn't help but notice unfamiliar men in Nazi uniforms having assumed positions of authority in their stead. Now lawlessness reigned supreme. Two of the members of the fire brigade who immediately returned to the camp were killed by overzealous rifle toting prisoners. To have survived almost six years of war, including incarceration in a concentration camp, only to lose one's life on the day that the Nazis finally surrendered was a tragedy!

Once the Americans assumed authority over the camp's operations, including the most important function of distributing food to the starving prisoners, Mieczyslaw and other members of the fire brigade returned to the camp. During the chaos that attended the camp's liberation, the water tower and sewage system were destroyed. Reassigned to the fire brigade whose duties were now concentrated on the provision of water, they were required to fill the water tank in a nearby stream several times a day and transport it back to the camp. As the brigade was operating outside the camp, they were issued a special pass that they routinely displayed to peacekeeping forces authorized to re-institute law and order in the countryside. Two weeks into their new assignment, Mieczyslaw and his workmates grew frustrated with their continued confinement within the camp. Although they appreciated that the evacuation of the camp could not occur overnight, they were anxious to escape the oppressiveness of Mauthausen Concentration camp, once and for all.

With a full tank of petrol, they headed west towards Murnau - a prisoner of war camp for Polish officers near Munich that had also been liberated by the Americans (and which the Nazis showcased to Red Cross inspectors for propaganda purposes as proof that they were complying with the Geneva Convention). The euphoria of the open road compelled them to drive all night. As the sun rose behind them over the Alps and they approached the frontier with Germany, their hearts pounded in their chests with anticipation. Submitting their pass to the American border control, they struggled to maintain their composure when the officer waved them through.

In Murnau, Mieczyslaw was reunited with some of his fellow officers. He was subsequently deployed to fulfill various post-war

military assignments in Italy. Two years after the end of the war he was demobilized to England, where he received clearance from Canada Immigration for permanent residence status. Eight days after embarking from Southampton on the trans-Atlantic journey to the New World, his ship anchored in Halifax's legendary Pier 21. A further three day journey by train through the St. Lawrence lowlands and across the Canadian Shield and prairies landed him permanently in Edmonton, Alberta but my father's journey was not yet complete.



Flag of Poland; courtesy Wikipedia

For many years after, even after marrying my mother, siring four daughters, landing a position with Gulf Canada Resources as a lab technician, Mieczyslaw continued to be haunted by the tragically horrible events that had shaped his young adult psyche. Throughout the rest of his adult life, he suffered from recurring bouts of insomnia and depression and grieved the loss of his homeland for which he'd so heroically fought to liberate from the Nazis and which tragically, after the war fell under the control of Stalin's Communist government.

He also struggled to overcome overwhelming spells of guilt over his sister Jadwiga's and his fiance, Felicia's incarceration in Ravensbruck Concentration camp – a hellish facility near Berlin, that housed exclusively women and children. Like Mieczyslaw, both Jadwiga and Felicia survived their ordeals but were permanantly and indelibly scarred by the deprivation and abuses that they were forced to endure.

In the 1950's and early 1960's there was still little understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder, its root causes and symptoms, and so to make sense of what had happened to him, why he had been destined to survive, while so many others perished in such hellish circumstances, Mieczyslaw tuned in, religiously every week, to the documentary, "Canada at War". Admonishing us when our voices rose too high at play, he'd lean towards the television set and strain to catch Budd Knapp's narrative – an outsider's take on the most widespread war in human civilization. It shifted the balance of power from continental Europe and Britain to the United States and the Soviet Union, ushered in the Cold War, the decolonization of Asia and Africa.

Epilogue: Mieczyslaw died on November 24, 2008 at the age of 91 years. He was predeceased by his wife Krystyna, who died twenty-one years earlier. He spent nearly three months in the Norwood Palliative Hospice. My sisters and I were amazed at our father's strong will to live. Since overcoming his despair in quarantine at Mauthausen Concentration camp, I believe, that his brain had become acutely programmed for survival.

The War of Brothers

By Sumit Chakrabarti

Sumit Kumar Chakrabarti, graduated in Commerce from the University of Calcutta. Later on, he completed his Post Graduate Diploma in Media studies with a specialization in writing and editing. He has worked in various industries such as Publishing, Transcription and Business Outsourcing for nine years. He did freelance writing assignments on Travel, Creative Curriculum Development for Children, Inspirational stories, Training and Business modules for just over three years. Presently he has a full-time job as a Content Writer in New Delhi, India.

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Like many children, I grew up listening to stories from my mother and my grandparents. The stories that they repeatedly told me were about the 1971 war where India had a face-off with Pakistan in the battle zone over the liberation of East Pakistan or Bangladesh. My mother's entire family lived in Tripura (India), and my father was posted in Calcutta as a government officer during that time. My elder sister was just a few months old when the war broke out.

The background of this war was coined way back in 1947 during the time of India's Independence. Prior to 1947, Bangladesh and Pakistan both were the integral part of India. Before the British left, they divided the larger Indian Territory into two independent countries -- India and Pakistan. Muslim dominated regions such as east and west sides of Hindu India became part of Pakistan. Post-independence, conflicts started between East and West Pakistan in terms of culture, administrative rights, language etc., which eventually led to the two regional brothers crossing swords to claim their dominance in Pakistan.

During the 1971 war, Tripura (the second smallest state in India) was the headquarters to both the Indian army and the Bangladesh Liberation Front (muktiyoddha) and it played a pivotal role in gaining a strategic advantage over Pakistan. My mother and grandparents were eyewitnesses of that turmoil; I can still remember how my mother always got excited and sombre at the same time while giving the graphic details of real war time stories.

My grandfather lived in Bangladesh before migrating to India and understood the root of the problem. He always believed the conflict between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan was inevitable since they were completely disconnected from each other – both geographically, linguistically and culturally. Geographically, the two regions were part of one country (Pakistan) but were separated by almost 1,000 miles (1,609 k.m). Pakistan's geography comprised deserts, forests, mountain areas, plateaus and coastal regions of the Arabian Sea to the mountain ridges of the Karakoram in the north. On the other hand, East Pakistan was predominantly a plain, riverine region with a long coastline in the north of the Bay of Bengal. Mountain areas were found only in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which was in the far southeast in the northeast in the Sylhet division. The transportation between these two regions was difficult due to this stark geographical contrast. Roads had to be fragmented by ferry crossings because of the dominance of river in East Pakistan whereas it was difficult to develop road connectivity from the West Pakistan to the eastern side for the rough and hilly terrain.

The minority non-Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims were in a precarious situation. Even though they were quite similar to the East Pakistanis in terms of cultural inclination, they could not support them openly for fear of being executed by the West Pakistani administration.

My family resided at my maternal grandfather's house in the capital Agartala, quite close to the Bangladesh border. There was a bee line of refugees who crossed the border into India and headed towards the city. Quite a few of them took shelter at my grandfather's house during the war which lasted two excruciating weeks. Those unfortunate people were generously fed and treated by my grandmother. Among the refugees were severely injured people who could not be admitted to any hospital since they were all already full with injured and screaming war casualties.

The hospitals soon ran out of medicines and other resources. Make-shift hospitals were erected with bamboo sticks and students, medical professionals and civilians alike worked hand-in-hand helping to save so many lives.

When the war was in full throttle, my mother was a worried soul since my elder sister was just four months old, and the deafening noise of shelling made her cry incessantly. But there was no escape route, since the only airport in Agartala was closed after being heavily bombed by the Pakistan Air Force. At night during the Pakistani air raid, mother used to wrap my sister in a thin warm blanket and put her in a basket before taking shelter in the trenches dug out at the housing compound along with the other members of the family. There were mosquitoes and other insects outside since there was a garden in the compound, so my mother not only worried about how to keep my sister safe from those creatures but from the Pakistani bomb shells.

Partition of British India, 1947, Courtesy of Wikipedia

My grandfather was a busy man during the war as he kept arranging resources with the rest of family to accommodate and feed the tortured and hungry people from across the border. All the Indian families in Tripura spread awareness among the others to help the Bangladeshi people by mobilizing more resources. According to my grandpa, it was not just a war between India and Pakistan, it was also a war to save a race from extinction.

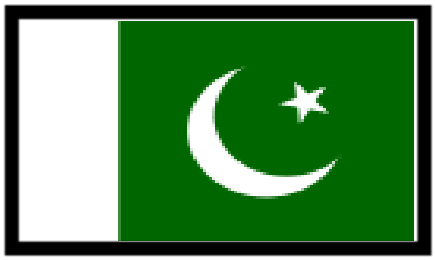
I heard the tales of horrific mass genocide of the Bangladeshi people by the Pakistani army. Such cruelty not only flared up the Bangladesh Liberation Front, but the Indian army and the civilians as well. I can recall how my grandmother choked and cried while narrating how she had to treat a five-year old child whose right hand was chopped off. People in the eastern part of India, specifically West Bengal sympathised with the Bangladesh since their culture and language were same. Moreover, West Bengal and East Bengal were part of the same country prior to 1947 (India's Independence year).

I always noticed intense sadness on my grandfather's face whenever he talked about tortures that were inflicted upon the civilians by the Pakistani army and also the murder and rape of Hindus and non-Bengali Muslims lived in Bangladesh by Bangladeshi Liberation groups. The archived documents at The Liberation War Museum of Dhaka describes — *"Between March 25 and December 16, estimated 3 million Bengalis were killed, 2,00,000 women raped and 10 million were displaced. This was the worst genocide after second world war".*

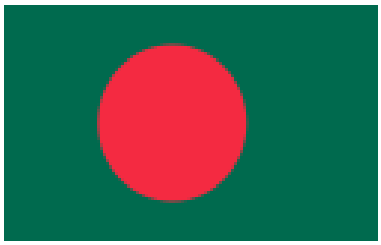
It was speculated that the minority hindus and Bengali intellectuals in East Pakistan were specifically targeted by the Pakistani army. Primarily doctors, engineers, writers and other intellectuals bore the maximum brunt of the Pakistani killing machine.

At the same time there is another side of story which very few people know. When talking about torture against innocent people, grandfather did not just talk about the victims of Bangladeshi origins, but also about non-Bengali speaking population who migrated primarily from northern India to East or West Pakistan. He narrated that the allegations of infamous sexual violence against the Bangladeshi women was just a part of the whole truth. Grandfather and his associates witnessed at the refugee camps that there were Hindu and Muslim rape victims who were tormented by civilians represented by various Bangladeshi liberation groups. It was a shocking revelation for me, because all the historical documents dating back to 1971 accuses the Pakistani army for brutal extermination of Bengali men and sexual violence against their women only!

During that war, the Indian government and the entire Indian population supported Bangladesh and her people wholeheartedly and stood by their side. But after knowing the other side of the story, it seems that the facts and figures on mass genocide and sexual violence on the Bangladeshi women alone was not the only truth. The other untold stories of brutalisation against men and women of non-Bengali speaking community remained under the rubble in the euphoria of victory achieved by Indo-Bangladesh joint army. This is yet another unfair facet of war.



Flag of Pakistan; courtesy Wikipedia



Flag of Bangladesh; courtesy Wikipedia

Flag of India; courtesy Wikipedia

Saved by a Plank

By Christine Sutton

This is the second story of Christine's in this special issue. You can read all about her with her story 'At War with Filth'.

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Growing up, my brother and I showed the usual youthful disregard for our father's wartime stories, only half-listening as he told us how his ship, The Empire Lake, had been torpedoed by a German U-boat. Dad took it all in good part, never once getting annoyed. Still, looking back, I wish that we had paid more attention.
Fortunately, I do now know what happened to him and the other crew members on that ship. In 1998, with Dad's health already beginning to deteriorate, I interviewed him about his experience for a magazine article. This is what he told me.

In July 1943, I was a twenty-three-year-old army gunner with two years service under my belt. I was assigned with a handful of others to protect the crew of the collier SS Empire Lake on a crossing from Durban in South Africa to Aden in Yemen. I'd already had several such postings since completing my training and although I wasn't a great sailor once I got my sea legs I was fine. We were a week into the voyage, skirting the southwest coast of Mauritius, when we came face to face with the enemy in the shape of two German torpedoes.

It was 4pm and I was in my cabin, fastening my life jacket prior to going on watch, when the first one struck. I yelled, "We've been hit!" – as if anyone needed telling! – and stepped over the threshold of the cabin straight into water. As I set foot on deck the second one hit us. Next moment I was in the water and going down. I tried to swim but the sea was rough and the suction from the water flooding into the ship too great. Suddenly, I saw a piece of duckboard, one of the planks that went across the hatches, a little way away from me. I reached out and grabbed hold of it and we shot back up together. I bobbed to the surface just as the ship was about to nose-dive into the water. I found myself staring straight down the funnel, right into a gaping black hole. In seconds it slid beneath the waves and was gone.

Stunned by the speed with which everything had happened, I clung to my plank and scanned the surface of the water for signs of life, but everyone seemed to have gone down with the ship. Then I spotted one of the ship's life rafts. On it was Fred Stafford, who'd been working as a stoker in the boiler room, otherwise known as a donkeyman. I swam closer and in a few moments he'd hauled me on board. As I lay there, vomiting sea water and gasping for air, a huge black shape broke the surface, a German U-boat. Fred said simply, "Aye, aye, 'ere they come. Let's tell 'em what they want to know."

But they already seemed to know everything they wanted. The hatch opened and two men with machine guns climbed out, followed by the Captain. They told *us* who we were and after pointing us in the direction of land they went back inside, the hatch closed, and the sub disappeared.

After the U-boat's departure we looked around for survivors but of the thirty-eight men who'd boarded the ship we seemed to be the only two left. Wet and exhausted, we wrapped ourselves in tarpaulins and tried to get some rest.

Waking at first light we took stock. Rather than a lifeboat we were on one of the Empire Lake's more rudimentary life rafts. These had no 'right' or 'wrong' way up, but consisted simply of a few slats of wood in a square frame. We had some supplies: water, biscuits and a few tins of some stuff called Pemmican, a thick, Oxo-like concentrate. Diluted, it was supposed to provide all the nutriments needed to keep body and soul together. Nourishing it might have been, steak and chips it wasn't! Fred and I prayed that our ordeal would be a short one. It proved to be a forlorn hope.

Len Sutton: courtesy Christine Sutton

We were in tropical waters and the suffocating heat of the day contrasted sharply with the chill of the nights. Water slopped incessantly through the slats of the raft, chafing our legs and buttocks and riming our skin with salt until it was raw and weeping. Days dragged by and soon became a week. Occasionally we'd spy a ship on the horizon or an aircraft way off in the sky, but although we sent up flares they were never spotted. We remained two dots of humanity atop a dozen planks of wood adrift on the vastness of the

ocean, with sharks, rays and jellyfish our only companions.

There was one fish in particular that kept circling the raft. Time after time we tried to catch it but it kept evading our grasp. Finally, after ages spent lying flat on the planks with my hands dangling in the water, I was able to grab it. We were really looking forward to eating some 'proper' food at last but when it came to it the flesh tasted horrible and we had to throw it back.

Finally, after suffering over a fortnight's searing heat and near starvation, we spotted land. Weak from hunger and sunburned though we were, we started paddling furiously. As we drew near we saw a group of natives walking along the beach. The tide brought us in and dropped us on a rocky outcrop a few feet from shore. The raft split in two, throwing me to the left, Fred to the right. But at least we were safe.

We were surrounded by spear-wielding natives and did wonder briefly whether our near naked welcoming committee was offering us a meal, or sizing us up for one. But a smattering of pidgin English convinced us that all was well and we were soon enjoying rice and vegetables cooked in a big, black pot over an open fire. Oh, it tasted good. An ordeal that had lasted eighteen interminable days was over.

After a night's rest, we made our way to the nearest town, where we learned that we had washed up on the east coast of Madagascar, currents having carried us about 300 miles. Amazingly, we later learned that five others had survived, too, and that their raft had also been washed up on Madagascar, on the same day and only about 30 miles further up the coast. The sinking of the SS Empire Lake had claimed the lives of thirty-one men, including the Master, Richard John Sprout, and two lads aged just 17. It is sobering to think that, but for a plank of wood, I might have made it thirty-two.

Len Sutton

After doing this interview with Dad I checked all the facts with the Imperial War Museum in London. They confirmed that on July 15th 1943 the 2,852-tonne collier SS Empire Lake was torpedoed off the south-west coast of Mauritius by German U-boat 181, with the loss of thirty-one personnel. The number of fatalities was so high due to the speed with which she sank, which, according to their records, was less than one minute. I found it very moving to hear the story being confirmed by a stranger and to know that everything Dad had told me was accurate and would be on record for perpetuity.

Years later, going through Dad's effects after he had passed away, I discovered a faded, yellowing sheet of paper that added another layer to the story. It seemed that some of the Empire Lake's survivors had sent a message of thanks to the people of Madagascar, expressing their gratitude for all their help and hospitality. What I'd found was the reply from the people of the town, thanking the men for their letter and wishing them all good health and happiness in the future. A moving footnote to a dramatic event.

Flag of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; courtesy Wikipedia

Coat of Arms of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; courtesy Wikipedia

The Escape

By Rita Bozi

Rita's career spans writing for theatre, radio, weeklies and on-line publications; acting in theatre, film and television; and dancing in both modern and classical companies. She is a Consultant/Facilitator of the One Brain System.
Rita has published articles on lifestyle and travel, has written about alternative healing and her travel stories were heard on CBC Radio Calgary's The Homestretch. Up In Smoke appeared in the premiere edition of Pages Of Stories. She is working on a short story collection called Hungry, High and Hammered, and on a novel called Uprising.

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1957. January 30.

His body slams into the frozen earth. Snow takes a bite out of his smooth handsome face. Bullets that should have left his brains running red onto snow crystals, land inches from his head. He scrambles back up onto his feet and keeps running. Have I been shot? He wonders, as his tightly-laced, black leather boots pound holes in frozen flakes. Weighty green-grey wool, a decoration, a rank of honour now meaningless to a man escaping. His vision blurs. No path, no direction just dead trees and barbed wire. Towers with glaring eyes. The cold scorches his trachea, breath solidifies his lungs like he's drowning to the bottom of a lake. More spraying bullets that should have ended his last name right there and then. The snarls echo across the crisp cold day, vicious black dogs. A line with death on one side, freedom on the other. Had that day been any different, I wouldn't be here now.

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Two hundred thousand people fled in the days and months after October 23, 1956 including my father István; intellectuals, professionals, young people, skilled workers, white-collar workers, women and children. For two short weeks of promise the world watched with bated breath. For those who stayed the possibilities were tangible, the country united, in a glorious momentum driven by the instinct for freedom. People slept in flannel pyjamas, tucked in their beds, while tanks brazenly entered Budapest. The sun would retreat and not come up on their day. After November 4th, the iron curtain came unfurling down shutting out any crack of light, making it nearly impossible for anyone to leave. Even Sartre, the Marxist philosopher, condemned the suppression of the Revolution by the Soviets. Now only time determined who would live and who would be taken away, imprisoned, tortured, re-educated or just shot.

István, a fireman with rank, with honours, was a freedom fighter. A man in uniform, expected to tow the party line, his fingerprints found their way onto books. His hands, like iron grips, pulled apart word for word the ideas that had created the conditions for inhumanity. His rage ripped through paragraphs and chapters. Tore through footnotes, through to the index. Muted olive green bindings spread like leaves blown from their neat piles swept up by an autumn wind.

Communist manuals, their pages dribbling over the office floor, like spilled milk. Covers torn from indoctrinating words, written by Russians: Lenin, Stalin, extolling a Utopia. As unforgettable as the taste of the Russian language he was forced to learn as a child. On the floor, a man torn in thirds: a face with no eyes, a face with no mouth, a man without a heart. A cardiac arrest. Stalin. He stared back at István long enough to warn, I'll punish you yet.

Driving supplies, food and ammunition donated by the Austrians, István curled vehicles along scraggy country roads, over half-busted bridges, dodged potholes, up to Budapest to support the people on the frontlines. The ones that amputated the sickle and hammer from the centre of the Hungarian flag. The ones brave enough to stand at the door of the Parliament building, shot on the spot, spilling their blood into the Danube. Returning at night, as not to be recognized, he slipped back into the morning as if nothing had happened. But fingerprints on Stalin's torn face were enough to incriminate him. Whether anyone saw him drive supplies or not, he left his mark. Evidence like a token. Breadcrumbs wanting to be followed.

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The Hungarian Flag; after the damage. Source: The American Hungarian Federation

His wife Etelka hands István a freshly ironed shirt. Still warm. The smell of bitter coffee and apricot jam on toast. A sensation of blood swelling

his veins. A blister forms on the roof of István's mouth. He couldn't wait for the coffee to cool, and drank the first sip scalding. His gaze turns towards the single window of their rented basement room and then back down to his coffee. Uncertainty suspended in the atmosphere. A last sip of strong coffee. He swills it back and then his two-week silence is broken with the sound of a cup on a saucer, over breakfast. "I'm going today."

I wonder what my mother said, almost as if I know: "Why didn't you say anything sooner?" He doesn't answer and she doesn't wait for an answer. "I begged you to leave during the revolution." And she had. Etelka had urged him during the days that the country churned, while others fled to the open arms of foreign nations. Silence. István tightens his lips.

"I'm not leaving." He'd said through tight lips two weeks earlier. István believed defiance could save his country or perhaps his passion would preserve her soil, liberate her skies and part her curtain. How could he abandon her? Having not abandoned his country, he will be forced to abandon his family.

"*Pista! Hallasz*?!" Etelka pleads for his attention. In their five years together, Etelka believes she is never heard, never listened to. Still, he has no answer for his wife and looks down at his empty cup.

"Pista!" She cries. Using his diminutive is not a show of affection. It is simply convenience and tradition. Every István becomes Pista. "We could have escaped together. As a family," says Etelka.

"No we couldn't have!" István slams his hand on the table, his cup clatters on the saucer.

"You're leaving now? When it's most dangerous?" She raises her voice.

"You know they're coming to arrest me." He moves his chair back, away from her.

"You never listen. Stubborn as always."

István bites hard into his lower lip where he leaves purple teeth marks. Frustration bends his nerves, blocks his cerebral arteries, curls his fist into a weapon. He wants to pound the walls, curse the God he was told still exists. He hates himself for his failure. With his life at risk he had hoped for words that might sooth. She had hoped for words that arrived sooner, that involved her and her baby son. Here's where the separation started, the separation that would never mend. The betrayal that saturated her skin like indelible ink. The tattoo that reads: *you left me*.

Etelka & István, 1957; courtesy Rita Bozi

István walks to work, carrying the dense load of his secret. The muscles of his hands, his arms, his neck contract involuntarily. White blindness, as the sun stares back at him, snow reflects the blankness of his mind. He's a massive knot by the time he reaches the door of the fire station.

The morning passes like a blur, sounds amplified, his movements magnified, as if under a microscope. He's certain he's saying his thoughts out loud, certain someone heard the fiftieth repetition of his plan. Acid squirts back up his esophagus during the morning meeting. The discussion: the arrival of Russian officials next week, for a friendly meet and greet. The reality: an inspection of the satellite nation under the thumb of the Soviets. An inspection for signs of dissent.

Officers in uniforms, hard as cardboard, sit at a round table, smoking. Smoke circles, wafts, in front of the red star in the centre of their caps. They all know, István knows, that he won't be around by next week. But by what means is what's flawed in each man's perception. He'll be rotting in prison. He'll be shot by this afternoon. He'll disappear without a trace.

István's mind sharpens, a knife chiseling the end of a pencil. He sounds clear, organized, obedient. Cheerful. His mind has come into intense focus. But he is not immune to manifesting the ill will directed his way. If he loses, a competitor wins. It was only the other day, when his comrade Sándor laughingly pointed a gun at him and said dryly, "I feel like shooting someone." Captives become vermin to each other. István knocked the revolver out of his hand onto the ground. Nothing was said. Neither of them spoke of it. Sándor now blows smoke towards István's face. István coughs. Sándor smacks him on the back. "Try smoking, Pista. It's good for your nerves."

István collects his monthly salary from the same secretary who two weeks earlier had whispered in his ear, "They're coming to arrest you."

She slides the envelope over the table, her fingers linger on his momentarily, their eyes meet. Thank you and goodbye, his eyes convey for a brief instant. He turns sharply, slides the envelope in his pocket and marches down the hallway, out the door. The heels of his boots efficient on concrete, he spins himself around corners with precise geometry and stops at the foot of city hall. A grand building, its façade deceivingly welcoming. Its interior occupied by the same men who sent the document, read by the secretary who whispered in his ear. He feels the acid of his morning coffee rising up. He squeezes it back down along with what might be a tear.

He walks in, through the imposing doors, his stride resolute, almost agile. His stomach gnaws, it's lunchtime, but he won't be eating. His jaw, tight with determination, his saliva quickens, he checks in at the front desk and asks for Etelka. He swallows hard as he waits for her to descend from the third floor.

The click of her shoes precede her petite form. She wears one of two skirts she owns, this one chestnut-coloured. Her olive pullover reveals the fullness of her nursing breasts. She is dainty and nimble as she approaches him. They walk outside into the crisp courtyard, trees brittle from the cold. The sun shines in celebration of the day. Their breath taints the air with anxiety. Her body begins to tremble, her fingers go numb. She clutches her arms around her frame. He wants to reach out and hold her but it would feel too final.

"Aren't you cold?"

"No." She doesn't identify this as cold, she feels it as terror.

He hands her the envelope.

"Thank you." She tucks it into her purse.

"It's nothing." He looks down at his boots.

"I hope it works." She offers.

He wants to collapse onto her, be held like a child and sob uncontrollably. He wants her to tell him it's just a bad dream. Instead they both stiffen, like the icicles dripping from the eaves above them.

"Go already," she says.

"Goodbye."

They do not touch. They do not hug. Their lips do not meet. Their heads turn in diverging directions like a fork in the road. They'll take separate paths now. Without each other.

Tibor, 1957; courtesy Rita Bozi

Etelka hurries back up the stairs to her typewriter. The click of her heels on marble pierce her eardrums. Her nerves susceptible to the vibrations of her psyche moving the plates from beneath her feet. Her earth moves miles, she's unsure now of every step she takes. Her ankle nearly buckles as she reaches the door of the 3rd floor. Unable to meet the gaze of her colleagues, she walks purposefully to her chair, to her typewriter and seats herself with pretend diligence. Defector. She is part defector.

Documents are a smudge of data, her pupils dilate and contract as they endeavor to put quantifiable words into focus. She wonders who's watching her. Her fingers feel like mitts, frozen, as if held in ice water for hours. The bones unable to move themselves into position. She hits one key. Pain pounds up to her temples, she looks at the words again but can see only gunshots. Her mind is a morass of possibilities, of the worst kind. Her imagination a hellish daydream of a woman and child left without husband, his body pierced with bullets, shocked into limpness then stiffness. His stunned eyes left open to the sky, no one there to close them. She shakes herself and begins to type. She has typed the same sentence three times before noticing the loop. Stuck in circuit. She rips the paper from the typewriter, crumples it and slaps her hand to her mouth as she hurries to the bathroom. There she looses her breakfast.

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The orange Skoda bounces up and down like a car in a bleached out movie from the forties, the haunting tone of the Theremin moving the action eerily down the road that hugs the border. This is the one and only day István has business near the border. This day won't come again.

"Let me drive a little." István says from the backseat while catching Laci's eyes in the rear view mirror. Laci slows the car, the car itself comes to a reluctant stop, the break fluid thick with apprehension. Laci moves into the passenger seat. Sándor lights a cigarette. The air in the car is stuffy with suspicion and cigarette smoke. Everyone in the car knows that something is about to happen. István moves into the drivers' seat, repositions the rear view mirror, catches sight of Sándor's golden tooth. Cortisol binds to receptors in his gut, burning its contents into waste faster than an incinerator. He adjusts his cap exactly above eye level. He remembered to shave. How does a man calm his sizzling nerves? How does he steady his hands on the wheel?

"I'm lonely back here," says Sándor. "Pista, I hear your sister's still a virgin. Perhaps I can help her."

István clenches his fingers around the wheel.

"Hasn't your mother learned that as Communists we don't believe in God? In my opinion, there's no reason for your sister to wait any longer. The authorities will shut down your mother's church before God punishes your sister's lothario. And that wife of yours. Etelka. Pretty little thing. Does she still think that her God can deliver her from the evils of this world?"

Etelka, covered in a black headscarf steals to church at night with other quivering women. All data is collected. All movements noted. Believers are recorded: Against Government Policy. Etelka's clandestine worship has been the source of added strain between them in the final months.

"Why do you need to go to church? Are you looking for trouble?" István replays in the argument in his mind.

"You've become one of them." Etelka's insult dug deep into his heart. His forced conformity only thinly veiled his hatred for the regime. His disdain for religion came not out of an alliance with the Communists, but out of his misalliance with a faith that promised deliverance if an individual abided by the law of God. István had no proof of deliverance.

"It's not your business what my wife does."

"Isn't it?" Sándor smirks. "In this world, everything is everyone's business, have you forgotten? Or are you so naïve? Just because we're all Hungarians doesn't mean we all share the same ideology. Does it comrade? You should know that by now. Or are you just stupid? Are you so holy that you are immune from what it takes to get ahead in this fucking system?"

István fakes a sudden swerve with the car, straightens the car abruptly, the occupants sway with the jerking automobile.

"Can't you drive?" Sándor says from the back seat. His words burn like engine acid over the hands of a mechanic who's opened the wrong valve.

"Something's not right with the car. I need to check under the hood." István stops the vehicle and steps out of the drivers' seat. He raises the creaky hood. Laci with his baby face is a frozen doll, the hood obscuring his view, while Sándor is a caged animal in the back, adrenaline accumulating in his hands, ready to pull a trigger. "What the hell is our dear comrade doing with the car?" Sándor eyes grow feral, his formal tone is mockery. Laci dares not move or offer any assistance.

István leans into the guts of the car, tugs on a few connections, his legs have gone weak, he wants to piss his pants. He hardens his nerves, controls his mind, looks to the left and

then to the right. Just make it to the border, he thinks. His neurons fire rapidly, his amygdala on high alert.

"Go see what he's doing!" Sándor orders Laci out of the car. István starts as Laci opens the car door and makes his way around the hood. He looks Laci square in the eyes, a king cobra mesmerizing its victim. "Farewell," says István, and sprints like a startled animal, running for his life.

A force greater than his mind has seized control of his legs. They are legs running without him. They move him, propel him, they know where to carry him. His torso is a mass of heavy clay, his heart a pounds like a sledgehammer. He stumbles. *His body slams into in the frozen earth.* He is unaware of the bullets spraying after him like the spit of a camel. *Snow takes a bite out of his smooth handsome face. Bullets that should have left his brains running red onto snow crystals, land inches from his head. He scrambles back up onto his feet and then keeps running. Have I been shot? He wonders, as his tightly-laced, black leather boots pound holes in frozen flakes.*

He is intact again, the fall jolts him back into his body, he understands what is happening. He remembers he is escaping. His cells align. He sees clearly. He flees faster and faster, races with clarity. The task keeps him alive. His body flails forward like a man at the end of a sickening marathon, tendons torn, tissues inflamed, guts oozing up through his esophagus. He throws himself towards the finish line, his face twisted with the agony of the charge. He wants to rejoice, throw his smile to the photographers and the applauding crowd. He wants his victory splashed over the front page, to tangle himself in streamers and swallow confetti.

Rifles meet his blood-shot eyes, István hears a command, border guards surround him "*Stop! Oder wir schießen.*"

István surrenders his arms into the air. He hears words but cannot make out their meaning. He sees only weighty green-grey wool. Hungarian green. He recognizes the uniform that will grab his arms and lock them into handcuffs. The uniforms that will throw him to the ground and take a good kick at his kidneys. These are the uniforms that will pull him back to his feet and drag him to a dark cell where they'll torture him.

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Etelka's body shakes for the rest of the day. Her imagination plays her prophecies in loops. What if he's caught? They'll drag him through the dirt, she thinks. What's waiting for him? What's waiting for me? Her focus is shattered like a mirror broken in a hundred shards, harmful little pieces ready to cut nerves and leave blood dripping from a wound. That she didn't know how long it would be until she heard news of her husband, made the minutes and hours since their farewell that much more agonizing. Her legs would have danced violently under her desk had she not clenched her thighs into a rigid brace, restraining wild horses.

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The barrel ends of guns approach, growing larger, like fleshy snouts emerging from darkened woods, slow motion inquisitors taking him in, smelling his woolen coat.

"What's your name?" The voice bellows. István floats in the current of an adrenaline overdose, a strange and pleasant concoction surges through his veins.

"István!" His name a paroxysm, an uncontrollable expression bursting from his body. Captured by the Hungarians. The joke's on him. But in a moment of lucidity his mind corrects the confusion. Austrian Green!

"*Wohin gehen Sie?* "

István tries to answer but he can't find the words. The questions are foreign coming from the uniformed men. Austrian Green! His confusion is like is a partial stroke, sounds melt like wax, spreading down the underside of his skull. German. Sound waves connect to his brain. They are patting down his body, hands moving in all directions, tentacles feeling for weapons. They're speaking German. He wants to laugh hysterically.

Like a waterfall cleansing away months of grime and sweat, he is bathed in the realization that these uniforms are Austrian, not Hungarian. He wants to cry out with joy. He wants to thank someone, embrace these men who now have his arms pinned behind his back, leading him to a room on the other side of the border. His eyes are cast downward as he's marched along a path. His smile concealed in the riddle his mind has untangled: these are Austrians he continues to confirm to himself. Their uniforms are the same colour as ours. Everything is clear now. I've made it. I've made it. I've made it!

Like a water-filled balloon, pricked with a pin, his swollen throat bursts open, flooding his eyes with emotion. His teeth chatter from the sudden realization that it's cold. But nothing could be more beautiful than the sun that pierces his cornea, blinding him with ecstasy and relief. Will I ever recapture this feeling? He holds on. Will I ever feel this measure of release again in my lifetime? He cradles this sensation like water in the palm of his hand. Slowly dribbling to the ground, precious drop by precious drop, slipping through his fingers. Now just a thimble-full, enough to quench the desert in his throat. They seat the man in a chair and offer him a glass of water.

"Please. Drink this." Says the blonde man with a soft face and blue eyes. István drinks the water, quenching the thirst of a lifetime: freedom.

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Etelka's stride explodes out onto the sidewalk the second the workday ends. She walks urgently, half running, as if someone is waiting for her at home with news and a cup of tea. Instead when she walks in the door of their basement room, her baby is in the arms of the teenage girl who lives upstairs. Etelka appears composed as though nothing in her life has changed in any way. She thanks the girl and take her nine-month old babe into her arms.

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The sound of metal bars slam shut, a lock, a smack, a kick, blood running out of her husband's nose and mouth. She can't free herself of the images. The silence of the room broken only by a tiny little sigh that escapes from the sleeping child. István's features appear while the baby sleeps, the baby's calm induced by delta waves, his facial expressions shaped by genetic codes.

A knock on the door shocks Etleka's reflexes into instant firmness. She gets up stiffly as if she's been sitting for years, waiting for a husband to return from war. From this historic state she walks slowly towards the door, still clutching her child.

"Yes?" She chirps like a friendly sparrow, as if greeting the unknown with cheerfulness could soften whatever news is on the other side of that door.

"Wife of Bozi István ? I am Bor Laci. My apologies for disturbing you, but I have news about-"

She scrambles to unlock the door like a child tearing open Christmas presents, not bothering to read the gift card. She doesn't wait for the voice to finish. "Did he make it?"

He turns his head quickly, scans the yard to see if anyone listens, watches from the dark.

"Yes, he made it." His face brightens momentarily as if delivering the news of a newborn.

She apologizes for leaving him standing there, taught with information. "Come in." She whispers.

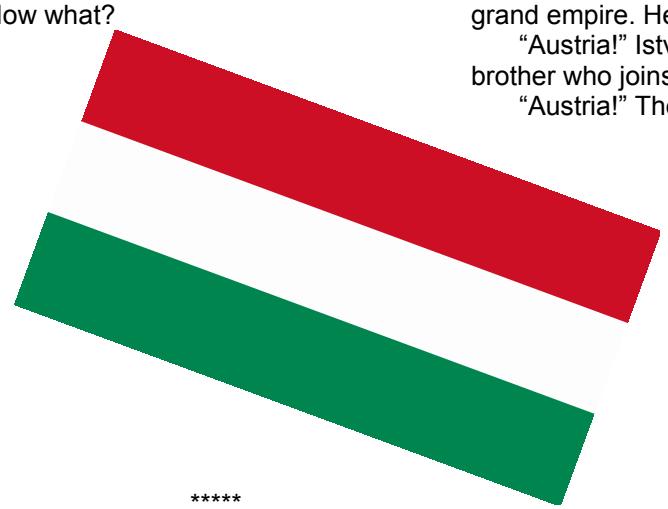
He slips in like a ghost. She reaches for the plum *palinka*, the only bottle in the bare cupboard. While pouring the clear liquid into two shot glasses she remembers the breathing baby still sleeps in her arms. How long could I have run with a baby? She thinks and wonders if she could have made it too. She places the child into its crib and sits facing Laci at the table.

"To our health." She raises her glass and clicks hers against his. She swallows the contents in one gulp, preparing herself for what she will hear.

"He said 'farewell' and then he started running. An Austrian radio station announced it this evening, that someone made it across. There was a border violation as they fired shots after him. A bullet crossed the border. There are consequences."

Her forehead falls into her open palms. Her thumbs feel the tension in her temples, as the blood returns, pulsing. "Thank God" she exhales her *palinka* breath into the room, her relief still not complete, as her thoughts race forward to 'now what'? Her head, heavy as a cannon droops forward in exhaustion, wanting to drag her body with it to the floor into a deep slumber. She thanks the young fireman for coming and extends her hand in gratitude. He takes her hand and rather than shaking it, he turns her palm down and bows before the lady, soft young lips moving towards veins protruding from under her skin.

"*Keszicsokolom."* He leans in to kiss her hand, then disappears through the garden and out the back gate. The air smells of snow and ice, hitting her soft face with sharp lashes of reality. Now what?



Flag of Hungary; courtesy Wikipedia

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The young blonde officer comes back in the room and hands István a steaming bowl of soup. István can't remember when it was he last ate. That he was seated facing his wife over bread and apricot jam just this morning is unfathomable. At first he can't comprehend the kindness of the Austrian soldiers. He had expected to be beaten, thrown to the floor. Now he inhales the steaming vapours of chicken soup, with carrots, potatoes and herbs floating on top. He begins to shovel the soup down his throat like a man who hasn't eaten in a week. He remembers his manners and puts down the spoon. Stops for a moment, wipes his wet salty mouth on his sleeve,

"*Danke*," he looks up at the officer, who looks at István with bemusement. The officer knows the soup is scalding. But this man in front of him eats as though he has a leather tongue.

"*Bitte. Guter appetit,"* the officer laughs and watches István spoon out each last morsel, then tip the bowl to drink the remaining drops. This has taken no less than two minutes to ingest.

"*Schnell.*" says the officer. István stands abruptly, like a solider ready for inspection.

The officer pushes *István* back down into the chair with a familiar hand, like an old buddy encouraging his friend to stay and have another drink. He breaks into laughter. István follows with laughter and sobbing interwoven. This is a heave that comes from deep within his gut, a gratitude for human kindness, a rare moment of exchange with a stranger. It is a memory in his cells, when the Austrians and the Hungarians were a grand empire. He sits with a brother.

"Austria!" István exclaims to his brother who joins him in this exaltation.

"Austria!" They cheer together.

István is kept for a week of questioning. His interrogators are stern, efficient, older and stockier. His soup brother isn't there to soften the probing. Each day the questions are the same. He knows the order off by heart. By now István understands the questions in German.

"Who are you?"

"Bozi István. Political refugee. Seeking asylum."

"What was your job in Hungary?"

"Fire Department."

"Why did you leave?"

The questions come like ping pong balls.

"Why did they want to arrest you?"

He answers the same way each time.

"What did you do?"

István keeps his story as straight as a line of marching soldiers. Even knowing that he has committed no crime, the interrogations leave a film of guilt on his eyelids. Pupils darting to the right and to the left, up left, down right until his eyes glaze over, the lamp too bright for his delicate sclera.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Wherever I can work."

"What do you want to do?"

"Whatever I am needed for."

"What are your skills?"

"I can do anything."

The officials are convinced: this man is not a Communist spy. He is just a simple man who ran for his life. Determined to be useful, István learns German as if he is born with its

knowledge, the child with Asperger's who magically becomes fluent in a language he has never before heard. Praised for his apt German accent, the officers put István to work and he rises to the ranks of camp translator. He soothes the worries of those refugees who do not understand why and where they are going to be transported to next. Again, a new destination. Again, another camp. István stays behind. There is no hurry to relocate a single man. Couples, families with children, they take priority. For now there is no rush for István. He has no plan. As long as he can be useful, he is comfortable anywhere.

In the tidy, spotless refugee camp, István has his own room, with a small mailbox outside his door, an item of luxury in the spare surroundings. He receives a letter from Etelka after two weeks. Two weeks after the escape. A small, pale green, onion thin envelope arrives addressed with pearl perfect handwriting. The letter is typed with thick, black ink. She wrote the letter from work, on an official typewriter. It says she and her son are eating.

*****

Each day at the county council, news spreads in hushed tones about who's been taken away and detained. An empty desk, an absent colleague, a position filled, a friend lost, a family shattered. Etelka knows her husband is safe, that he's not being tortured in a dank rat-infested prison somewhere. Now her fear is for herself and her baby son. Etelka counts her forints over and over. She loses counts and starts again. Calculating, recalculating. With her meager salary and her husband's income gone, she wonders how she will continue to feed her son.

Her stockings catch on a nail edging out of her chair, and start to run. She smacks the chair and wants to swear but restrains herself. God is listening. She's embarrassed by the flaw. Her flaws. She wears the stockings until the run is too obvious to hide by the way she positions her legs when sitting in a chair. By February the stockings are too worn. She tosses them in the garbage and counts her coins again. She walks to work without stockings, the winter wind scarring dry her exposed legs.

She pays for a meal ticket at city hall and eats only lunch most days. At the end of the workday she hurries to the butcher who by now has only chicken heads for sale. Even if the butcher had a thigh or even a neck for sale, all she can afford is the head. The chicken's eye, from under the bag, monitors her all the way home. Even the chickens have become Communists, she thinks, and slams the bagged head on the kitchen counter. The head tossed in water with paprika and an onion comes to a boil. She cooks a weak broth to feed to her baby. She waits until tomorrow to eat, when she receives her one meal ticket of the day, to calm her own insides. A stomach turns over and over waiting to digest something, an agent of hunger eats away at its walls, expectantly doing its job. Her main purpose: keep my baby fed.

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By day, István works fixing car engines for officials, repairs electrical problems and earns what he can at odd jobs. His usefulness lifts his spirits. Wires, currents and sparks delight him, his hands eager to bend, cut, twist and mend. István forgets that he is a refugee, a husband, a father. He delights in his linguistic skills and finds pleasure and purpose in his job assignments. He is well liked by the Austrians. A perfect match. A man of the same fabric, industrious, clever, hard-working. He is welcomed.

Nights are filled with conversation, games, cards and story-telling. Families are wrapped around long tables, their bodies spill over each other's chairs and hang over to the other side of the table to catch snippets of information. The scene is like a Caravaggio painting. Someone who bangs out a folksong on the piano, repeatedly hits the one key that has gone numb with wear. Tears flow from the ducts of ladies wearing eyeliner as they sing the songs that tell the story of the Magyars that traveled far and wide, with wild horses and arrows, they saw the vision of the homeland. Like a princess waking from a dream predicting the faraway land of riches, sparkling trees and promise.

"Where do you want to go?" István is asked, in formal address, by those who see that he is now a fixture at the camp.

He smiles, laughs and says, "I am in no hurry to decide."

The nightly discussions revolve around lands of potential: America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Knowledge is gathered and shared, each person attempting to outdo the other with the information that is the clue to a profitable future.

"What I've heard is this … "

"But that's just hearsay."

"None of us really know what it'll be like."

"Yes, but I have a cousin there, he left before the war. He says, that America is the best country in the world."

"The Americans can rot in hell. Why didn't they help us when we needed them? I'm not going to America."

"I'm going to Canada!"

"Australia is better. It's much warmer."

"Yes, but their accents are ridiculous."

"Not anymore ridiculous than New Zealanders."

"English is a meager language to begin with."

"Canada is big, beautiful and clean."

"How do you know it's clean?"

"Because America is filthy and Canadians and Americans are different. So the Canadians must be cleaner."

"That's ridiculous!"

The *palinka* flows between the refugees, bottles stuffed in the one suitcase they could run with. Small shotfuls of the flavour of the homeland.

"There is a railway that goes from the east to the west, all the way across the country. One day I will ride the train."

"If you are ever rich enough to buy a ticket. Right now you don't even have a schilling to your name."

"But in Canada I will make many, many dollars."

The nights carry on like this, in the camps: hope and dissuasion, people's competing plans, one-upping each other with ideas of where life is superior, conclusions outdoing presumptions. Groups of people come together to console each other through the endless waiting hours, as the Red Cross brings the weekly supply of food and clothing. All of it plentiful, each man, woman and child take all they need, nothing is lacking except for direction, solitude and a meaningful existence.

Had István ever really contemplated his destiny past his mad dash towards dead trees and barbed wire and towers with glaring eyes? I don't know anyone in Austria, he considers. Where will I lay down roots? He asks himself out loud as he stares at the clean, bare walls of his room. Like after a long contemplative pause, and a prolonged silence in the classroom, we students admit our lack of experience. And relief comes when the teacher no longer keeps us students guessing and finally writes the answer on the chalkboard. We are no longer stupid.

Austria. In a country at once so familiar and yet so obviously a complete unknown, it's like looking at a map, pointing a finger at a name and asking aloud: I wonder what's there? It slowly dawns on him that in his thirty-some years he's never stepped foot off the soil of his ancestors. How could I possibly know where I want to go? To safety. I want to go to safety. To freedom. To where I have a purpose.

Five months in camp and his body becomes settled, accustomed to the physical movements of the daily routine. His brain has mapped the trajectory of each undertaking. In this comfort, he begins to imagine a life in Austria. Neatly tended gardens, green shutters, smooth black roadways with perfect yellow lines. Grey, suede leiderhosen and funny hats with a long single feather, with *umpapa* music on Friday nights over bratwurst and lager. Eventually a good German car and a pension. But this is only an illusion, a wish for what he wants to see. Others dissuade him from staying in Austria. "You can never become a citizen. They're a closed shop, the Austrians. They only ever wanted our culture, our land, our good taste and our strudel. But now when we need them, they would never let us be one of them."

The Austrians are only too eager to keep their eastern neighbours moving. During the Revolution they greeted hundreds of thousands of refugees with chocolate, oranges, open arms and cheers. Still, the only omission is Communism but otherwise Austria is as poor as Hungary, with little prospect and limited opportunity. Austria is the cousin whose clothing only looks more expensive, but the reality at home is deprivation. Austria is the host who welcomes the guest all the more warmly for knowing when the departure is planned. Austrian Interior Minister, Oskar Helmer sent urgent cables to the UN asking for both financial assistance and assurances that most of the refugees will be swiftly moving on.

Months pass in avoidance, the hard work soothes his muscles and the fibres of his memory: István replays over and over the last hour with his wife. German now trips off his tongue like a birdsong, he helps other refugees sort through plans and actions which up until now elude him. He is unwilling to confront the question: Where will I go once they shut the doors of the camp and tear down the protective fences, between now and hope.

Diarrhea, cramps his guts, the result of deep nervousness, the inevitable letting go of this oasis of camaraderie. His soup brother hands him a banana, the first he's seen in his lifetime. "This will help your guts," he says with a laugh. István peels the banana, its skin hangs down, like a cheap, faded propaganda poster peeling off a concrete wall. The forbidden fruit of the west and the Communist's symbol of western decadence. The fruit that would never touch the soil of Hungary. The banana slides quickly down his throat. With ease.

Then, like a forest fire igniting through the countryside, the news burns through the camp over dinner. Like smoke wafting between tables, bits of information float overhead and mixes with the steam rising from bowls of soup. Puffs of dialogue mix with mouthfuls of excitement, but leave a bitter taste in István's mouth.

The camp is closing its gate. The gatekeepers are being sent to another job. Canada has come to the rescue. This gracious and enormous country has swung open its terrain of opportunity. Forty thousand are welcome! Canada is sending boats! Canada! The word is an unwelcome trumpet call smashing István's eardrums. The musician from the *umpapa* band deserts the troupe to join the orchestra of Canada, heralding a migration of which István now has no choice but to follow. Destination: Quebec Harbour. My father is one of them.

Tibor and Etelka in Szombathely, Hungary 1957; courtesy Rita Bozi

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"Please don't write about this," he says to me over the phone. István's mind is well-trained to keep silent. Keep safe. And in his silence he learned that there is no one that can help him. He's on his own. He ran alone and arrived alone. He worked alone and survived alone. He never had any proof that talking would get him any further along in life. Quite the opposite. Talking would only get him into trouble.

I want to say, "It's all right father. It was a long time ago. No one will arrest you now." But I don't, I just hold on to the details, the impressions made on my subconscious that drive me to tell his story. Would I betray him to reveal his account after he passes away?

His aging mind plays everything in retrograde. He lives his life in reverse. He has been sifting through memories for the past five years, speeding up time as his mind grinds down to low gear. He replays the things that happened early on. The closer he moves towards death, the more his memories reach backwards, grabbing, holding, clutching, scanning the days of his youth. His memories lengthen the concept of existence.

"I've been here a long time." He says through a fatigued exhale. "I worked for 50 years in this country." His body moves forward to an end point, and his hippocampus keeps extending the picture back towards a beginning. My father is an old man.

"Why did you stay is Austria for six months?"

"I don't know."

"But you have to know. You know, father. Please tell me."

"I don't know."

"Of course you know. You can't not know why you stayed. Tell me. Why did you stay for six months?" I am now the belligerent child, exasperated. Tugging on the ear of a near deaf man. The near deaf man pauses and senses his breathing. His eyes catch the sun coming in through the window, touching his retina. He has time to pause. But I don't. I don't have time. I need his story now.

"Why did you stay father?" I ask again, insistently as if the interrogation will stir something in his imagination, pressing him to share my urgency. Why doesn't he understand my need? His story is my life-line. Without it I have no reason to create. My esophagus is a strangled garden hose, my heart a fist.

"Nem tudom." He grunts two words. He doesn't know. Forcing sound through his larynx, wind strangled in his throat, he is a powerless engine pushing sound upward, chugging out responses. I want to throw the receiver against the wall.

"Yes! You know!" I have turned into my mother: I hate this man who withholds from me. I don't want to tell my mother I understand her frustration. But I still don't want her to win.

I try to calm myself.

"I was in no hurry."

My mind seizes like a brake. Scraping on the metal of his answer. I want to spit a profanity into the air but I am compressed against a pocket of oxygen so thick, I may burst a blood vessel.

I try to feel what this must be like. *I was in no hurry*. I clamber to comprehend what this means to him. He was in no hurry. So that means, he ran for his life. Ran like a hunted animal. He fell, he got up, he ran some more, threw up his arms, and then fell bawling into the arms of the Austrians. And then they fed him soup and then he was in no hurry? I simultaneously want to scream and get into the mind of a man who has time to spare while his wife eats chicken heads and his baby grows by the hour. He was in no hurry. Does that mean he sat and played cards? Listened to the man at the piano, expanded his German vocabulary and generally had a carefree time in the spotless dormitory? Is this the first time in his life that he didn't have to run?

"But didn't they pressure you to leave?"

"Nem."

"Why not?"

"They didn't."

"I know they didn't. But why-"

What is it I want to know? I don't even know anymore. Why do I need to know the answer to this particular question? Is it because I can't imagine waiting for six months to know what will happen with the rest of my life? I would drive myself mad in six months. Could I ever *not* be in a hurry?

I remind myself that this is a fragile old man. Be gentle with his frail structure, his thinning skin, his tender arthritic feet, his delicate tissues. Touch his memories softly. Stroke them kindly. Feel the sinews holding together by a thread. Severed ligaments barely adhering to the bone. Hardly man. Hardly animal. Barely maintaining form. Barely a nerve left to fire any movement.

"I was waiting for your mother to join me."

I sit bolt up in my chair as if woken suddenly by a loud noise. "Mother? What? She was trying to make it across too?"

"What are you telling her?" I hear my mother wind up in the background. I am relieved she has joined my crusade for the truth.

"I was never going to join him. What are you telling her?! You're misleading her!"

I am rescued by the bystander that tells me my directions are completely wrong. You'll never find what you are looking for in that direction. Who gave you these directions?

I was told by a man who didn't want to lose face. A man who wanted to protect his right to a rest. Who needed months to recover from a lifetime of fear. I let it go. The need to know. I'm a flat tire. Unable to accept the things I may never get an answer to. So I make it up. *The brain doesn't know the difference between the real and the imagined.* Can I ever really ever get into his skin to fully experience the sensation of his history?

István on the boat to Canada 1957; courtesy Rita Bozi

Bullet Holes in White Flags

By Dana K. Haffar

Born and raised in Lebanon, Dana K. Haffar obtained a BA in English Literature from the American University of Beirut and subsequently an MLitt from Oxford University. She is co-editor of Lebanon: A History of Conflict and Consensus (IB Tauris, 1988), and author of Beirut in Shades of Grey which Publisher's Weekly described as a 'vivid portrait of a country in turmoil'. Her second novel, 'Leah', is now available on Smashwords.

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It seems to happen overnight. But it doesn't, of course. It starts like rain: a drop here, a drop there until, before you know it, the heavens have cracked open and you're caught in the downpour. Somewhere in the mountains or along the coast of Lebanon, a fight breaks out costing lives. The people of the victims swear revenge which they get by inflicting even greater losses on their adversary. Until sentiments cool, all public establishments – schools, banks, shops – shut down for the safety of citizens. When the situation is finally contained and a cease-fire reached, life resumes as normal, for a day or two. But blood has been shed, too many times, and the 'martyrs' will not be forgotten.

The circle of attack, retaliation, attack closes in. In the time it takes for sand to flow in an hourglass, the country is plunged into a spiral of violent massacres and irredeemable losses. There are no broadcasts declaring War. There are no drills. The clashes are referred to as *hawadeth* or "incidents", a term which sticks to what becomes a brutal war that lasts close to a quarter of a century.

In the middle of the fray are the innocent bystanders–people like us–who are uninformed, but quickly learn that mortar fire does not discriminate between civilians and fighters. At first, our routine is disrupted. Classes and jobs are suspended. It's only temporary, we say. The dispute *has* to be resolved, for it is inconceivable that life as we know it has come to an end. We can only be patient, and play it safe. We restrict our movements, we stay at home when advised to do so and keep up with the news.

We learn to take cover, stay away from windows and doors, and whenever the battle heats up, to shelter in the hallway or staircase. There are no basements, no bunkers. Our best and only protection are the few walls that separate us from the exposed exterior of the building. Those who live on the upper floors leave their apartments for the safety of the lower part of the building. The survival instinct kicks in. Our "siren" is the screech of an incoming missile or the crack of bullets. Then we move. As fast as we can, before the next rocket hits or the militias rally to a full-blown battle.

Housing complex; Beirut , Lebanon; courtesy Dana Haffar

In our ten-storey building, we have many friends, and those who were mere acquaintances we get to know quickly by force of circumstance. Together, we spend days and nights in close quarters, playing cards and backgammon on the tiled landings. So long as the rumble of artillery is not too close, we're all right. There's nothing we can do except make the best of our confinement.

The battles begin to escalate. Rocket launchers are installed on rooftops in the heart of the city or mounted on moving trucks. Snipers take up strategic posts along an imaginary Green Line across the city, effectively dividing it into "west" and "east Beirut". Their targets are not enemy fighters but men, women, children who dare presume that life is normal and carry their innocence like a white flag. Tactically, though, it is their deaths that are most effective in instigating outrage and driving the militiamen's message home.

Soon, people grow wise or scared enough to steer clear of the Green Line. They realise that they're mere clay pigeons in a shooting range. The snipers succeed in cutting off the supply of bread, flour and fuel. We pool together what we have in our freezers, and live on what's available. We joke about the repetitive meals and the many ways to cook a chicken. When electric cables are destroyed, we hoist buckets of water up the stairs. We recycle it. We read and play scrabble by candle light. But the threat does not only come from a random hit. The militiamen have the run of the country. They not only cripple us but terrorise us. They act brutally on a whim the minute they grow suspicious of a civilian's sympathies.

And it happens like this. We hear a commotion, the stampede of heavy boots up the staircase, the thump of Kalashnikovs and heavy artillery against the balustrade, thundering voices. We peek through the peephole, whisper behind our front door and hold our breath. We have no idea what's

going on, whom they're after, what they want. The yelling gets louder, feverish, and our blood runs cold. At any moment now, their rage will explode into gunfire, we know it. Then there's the wail and anguished pleas of the women as their husband, son or father, is pushed and shoved at gunpoint right down to the exit of the building. He's bundled into a car which charges off, tyres screeching, shots firing through open windows into the air. And it may be the last time he is ever seen. We don't have to witness it to know it. The terror of it shocks our senses.

We hear of cold-blooded massacres and rising casualties, thinking that any day it could be any one of us. We're no longer bothered by the lack of amenities, the sleepless nights or the incarceration. We don't notice that they're wearing us out. The torture is the uncertainty, the possibility that at any time the thud of boots will stop at our door, the missile will blast through the concrete walls of our living-room. And throughout it all, there's no-one to turn to. We don't know our enemy because as far as we're concerned we haven't got one. But it's not about that. It's about whom the fighters choose to sacrifice for their cause. Which ostensibly gives each of us a foe: the one who launches the rocket or fires the bullet that maims or kills us.

And that's the curse of the civil war. The faceless adversary. We cannot see him coming, we cannot hide from him. He lurks on rooftops, in alleyways, garbage dumps and in our subconscious. The battlefront is not a line. It snakes through narrow paths and backstreets, constantly moving.

The days roll by and we master the skill of survival. We install a gate at the entrance of the building and reinforce the wooden door to our apartment with a double-bolted iron door. We grow savvy, determining that a flare-up a couple of blocks down the road would still provide us with a window to run down to the bakery and get some bread. If we're quick. We no longer scurry for cover at the slightest sound, having learned to judge how far the shelling is and whether there is a dire need to give up the comfort of our living-room. Sometimes we can only get a shut-eye to the echoes of shelling which help us determine the distance between us and danger. Sometimes, it's the portentous silence that keeps us awake, expecting an outbreak of violence at any given moment.

We're marooned on a land that's turned into a slaughterhouse and we take chances to survive. Yet, not one of us takes up arms. Not one of us burns with the acrimony it takes to harm a human being.

The gruesome accounts of brutality that reach us every day are unimaginable. We cannot make sense of the cauldron of seething grievances that our country has become. New alliances are made with foreign organisations and armies that have jumped into the fray. The telephone lines are down and there's no communication. What holds us together are our neighbours and our friends, until the apartments start to empty and people flee to safety during intermittent lulls. The airport, bombarded once too often, is now closed and the only way out is either by sea to Cyprus or by land to neighbouring Arab countries. Escaping, in itself, is like defusing a time bomb. But the risk we take in staying is just as great.

Beirut, 2011; courtesy Dana Haffar

All of us, young and adult, students, grocers, professors, lawyers, taxi drivers become indistinguishable, "citizens of a war-torn country". The change in each of us is gradual, defined by our own experiences of the War, the common thread in our disparate lives. One way or the other, we are all touched by it.

Months later, an uncertain peace is restored. We come out of our hideaways like rabbits from their warrens. We enrol into whatever schools are open, losing touch with old schoolmates without having said our good-byes. It's time now to co-habit with our scourge, to carry on in a booby-trapped existence. We walk along strangers armed to the teeth, giving wide berth to their AK-47s and RPGs. We run away from crossfires. We steer clear of speeding jeeps rushing the wounded to hospital, and their spray of bullets. We zigzag our way to school and through campus. We're shocked to find our own people transformed. Incredibly, vicious fire fights erupt in traffic, in queues outside bakeries and at petrol stations among civilians at the end of their tether. We take every day as it comes in an effort to preserve a semblance of a life and conserve what is left of our sanity.

Years down the line, we're still scattered across the globe, having enjoyed our last meal with the extended family intact as far back as 1974. When we reunite, we reminisce about our days in wartime. We don't speak of the terror, the horror of it all, but recollect how clever our Spaniel had been in distinguishing incoming from outgoing missiles. How he had his way with the neighbour's miniature Doberman Pinscher when we weren't looking, and their cute litter. We recall the jokes, the bond we shared with others, the generosity of some who looked out for us.

Then, at dinner with our children and spouses, a car backfires. We jump up a foot. They all laugh. So do we, from the bottom of our hearts. Because it feels good.

Flag of Lebanon; courtesy Wikipedia

The War is Over

By Xenia Gallardo

Xenia started writing when she was in elementary school and has since never stopped. She enjoys writing fiction novels, but has now become interested in short stories and poems as well. She lives in Manitoba with her family and their dogs and cats. Xenia was homeschooled most of her life and is currently attending university and college. She still plans on continuing with her writing and hopes to finish the novel she started at fifteen.

The war is over,
I am alone.
My home is gone.
I stand forlorn.
For days I wander,
To look for aid.
My parents I grieve,
Both killed in war.
I'm a child of no one,
To love and protect.
The soldiers are gone,
Nothing to fear,
But I'm afraid
Death is still near.
My stomach growls
My throat is dry.
But no hope I have,
To satisfy either.
No one to turn to,
I'll probably just die.
I feel alone,
Because I am.

Thank You