

June Mansfield

Gas cupboard

I never thought of the war as a bad thing because I think I was too young to see the bad things. I thought it was fun. My mother used to say things like "oh, it's not going to be a bad air raid tonight so we won't bother going down the garden to the shelter." Instead we would sit in the gas cupboard under the stairs or sometimes we would sit under the kitchen table.

School

When I was a baby I had been very poorly and had nearly died and I think this was the reason that my mum wouldn't allow me to be evacuated, she wanted me near her. We lived in Bishopton Road at the time, and my mum was asked if school classes could take place in our house. Each day between 8 and 10 children would come over for about 3 hours and have lessons. We had a slate to write on with a piece of chalk. There were no books, just pages that had been pasted on to card and then varnished. We had a big open fire in the front room and I remember the teacher asking the children to bring a piece of coal with them the next day, and they all did. Coal could be pretty hard to get your hands on at the time and bringing the coal saved my mum from chopping up any more of our furniture.

Games

We played Tip Tap Toe, which was a piece of wood about six inches long with a pointy end that you would balance on the kerb and hit with another piece of wood, then you would mark the spot where it had landed and the person who's piece had gone the furthest was the winner. We played Ludo and skips and there was always a tarzy somewhere to swing on. Hopscotch and marbles were two of my favourites along with conkers.

The bombs

The nearest bomb to us that dropped was on Bellview Road. All the houses in our road had their windows blown in except ours and my granddad's. Before he had gone to War my dad had been a joiner and had put shutters up at all our windows so our houses didn't take such a battering. The next day the whole street went to see the huge crater and the two houses flattened by the bombs.

I remember standing at the bottom of the garden and watching the bombs coming down and seeing the barrage balloons and the search lights, shrapnel landed in the garden a couple of times but I wasn't really frightened. It was made a game of when we went to the shelter, there were bunk beds and my mum kept a tin of sweets for us in there, it almost felt like a treat to go to the shelter.

Rations

My mum would send me to Hintons over at Grove Hill to collect the rations. I had to take the ration book with me and when I had gotten the groceries the book would be stamped with a big black H. I remember going back one day and the girl behind the counter saying that she thought my ration book looked suspicious. Well, unbeknownst to me, my mam had been using a match stick dipped in a mixture of water and bleach, and sitting on a night, she would very patiently rub out the big black H. You really did have to live of your wits during the War!

The coat

I remember having a coat made out of a blanket that had been dyed blue, and oh how it itched me. I hated that coat.

The day my dad came home

I remember clearly the day my dad came home from the War. He had been stationed in Iceland and I hadn't seen him for over three years. He would write letters and postcards home regularly and I always got a birthday card. The War had finished before he managed to come home and I remember him walking down our street with a great big sack of boiled sweets and all the kids in the

neighbourhood thought it was marvellous, but I wasn't allowed to eat any if the sweets because I had a bad toothache.

The Germans

Right over the road from where I lived on Bishopton Road stood a big private house, in its own grounds surrounded by orchards. The people who lived there were called the Haas family and they were German Jews. The lady of the house, I remember, always wore high collar blouses with a sting of pearls. She had a club foot and had to wear one shoe with a platform. They were very sober people.

I used to sell saving stamps, and on a Saturday I would go with a friend and sell Mrs Haas some stamps. We were asked in to the house, we would go through a beautiful hallway with a grand staircase and suits of armour and taken in to the parlour where we would sit on the couch in front of the French doors. We were always given a toffee, they were really very nice. When we came out we would giggle and laugh together saying "ee, they were the German!" We would plan all the things we would do if they attacked us. One day they were just gone and I never did find out what happened to them.