

And the lads came marching home

In the past few weeks, men have been returning home from the front to pick up their lives as husbands, fathers, workers and drinking pals. Some have been away since the start of the war six years ago and have been keeping up with family life through intermittent letters and reports from home. Some children are meeting their dads for the very first time and all will have grown and changed in the time their dads have been away. Sparks might fly when the women of the house are expected to pick up their pre-war lives. Many have been working, in munitions factories and potbanks, and have been enjoying their time as “all girls together”. Children’s lives will never be the same.

Our reporter has been talking to some of the people involved, asking “what was it like being a child during the war?”

Dad’s home!

Up to 9 million children have spent part or all of the war years separated from their fathers. Many, like Janet (not her real name) were very small when they said goodbye at the station.

“I remember being on the station and being frightened of the steam train, and somebody hugged me with a scratchy coat”. That person was Janet’s dad and she didn’t see him again until she was 8. Janet has been used to being with her mum, nan and aunties and it will be funny having a man around again. Janet’s dad was in Burma so didn’t get many letters from home and already people are seeing differences in him – he won’t set foot in a Church any more, and he doesn’t seem to want to talk about his experiences.

Elsie (not her real name) was 9 when her dad went to war and 15 when he came home. She told me that he was disappointed with her choice to work on a potbank. “What are you letting her do that for?” he said. Elsie’s dad has also taken over the family radio and this causes arguments because Elsie can’t listen to her beloved Frank Sinatra on the American Forces network any more.

Both Janet and Elsie told me that they had been well fed and looked after during the war years, Elsie remembers always having a cake for her birthday, as well as plums and apples from a smallholding kept by a friend of her grandmothers. Janet is glad they don’t have to use the air raid shelter any more because her grandma is frightened of the frogs that make their way in there sometimes!

It’s going to take a bit of time to settle back into family life.

“Well lass, it’s over” Charles said, holding her hand in his. “But wot sacrifices we’ve al ‘ad ter make and still will ah suppose fer years to come (Leigh)

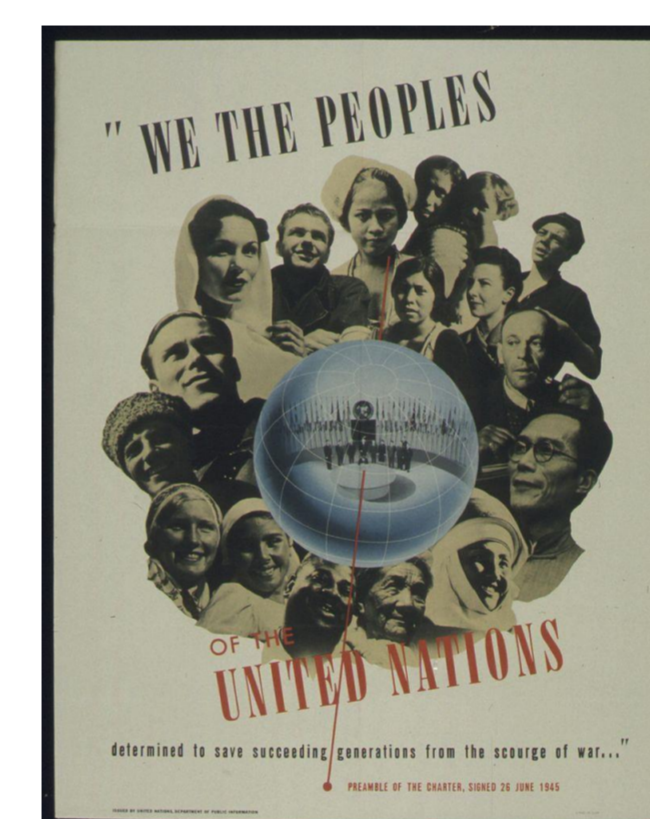
Weather forecast

The weather will be largely dry and mild but some light rain is forecast in the first week of the month. Don’t forget to wrap up warm against Jack Frost



Headlines...

United Nations formed..
 The United Nations charter was officially ratified on 24th October



Stan becomes a dad for the second time...
 Stanley Matthews son – Stanley Jr was born on November 20th. Congratulations Stan and Betty

Editor’s comments

It has been a long six years and I am sure that everyone is glad that the fighting is over and life is starting to return to normal. The children interviewed seem to have been well looked after by their mums and grandmas in dad’s absence but it must be hard when you can’t even remember what your dad looks like.

The Editor hope that future researchers will look back on the experiences of children like Janet and Elsie⁴. They will talk to them to find out about their lives over time and the phenomena that have shaped them. I’m sure that we will be able to develop tools that will help us to explore more deeply the meaning of these phenomena, and answer the question “What was it like to be a child in World War Two?”⁵.

What do the experts say?

Back in 1939, prominent psychologist John Bowlby¹ warned us that separation might have damaging effect on the lives of children of the wartime generation. He was referring predominantly to evacuation but lots of children have also been without their fathers at home.

Children, their parents and grandparents have all been living through this very tough time but everyone will have had their own priorities. The men have been keeping Hitler from our shores, grandmothers have been caring for children while their mums kept the wheels of industry turning., and the men left behind have been fighting fires and “digging for victory”².

Children born before 1945 are called the Silent Generation; we have taught them to be “seen and not heard”, but people are calling for their stories to be told and their experiences not forgotten.

We need to understand how being a child of war will affect their lives growing up³.

References and acknowledgments

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Pictures from www.nationalarchive.co.uk

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