

Memories of the five years, when the Second World War broke out.

Friday morning, May 10, 1940 at 4 o'clock, was when World War Two became a reality in our lives.

This morning my mind was very clear and I had rested well, but the next moment my mind was flooded with war memories. I could hardly keep up as the details came into my mind. Where do all these thoughts come from? It was 65 years ago when this happened and I had just celebrated my 15th birthday!

Some time ago, the children have asked me to write about these five years of the Second World War (1940- 1945) and now I will do this to the best of my recollection.

I had rested very well with six hours of refreshing sleep and I did not dream as far as I can remember. But the memories came, tumbling over each other, the kind you did not start. They just come and you cannot stop them! Then it is time to write them down! December 2004.

The five days of active war started with a tremendous noise from many planes and much shooting, which brought our whole family downstairs in minutes at 4 o'clock in the morning. These planes came from England which was only 17 miles away (as the crow flies). They came right over our farm by the dozens, about one dozen at the time. After much shooting for a little while, it became very quiet for a few minutes and soon there after the droning of the next planes were heard. This went on for about two hours. Since it was early in the morning, Dad and my two brothers did not milk the cows until all was quiet and that was two hours later than normal. The result was that only half of the milk was produced. This has happened often the last two years of the war during the summer time. The cows were very restless and they were not the only ones.

Our "shooting defense", (I don't know another word for it), was placed about two miles away from our farm and many other farms in a circle. This was done during the mobilization year of 1939, in case war broke out.

When my brother Kees came down stairs he said: "This is war, Germany has overtaken us."

These words I have never forgotten and it felt as if a bomb had fallen, taking away our freedom.

It was good that Kees had told us that there was a possibility of war, since the political problems could not be solved without it, as far as he could see. He had followed politics all his life and kept us daily informed these five years. We had to learn to follow up their orders but most of all that our freedom was gone (May 10, 1940 to May 5, 1945).

In our cow stable there was room for 40 cows in the winter where they stood in two rows. On the end of one row Dad had put two calves. Close to the calves, my brothers started digging to make an under ground hiding place for themselves, and for other people as well, who came to live with us. We were very fortunate that we lived close to the coast and could hear the news from England every evening. And it was a blessing in itself, that my brother spoke English and could go down to our hiding place to hear the news when all the doors and windows were locked!

Of course none of our younger brothers and sister knew anything about what was going on. There were many things that we who were older never knew either. Only Dad was carrying these burdens for the safety of his family. We never knew that Dad had many stunguns hidden in our haystacks and that he helped and protected people in the under ground forces.

A German soldier, who was 46 years old had deserted the army, and was brought by our Pastor on a winter evening to our farm. He was working on our farm and living with us more than two years and hiding until the war was over. And so was the head of police from one of our large cities. He was in jail for hiding Jews and other people who were in danger. He was freed by the under ground forces (which my husband was part of) wearing uniforms from German soldiers. He too was brought to our home and lived in our upper room with my brother who was studying civil engineering and continued to do so as much as possible. Since several people were hiding on our farm, they peeled many pails of potatoes and prepared many pails of beans and other vegetables for the 23 of us during these last two years. They were all very thankful people and so was I for all their help. Two meals always were vegetables and one meal was bread with home made cheese the last two years. Once a week we had some hamburger, which was a feast! Every one who stayed with us was always very pleasant when we brought their meals, in spite of their stress of being away from their own homes for so long!

We all felt sorry for them and when all our little ones were upstairs in bed, we called our people in hiding, into the living room until ten o'clock, to enjoy being together with the rest of our family. It was most of the time some encouragement

for all of us as we listened to the news from England, but sometimes there was no progress in sight or that we would be free soon. We had taken care of an English pilot for six weeks as well, who was shot down not far from our farm during 1944. To me it felt like the biggest risk of all we had done. Neighbors not far from us, were hiding this pilot for more than a year until someone discovered it and start talking about this. He was six weeks with us before he could go home. This pilot was introduced to our five younger brothers and sister as deaf and dumb. He was having his meals with us, and my brother, Kees was the spokes man and played his game very well by asking him questions during our meal. The pilot answered by nodding or shaking his head. We used this white lie to tell the smaller children that this man was like Mina Moerman, who was deaf and dumb because they knew her. She was a sister of my boy friend John. All went well and six weeks later the pilot was transported to Belgium and from there he arrived safely in the USA. A few years after the war was over, this pilot visited Mom and Dad (and others, no doubt) to thank them for saving his life!

My Dad was a hero, I have no other word or name for him. He risked his life and could have been “shot on the spot” many times, if anything was discovered. This had happened often in the last two years and we all knew this, but we were not aware that Dad’s life was practically always in danger as well.

I did know that my boy friend, John was often in danger these last two years and I found it very difficult at times, even though we never talked about anything that was related to the war.

I heard about all that my Dad had done when we had already immigrated to Canada. And I am very thankful that I did not know this before because, what I knew was some times more then I could handle.

I believe that people began writing about the war years even though I have never read anything of that myself. I have heard much from my Mom who came to visit us three times in Canada.

My Dad went to his heavenly Home in 1964 and Mom visited on his request, all the children soon after he passed away. She first went to all the children in Holland and there after it was Cathy and my turn in Canada. It was a wonderful time, to hear about Dad’s last months of his life. This was my first experience in losing one I loved dearly while I was living in Canada.

Of course my husband and I were well aware that we could not go home when loved ones passed away. That was the topic we discussed often when we were in the process of immigrating. And of course that was heavy on our parents as well. To go home by plane was not in reach at that time for us. When my husband lost his Mom in 1955 while he was in Seminary in Holland, Mich. we talked it over at length. We came to the conclusion that we should not borrow money to go home. I have always agreed with John on these things with my whole heart when he said "Mom, we have to set a pattern. We have large families and we will lose loved ones like every one else."

I am glad we did. This has never been a painful spot in our lives because we knew that God had directed us to Canada. I have talked about my Dad with my older brothers as well and they too told me several things about Dad. He was a hero and had received a medal from the Queen which he never saw because he had gone to be with the Lord already! Mom was very pleased that some people had recognized what Dad had done. Even though it was several years after the war was over.

Once I saw my Dad kneel by his bed during the day time in those years and it gave me a feeling of security. I realized more and more that the secret for his courage came from his relationship with God!

I was a young teenager when the war started on May 10, 1940 but certain things have stayed with me for life. We don't have to forget the past. There can be value in remembering how God rescued us in difficult situations. We only have to forget the times when people have wronged us because that is one of the devils favorite tricks that can harm our relationship with Jesus and with our loved ones. This has to be rebuked in the Name of Jesus!

I knew all along what Dad's secret was but many things became so much clearer now I am older. I know that God has protected us in very special ways during those five years. It seems to me that God even protected us from being overwhelmed with all the danger we were in and helped us cope with the fact that we could not buy the things any more that we were used to and which were needed.

The most amazing thing in our family was that we were all alive and well. None of my four brothers were drafted into the army because they worked on our farm. Planes from England came over by the dozens, loaded with bombs for two years. As soon as it was dark we heard the droning sounds for two hours! There was much shooting most of the time and only once a plane was shot down and dropped his load of bombs one kilometer from our house. It left 13 huge craters (holes) in the fields

of five of our neighbors, killing a couple of cows. The noise alone was very scary but the uncertainty where the bombs would be falling was the worst of all.

Every thing was on coupons and the stores were half empty. But we always had plenty of food growing on the farm. We had wheat for our bread, milk and eggs and big gardens full of potatoes and different kinds of vegetables plus a large orchard with apples, pears and plums! There was a great abundance for our family of 12 and also for a family of 7 who lived with us for two years and for 3 men who were in hiding until after the war. (May 5, 1945)

Plus there was a few people who came twice a week for a meal. When the war was over and we were with our own family again, it was almost strange to have only 12 people around our table, as we did in 1943. My two sisters were married and our friends in hiding went to their homes! Many people came still to our farm for food after the war. First we sold one liter of milk to families with small children and later we let each person drink one cup of milk until we had only our quota left which we had to deliver. We did not sell milk any more because we discovered that some people had six bottles already and asked for more and we wanted to help as many families as possible. It took several years after the war was over, before every thing was available in the stores again.

When we left Holland in 1948, there was no furniture in the stores yet either. Our parents traded food for the six chairs we still have! And our bed with all that belongs to it was bought or traded with food as well. It took five years before every thing was normal again.

My personal observation is that these last two years were very emotional. When young German soldiers are living on your farm and come in your home by invitation on weekend evenings, singing hymns with us in their own language around the organ and you see the tears on their faces, my tears were close as well. And I was not the only one in our family.

We heard stories (via my brother) of their wives and their babies they had not seen, who were born after they left for the army. Whether they were German soldiers or soldiers from England during the end of the war, it makes no difference. They all suffer the same pain of being sent and are longing to go home.

War is very cruel in more then one way. Even though we only began to learn to speak a part of their language, my Mom has spoken with her acts of love.

We did not even realize that we talked with so called “enemies.” If these few young soldiers were our enemies, Mom especially showed her love to all who came. She invited every soldier who lived on our farm for a shorter or longer time, into our home for weekend evenings. “They are all sent and we can help them by inviting them in our home,” Mom would say. As you have noticed, I am humbly proud of my parents and I thank God for our home and all we have seen and learned from them!