

Second episode,

We heard the lorry coming and suddenly everybody was silent. We stood side by side and waited for it to lumber to a stop by the side of the road. A gruff voice said; *be quick about it* and Dad and Frank put our goods on the back of the lorry then climbed on themselves after helping me and the baby on. There were several other men and women seated at the back but nobody spoke as they sat rugged up against the cold. We started off and Mum stood with my little daughter in her arms and waved until we were out of sight.

What my feelings were, as I rode on the back of the lorry in the Winter of 1937, can never be expressed.

I tried hard to be brave, tried to convince myself that this was all that I wanted from life. Work. The right to work.

As the lorry rumbled on, the realization that we were no longer on the dole began to sink in. We were going to be human beings again. Members of the working class. Able to provide for our two children.

My husband sat hunched with his head between his knees. Dad put his arm around me and squeezed my shoulder. Not saying anything but showing that he was still taking care of his little girl.

I sat on the back of that uncomfortable lorry, cold and aching in every joint, not being able to move into a more comfortable position ,with a sleeping baby in my arms but happy for the two men sitting alongside me.

I wanted to tell them that it was over and that we now had work and the black years were behind us. All that lay ahead was the bright future.

Little did I know how wrong I was.

We arrived at our destination, tired and hungry, having eaten so early in the morning. Mum had packed some sandwiches for us but as the other passengers in the lorry did not appear to have any food we didn't like eating in front of them. There was not enough to share.

We had to stand and wait until our accommodation was allocated, with our goods on the ground beside us. I had been able to feed Barry on the back of the lorry but he was crying as he had a wet bottom. I had been unable to change him.

While we waited for the Camp Boss to arrive I had time to take stock of my new home.

The ground around the tents had been leveled and was a large area of clay with no grass. The tents were pitched close together.

We were told to stay there as the Camp Boss was having his afternoon tea.

Fifteen people stood in the bitter cold, tired and hungry after the long rough trip, with crying children for over an hour until the Camp Boss arrived.

Names were called and tents were allocated and given a number. The men were told to report for work at 7am the next day.

There were lots of small children in the camp and all had coughs, sores and runny noses.

Our tent was not what we had expected. No board floors, just bare earth. No hot water, no taps, no stoves and no beds. Dad found a few corn bags and used his axe to cut some saplings we soon had a couple of beds. He found a box and made a cot for Barry.

Dad's tent was next to ours and he was soon comfortable with a bed and a box to put his shaving gear on. He would eat with us. He was an old drover and knew how to make do.

That first night we sat on corn bags on the floor to eat our meal. We had bread and cold mutton that we had brought from home. We had a light from Dad's hurricane lamp. Later Dad would make me a table and a cupboard using boxes and saplings but on that first night we sat on the ground in semi darkness each with our own thoughts.

It was very cold that night and Barry cried a lot as he was unsettled. We did not get much sleep. In the morning I got the men off to work, fed and bathed the baby, washed his clothes and set about tidying the tent.

By eight o'clock I had nothing to do so I went for a walk around the campsite. The men had a half hour lunch-break so I had to be back to get their lunch.

I had a look at the communal lavatories and what a disgrace they were.

A rough frame, covered with hessian, full of holes. Inside a box-like contraption with a hole in the middle was built over a deep hole in the ground. There was a dreadful smell coming from this hole and even though it was winter there were flies everywhere. On a bent nail nearby were squares of newspaper.

Children would do their business on the floor while their mother perched on the box.

The men's lavatory was nearby and was in the same condition.

At the edge of the tent area there were piles of rotting garbage.

:-----:

To be continued. Hope that you like my story. I gets' better. And worse.

John Imrie 31/3/2020