

NEVER FORGET

By Gail Jan...

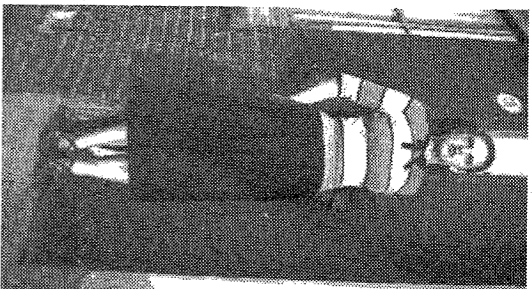
This is a story about Margaret, a little eleven-year-old girl from Holland, whose life, on the morning of May 10th, 1940 changed inexorably forever, when she awoke to the site of planes filling the morning sky, marked with black swastikas. Planes that belonged to the Germans.

Listening to the radio alongside her parents and seven brothers and sisters, Margaret soon learned of the devastating news. Her city of Rotterdam, Holland had been bombed. War had begun. After five days of bombing the Dutch Army surrendered. The fighting in Holland was over, to be replaced by five long years of brutal occupation.

With television not yet invented, and all radios soon to be commandeered by the Germans, little was known of what was happening outside of their neighbourhood, and the outbreak of Tuberculosis (TB) ravaging the country was upon them before they even knew they were at risk.

In 1943, two of Margaret's sisters came down with the dreaded disease, and were sent to a long-term care facility known as a Sanatorium. A year later in 1944 Margaret also got TB, but the nearby hospitals were full and the journey by train to the Sanatorium was too dangerous. Fighter-bombers had targeted trains to prevent the German Army from moving men and equipment around the country. Without the train to make the journey she would have to wait until the war was over to receive the life-saving treatments.

Despite a lack of medication available for her TB, a lack of food and air raid sirens a thing of the norm, the hardest day for young Margaret was the day when her brothers were gathered up and taken by armed German soldiers to be taken to work camps.



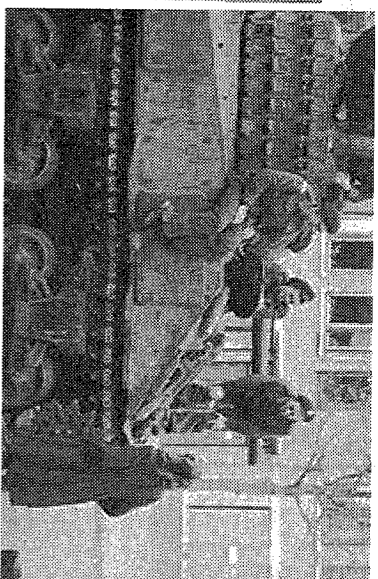
Margaret Van Gent,
August of 1951

All of the men had to go, or they and their families would be shot. It broke her mother's heart as she watched her sons walk out the door, not knowing if she would ever see them again.

The winter of 1944 was one of the coldest ever. There was almost no food, no way to heat the homes, and still no medication for Margaret's TB. How they survived the harsh winter is a miracle, when over 30,000 others died that winter of hunger.

Each morning as a way to provide for his family, her father dug through the garbage's of those with more money, searching for remnants and peelings of items bought on the black market. Potato and carrot peelings brought home as other's cast offs, were turned by her mother into nutritious life-saving soups which became the staple of their meagre food supply.

Then came the news, the Allies and the Germans had made a deal that the Germans would allow Allied bombers to drop food to the starving country in a live-saving operation known as Operation Manna. Led by



October 29th, 1944 - A Dutch girl offers some coffee to tank crew of South Alberta regiment.

the Lancaster Bomber, Bad Penny Operation Manna began in earnest when the Canadian crewed Bad Penny took off in bad weather, without a ceasefire agreement from the Nazis in place, in order to feed the starving people of Holland.

Despite her weakness, Margaret ran out to wave to the planes as they came over and devoured the sweet white bread that fell from the sky as if it were cake. It was then that she knew it would soon be over.

The Allies at Normandy had invaded mainland Europe. There was fierce fighting as they advanced into Holland, led by the Canadian Army. When the Canadian soldiers finally arrived in Rotterdam, Margaret and her family knew their nightmare was finally over. People were filling the streets, cheering, laughing, crying, and singing. Soldiers handed out candy to the children, and food to the grownups. For Margaret, the Canadians arrived in the nick of time.

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Had it taken longer, she would not have made the long awaited journey to a Sanatorium, where doctors believing it too late, did not believe she would survive.

But she did. Although it took nearly ten long years before she recovered, most of which were spent in the Sanatorium, Margaret eventually grew up, got married, had children of her own, and moved to Canada, the home of the soldiers who saved her.

She never forgot the sacri-

ifice of so many, and she remembers them every year at Remembrance Day. It did not matter if the temperature was minus 2, or minus 20, she took her two sons to the cenotaph every year. She knew that if it were not for the Canadians arriving in the nick of time, she would not be alive today. In turn had Margaret Van Gent, that little girl, not survived her terrible ordeal, my own daughter and son, her grandchildren, would not be here today.

While controversy rages over whether or not Canadian

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soldiers should be in Afghanistan at all, fighting what many believe to be a war that is not ours, and while the loss of life to those brave young ranks have been high, let us not forget the people they are saving. By their presence and by their actions, they are saving lives that will carry on to create descendants of their own. This is the legacy that Canadian soldiers both past and present leave behind. Let us never forget. I know my children never will.