

“Come Home”

By Annabel McDonald - Bayside Christian College

22nd June, 1940

“DING, DING!” the school bell rang. As all of the children rushed out of the classrooms, I was trying to look for my older brother, Edward, who walked me home everyday because Mother and Father said that I’m not old enough to walk by myself yet. As Edward and I strolled along the rough, stony path he stopped to talk to a girl, she was very pretty. ‘What if Edward had a secret girlfriend and he didn’t tell me or, especially, Mother and Father?’ I thought to myself. When he had finished talking to that girl, he grabbed my arm and we kept walking along the path, silently. He didn’t say anything the whole way home until we heard a faint yelling of a familiar voice, calling our names. “Edward! Ruth!” it called. A dark shadowy figure emerged from our street. It was Mother! “Oh my goodness!” I sighed. “Mother, you scared us out of our skin!”

“I don’t want to hear it, young lady!” she snapped. “I want to hear what Edward has to say about this.”

Edward slowly stepped forward, his head hung low. “I will take full responsibility for arriving home late, Mother.” he started. “I stopped to talk to my girlf-, I mean my friend for a while. I’m terribly sorry.”

“As you should be!” Mother said angrily. “Now, let’s all go home, shall we? You both have some chores to be done.” she ordered.

Back at home, Mother took us all into the living room, with her cup of coffee of course.

“Ruth,” she started. “How was your day at school?” I looked up at her in surprise, and answered. “It was good, I learnt about the war, and that they are planning to have another war soon. I found it very interesting!”

“That’s good, Ruth. Edward? How about you.” Mother said, turning her head to face Edward.

“It was ok I guess.” said Edward.

“Well, what did you learn?” Mother tried to open him up.

“Umm... I learnt more about geography, I’m really into that. But our teacher, Miss Brown, makes the learning quite unenjoyable.” he moaned.

“Oh, that’s not good dear.” she replied. Edward rolled his eyes.

“Now, go and do your chores please.” she suddenly boomed. Edward and I didn’t move.

“Chop chop! What is going on with you two today.” At that moment, Edward and I made our way to the kitchen.

That night, I was in my bedroom reading my book when Father slowly walked into my room. "Hello Father." I greeted him with a smile. He didn't say anything, instead he smiled and kept walking until he got to my bed. He sat down on the edge of the bed next to me and opened his mouth to say something. "Ruth, this may alarm you a little bit," he started. "Okay?" I said slowly. "I have signed myself up to go and fight for our country..."

I stared blankly at him, and then I woke up from my daydream. "You mean you're going to fight in the war?!" I whispered nervously.

"Yes I am," he said.

"Why did you sign up, Father? You'll have to leave us, and you might never come back." I said.

"Ruth, I signed up because I want to protect my country and fight for what is right." he spoke bravely. I wonder if he is nervous. 'Why would you sign yourself up for certain death?' I thought to myself. The war didn't seem so interesting anymore.

The next morning I was awoken by the sunlight shining through my curtains. I threw off the covers and tiredly walked into the kitchen, thinking about the news that was revealed to me last night. I feel like I grew up overnight and I had trouble sleeping, too. I had so many questions whizzing through my head, and all I knew was that life would never be the same. When I reached the kitchen I saw Father making toast. He wasn't his usual cheerful self. I wondered if Edward knew that Father had bravely signed himself up to go to war. As we all sat down at the table, we linked hands and said grace. Mother and Father loved to give thanks to the Lord, but Edward and I on the other hand don't mind whether we do it or not. We all ate our breakfast in silence and once we had finished, we all went off to do our own thing. The house had never had such a depressing vibe in the air. I went to my bedroom and shut the door behind me. I sat on my bed, legs crossed, and thought long and hard. With Father going to war, I felt unsteady. I didn't know whether to be happy for him or to feel sad. I don't see why there would be any reason to be happy for him.

A little while later, I was feeling hungry. I went into the kitchen to see if there was a snack. On the way I saw Father sitting on the couch reading the newspaper. I made a detour through the living room so that I could talk to Father. I sat down on the couch next to him and said "Hello Father, how are you feeling today?" There was no reply. "Father, are you alright?" I tried once more. He lowered the newspaper from his face and said "I am just feeling very nervous about leaving you, your brother and your mother. I don't even know why I signed up in the first place" he sighed.

“You signed up because you have a big heart, Father” I said with a smile. I burst into tears and so did Father. We sat together and hugged for the longest time. I suddenly realised that I hadn’t even got my snack yet. I pulled away from Father’s grip and said “I am going to get a snack, Father. Would you like anything?”

“Oh, a cup of tea would be lovely. Thank you, Ruth” he replied. I walked into the kitchen with a happy feeling in my stomach.

Later in the afternoon, Edward and I were playing outside in the street with our friends. I was playing jump rope with my best friend Valerie and Edward was playing marbles with his friend Ron. We heard Mother yell something to us from inside the house so we said goodbye to our friends and ran to see what she wanted.

“Ah, Mr Campbell these are my children, Edward and Ruth.” she said proudly. “Say hello to Mr Campbell please, children.”

“Hello, Mr Campbell.” Edward and I chimed. Mr Campbell was a tall man wearing a suit and a hat. I felt like this was the appropriate time to curtsy. I nudged Edward in the ribs for him to bow.

“Oh, please. There is no need to curtsy or bow.” Mr Campbell said kindly. I shot upright and stood still. I could feel my cheeks turning bright pink with embarrassment. ‘I guess this wasn’t the appropriate time to curtsy.’ I thought to myself.

“Run along children. Mr Campbell, your father and I are going to have a little chat.” she said shooing us away. I hurried to my bedroom and walked in circles mumbling things to myself. ‘Why was Mr Campbell here?’ ‘What were they talking about?’ ‘Should I be worrying?’ I had so many questions but I didn’t know who to tell them to. I went into Edward’s room thinking that he would be the best person to share my thoughts with.

After sharing my thoughts with Edward, I felt that the weight that was holding me down had been lifted off my shoulders. I went into our small living room hoping not to see Mr Campbell and my wish was granted. Mr Campbell was gone, and so was Father. I turned to face the kitchen and I saw Mother sitting at the table with a cup of coffee, reading the newspaper. She raised her head and looked at me with a smile. “Can I help you, my dear?”

“Umm, yes. Where is Father?” I asked calmly, but on the inside I was bubbling with fear.

“Oh, he went with Mr Campbell to have an introduction to army camp.” she said.

“Army camp? What’s army camp?” I asked, confused.

“Army camp is where all the soldiers from Victoria are sent to train for 4 months so that they are ready to fight in the war.”

“4 months?! That’s a long time. Will we get to see him again after army camp?”

Mother was not acting as calm now. “Unfortunately not. Straight after army camp, he will be sent to New Guinea and we don’t know how long he will be gone for after that.” I could see tears welling in her eyes. “But, you will get to spend time with him for the next week before he leaves.” I didn’t say anything and I wanted to stay strong, but it all had to come out. I burst into tears and ran into Mother’s arms. I needed a warm, comforting hug.

“I am going to work now everyone!” Mother called early the next morning.

“You’re going to work?” I asked tiredly.

“Yes, I am. I’m going to the big clothing factory in the centre of town to make army shirts for the soldiers going to war. You won’t see much of me this week because I will be working long hours every day.” she said on her way out of the door.

“Have a good day everybody.”

“Bye!” Edward, Father and I sang. ‘How could my life be changing so much in such little time?’ I thought. ‘Why do things have to be like this?’ I feel like there are many secrets being kept within my family. At least we will get to spend time with Father this week, even if Mother will be gone. I want to always be able to look on the bright side of things, but with Father going away I don’t know how I’m going to.

This week went by fast and many things happened. Mother ran out the door early each morning and came home late from the clothing factory each night. Edward and I got to spend quality time with Father, which was nice because he has been at work 6 hours a day for the past 11 weeks, and I had become more familiar with saying grace and thought that it might come in handy when Father is away. When Mother came home from the clothing factory on Sunday night I realised that Father would be leaving for army camp tomorrow morning. My heart skipped a beat whenever I thought about it. While Mother prepared dinner for us I sat on my bed breathing heavily, in and out. It felt like it had been forever when Mother finally called “Dinner is ready!” We ate our dinner with great depression. I looked across to Edward, but he didn’t look at me. My stomach churned and twisted and I didn’t feel like eating my meal of chicken and vegetables. I started to sob and then I just couldn’t keep it in. The hot, wet tears rolled down my cheeks as Edward, Mother and Father rose from their seats and came to wrap me in a big hug. “This is what I will miss. Family cuddles.” I said with a sad smile.

The next morning came, although none of us wanted it to, and it was time to say our goodbyes. A sad feeling washed over me when the time finally came. I told Father that I would write to him as often as I could and made him promise to return to us - he held me

tight and didn't utter a word... we both knew that was a promise he could not make. My last words to him were "Please Father... Come home."