

Me and the big war...

When I was about five in 1940 I suddenly realised there was a big war on the other side of the world, the old part of the world. I must have picked this up because Australian soldiers were saying goodbye and leaving the street to go overseas. This did not worry me a bit. It was too far away and besides I was enjoying life in Collingwood and was soon to go to the Cromwell Street State School.

A year or so later it certainly did worry me... There was talk all up and down my street, Campbell Street, about the enemy beginning to threaten Australia. I ran into my grandmother's kitchen. 'Grandma,' I shouted, 'there is a big war on and we could all be blown up or hurt.'

'Don't you worry about it. We'll win.'

'How do you know?' I asked.

'Because we are in the right,' she said firmly.

So I didn't. I must have been in what was called the 'Bubs' then and all I thought about was playing, trying to get the grownups to read to me, and going to the Austral Theatre in Johnston Street to see the serials at the children's matinee.

Within a year it was all a bit different. The enemy was coming through the islands to our north and Darwin was bombed. I didn't know it at the time but midget submarines had entered Sydney Harbour and damaged our ships.

Everybody seemed frightened. People who had never been inside a church were filling the pews every Sunday. And then the war began to affect us kids.

The headmaster at Cromwell Street at assembly told us we had to practise air raid drills. These were not hard. If we were in the school ground as soon as the warning siren went we had to lie flat on the ground with our hands on the back of our heads to make us keep our heads down.

Messing around on the ground was no hardship; we did a lot of that, playing cherry bobs and alleys (some people called it marbles).

But worse was to come. There was a big announcement. We Collingwood kids, all the inner suburban school children, were to be evacuated. We were to be taken into the mountains where we would have great fun in the snow. Our mothers and fathers were to stay behind working for the war effort. Our grandparents and other older people were to be in charge. My grandmother would have to look after a group of children.

Some of my school friends were so excited to be going to the snow. We had our haversacks all packed ready to go; it was to be a big adventure.

Then came the let down. Our soldiers had stopped the enemy. They were not going to reach Australia and the Americans were coming to help us just like in the movies.

Some children were sorry to miss out on seeing the snow. Not me though. I liked running the streets of my Collingwood.

This is my story, my history. Think about your history because at some stage we all have history. Perhaps it should be called herstory too. And I bet you don't know about playing cherrybobs.