Doing one’s bit

Inspired by “The Spitfire Club” play by Alfie James

**MISS EVERS:**

‘Right, we’re all here. Er, well, at least most of us are. Yes, young man, just because you’re standing at the back, it doesn’t mean that I can’t see you. It’s important that you pay attention now, my dear. There’s no point in dwelling on sad times. As my significant other, Winston would say, it’s best to keep moving and not overthink things. So, say goodbye as quickly as you can.

I am Miss Evers, the Billeting Officer. I was one of many ladies whom were given the task of overseeing the evacuation process. I am a strict woman. I don’t mind admitting that. One needs to have a degree of professionalism, don’t you agree? I sport a pair of spectacles at the end of my nose and a clipboard which helps me to keep organised. One can’t lose anyone, can?

Now, that’s it, my dears. Dry those tears and try to be brave. Remember, it’s the British way. We have a long journey ahead of us. Young man, those sandwiches are for later, not now. Put them away otherwise you won’t have anything to eat on the train. Listen for your names and make sure that you remember your suitcases, gas masks and labels.

They called the evacuation process ‘Operation Pied Piper.’ One suitcase or a large pillowcase filled with a small set of belongings was all that each child could take. The children wore a name tag around their necks which also had the name of their school written on it. Their parents dropped them off at stations such as Ilford. They were then taken by train to safer towns and villages in the countryside such as Suffolk. Many of the children in Redbridge were taken to Ipswich. The Beale school in Ilford even moved their whole school into a temporary building in the country. Others were placed in temporary homes. It was a huge task, but as my significant other, Winston would say; needs must.

Like many Billeting Officers, I was a member of the Women’s Institute. Fellowship, truth, tolerance, and justice. Those were the ideals which the Women’s Institute are based upon. I was proud to be a member and to do one’s bit for King and Country. It was my duty after all. We must all play our part in keeping the home fires burning brightly and to keep hope life, don’t you think? My significant other Winston would often say, we may all be tiny fishes in a big pond, but together we make a giant ocean. He was a sweet man. He enlisted straight away and it’s wonderful to receive his letters when I do.

It isn’t easy being a Billeting Officer. The poor little Bens are often frightened and confused. It is a very unsettling time, you see. It is important for us to make them feel safe and looked after. Arranging for people to take them in can be a rather difficult at times, you see. Some of the people aren’t used to taking Londoners in and one sometimes needs to use a degree of diplomacy. We must all do our bit. After all, there is a War on. But it is worth it in the end. People are just uneasy, and they need a little direction.

War is a dreadful affair. I do hope that it is over soon. Whenever I fond myself feeling a little anxious, I remember my papa and when he kissed me goodbye before he went off to fight in the last War. I close my eyes and picture the twinkle in his eye when he smiled and when he told me to be brave. He was my hero. He looked so smart in his uniform. I was too young to understand why my mother was so sad. I thought that he would be home in no time. I didn’t realise that it would be the last time that I would see him. *(Short pause, choking back the tears)* He was a good man. He was my pa.’ *(Pause)* It’s where I get my sense of duty from, so I’m told. We cannot bring back what is lost, but we can look to what is in front of us and to make the most of it. That’s what Winston says.

Now, come along. That’s the sound of the steam engines. Form an orderly line, my dears. Wave goodbye to your parents and say a cheerio until the next time you meet again. It’s alright, my sweet. Hold on to Miss Evers hand now. I’ll look after you. Onwards and upwards now!