



‘There was a Child’ is a short story used as stimulus for work across eight primary schools as part of the project, **‘Through the Eyes of Children’**

There Was A Child

There was a town.

A town very much like this town.

In that town, there were streets. There were buildings. There were supermarkets where people could buy food. There was a hospital. There were factories where people made things and office blocks where people went to work.

And there were neighbourhoods, very much like this neighbourhood. Or your neighbourhood. There were streets. Cars. Neighbours. Corner shops. Houses very much like your house.

And in one of those houses lived a family. A family quite like your family.

And a child. Very, very much like you.

That child liked to ride their bike up and down the street. They liked to jump on their trampoline in the back garden. They liked to play games on the family iPad. They liked to play with their toys and be daft with their friends.

And they liked to spend time with their family. The home and the family within it could be loud, messy, silly, annoying, sometimes argumentative but it was always safe and a place to come back to after a hard day.

There was a war.

At first, it was very far away. An important man came on the television and told everyone it would be over soon. That it was nothing to worry about. That we would win.

The child felt excited and curious at the idea of the war. The children at school played army, they made machine gun noises and pretended they were tanks and planes - blowing things up.

Everyone said it was okay. Nothing to worry about. I'll be over before it began. They had parades and sang songs about how good their country was.

Some of the local lads - young men, went away to join the war. Everyone cheered and waved them off with flags as they went. Most of the boys smiled bravely, some of them looked a little worried.

Months passed. The news said things were going well.

Some of the boys who went away didn't return.

And the child carried on playing. Carried on going to school. Life was mostly normal.

Except sometimes they practised hiding under their desks in school. Just in case, they were told.

Time went on.

The child started a new year at school. It felt different - the seats they sat in were bigger and their new teacher was very strict and had sent them to the head when they had been caught throwing a paper fighter plane during a maths lesson.

Now, sometimes, in the middle of the night, they had to get up and go into a shelter with their other neighbours when a loud siren sounded.

Sometimes, when they were lying in bed trying to get to sleep, they could hear their parents talking. Sometimes arguing about what they should do.

But they were still told it was okay. That the war was far away. That they would be safe. It would all be over soon. It's just that the adults that said that would now sometimes look worried or sad.

And more time passed.

And the war got closer.

There were less things in the shops. Less sweets and treats and favourite dinners.

Now, in the evenings, lying in bed, they could hear loud noises in the hills beyond the town. Shouts. Planes overhead. Military vehicles thundering down the high street. Flashes. Bangs. Cries.

And when noises got close, they would go to their parents.

“Mum.... Dad... we are safe, aren’t we?”

“We’ll be just fine,” they said. But the worry and sadness in their eyes never really went away.

Then one night, there was an urgent whisper from Dad.

“We have to go. We have to go now. It’s not safe...” The parents started bundling clothes and food and whatever they could take into bags.

The child ran to gather their toys.

“You can’t bring your toys. We have to leave now. Just choose one.”

“Can we come back for them?”

“Just one.”

The child held their favourite cuddly toy tightly. Rubbing it’s ear with their thumb, the way they always did.

The child’s mum went out into the garden and opened the rabbit’s cage, letting it run into the school field behind the house. “I’m sure Bun will be fine,” she said.

The child looked around their room. Their toys. Their clothes. Their comfy, cosy bed.

“Look, we have to go.”

And they said goodbye to their warm, safe, messy house.

They got into the car and left.

At first, the roads were familiar. The usual ones they travelled on all the time to go shopping or to trips to the zoo or days out at theme parks.

But they were crowded. Cars packed with people. Bags tied to roofs. Families sitting close together, all silent.

Sometimes they stopped. Sometimes they waited.

Sometimes soldiers stood in the road.

“Where are you going?”

“To stay with family.”

“Open the boot.”

They travelled on. The roads changed.

There were no more shops now. No more streetlights. Just long roads, fields, and lines of cars stretching as far as you could see.

Until, eventually, the car ran out of fuel and could go no further.

So they said goodbye to their car and they walked, carrying whatever they could.

They walked along roads. They walked across fields. They walked with hundreds of other people.

The child got tired.

“Can we stop?”

“Just a little further.”

Sometimes they counted their steps. One, two, three, four. Sometimes they tried to not step on the cracks. Just like you might on your way to school.

Sometimes they held a parent’s hand so tightly their fingers hurt, just to make sure they didn’t get lost.

They walked past people sitting on the ground, and people carrying bags that looked too heavy.

Sometimes kind people stood by the roadside and handed out water. Or bread. Or blankets.

But sometimes there was nothing and the child’s tummy burned with hunger.

At night, it got cold.

They slept outside. Or in crowded buildings. Or sometimes they didn’t sleep at all.

The child would lie awake, listening. Different accents. Different voices. Different ages, mums, dads, grandparents – all on their way – away from home.

Even more time passed.

The child stopped asking when they would go home.

They kept walking.

They crossed fields and rivers.

They waited in long lines. Moving slowly forward. Always forward, away from home.

They walked on.

And after more walking, more waiting, more lines of people, they reached a place where the road stopped.

In front of them, there were fences.

There were barriers.

There were people. So many people.

All waiting.

This was the border.

On the other side, they were told, if they could get across, it would be safe.

But first, they had to wait.

They stood in line.

Holding hands.

Holding their bags.

Holding their one small piece of home.

And they waited.

They hoped.

So, this isn't where the story ends.

It's where your part in the story begins.

What do you think should happen?

What does this child need right now?

What would you offer this child and this family?