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**Catherine Marsh** has attended W.I.N. for several years and has many interesting stories to tell of her childhood in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and also in Canada, once she immigrated. Her story (abridged) is about the bombing of her working class neighbourhood in Belfast in World War II.

(L-R)-Seamus, Sean, Maureen, Catherine, Patricia, and baby Gerard in pram, 1939, in Belfast. Maureen and Catherine –England, 1990s.

**Catherine’s story:** I was the eldest of six children and our father was away working when our Belfast neighbourhood was bombed by the Nazis in 1939. I was ten years old. Many houses were completely destroyed and some people were killed. We were evacuated to a Boys’ School where we were told not to drink the water in case it had been poisoned. We were all covered in sooty dust and the children slept that night on top of tables and chairs while the grown-ups talked and worried. Towards morning soldiers’ trucks arrived with food, water and clothing. I squeezed my feet into a lovely pair of black leather shoes, much better than being barefoot. We were then settled into another school in the small seaside village of Hollywood where mostly elite professionals lived. Many inhabitants volunteered to temporarily house the homeless. Mrs. Cruikshank offered to take two little girls. Her young daughter, Barbara, was about my age and she chose my sister, Maureen, and me. We kissed our mother good-bye.

Mrs. Cruikshank was a very sweet and caring woman. She bathed us, brushed our hair, and removed broken glass from my feet. At dinner that night I answered questions while Maureen just cried for our mother and refused to eat. I, on the other hand, stuffed myself. I assured Mrs. Cruickshank that Maureen would be fine the next day. Before we left the dinner table I let Mrs. Cruickshank know that we were Catholics and had to go to mass on Sunday. Mrs. Cruickshank assured me she would indeed take us to mass. Emboldened by my success I then mentioned that Maureen and I could not eat meat on Fridays. Mrs. Cruikshank very kindly agreed to that demand too. (Many decades later, as an adult, I wished I had made the effort to find Mrs. Cruikshank and thank her for her kindness at such a scary time for our family. Unfortunately I never managed to do so.)

**Afterword:** These two stories touched my heart. They show the compassion and generosity of spirit that “ordinary people” can demonstrate during frightening events in war time. Gail’s mother realized that the young escaped German prisoner of war was just a child—a starving, cold, and scared-to-death child. Catherine feels now that she was too bold when Mrs. Cruikshank was showing so much kindness. But Catherine was only ten years old and beneath her precocity was a worried child who felt responsible for her sad younger sister, this in a strange home. Today, as back then, there are many theatres of war. Some of those are the war theatres of social media. I hope that stories like these can inspire more benevolence, altruism, and empathy among all of us, including powerful world leaders.