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In the general strike of 1926 I was three years old and I remember going to the village school where they handed out hot soup to the village children. On Sunday mornings the grown-ups sometimes held 'grudge fights', and as we grew up, the young lads went to see the fights on the mountainside. Once the grudge fight was over, the young lads were encouraged to go a round or two with someone of equal age and build. It was worthwhile because if the miners thought that you were good, they would throw coppers at your feet. One sure thing was when it was known that you had taken part in these Sunday bouts, nobody bullied you!

We had no place for swimming other than the rivers, which were ice cold, even in the middle of summer; and they were dangerous. As we grew older, we used to go on bicycle rides. We had an old dog called 'Chum', a smooth-haired terrier, who used to follow us, arriving at the river panting and exhausted, and his only reward was being thrown into the icy waters. It sounded cruel, but he lived to a very old age.

On my way to school in the mornings, I often came across old miners, sitting on the school steps resting, as they struggled home from the colliery, coughing and spitting from clogged lungs. It stuck in my mind, and I was determined that I would never go underground to work.

In the 1930s the rate of suicide was high, with throat cutting, hanging, drowning, and even using dynamite. Disease was lethal, with tuberculosis rife, and my mother would ply us with cod liver oil and malt, from huge jars, to keep us healthy. It worked.

In 1937 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth came to visit our school in Neath, and with them the two princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. I was in the choir that sang to them only 10 yards away from the platform where they sat.

In April 1944 my dear wife Gwladys and I decided to elope and marry without telling anyone, as I had my orders to go to France and we wanted to marry before I left. After I was

married I went to Normandy with the 11th Armoured Division in a tank crew as a wireless operator/loader and went all the way to the Baltic Sea, being wounded twice in the process.

My division took terrible casualties from Normandy to the Baltic, but that was a sacrifice we had to make in order to go and release those poor people from the horror camps.

On 27 January 1945, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, and in April 1945, Bergen-Belsen was overrun by the British 11th Armoured Division, and being the first to get there, my regiment played a leading role. I had been wounded some days previously, and flown to hospital in Brussels, where I spent a month. I returned from England, following sick leave, in a Lancaster bomber and was then travelling in an army truck, back to my regiment, who were then on the Danish border, when it crashed, killing six out of 20 men, all of whom were returning to their units after being wounded. That was near Belsen, and so I saw (and smelled) the aftermath. I stood on the Belsen site in shock at the knowledge of what had happened there. I was absolutely horrified to find out about the inhumanity of man against man. I have never been the same since. It has never left me, so much so that on the 50th Anniversary of the liberation of Belsen, I wrote a poem. The Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, accepted it for their archives.

It is because of my experience at Belsen that I would tell teenagers of the importance of being tolerant, to avoid racism, and try to understand their fellow beings and they will discover that 'hate' has no future in their lives. I believe that throughout history, it's hate that is the root of all evil, not money.

I had no idea I would meet the Queen, who had been Princess Elizabeth in 1937, again in 1995, as I stood sweating, in the shadow of Buckingham Palace, awaiting the march down the Mall, for the VJ Parade. She stopped in front of me to say that she believed that it was the last big parade, and I nodded, thinking, God I hope so, I've stood here for over three hours in this heat. Many of the British Legion veterans fainted, and one died, however, she was very gracious.

We were milling around the Birdcage Walk when we heard the Guards Colour Sergeant shout 'PARADE', and in a flash, thousands formed ranks and at attention. The discipline never goes away. I couldn't believe I was marching down the Mall, with thousands cheering, then passing the saluting dais, with the Royal Princes, Princesses, the Prince of Wales, and Diana, with Harry and William, standing each side of the Queen and Prince Phillip. It was a memorable occasion, and for me, the circle was complete, from that sunny day in 1937, to the sunny day of 1995.