



## **Martin's Story, Chapter 10**

I can't remember how long I'd been in England, probably a week or possibly a fortnight before I went to the local school. And the local school as I know realise in retrospect was actually quite a well-run school, although it didn't pretend to be anything special, it was just an ordinary local authority-run school. But it was very well run. But when I had been there for a very short time, probably a week or a fortnight something like that, one day the whole school was assembled in the school hall and the headmaster made a speech. I couldn't understand a word of it of course but there was one word he kept using and every time he used it there was a strong reaction among the boys. I didn't know what the word meant but I could remember what it sounded like. The word was 'holiday'. The school was about to break up for its summer holiday. So after being at the school for only about a week or two I went on holiday, or rather stayed at home on holiday. Well as I discovered the holiday was supposed to last for four weeks but during those four weeks the war broke out and nobody knew quite what was going to happen. It was obvious that with the developments that there had been in aeroplanes that at least some British cities, possibly all of them were going to be bombed but nobody knew what this bombing was going to be like. Were two or three aeroplanes going to come over and drop half a dozen bombs, or was a huge armada of planes going to come and devastate whole cities? Nobody had any idea. But one had to prepare for the worst of course. And so no schoolchildren were allowed to go back to school until an air raid shelter had been improvised and since there was nowhere in this school where a shelter could be built outside it meant that the school hall had to be partitioned off, separated into compartments with sand bags contained in wooden frames and so on. And the other thing was how was one going to handle a large number of casualties of bombing? Of course the city had an ambulance service but that was intended for the two or three accidents or cases of illness that might happen on an ordinary day, it would be completely inadequate for disasters with hundreds of casualties. So lorries were commandeered and converted into makeshift ambulances but they had to be parked somewhere and somebody had the idea that they could be parked in school playgrounds. So part of the school playground had to be converted into an ambulance station and the school hall had to be converted into an air raid shelter and of course all this took time. And during this time we were not allowed to go back to school. So the holidays took considerably

longer, or lasted considerably longer than the intended four weeks. Just how long they lasted I can't remember. But during that time of course I had played with other children and I had listened to the wireless and I had been to the cinema and I had heard people talking and so by the time I went back to school I could understand a little English and could speak a little but only a very limited amount. Now today it is quite common for schools to have children whose native language isn't English but in those days it was a curiosity, it was something that most teachers had never come across before. And yet they knew how to handle it. I'm full of admiration for these people because nothing in their training could have prepared them for this but they had such a good understanding of what children were like and what the needs of children were that they knew how to handle it. And so when I went back to school I was put into a class of boys who were a year younger than I. of course at first I could follow very little of the lessons but of course every lesson, no matter what it was supposed to be teaching, was for me an English lesson. Each time I learnt a few more words, a few expressions, I came to realise a few grammatical points and so on. And this lasted until Christmas. And so when you remember that the European part of the war began in September and I was off school for a bit longer than that while all this work was being done in the school so between then and Christmas, you can roughly work out how long that was. And then after Christmas they put me among a class of boys of my own age. Of course again I was still well behind them but I now had the chance of catching up and so gradually I caught up.

**Did any of them express any anti-Semitism to you?**

No. no, they didn't. And I can say this both of that school and of the school I attended later. Although I experienced anti-Semitism outside school I didn't experience any in either of those two schools. Not from the boys and not from the staff.

**What form did the anti-Semitism take outside school?**

Outside school I met some people who were anti-Semitic but also some who weren't. There were people who were kind to me but there were people who made some very very unpleasant remarks and I know with one family in particular they encouraged their son to hit me but if I laid a finger on him, oh dear that was terrible. And so it took various forms like that. But I don't want to give the impression that everybody was like that because there were other people who were kind.