

One Teenager's War, Part 2

Growing up Quickly

(End of Part 1

"I then discovered that with parental agreement, I could join the Women's Land Army (WLA) at 17. Getting that parental permission was a bit of a struggle but finally Mum and Dad agreed. My High School teachers tried to dissuade me and I respected that but when the school year ended I left school. I found a job as a farm worker whilst awaiting my 17th birthday when I could sign on for the Women's Land Army – 76 years ago at the time of writing and the subject of yet to be written Part 2 of One teenager's war.

Audrey D. Cole 19 November, 2020)

Part 2 (a)

One would presume that having completed a chapter on the effort to take a significantly different direction in one's life, one would remember the details of making that happen. I do not remember! I have no recollection of how I got a job on a farm two weeks after I left High School. I just remember that I had to get a job quickly as there were some months to pass before I would be seventeen and eligible to apply to join the Women's Land Army (WLA) and, in the meantime, I had to earn my living. It made sense that I look for farm work. My Dad was working as an agricultural agent for a feed and seed company. He wasn't earning very much because cattle feed, like all our food, was strictly rationed. He may have been some help, however, because he knew most of the farmers in the area. All I recall is that the farmer who ultimately employed me was never one of Dad's customers. Suffice to say that somehow, the right connections were made.

I found myself working on a small mixed farm about 8 miles from home. The farm had sheep, poultry, pigs, a couple of work horses, some hens and about 110 cows. Twice a day, we hand milked 106 of them. The milk had to be in standard size milk "Kits" on the wooden milk stand by the road at the farm gate every morning by 8 am to be picked up by the local "milk wagon." Every morning at about 4:30 am, I would be awakened by a gentle voice saying, "Wakey, wakey, Sleeping Beauty, time to get up." Carrying his own candle from which he lit mine, my boss would then take a somewhat similar message to the other "milkers," one his eldest daughter, a year or so older than me, who worked full time on the farm, the other, a male farm worker, a few years older. Every morning, we would go downstairs to the kitchen/living room to a roaring fire that the farmer had built, and a snack of hot tea and rock buns, sufficient to sustain us until breakfast. Breakfast – home cured bacon, fresh eggs and toast – prepared by his wife would be ready when we returned, hungry, at about 8:30 am.

I loved the work and those with whom I was working. I had good teachers in the farmer and his daughter as I learned to milk by hand. We all worked hard whatever the task. I don't recall any disagreements or squabbles. We also had fun. When we had snowfalls that winter, we hauled out the toboggans and skis, all hand made and somewhat primitive. Joined by the farmer's two other children (younger than us) we enjoyed the steep hill near the house despite the danger from the five foot high, two foot thick stone wall at the bottom of the hill – one had to change direction or stop very suddenly if one wanted to survive. We did!

We also went to area dances. In wartime England, there were two kinds of gasoline, regular and coloured. The latter was strictly for essential services. Police carried testing kits and were allowed to spot test parked cars (no locked filler caps in those days). If one was travelling on coloured gasoline, one had to be able to justify that journey. I can remember us all piling into the family car and my boss adding a sack of feed or, occasionally, a sheep, to deliver to a fellow farmer in the village where the dance was to take place thus allowing us to be driven on coloured gas – h'mm! Sometimes we cycled to the dances, other times we walked. Whatever time we got home we still woke up to that "Wakey, wakey, Sleeping Beauty" call early next morning.

We did all the things one has to do on a farm but not all chores are equal. Some were obviously harder or easier, some were more or less pleasant. I enjoyed most of the things I had to do except for a few tasks. My introduction to one of them was an hour or so before lunch. My boss had to do some telephoning and suggested that while he was otherwise occupied, the other non family farm hand and I could "spread that muck" (manure) that had been dropped in piles at 25 or 30 feet intervals over a particular field close to the house. Although a common task that I did many more times, that is the only time I clearly recall performing it. Believe me, it was far from today's method which at least ensures that the smelly stuff is behind or well to the side of you most of the time as you drive the tractor and spreader. Another unpleasant task was stripping and cleaning the inside of a hen house – Ugh!

The other task, and only once was I obliged to participate, was horrifying! A delicacy much enjoyed by the family was blood pudding! The blood came from pigs and, should the reader be interested in the process, it can be found on the internet! (https://www.google.ca/search?q=What+is+blood+pudding+made+of%3F&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj876H_grvtAhWrEVkFHdr0AJ0Qzmd6BAgLEAU&biw=1254&bih=593#spf=1607315072139). Suffice to say that although I had to eat the product or go hungry, I cannot bring myself to describe what seemed to me the utterly inhumane process of collecting the major ingredient.

One thing about farming with animals, pleasant or unpleasant, the responsibility is relentless. No matter the weather or other realities certain things just have to be done when required. My boss was a very gentle and caring man both with people and with animals (yet he loved blood pudding which doesn't quite fit). Once I had to help him with a difficult calving as the Vet was delayed and no-one else was available to assist. I admit that I was absolutely terrified, the poor cow was in such obvious distress. As my boss somehow held the horned cow, I gritted my teeth and did whatever he told me

to do and the calf was eventually delivered. Although I do remember the Vet arriving and attending to the cow, it was such a scary experience that, literally, I blocked it from my mind. I don't recall thinking about it again until writing this piece. Yet, one thing I can probably say is that it is highly likely that someone, somewhere, even as I write, is doing whatever it was that we had to do that night.

My boss wanted me to remain in his employment when I turned 17 and applied to join the Women's Land Army. I would have been very happy to do that and said so. Although controlled by Government, Land Girls were individually employed by the farmers at a rate and under strict policies set by Government. My boss made the necessary formal application to employ me but it was not to be. The system had other plans.

It was a matter of war and timing. Obviously government intelligence knew more than we did. A decision was made that because Land Girls working in open fields on farms in Southern England particularly in the area South of London were in danger or constant threat of danger, they would be transferred to the safer North to give them a break from the stress. Yorkshire, the largest county thus the source of a high proportion of Land Girls, was considered a safe area and henceforth, new recruits from Yorkshire, such as I was, were simply told that all women applying in Yorkshire to join the WLA would henceforth be sent to farms in the South of England. I was sent South to a farm in Weeting, Norfolk.

I travelled by train. I was wearing my uniform, as required – government issue beige corduroy riding breeches, knee length woollen stockings, beige shirt and green tie, green pullover, brown overcoat (car coat length), distinctively styled and badged hat and government issue brown leather shoes. The clothing was of top quality but I recall that my suitcase was quite heavy. It contained WLA work overalls, leather boots, rubber boots, trench coat, canvas leggings, spare breeches, shirts, stockings etc., plus a couple of books and a few personal belongings. I had a travel pass and an itinerary which said I would be met at the station in Brandon, Suffolk and taken to my billet. It was scary, I admit. I said a teary goodbye to my family.

The first leg of the train journey took me from my local station in Skipton, North Yorkshire, to Leeds where I changed to another line - requiring a ten minute walk carrying my heavy case. I entered a compartment on the London bound corridor train. One other passenger was already seated by the window. She was wearing an identical WLA uniform. I couldn't believe my eyes! We knew each other! Not only were we now wearing identical uniforms but this was the first time I had seen her wearing anything except at down times when she wore a gown. She was the model I had drawn in so many poses at the School of Art! (See "*One Teenager's War*" Part 1). It is certainly a very small world! We talked non-stop until we had to change trains, she to a connection for Cambridge and a Women's Land Army Hostel, me to a connection for Brandon in Suffolk to a farm a couple of miles over the county border in Weeting, Norfolk.

I was met by the farm Manager, the son of the owner of the seemingly huge 1600 acre farm. It was primarily an arable farm but it also had some wooded areas. My work was mostly on the home farm where I was responsible for the yard work and the care of 5 milk cows and their periodic offspring, two bulls (one not very nice), 3 work horses (one in retirement), and some pigs. We had a quick tour of the farm buildings before I was taken to my billet on the edge of the village about a ten minute walk away. The family I was to live with for the next few months was welcoming and my small room in the two-story "council house" was pleasant enough. We ate dinner and I retired early to sort out my stuff to be ready to report for work next morning.

Over the next few days I was introduced to the rest of the workers, all male, I think fourteen in all, with ages ranging from teens to 82. As I recall, there were three teenagers, one 16, me 17 and one 18. The latter had volunteered for the army and served a few months before being discharged for some health concern. One man in his early 20s had not passed his Army medical. The next youngest was in his late 40s and at least three were in their 60s.

They were great to work with, kind, respectful, considerate and helpful. John, the eldest, aged 82, attended to the hens and chickens. He would collect plants, including dandelions and such, light a controlled fire behind the barn and cook up a healthy concoction for their feed. Every morning he would come to the back door of the barn, saying, "time for a break, Audrey!" He would hold out my "snack!" He would never tell me what I was eating but it was always delicious. It was something he heated in the pan as he cooked up the mash for the hens – perhaps it was even the same food! I was more or less tied to the yard and the barn every morning, milking, feeding and cleaning out the cow shed and feeding the other animals and cleaning their sheds. I would return to the barn to tediously turn the handle of the portable grinder for an hour or so as I ground endless tons of mangolds (mangelwurzel) to mix with sugar beet pulp and water to feed the animals. Farm animals have voracious appetites.

The problem with writing from memory is that each thought triggers so many other memories. Speaking of appetites, the owner's wife very kindly invited me for breakfast every morning after milking and before those other chores. Her husband often joined us. He was an irascible man and not well liked by my colleagues who simply warned me to just keep out of his way. But although somewhat abrupt, he was always very polite to me. He was a well known and recognised authority on Norfolk flint (see below) at times speaking on the radio on his subject. He had a spectacular personal collection of ancient flint tools which he took pride in showing me. To quote from the Norfolk Web site, "*Flint is an inescapable and indelible part of Norfolk's history and landscape. Found naturally in chalk, with layers in various shapes and sizes, flint is almost pure silica, but any impurities give different colours: brown field flints eroded from the chalk around Fakenham; black flint around Thetford and Swaffham; chalk-covered grey flints north of North Walsham; light grey around Holt; rounded beach flints near Wells-next-the-Sea, Sheringham and Cromer.*" (<https://www.visitnorfolk.co.uk/inspire/seven-natural-wonders-flint.aspx>).

My yard work did not keep me busy all day but I had additional responsibilities depending on the season. On this primarily arable farm, most of the men worked on tractors. Wartime food production was serious business. It seemed that the tractors were going none stop, all day. But even tractor drivers have to eat and take a break periodically. We teenagers, together with the Manager had the responsibility of relieving the drivers for lunch breaks. Around 11:30 am I would get on my bike and head out to relieve a couple of them in turn on different sites while they took a break and ate their packed lunches. Whether it was plowing, seeding, fertilising, whatever, the idea was that the drivers might change but the tractors kept going. By the time I had cycled back to the farm and had my own lunch it was time to call in the cows for the afternoon milking. I learned a lot from those experiences. I milked, fed, ploughed sowed, fertilized, and carted things from here to there and I screwed up royally on one occasion!

Perhaps by agreement but most likely commandeered, certain areas of the property were used, particularly at night, for artillery and other training exercises by units from local Army bases. The Army dug 6 feet deep trenches at intervals on the edges of the growing areas in some of the fields. We were cautioned to avoid these trenches. Don't ask me what I was thinking on one particular occasion but, obviously, I was not paying due attention. As I came to the end of the row, I accidentally double tripped my plough cord, dropping the plough share into the ground again. As I turned to look at what I had done, I ploughed right through the deep trench, quickly accelerating to full throttle to pull me out. No-one had ever done that but the scars in the ground were clear evidence and they remained, apparently for a long time! I don't know what it did to the Army exercises but I don't think I ever lived it down! Some years later, whilst on a short weekend vacation, I returned with a friend to the village. The response when I introduced my friend to former co-workers was "you know Audrey once drove a tractor and plough through an Army trench!"

Hand milking alone brings its own memories. It was what took me to that particular farm. Their primary requirement was that any Land Girl they employed had to be able to milk by hand. I had the advantage of a very good teacher in my first job. It seems that electrification of the farming system in WWII was tricky. Electricity was strictly controlled by rationing. If a farm was not already converted to electricity to enable machine milking before WWII, it had to wait until the end of the war unless there were extenuating circumstances. Although the family was obviously quite wealthy (at least to my understanding) neither the large estate house nor the farm buildings were electrified.

Coming as I did from the Dales in North Yorkshire (i.e. hills and valleys), Norfolk seemed unbelievably flat but it was not without interest. Obviously, it has its own history. Weeting Hall, a large mansion about a mile from the farm was clearly part of that history. In WWII many such homes were commandeered by government but that was not the case with Weeting Hall which had actually been sold before the war to the Ministry of Labour and used as a training centre. When I came to the village, Weeting Hall was being used as an administrative centre for the Indian Expeditionary Force and

a hospital for wounded Gurkha and other Indian soldiers. Those soldiers who were able to walk did so for exercise. Wherever one went, one came across wounded soldiers wearing "hospital blues." I would be driving a tractor, hauling a load of something to somewhere when some of them, including many Sikh soldiers, would flag me down and request a ride. I didn't have the heart to say no but am not sure what the penalty would have been had we been caught. I occupied the only seat on the tractor but that didn't seem to matter. I have had as many as four wounded soldiers on the foot plates hanging on to the tractor as I drove, the rest of them hanging on to my trailer!

Don't ask me how they did it but they enjoyed it. They were grateful and so polite and respectful in their thanks. Sometimes, they would wait for my return trip to catch another ride! Thinking of those times reminds me of the very young soldier from India who, every morning at milking time, came to the farm and bought a pint of fresh warm milk straight from the cow. I was told he was an orderly at the Army hospital. I always spoke to him but he never spoke although he obviously made his wishes known. He always had the money ready as required by my boss. I would give him the bottle of milk which he drank immediately, standing there in the yard. He would hand the empty bottle back to me with the most beautiful smile, then turn and run, presumably back to the hospital.

Later, Weeting Hall had a change in tenancy and was occupied by a Unit of the Royal Tank Regiment as they awaited a post war overseas posting. They held dances to which they invited all the villagers and also transported WLA Units and women's Army and Air Force Units from hostels and bases in the general area. The music was always great. I loved the dances. I made friends with a couple of the soldiers, one of whom was a wonderful dancer – it was such a joy to dance with him. The other, his friend, wasn't much interested in dancing but he and I remained in contact for many years.

Apart from these occasional events, my downtime activities were reading and going for walks or bike rides. With my younger co-workers, I would walk to Brandon and go to the movie theatre once a week. I have absolutely no recollection of the movies we saw. I recall that before the show, we would go to the bar at the local pub where the boys had a beer. I didn't drink. I did go on a couple of weekend bus trips to Kings Lynn and I visited nearby Sandringham on one of those trips. It was not open to the public at the time as members of the Royal Family were in residence.

Not that I had abundant downtime to kill! I worked seven days a week and every third week I had Saturday afternoon and Sunday free. I found that not to be very useful so I negotiated a change to have the time off on the fourth weekend so that I had two full days, Saturday and Sunday, off. That gave me much more freedom. I couldn't go home - I could not have afforded to do so. My WLA wage rate was the same as the armed forces, a shilling an hour. I seem to recall that just over a shilling was deducted at source for employment and health insurance and I paid a standard 25 shillings for my board. I sent 20 shillings home to help Mum and Dad and my brother leaving me about 2 shillings spending money for the week. Suffice to say I wasn't a big spender! In fact I had always been saver and if I was short, I would take a few shillings from my Post Office Savings Account where I always tried to keep a couple of pounds in reserve. My two day weekends enabled me, occasionally, to take a train to London on the Friday

night and spend time with my Aunt and Uncle in Weybridge, Surrey, arriving back in Brandon late on Sunday night.

Sadly, one of those weekend trips to Weybridge led to the first of three violent attempted sexual assaults I endured during the 18 months I served in the WLA. Whether or not I should refer to those incidents in these writings has been very much on my mind. My conclusion is that it is possible that some readers may want to skip these references and they are obviously free to do so. But the reluctance of my generation and even earlier generations of women to talk openly about such matters has not served later generations of women well! I am absolutely appalled by the assaults that I read about today, not that they are necessarily worse but that they are still happening. I apologise for my role in that failure to speak out. This was not something one could easily talk about back then but I do believe that we should have developed the courage to do so. I am not proud of having, for the most part, kept it a secret.

Suffice to say, on this occasion, as was common practice in wartime in rural areas where there was no public transportation, I walked from the train across the station yard to where the Army and RAF transports were waiting to take armed forces personnel coming off leave back to their respective bases. One of those transports would pass my billet a mile or so down the road. I asked the driver if he could drop me off at the edge of Weeting. As usual, the driver said sure, hop in. He added that he was just about to leave as it was obviously a very slow night. I took that to mean he was empty. I was wrong!

I walked to the rear of the canvas tented truck, hauled my case onto the truck bed, climbed in and sat on the closest bench as we pulled away. I certainly didn't see any one else in the truck but it was very dark and this was wartime: there was no lighting. As the truck accelerated onto the road I suddenly found myself physically thrown onto the floor by an airman whose intentions were very obvious. But I too was strong. I did not share his intentions. Fortunately, even with screened headlights on all vehicles, at 10:30 pm on a clear road, a mile in an Armed Forces truck doesn't take long to cover! As we fought, I apparently managed to hit or kick my attacker where it hurt. The truck stopped at Weeting, I grabbed my case, jumped out and told the driver. He apologised – I don't think he had known there was another passenger. I confess that although usually a caring person, I have never given a thought to the well being of my attacker.

About this time, my landlady became ill and I had to leave. The system found me another billet in the village, sadly not as comfortable as my first billet but it was all that was available. It was a tiny, very old and very attractive thatch roofed cottage in the middle of a row of either seven or nine identical cottages – I think, nine but do not clearly remember. I shared a bedroom with the daughter of the family. Although we had a civilised relationship, unfortunately, we had absolutely nothing in common. We used candles upstairs, paraffin lamps downstairs. To get to and from our bedroom we had to go through her parents' bedroom, literally a double bed on the landing at the top of the stairs. There was no electricity, no running water and the outhouse was down the back yard most of which was dug up to grow vegetables.

Those occasional trips to my relatives in Weybridge were a saviour. Apart from the welcome family contact, they had a very practical advantage in that I could take my dirty laundry and wash it under more normal circumstances at their apartment, a refreshing change from the other weeks in my billet. There, I had to collect fallen twigs and small branches for the fire, pump the water at the outdoor hand pump we shared with the other cottages in the row, haul it in pail by pail to fill the fireside boiler, wait for it to heat, wash my clothes in a portable basin on a table in the kitchen, wring them out by hand and hang them to dry on the line in the back yard near the outhouse. Not fun!

Similar chores were required to bathe. Innocently, the first week, I asked how one took a bath. My new landlady just laughed! "Bath?!!" she said, as she shrugged her shoulders. She said there was a tin bath hanging up in the coal house and I was certainly welcome to use it (apparently no-one else did). The process was the same as for washing my clothes: collect the wood for the fire, pump the water, carry it in to the boiler, wait for it to heat then carry it pail by pail to the coal house, enjoy my bathing luxury, get dried and dressed and cart the used bath water, pail by pail to throw out over the ground at the front of the cottage. I did it on my first weekend off. It took all of my Saturday afternoon. From then on, I managed with sponge baths every evening!

In my job, I was disillusioned by my suspicion that my employers were not entirely honest. In WWII there were very strict regulations prohibiting sports hunting and rightly so, bird game, etc., being potential food supply in a country at war that could not without external help feed itself adequately. In pre-war days, game bird (pheasant and other small game) breeding had been almost certainly the most profitable activity on the estate. They still, in wartime, employed a full time gamekeeper, re-designated officially as a farm labourer but whose work remained as it had always been, solely, in the hidden areas of the forest, to breed pheasants and other small game for hunting. Presumably, participants in the then (I believe) illegal hunts or shoots, paid large amounts of money for the privilege of hunting that game.

I was told by my boss one day that all employees had to be ready at a certain time the following morning to act as "brushers" ("beaters") for a "shoot." I would get help with the morning's milking to be sure I would be ready on time and was told that this was part of the job.

It did not feel right to me but I had little choice. The colleagues I approached saw this as a necessity with which they had always complied. In fact they quite enjoyed the change from regular tasks. And, for sure, for a while, it was a pleasant, although at times rough, walk through the forest. Still carefully in line, I came out from behind a large tree and was suddenly peppered with shot pellets from shoulder to the ground! Had the gun been a fraction of an inch higher, the shot would have hit my face! Thankfully, I was wearing my heavy canvas rain coat, thick canvas leggings and boots. The shot had supposedly been aimed at a rabbit that was going to get away – and did! Although not typically given to swearing I turned to the shooter, Sir *..... *....., (yes, I do remember his name) calling him a "gormless b.....," and suggesting he learn how to aim his gun before pulling the trigger. He was in the brushing line for the sole purpose of catching game that got away i.e., he was entitled to shoot anything behind the line not in

front of it. The shoot was halted for the moment. I was totally surprised when the manager came to me and demanded that I immediately apologise to Sir *..... *..... for my rudeness when he had paid a great deal of money to participate.

I couldn't believe what I heard! I replied that it was surely not for me to apologise since I was the victim of the shooter's stupidity. In addition, I said that I knew nothing in WLA requirements that would justify my participation in this non-agricultural exercise. I said I was leaving the line and going back to the trucks that had brought us to the site. I turned and left. Interestingly, there were no further requirements that I participate in those shoots although they did continue. I never received an apology.

There were richer recollected highlights of my life in Weeting, however. Not only was it, in general, a good place to work with compatible work mates, it was for the most part satisfying that need I had felt in High School to be part of the war effort. I will never forget the impromptu celebrations on VE Day. We worked all day, but most of us walked to Brandon that evening. The local Air and Army Bases trucked in their personnel from the bases, except for essential maintenance staff. There was dancing in the main street, great music, bon fires here and there, refreshment stands! The tiny local "pub" was bursting its sides! Everyone was a friend! It was a very powerful "equal and together, whether civilian or armed forces" atmosphere. It was very special and not something one could ever forget. But, cows have to be milked and we had to be back at work early next morning. We had to leave the still bouncing celebrations to get a few hours sleep.

VJ Day a few months later, was a somewhat different story. We were in the midst of harvesting. The weather was good and we worked late. It was dark as we got back to the farm buildings. Despite being tired, we younger ones were raring to go but it was too late to walk into Brandon to join the celebrations there. I don't recall whose idea it was – I know it wasn't mine and I had qualms about the notion but the war was over and who was I to pontificate? We decided to ring the church bells! We hadn't heard church bells for many years. During the war, they were commandeered by the state. In rural areas such as we were in, they were part of the air raid warning system. But this was VJ Day. There would be no air raids that night. In our opinion at least, that wartime warning system was no longer relevant. We harnessed a horse, attached a wagon, piled on to it and headed for the church. We appointed the two most agile of the group to somehow get into the church and ring the bells in celebration rather than in the threat they had been representing for so many years. We simply assumed that people would share our joy. It didn't work! The Church was very securely locked! The action team was quite resourceful and tried every entry and every window but there was no way to ring the bells beyond scaling up the tower and banging on them, hardly a reasonable solution! It was a real "downer!" We drove around the village again, headed back to the farm, put the horse to bed, hugged each other and retired to our respective homes.

Strictly speaking, this narrative, entitled as it is, should now end. That teenager's war was over! However, in fact, the next day was no different than the previous day: the cows had to be fed and milked, the harvesting had to continue and that teenager, as all

WLA members, had committed to work as long as required. Food was still rationed. On a day to day basis from a farming point of view, nothing changed. Thus will there be a Part 2(b) of "One Teenager's War."

Part 2 (b)

Post WWII

When Christmas came a few months later, I was due for my annual 7 day leave. I had my railway pass and was truly looking forward to going home to my family and enjoying a break. I had to work on Christmas Day but was free to leave on Boxing Day. This would be a day of mixed emotions. The first leg was uneventful. I switched to the North bound London to Leeds train which, literally, was packed like sardines. Somehow, I squeezed in and stood to the right of the exit in the packed corridor. Virtually shoulder to shoulder on my immediate right was an RAF Leading Aircraftman heading back to base after sharing Christmas day with his widowed mother. He was a very pleasant co-traveller. We chatted comfortably and he generously shared the delicious lunch package his mother had prepared for him. I had no food with me. I had been alone over Christmas: the family were visiting relatives elsewhere. Co-workers had invited me to Christmas dinner. I was afraid that if I took food from my lodgings for my trip home, I could be accused of stealing – that was the level of relationship with the household in which I had to live. My innocent young brother had spent a week or so with me that summer and helped with hay making. He slept on a camp bed in the living room and I paid for his week's board. Innocently, he took an apple from a dish on the sideboard and was accused of stealing!

My RAF fellow traveller and I said our friendly goodbyes at Leeds and I walked to the other station and my final connection to the London to Glasgow train that would take me to Skipton. I put my case in the luggage coach and got onto the train. In contrast to the other train, there were many empty seats. I put my coat and hat on the rack, pulled out my book and settled down to read. It was an open coach and I was alone in my immediate section but there were other people a couple of rows down the aisle. We had gained good speed and I was deep into my book when suddenly from nowhere a soldier grabbed me and started mauling me. He had obviously been drinking. I managed to push his hands away, told him to buzz off, picked up my book and went over to the empty seats in the next row. But he followed me and repeated his efforts. Again, I pushed him away, told him to buzz off, and returned to my original seat. He muttered something and disappeared. It struck me as odd that no-one came to my assistance or even asked if I was OK.

The second stop would be my stop but, first, we would stop at Shipley. When the train pulled into Shipley station, I stood up to get my coat and hat from the rack to be ready for the next stop. As I reached up to the rack with my right hand I was suddenly hit very hard by a clenched fist on my left cheek and knocked to the floor as my soldier attacker ran off the train shouting "You stuck-up bitch!" It was a powerful blow and the only time in my life I recall "seeing stars." Again, no-one came to my assistance! I got myself

up from the floor, looked out of the door and my attacker was running to the exit. My face felt very sore and my head was aching. I seem to recall that it was about half an hour to Skipton. When we arrived, I got my bag from the luggage van and walked to the station gate, where my Dad was waiting for me. He had cycled into town to meet me. He greeted me with "Good Heavens, Audrey! What on earth have you done to your face?" I told him. He was appalled! He wanted us to go the Police station but I couldn't have described my attacker and it was already 2:30 am. I just wanted to go to bed! We tied my case to the bike and walked the couple of miles home.

I don't recall the dates but, shortly after my return from that leave my Mum became ill. She required major surgery and would be out of action for a while. Explaining the circumstances, I applied to the WLA for a transfer that would enable me to live at home. Surprisingly, there was a vacancy at a large dairy farm nearby. I sadly said my goodbyes to my co-workers and other friends in Norfolk and headed home. I have no recollections of that trip except that I recall I had no food other than a box of almonds that I had just received by mail from a long time friend from my village who was serving in the Army in London. Regretfully, I ate quite a few of the almonds. Suffice to say that was how I discovered I am allergic to nuts!

My new job was very different from my previous placements. I believe the estate was even larger than the one from which I had come. It was certainly a much more impersonal corporate entity, producing milk for household delivery and bulk shipments to other towns and commercial establishments it owned. Work was much more compartmentalised and limited to particular tasks than in my previous placements.

I was one of three Land Girls. Two of us worked solely in the dairy, the other worked with the young stock, calves and young heifers. We would see her two or three times a day. Mostly, the two of us worked together and alone. We started very early in the morning, personally bottled and date-capped the milk as it came through the cooling system, steadily, for a couple of hours. The process was primitive and tedious by today's standards but was certainly the most up to date system available in those days. Once the milk was bottled, we had to wash and sterilise the empty bottle and milk can returns and all the dairy equipment. That was a complicated steam pressure process - please don't ask me to describe or explain it! It seemed to work! We would then be off duty for a couple of hours and would return for the afternoon milking and a repeat of the whole process – not the most interesting job I have ever held.

An advantage of having more than one Land Girl on the farm was the early warning system about predatory co-workers. I was saddened by the name of one of them whose wife, about 3 years my senior, had been so kind and helpful to me as a child in elementary school. The other name was a complete shock, a highly respected so-called pillar of the community," an elected village Council member, a man who sat at the same village Council table as my Dad. It was hard to believe but it was certainly a fact, as I was to learn.

He was a very competent man, highly regarded in the village for his voluntary work. He managed administration for the operation, his office attached to other buildings in the farm complex. We members of the WLA were offered extra pay if we would spend a

couple of hours a week cleaning the estate office and adjoining Board Room. Knowing this man's reputation, we never worked there alone, only in pairs. One day, as I was on my hands and knees cleaning the floor of the Board room, my colleague whispered that we had run out of some supply or other and she would creep out of the back door to get a replacement from the storage shed. I whispered back OK and she quietly left. He must have been at the door just waiting for an opportunity. Suddenly, I found myself pinned to the floor by my arms as this 6 foot heavily built man tore at my breeches. With only one free hand (the other pinning my wrists to the floor), he couldn't undo my leather belt but managed to tear all the belt loops. But I, too, was pretty strong and, somehow, I don't know how, I managed to get free. He retreated to his office as my colleague returned. I told her what happened. She, in an earlier unrelated context, had been the victim of sexual assault. We left our cleaning equipment where it was and walked up to the mansion where the owner and his wife and household staff lived. We reported the attack to the owner's wife. We told her that under no circumstances would we continue the arrangement to clean the offices or even return to the office to collect the equipment. That was accepted. I sincerely believe that she was utterly shocked by our complaint. I know she believed us, a glance at my torn belt loops was enough. Yet the perpetrator was never fired. There were no consequences for him. He still maintained his well paying job. He still sat at the local Council table with my Dad. That was life back then. I am not convinced that it is much different now.

Life in the dairy went on. Endlessly, twice daily, my colleague and I washed and sterilized hundreds of milk bottles and the dairy equipment. As we filled them with milk, we date capped and crated those bottles for delivery. Sometimes we were even called upon to do some of the deliveries – in those days in the UK, milk was delivered daily to one's doorstep. I do admit that at times I regretted having signed on to serve as long as necessary.

I am hazy on actual dates but I believe it was in the summer of 1946 that I was hospitalised for some necessary surgery. The timing was unfortunate. My week in hospital coincided with an epidemic of gastro enteritis in the children's wards. I was never in such a ward but discovered on release from the hospital that I had picked up the bug. I was very sick for a month or more and lost 40 lbs in weight. Although recovering, I was very weak. I couldn't have picked up an empty milk crate never mind a full one! I had no choice but to apply to leave the WLA on health grounds. I had the necessary doctor's authority. Thus, with mixed feelings at the time, I resigned.

Fortunately and obviously, my health improved and once again, I became an ordinary but older and much wiser teenager as I entered a very different life based on my so-called artistic skills.

Audrey D. Cole

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