

London Connection

By Duke Castle

London – November 1940

Silence. The bombers were gone. Finally.

The German Luftwaffe had been raining bombs on London for over 50 days. The impact was devastating. Buildings destroyed. Thousands killed. Would it never end?

John Baker and his wife, Margaret, emerged from the Tube, the underground subway station that served as a bomb shelter. There was smoke rising from the end of their street. Who was hit this time? The Wainwrights? The Grahams? John didn't want to know. How could they ever get through this? How could their country survive? Hitler's armies had conquered virtually all of continental Europe. Britain stood alone waiting for the invasion that was surely coming.

Britain was surely doomed. The Americans weren't coming to their rescue and the American ambassador, Joseph Kennedy, told them they should make peace with Germany and save whatever they could.

Despair was everywhere. What chance did Britain have alone against the German juggernaut?

John and Margaret saw this coming and sent their two children to the countryside which was considered safer. John was a butcher and stayed behind to provide what little food they could for their community. Even that was running out.

When they arrived back at their home things looked intact. Margaret went upstairs to continue her sewing. There really wasn't much to do but it helped take her mind off the chaos and devastation around them.

John just stood in the front hallway wondering how much more they could all take.

There was a sound below him in the basement. What was that about? John walked downstairs into the basement. There was a man sitting at a table in the corner drinking tea. Who was this? Had someone taken shelter in their basement during the bombing raid?

"Who are you?"

"Are you John Baker? The John Baker born in Chelsea in 1895?"

"Yes. Do I know you?"

"Not directly. But I do know you, or I should say I know quite a bit about you?"

"You do? Well I don't know you. I have never seen you before. What are you doing in my house?"

"John, I have come to thank you. You, your neighbors and in fact all of your countrymen became a real inspiration to my generation. You helped us see that it is never too late."

"What the heck are you talking about?"

“John, I live in a small town in the northwestern part of the United States called Lake Oswego. Our community, in fact the whole global community, was dealing with an issue called Climate Change. We were burning fossil fuel at a rate that was causing the entire planet to heat up. There were violent storms, flooding, droughts that seemed unstoppable. And no one seemed capable of doing anything about it. The despair many felt was not unlike what you and your countrymen are going through now.”

“Well, I have never heard of this ‘climate change.’ What does this all have to do with us?”

“John, in the darkest moment of despair your country did not give up. Hitler’s bombing did not break your resolve. You will not be conquered and will become an inspiration to America and others who will help you win this war. And your example inspired my generation. We also didn’t give up and ultimately turned the tide on global warming and climate change. We learned from you that it is never too late.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because, John, you are my great-grandfather. Your son does survive the war and emigrates to the United States. He is my grandfather and the stories he told us about what you and Margaret did to get through these difficult times inspired us to not give up. Thank you”.

John hears Margaret call out. “John, who are you talking to?”

“Margaret, come down here. There is someone I want you to meet.”

John walks over to the stairs to give his wife a hand.

“So who is this you want me to meet?”

“He is right here”, John calls out. He turns to show Margaret but there is no one there. John just stares at the wall. “There was someone there! At least I thought there was. Well, there or not, one thing is certain. We are going to get through this. We are not going to give up!”

Duke Castle is a retired business and sustainability consultant. He and his wife have lived in Lake Oswego since 1984.