Migratory birds: Silent panic and play - Reflections on memories of childhood and adolescence from World War II

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Introduction

This paper is based on memories of childhood and adolescence during World War II.[2] It relates, in particular, to memories relating to the forced evacuation of Finnmark and Northern Troms, Norway 1944. During the German retreat from Murmansk front towards the end of the war the Germans implemented the scorched earth tactics in Finnmark and Northern Troms. This was done to deny resources to the Soviet Red Army. The Norwegian population was forcibly evacuated to an unknown destination, or escaped to hide in mountain caves or turf huts (Hauglid 1985; Petterson 2008). Among these evacuees, oral history interviews were conducted with 30 time witnesses, both men and women, between 2004 and 2014. At the outbreak of war, the informants were children, ranging from preschoolers to adolescents. The youngest was born in 1940 while the eldest was born in 1924 and was 16 years old in 1940.[3]

During the war, the time witnesses experienced losses and restrictions in some form, such as rationing of food and clothes, insufficient schooling, bomb shelters and blackout curtains (Nøkleby 2000; Wetlesen 2006; Hjorth 2009). They also lost homes, pets and toys and everything familiar as a result of the scorched earth tactics, forced evacuation and/or bombings. Although there were similarities, every story was unique. Each had his or her own set of memories and experiences, some of which were nostalgic, others neutral, and some traumatic. Some informants experienced life during war as relatively safe while others felt threatened. One example might illustrate this variation.

Grethe[4] and Ingrid[5] lived in a small community in the eastern part of Finnmark that was one of the most heavily bombed places in all of Europe during WW2. They were best friends and the same age, but they had different memories about the bombings at the age of seven.

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[2] Hereinafter referred to as WW2
[3] Names and facts that could reveal their identities are changed.
[4] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold at The Museum of Reconstruction March 6th 2013.
[5] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold at The Museum of Reconstruction February 27th 2014.
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Grethe could not remember being frightened during the bombings. She said: *"We were chased down in to the basement during bombings. And I was pretty much an obedient young girl, but I had little desire to go down to the basement because, to me, the shooting and stuff were like fireworks on New Year's Eve. I must have been stupid."*

Ingrid on the other hand was scared and said: *"As the war continued, the bombings increased. Sometimes we had to stay all day in the basement. We were too afraid to go upstairs."*

Grethe and Ingrid had different memories of the bombings. Elisabeth Kensinger, professor of psychology at Boston College discusses how aging may in itself could be a factor that may protect against painful memories or reinforce them (Garry 1996; Gregory 1982). Perhaps Grethe repressed the painful memories and remembered the good memories? Conversely, maybe the negative experiences of Ingrid were reinforced by the years that have passed by (Kensinger 2011; Hjorth 2009; Skre 2009)?

Grethe also questioned the accuracy of her memories: *"You should have talked to my deceased brother as well. I believe that he would have told you a very different story than me. He was afraid during the bombings, and he embarrassed me."*

This leads to **the first research question** which is about war memories and the effect of aging: is it likely that the memories of the time witnesses have changed over the years, either to become more positive or more negative (Maher 2006, 135)? The memories have been processed by new experiences and reflections through almost seven decades (Parsons 2008, 18). It can be difficult to distinguish between false and real memories, according to Elizabeth Loftus, an American psychologist who specialized in human memory, and other scholars (Lofthus 1997, 70-75; Markowitch 2010, 17). However, the purpose of asking this question is not to provide an exhaustive description or a complete discussion of memory as a topic, or even to come up with an answer. The underlying intention was to increase the museum's awareness of what kind of stories we get to know and tell, and how we use them.[6]

Grethe and Ingrid's different perceptions of the war also steered the researchers to **the second research question** of this paper: what factors during the occupation made some participants more vulnerable and others more resilient in relation to the consequences of war at the time (Waaktar 2012, Sheidow 2001, Nordahl 2005, Taslaman 2006, Rutter 2012)? In order to discuss this, both protective factors and risk factors were considered to be relevant (Nordahl 2005). Thomas Nordahl is one of those who have done research on these factors.[7]

Protective factors could be defined as any factors in individuals or the environment that prevented the probability of negative psychosocial development in the future, such

[6] The Museum of reconstruction for Finnmark and Northern Troms is located in Hammerfest, Norway.

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as mental health problems (Nordahl 2005). Bjørg[8] experienced a safe childhood. She said: *"Despite of the war, my childhood was quite unique. Our village was like a big kindergarten because there were a lot of kids, and we played everywhere. We felt safe and there were many adults that took great care of us. We thought that they could always protect us."*

She was moved to tears of happiness when she talked about what happened after they were forced to evacuate. On the one hand, her father was in prison indefinitely, and she and her siblings were plagued by lice.[9] Their brand new house also went up in flames due to the scorched earth tactics. She had also felt her life threatened three times during the war. Yet, on the other hand; she had a rich social network with immediate family, relatives and friends, and their hostesses took great care of them, [10] among other things they let her play with their animals in the barn and they taught her how to swim, and she went to school.

Risk factors could be defined as any factors related to individuals themselves, or in their environments that increased the probability of negative psychosocial development in the future, such as mental health problems (Nordahl 2005, Finne 2005). The evacuation was one of the most noticeable risk factors for this study's informants. Arvid Petterson, a Norwegian historian, concluded that the evacuation marked the end of one era and the start of a new one (Petterson 2008). The evacuees went from the known to the unknown. Evacuees were more prone to diseases and lice, and social networks were dissolved.

Ruth was forced to evacuate on the Carl Arp, one of the ships that were used during the evacuation of Finnmark. The journey from Porsangerfjord to Narvik lasted five days. A total of 1,850 evacuees shared two toilets on a boat that was regulated for 150 people. Typhoid, diphtheria and dysentery flourished.[11] She said: *"If there is something called hell on earth, that's what happened. People cried. People prayed. People shouted. It was completely, absolutely terrible."*

Risk and protective factors were not necessarily opposites of each other, e.g. when considering age. Perhaps sometimes a child was more protected, during the war, than an adolescent. But the case could also be contrary.

Briefly summarized, there are two central focuses of this paper. Firstly, the paper will consider ways in which informants' memory about the war changed over time either to become more positive or negative (Maher 2006; Hodne 2005; Kensinger 2011). Secondly, this study aims to analyse "risk factors" and protective factors. It will explore those factors during the occupation, which perhaps made some of my informants more

[8] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold at the Museum of Reconstruction April 11th 2011.
[9]Lice became a major health problem (District Medical Officer in Alta 1943)
[10]The evacuees from Finnmark and North-Troms were accommodated in private households all over Norway (Petterson 2008)
[11]NAV 2008

vulnerable and others more resilient in relation to the consequences of war at the time (MacCormack 1996; Frey 2011; Jayawickreme 2009).

Methods used

A semi-structured questionnaire with an emphasis on war, evacuation and reconstruction was used to guide the conduct of interviews (Hammersley 1992; Hellevik 1997). Some of the informants assumed that they ought to tell the "official" story of all events, dates, names, numbers and locations, but there were no right or wrong answers. They were encouraged to describe incidents and events in their own terms and from their own perceptions (Lorås 2007). In this way, the questions, topics and order of topics varied. Active listening resulted in additional questions such as: "Can you elaborate on this?" (Nielsen 1996, Karseth 1997).

Informants were interviewed between one to three times either in their homes, or in my office. The interviews were taped, and each interview lasted between one to three hours. The first interview was always the most detailed, but nevertheless, a second interview complemented the story. The second time they remembered more details, and gave reflections on living with the memories of war. It also gave the opportunity to ask additional questions.[12]

Each participant signed a consent form. All interviews were transcribed and copies were sent to participants. In some cases, informants erased parts of the transcribed material, especially information that could harm the reputation of others, e.g. names of members of the National Socialist Party.

The informants were recruited in different ways. Two women had recently been interviewed in the projects "Document 100 women"[13] and four of the informants through the school project "The War We Lived".[14] Some were already in the local network of the museum, while others were recommended to the museum by others. We also accidentally came in contact with individuals who wanted to tell their story. In addition, the museum encouraged time witnesses make contact. Announcements on the radio, internet and local TV also resulted in a number of interviews. All were volunteers who came forward willingly.

We were aware how the interviewer might affect the outcomes of the interviews (Batty 2009, 109). For example, Petrine told about hygiene and menstruation when she lived as a cave dweller.[15] She used to boil the fabrics in a pot used for laundry. We wondered if she would have given us this information to a male interviewer.

[12] The informants could end the interview whenever they wanted to.

[13]The Norwegian title is "Dokument 100 kvinner" A number of museums have interviewed women all over Norway. The Women's Museum in Norway (Kvinnemuseet) is the initiator and project manager. The result is a book to be published in 2015 (www.kvinnemuseet.no).

[14]More information about this project under the section: The use of retrievable information at the museum.

[15] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold in her home October 28th 2011.

Both men and women shared traumatic experiences and sensitive issues which confounded my expectations. We expected that women might be more open than men. Bjørnar, among others, said that talking and expressing his feelings allowed him to alleviate feelings associated with distressing memories.[16]

The use of archives

This paper is also supplemented, to a small extent, with essays written by graduate students in 1945, just after the war ended in Torsken municipality in Senja in Troms County.[17] The essays provided a unique opportunity to meet young people in their own time as they presented first-hand accounts of life during the war. The essays were written while the memory of the war was still fresh; thus giving the nerve of a youth-like understanding of themes such as family relationships, vulnerability or feelings of fear and loneliness (Slettan 1997; Parsons 2008). The descriptions were honest and heartfelt. However, it was not possible to conduct an interview and angle the issues towards specific interest, or ask additional questions when something was unclear. The essays were also written within the rules of a short structure and it was impossible to give all things full play. Thematically they were restricted to a particular event, such as a trip to the church or into the wild. With time witnesses, however, it was possible to ask about different topics and give follow-up questions. It was also possible to assume how the war affected the lives later. However, the intention was not to decide whether the one source was safer to rely on than the other. Rather, the essays and interviews complemented one another.

Repressed or emphasized war memories of time witnesses?

Recent studies by the psychologists Mara Mather indicate that elderly people tend to emphasize information that is emotionally pleasing whilst blocking painful memories (Mather 2006). This debate seemed relevant, especially because of the following example.

"My mother was an excellent cook"

Ellen was interviewed in 2004 and then, seven years later, in 2011 about the forced evacuation.[18] She was 19 years old at the time. Did her memories become more positive over the years?

In 2004 she said: *"Tromsø was crowded with people from Hammerfest and Finnmark. I remember very well the depressive atmosphere. It was silent panic. Nobody*

[16] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold May 30th 2013.
[17] IKAT: Torsken kommune arkiv 1943
[18] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold May 4th 2004 and October 27th 2010.

complained. Even the kids did not play. They were also affected by the situation. They understood what was going on. We were not shopping like we usually would do in Tromsø."

But eight years later she stressed that they were evacuated in a private fishing boat and were therefore allowed to bring their personal belongings and furniture.[19]

In 2011 she added: "*We managed to rescue our linen, and the heavy dining room furniture in oak, which Dad had bought at an auction. My mom had painted it black. It was lovely. Whenever we had company she dressed the table with a pink tablecloth of damask. Mum had such a good taste in colours."*

The reason why she associated more positive memories with the evacuation at the last interview could also be about the focus (cf. Hjorth 2009). In 2004 she was asked her to tell about her memories from the evacuation. In 2011 it was a life-cycle interview[20] and she started to tell about her parents and childhood home. Perhaps this influenced what she remembered about the evacuation as well? It is likely that this started a process in her that caused her to recall also positive memories related to the evacuation.

Perhaps the discussion about aging promoting positivity is better supported by another argument, i.e. most interviewees expressed a deep appreciation towards their parents saying they were excellent caregivers in spite of the difficult circumstances. It is possible that they glorified the parenting skills of their mothers and fathers and their ability to provide care during occupation when they became elderly.

Grethe said: I must say one thing; our parents took such great care of us. They were so calm and so confident and that meant a lot to us kids. As an adult, as a mother myself, I started to realize that, oh my God, they must have been terrified, but us kids never saw them crying or being upset. Not at our house at least. Instead they made jokes and laughed with us kids."

In particular, time witnesses emphasized that their mother played a significant role in their upbringing during the war. Ellen remembered: "Luckily I had a mother who was an excellent cook. During the war she made potato salad with onion and herring, oh my God it tasted delicious on a slice of bread."

A nationwide collection of life stories in Norway also indicates that memories become more positive over the years. Altogether 4600 men and women wrote their childhood narratives in 1964, 1981 and 1996. They were given the task of focusing on life changes between childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The majority of them focused on their childhood and the role of their mother. She was described as good, kind, strict,

[19]The evacuees were otherwise only allowed to such as "clothes, all fishing gear and food for 4 weeks" (Announcements, Neverfjord, source: The Museum of Reconstruction for Finnmark and Northern Troms).

[20]On life-cycle interviews, see Wetlesen (2006).

religious, wise, hardworking, loving and brave and so forth. The hard times were forgotten (Hodne 2005).

There may also be another explanation as to why there were so many positive memories associated with the war. It may also be that those who had more difficulties than average might not have been included in this study. That may be because severe post-traumatic reactions are associated with an early death and substance abuse problems.[21]

Remembering too well?

However, other researchers such as the psychologists Stephen Porter and Ingunn Skre suggest that it might be the case that some memories, especially traumatic memories are special, e.g. as put by Skre "*remembered too well, too often and too detailed"* (Skre 2009, 195; Stephen 2009). The fact that most informants often gave detailed descriptions of the traumatic evacuation, whereas the daily years of war often seemed more blurred in their memory, may indicate that traumatic memories are remembered better than more neutral or nostalgic memories. This could also indicate that their memories became a heavier burden over the years. The effects of the war became stronger and stronger as they got older and reflected more and more about what happened at the time. Several of the informants had never talked about the war before, but they felt a responsibility to tell younger generations about it before it was too late.

The other informants also gave examples of living with war memories, e.g. of nightmares and anxiety from the noise of planes. This was also the case for those who remembered their childhood during the war as relatively safe. Informants had an explanation for this: *"At that time we did not know better,"* they said. *"We were so young, and we were not allowed to listen to the radio and read the newspapers. Besides, we rather played and had fun."*

"Dear God – save our lives!"

But even if the time witnesses put most emphasis on particular events such as evacuation, most of these stories were neither black nor white, but varied with shades of grey. The one did not exclude the other. For example, Bjørg had both positive and negative memories from the evacuation ship. For her playing with other children on the evacuation ship was perhaps a protective factor that made the trip less scary for her.

She said: *"Suddenly, we were commanded to the top deck. The Germans threatened to shoot us if the boats in the convoy were torpedoed. So we were kind of hostages. We kids knew what happened when a ship was torpedoed, that had been described in all possible forms. I prayed: 'Dear God, save our lives! Then after a while, I lay beside the*

[21] NAV 2008

window and looked at the great scenery. I felt safe and calm. We kids were also having fun. We actually played hide and seek on board. There were so many places to hide."

Regardless of whether traumatic or nostalgic memories last the longest, these stories also increase our understanding of what it is like to live with such memories in old age (Wetlesen 2006; Porat 2010). For example, Ruth was evacuated on Carl Arp.

She said: *"I was so thirsty, but I could not swallow a drop of water. My throat was completely blocked. I was so thirsty that it is impossible to describe it. And ever after I would always have water, juice or something next to me. Even for a short drive I bring a bottle of water with me. I have been so scared of being thirsty ever since."*

Freezing cold and sick

But perhaps it is not really a question about whether their memories became more positive or negative with age. Instead, perhaps some memories remained more unchanged than others. Memories that are associated with strong emotions such as happiness, sorrow, anger or anxiety lasted longer than the more neutral memories (Brown 1977). It was as if the informants still could smell the smells, taste the flavours, and hear the sounds. Ellen remembered the evacuation very well: "I stood on the deck almost all the way to Tromsø with wet shoes because I couldn't stand the smell of the engine. It was freezing cold. My only pair of mittens was forgotten at a cafe where we sat and waited for the evacuation boat."

She seemed to relive what actually happened. In general, the stories of the time witnesses were most often detailed and dated. This is referred to as episodic memory (Heskestad 2001; Wetlesen 2006; Hjort 2009). Emotions may function like colour markers to emphasize the importance of the text, to make it easier to notice a particular word or a paragraph (Heskestad 2001).

The episodic memory of Ingrid was also quite strong about the evacuation. During the transport she had to stay in a church along with other evacuees as they were being transferred from Finnmark to the south of Norway.[22]

She remembered: *"We were served oatmeal porridge on large print plates, oatmeal. I brought my plate with me and sat on a gravestone in the cemetery. I ate there because of the heat and the nauseating odour inside. I vomited after eating. I was well grown, certainly in my forties or fifties before I managed to eat oatmeal again. That I could not do, no! I remembered the sick feeling in the cemetery too well!*

Just like migratory birds

Considering episodic memories, it was interesting to compare Ellen's story with one essay from 1945 written by one of the previously mentioned pupils. He wrote about his

[22]They were forced to evacuate because of the scorched earth tactics implemented by the Third Reich (Fosnes 1974).

experiences as an evacuee. Their understanding of the evacuation was fairly similar and the words were often the same. This shared understanding between Ellen and the young boy indicated that the young voice of Ellen was well preserved in her. She seemed to be in contact with the young person in her experiencing the war (Wetlesen 2006; Hjorth 2009).

The title of the paper was "a memory."[23] The boy wrote: "*We were just like migratory birds. Nobody knew where we were going. I wanted to go home." The evacuees were well received in Tromsø. At Sagatun we ate breakfast, dinner and supper for free. We had to leave Tromsø after half a week. I began to worry. Nobody knew where we were going. I went to bed and did not know anything. Here we are and have to suffer because of one man only."*

Ellen told: *"Nobody knew where we were going. We wanted the war to end so we could go home. We ate fish soup at Sagatun café. The skin of the fish was not removed. But under those circumstances… Everything could not be perfect. Everything was urgent. We stayed in Tromsø for three days. We had no idea where we were going next. We just looked straight ahead. I do not know if it was the Red Cross or any other association that arranged accommodation and food in Tromsø. They were fantastic! So helpful!"*

It was as if the years between the stories were erased. The experience of Ellen and the young boy were characterized by strong feelings of uncertainty, helplessness and powerlessness, but also of gratefulness for being served food at Sagatun café in Tromsø.[24]

Episodic memory could also be manipulated by the years that have passed by ever since, and the informants may not give an accurate description of what happened (Wetlesen 2006). But there is no question that they were there and that the war happened to them. So there is no reason to ignore their stories. Besides, it was not common until the 1990s to ask children or adolescents about their war experiences. And after the war ended it was usually a "non-topic" (Werner 2000, Hake 1999) The knowledge about their experience at the time was lost. Therefore, the stories of the surviving witnesses are important sources in order to understand childhood and young life during WW2.

Vulnerability and resilience in childhood and adolescence

There are three main points to be made about childhood and adolescence during war. Firstly, children are not just children. They are constantly developing as they grow from young age and into adulthood. So, therefore, their age at the time may also have been

[23]In Norwegian – *et minne*.

[24]Tromsø was one of the transit towns during evacuation, and the evacuees were served food while staying there (Fosnes 1974).

critical for how they felt about the war (Hjorth 2009; Wetlesen 2006; Kjærholt 2001; Johansson 2000). Secondly, it also became quite evident during interviews that the informants had their own defining moments as children when the war became real (Stargardt 2006). Thirdly, the importance of parents' protection was important, e.g. in an English nursery during World War II. It was proved that parents' protection and sense of calmness was of great importance to children during severe war attacks, such as bombing (Freud 1943). Children under five years showed no signs of panic if they were in their mother's care and if she was at peace. On the contrary, nervous mothers led to anxious children (Freud 1943).

My world collapsed

An example may illustrate the importance of maternal care. This is how Grethe felt when her mother became ill and could not support or care for her.[25] It was a defining moment for her: *"It was very scary when my mother became ill. Mum was the very foundation in our family, and she was never afraid. She was always there for us. Suddenly she cried and seemed very upset. She probably thought that she would die because she urged us to be kind to one another. My world collapsed. It was absolutely terrible. What more can I say?"*

At the beginning of the article, we wrote that Ingrid was very scared during the bombing at the age of seven. But in her pre-school days she felt completely safe, even if the bombs dropped daily. Her father and mother arranged a bomb shelter in the basement of the house they lived in, with ready-made food and beds. It was a safe haven for her. But even though she felt safe for the first few years of the war, she remembered this from 1940: *"It was one of those days that I remember. My father seemed very determined and scared. I did not understand any of it. But I can remember it."*

The outbreak of war was not intimidating in itself. Instead it was her father's reaction that frightened her. The reason why she varied between feeling safe and unsafe may indicate that she was in a constant process of interpreting potentially frightening situations by being attentive to her parents' reactions. It was a dynamic interaction whereby she probably looked to the reaction of her parents as a means of interpreting the threat as well as searching for a source of reassurance.[26] She experienced the absence of her father's protection, not physically but mentally. There was something inexplicable about her father's reaction she said. And this made it a terrifying experience for her; he showed feelings that she could not understand.

Bjørg said: *"I somehow thought that it could not happen to us, we heard the stories of all the people who had to escape, but nothing could happen to you personally and*

[25] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold April 11th 2013.
[26] NAV 2008

there were so many adults who would care for us. And we did not understand that the adults could not save us if something were to happen."

Bjørg was also aware of the adults' reactions. She also saw her father crying once, and she could not understand why. She had never seen him cry before. Years after she realized that his tears were probably caused by the sorrow that his best friend was killed in the Battle of Narvik.[27]They never talked about it. Her father's way of getting through this distressing loss was through muteness. Painful feelings were not worked through.

It is likely that this stopped Bjørg and Ingrid from communicating and expressing themselves (Mellemgard 2002). Bjørg and Ingrid were probably too young to understand and lacked the ability to put the reactions and actions of their fathers into words (Dyregrov 2000). At the time it was not customary to talk with children about such losses. When fear is not explained and discussed, it feels like it has no boundaries, and when children cannot ask, they cannot be comforted (Wetlesen 2006; Hjorth 2009).

Later on those who were children at that time were aptly conceptualized as the 'silent generation.' Perhaps this silence was caused by a collective bad conscience among adults towards the war-exposed children (Werner 2000). The adults also possibly thought that silence would protect the children, thinking they were too young to understand (Wetlesen 2006; Hjorth 2009). Besides, after the war, even if they wanted to talk, there was no time to analyze, the informants said. The great priority was to rebuild the very foundations of their lives.

I have nothing to apologize for

The language of silence is often associated with children of the Nationalist Socialist Party (Eik 1999; Oxenberg 2004). Grethe experienced this. It all started after the war when her father was arrested and sentenced to prison for nine months for being a member of National Unity. It was a defining moment for her (Stargardt 2006). Grethe said: "*I was totally unaware that it was illegal to be a member. I did not realize that he was seen as a criminal. So I learned it the hard way. After the war, only those who had been good Norwegians during World War II were honoured. I could not understand why other people had been so much wiser than my parents. It created a mess in my head, and I was afraid to be identified with the Nazis. But, I was only five years old when the war began and 10 years old when it ended. I had no effect on my parents whatsoever."*

The theme was a taboo and this created a conspiracy of silence (Eik 1999; Oxenberg 2004). Her parents were unable to talk about it. It was also a non-issue in the local community. So Grethe was left to grapple with the silence and questions by herself. It was not until her father passed away that she and her mother, finally, were able to break the silence.

[27]It was a battle between the German invasion forces and the Norwegian, British, French and Polish militaries. It lasted from 9 April until 28 May 1940.

Her mother was innocent, Grethe said. She only followed her husband as a party member. She apologized for the damage this had caused her children. As a part of the healing process, Grethe learned that it was her father's choice and commitment. Then Grethe felt relief. It had taken her many years to arrive at this: *"I have nothing to apologize for."* But still there were some unresolved questions. She had never had the opportunity to ask her father. "*Why did you do it?"*

Grethe was clever at school and thought that this had given her status and respect among the other children, even though her parents were involved in the NS. This is an example that personality and individual factors like intelligence and social skills also affected children and young peoples' wartime experience. But I have not chosen to focus on these potential risk or protective factors. The reason for this is because I cannot travel back in time to observe their behaviour and reactions at the time.

War stories were our entertainment

But it was not only child-parent relationships that influenced the child's ability to process scary or traumatic events of the war. Children also found other ways to express themselves. Interaction between children was also one important protective factor in play, school and other activities (Maccormack 1996). Some examples were mentioned in the introduction to the article. Others follow.

Even though Ruth described Carl Arp as a living hell, she also said: *"It was a relief when we were healthy and could be on deck, because we were on deck almost all the time. We played. We were kids. We were accustomed to being outdoors. It was a lovely autumn. All the nice weather… But when we were down in the cargo it was absolutely terrible."*

Bjørg said: "*War stories were our entertainment. We grew up with them. We children competed to tell each other the most gruesome stories and as many as possible."*

Small acts of kindness

Was this silence as significant a risk factor for adolescents as it seemingly was for younger children? An interesting study about the Great Depression in USA shed light on the difference between older and younger children. Younger children (2–6 years old) had worse symptoms in later life than the adolescents. Small children were more home-based and thus more easily influenced by the depressive family atmosphere. The adolescents, on the other hand, if they could find work, had their own time away from home. They could contribute financially to the home. This boosted their self-confidence and the sense of powerlessness decreased. The youngest children lacked this opportunity for action (Elder 1999). The time witnesses that were in their teens at the

time also experienced increased independence and could act on their own outside the home.

Ellen said: "*I worked at the Marine warehouse during the war. A woman became sick and they asked if I could come. I knew they stole food there. Coffee, sugar and butter. So I took the job. Whenever a boat with goods came the Russian prisoners had to load it into the warehouse. They had to do the all the hard work. This is how I became acquainted with Michael. I felt so sorry for him. Today I would not have dared it, but then I was young and thought that nothing bad could happen. I made 3 to 4 slices of bread with real butter and strawberry jam. And the Russians probably felt when someone would give them something, because he stood behind the door. And you should have seen it. I have never seen a man who ate like that, completely starved; it was absolutely horrible to watch. Thankfully it was not detected. It was only a small act of kindness, but I'm happy I did it."*

There were also other examples of increased independence among the informants during the war that was positive for their experience. Sigve and Petrine left their families and volunteered to accompany the Norwegian forces at Sørøya in the winter of 1944/45, highly motivated to protect the island from the scorched earth tactic. Sigve was involved in the warfare between Norwegians and the German occupants, while Petrine made food for the forces. It seemed that Sigve remembered this period as the prime time of his life. He knew the geography of the island very well and could lead a military force to a safe hiding place.

Petrine said that she was tired of washing her brother's clothes. She wanted to leave and have an education. *"If only I was a boy,"* she said, but helping the forces gave her opportunities to leave home. She proudly explained how they managed to get the food to feed as many as possible and for as long as possible.

"We had flour in water and touched it, and kneaded it in the oven. This was named clap cake. We also roasted the meat in the pan. We ate these three times daily."

The activities of Ellen, Sigve and Petrine suggest that the adolescents had more choices and opportunities than young children. Perhaps all of this strengthened their confidence and improved their lives during the war?

"Ugh, I'll never forget those words…"

But although the adolescents may have gained a great deal of independence acting on their own, they still needed the reassurance of their family to a large extent. Their thinking and feeling still went along with the reactions and beliefs of their parents (Steinberg 1999).

In the graduate exams mentioned in the beginning, parents also appeared to be of vital importance to war-exposed teenagers. [28] One of the pupils described what happened when the Russians torpedoed Norwegian fishing boats outside Senja on 12 April 1942.[29]

One pupil wrote: *"My mother said that I had to go to bed because I was not strong enough to watch. I was shivering and crying.*

Ellen was 19 years old at the end of the war and was upset by the reaction of her mother. She remembered this when she and her mother came to "the house of Finnmark" in Oslo.[30]A woman from Ellen's home town handed out food and greeted them nicely. Then her mother responded in a sad voice: *If only I could go home to rest in our domestic soil."* Ellen continued: *"Ugh, I'll never forget those words and the look on her face. It was deeply disturbing."*

This episode probably gave her insight into her mother's concerns about how everything could possibly be resolved. But unlike Ingrid and Bjørg, perhaps Ellen had greater opportunity to understand her mother's reactions because she was probably old enough to approach an adult understanding of the causes of her mother's reactions. [31]Due to her age and the subsequent understanding of language and concepts, she could probably sort out and make meaning of situations like this.[32] Ellen's way of processing the war has always been to seek information about the war and being engaged in politics. It helped her to find meaning in the sad and disturbing experiences.

"It was blackout curtains and everything"

But even if young people had a more cognitive understanding of the war than younger children, it could be difficult for the adolescents to accept the circumstances. They often reacted with helplessness and irritability (Saylor 1997). Black-out curtains seemed to be a symbol of the loss of personal freedom.

Ellen said*: "It was black-out curtains and everything. Nor could you go out in the field either during the war. You had to follow the edges of the road. So there were not many berries to be preserved, only a little, so that you got a touch of jam on your bread."*

In one of the examination papers about the evacuation, one of the pupils stated with a sense of powerlessness and petulance: *"And I said to myself, and here we must suffer for the sake of one man."* [33]

[28]IKAT: Torsken kommune arkiv 1943.
[29]Ten fishermen were killed and several wounded. Seven were taken as prisoners to Murmansk. Only four of these came back (Vatne 1968).
[30]It was a help station for the evacuees.
[31]NAV 2008
[32]NAV 2008
[33]IKAT: Torsken kommunearkiv 1943

It may be that the lack of social freedom was more noticeable to the adolescents than the younger children? After all, young children were more attached to the home. Perhaps they were less effected by the German restraining orders and curfew. But the lack of autonomy seemed to become quite notable early in childhood to the same extent as with older children. When they talked about these losses, the child's voice in them became obvious and they became strongly emotional about it.

Ingrid said: "*Mum went to the barn half past six to milk the cows, it was not far to go, but she had to bring her passport. A passport was the first they were given during the war, you could not go where you wanted to. Dad used to go looking for mum if she stayed too long. I used to worry. Fortunately nothing happened to her."*

Grethe remembered this when she came home after the war: *"I had my own cat. I was quite sure that she was waiting for me, but she was not. I just could not understand that everything was gone. All the nice things…"*

Ingrid has kept in her mind and heart that she was not able to take her beloved doll during the evacuation. Her mother said that the doll had to wait at home until they returned. She said:" *I did not scream, but I cried because it was so painful. So I felt quite poor, completely naked. I even get tears in my eyes today just thinking about it."*

The overall impression of older women is that they had a special relationship with their dolls. It pained their hearts to leave the dolls behind as they evacuated. The dolls were cherished. They remembered their names, and how they got their names. It was customary to name the doll after famous people, e.g. Margrethe was a typical doll's name.[34]

For an evacuee, stability was important at all ages. One of the pupils came to Grylle-fjord as an evacuee: *"When we got to Gryllefjord I was happy. I thought that I would like to stay here, and I enjoyed myself."*[35] The writer probably felt that staying in Gryllefjord was an opportunity to establish continuity after the chaotic weeks as evac-uees.

No chance to fight the fire

The place of residence during the war could be a potential risk factor. For example, recent studies argue that physical distance, for instance from bombings and along with number of bombings affected the degree of perceived danger. [36] With this in mind, perhaps the children and adolescents in the eastern part of Finnmark were more vul-nerable than those growing up in the western part of Finnmark.[37] But this could not be

[34]Margrethe II of Denmark born 16. April 1940. She has been the queen of Denmark since 1972.
[35]IKAT Torsken kommunearkiv 1943.
[36]NAV 2008.
[37]Kirkenes, Vardo and Vadsø in the eastern part of Finnmark were among the most bombed cities in all of Europe during WW2.

verified conductively, due to the small number of participants in this study. When and if informants were traumatized by the war seemed to be highly individual.

Solveig[38] remembered that this happened in year three at school: "*The big bombing of Vadsø happened 23 August in 1944. The town centre where I lived was hit. Our house was not bombed, but it was burning everywhere, so our house disappeared in the flames anyway. Oh well, it was the bombing and we were in the shelters. We had to do it. But I thought that nothing could happen to us.*

Moreover, a single incident of bombing could adhere equally well in memory as many bombings regardless of geographical location.[39] Bjørg had such an experience. Her story tells that the absence of a responsible adult made the situation even more traumatic. *"I was on my way home after I had visited a friend. First came the Norwegian aircraft siren, and then came the German. Then we realized that it was serious. On the way home I saw a bomb that fell in the mountains. I ran into a house and down into the basement. More and more people came. I was very scared. I was afraid that the bombs would hit us. I was also very cowardly. I sat in the middle of the room. It was because I thought that if we get hit by shrapnel they would not hit me. Imagine being so cowardly, but I was only 12 years old and very scared. After a while, the house next door caught fire, and they all ran away. I was all alone in the dark and everyone had left. Well, there was a man left, but he left me behind. What kind of a man would leave behind a young girl who screamed, in that situation? He should have taken me by the hand and said `let's go.'"*[40]

In terms of geography, one story indicates that the size of the community could make a difference during evacuation. In more remote and inaccessible areas it would be harder to reach people with information about the forced evacuation,[41] compared to towns or villages with higher population density. This has partly to do with the fact that more people meant more places, such as shops, that could receive telegrams about subjects such as the forced evacuation. Where Per[42] lived there were no such places. There was no shop to receive telegrams and spread the news, only a few family farms. They had indeed heard rumours about evacuation and the implementation of the scorched earth tactics. But they did not think it would happen. Nor did the German occupying force set up procedures and boats for evacuation at Per's home village. Thus, they stayed, and suddenly they became witnesses of the scorched earth tactics.

[38] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold in her home August 20th 2012.

[39]NAV 2008.

40There were many German soldiers stationed in Hammerfest, west Finnmark, but the town was little affected by physical acts of war such as bombings and shootings compared to eastern Finnmark (Fosnes 1974).

41In late October 1944, Hitler declared that the population had to leave the area because of the scorched earth tactics (Petterson 2008, Fosnes 1974).

[42] Interviewed by Heidi Stenvold August 14th 2013.

Per had nightmares ever since this happened and said: *"I lay there with my brother (on a ledge) to watch the burning. They also shot the cows. The cows did not die right away, but were jerking in pain for half hour or perhaps one hour. It was horrible to watch. The house burned. We kids had no chance to fight the fire. That was it. It is things like this that you remember, right?"*

Fish, fish, fish

Informants living in the countryside said that they were better off because they could grow vegetables, go fishing and keep animals. But this was not true in all cases. For example, both Per and Bjørnar remembered that they starved although they lived in the countryside during the war. Per remembered that hot chocolate and candy was given to them by the Germans shortly before he was evacuated. He said that this happened in a warehouse in Hammerfest. He ate like a maniac he said.

Bjørnar described the food situation during the war like this: "*We ate fish, fish, and fish! I cannot remember anything else. We even ate fish stew on Sundays. A German ship came with the bread in the evenings. I used to go there to have some bread."*

Besides, the informants who lived in the towns and larger villages felt that they did not have any less access to food compared with those living in the countryside. They explained that they got access to food in different ways, e.g. through a large social network, family shop, a small kitchen garden, fishing, relations with farmers in the countryside and, of course, their mothers and grandmothers knew their way around the kitchen.

A pile of corpses

Did gender have an impact on war experience? There were indeed different expectations associated with being a boy or a girl during the war. Daughters were probably more often than sons involved in food making (Passlack, 2003). We assumed in advance that there were many girls that would help quite a lot at home and in many cases they had to take over as a homemaker. Eli remembers very well the shortage of groceries. She said: "*No milk and no coffee. Margarine was mixed with boiled potato so that it lasted longer. Sugar and stuff did not exist. Then something awful came. It was called 'krystallosetter'. It was a kind of artificial flavour substitute. It was burning on the tongue."*

While sons were more often involved activities outside the home, such as fishing, the assumption was that boys were, to some extent, closer to the actual events, and thus at greater physical risk.

Bjørnar remembers when the two German transporters, Donau and Bahia Laura, were sunk by torpedoes from a British submarine some distance from Bjørnar and his stepfather and his brother. They went out to see if there was anything they could use or

eat from the ship. He said: *"They were torpedoed mid-afternoon, so we went early the next morning in the fishing boat to look for things to save and use. Oh my God, how many corpses. We did not understand. We saw the darkness of the water. Kind of circles. My stepfather said: 'What on earth – did they set the nets already?' But it was a pile of corpses. We could hardly find our way out. They all lay there in a swimming position. Someone was further ahead, probably better to swim. But it was too far away from land anyway. It was no fun. And ever after I saw these people in my mind."*

Although the girls might have more responsibilities at home, they were also vulnerable. Home was not necessarily synonymous with safe. Girls probably experienced fewer direct confrontations with German soldiers, but nevertheless they noticed the presence of the soldiers.

Ingrid said: "*Mum had knitted mittens for Russian prisoners, there were many and we felt sorry for them. They were almost naked, barely any clothes. I was given the task to give the mittens to the prisoners. I had to be very careful when I did this. But, I was discovered. Then I stopped, and ran away the fastest I could, so that they could not see me anymore. I have never been so scared in my whole life."*

But it was not only gender that decided how much responsibility they had at home, e.g. Ellen was the youngest of six siblings. She said: *"I was treated like a doll. I did not have to do any chores."* Her older sisters did the housework. Ingeborg did not have older siblings who could do the housework, but even then she remembered that she spent her time playing. She was an only child and a beloved child. She was their princess and a much wanted child. Her mother and father did not believe that they could have children because of their advanced age so she came as a surprise. They gave her all the love and opportunity parents could possibly give. She got lots of great toys, e.g. a doll's carriage, dolls, doll's clothes and more. During the war they also bought a cow so that they could give her milk.

Concluding remarks

Two questions were raised at the beginning of this article: Is it likely that the memories of the time witnesses have changed over the years, either to become more positive or more negative (Mather 2006; Hodne 2005)? What were some of the factors during the occupation, that perhaps made some of the informants more vulnerable and others more resilient towards the consequences of war at the time (Waaktar 2012; Sheidow 2001; Taslaman 2006; Rutter 2012)?

Scholars discuss whether memories become more positive over the years or not (Maher 2006; Kensinger 2011). However, if memories became more positive as people get older, then we would expect the informants to have more positive memories from

the war than negative. But that was not the case. The interview seemed to be a forum in which they could expose and ease themselves of heavy burdens, whether they felt guilt or innocence. At the same time, it was also a space for them where they could remember the good times. They remembered both the silent panic and play during the forced evacuation.

Our thinking was that those who had more positive memories and protective factors during the war would be protected against trauma in old age, whilst those who were exposed to a number of risks were more traumatized. However, that did not seem to be the case. They all seemed to be more or less affected by the war. It is possible that silence and denial has an impact on their conformity to withstand trauma. The war was a non-issue after the war, and many did not talk about it until several decades later. Grethe told me that she and her friends did not talk about the war until their senior years. They asked each other: "Do you remember the great bombing of our home town?" Then they remembered exactly when, where and how it had happened.

Some of time witnesses seemed to be more vulnerable at the time while others appeared to be more resilient. The concepts protective and risk factors proved to be useful as thinking tools in order to systematize and present the interviews. (Nordahl 2005). Access to education, play, and social networks was important enabling resilience (Waaktar 2012; Sheidow 2001; Nordahl 2005; Taslaman 2006; Rutter 2012). However, it was apparent that age at the time could be both a protective factor and a risk factor. The same holds for other variables such as gender and place of residence (Wetlesen 2006). This is perhaps due to the fact that each child's experience of war was affected by a number of factors. There was no single factor that determined how the war was experienced by each child, but how well these factors worked together. The story of Bjørg is consistent with research on children's wellbeing during wars: a positive development depends very much on the protection of at least one parent and/or other caregivers, as well as a predictable setting with school, activities and play with other children. The important elements are safety, love, routines, security, consolation and justification.

There is no so such thing as an absolute reality or truth. Rather, time witnesses give us their perceptions and opinions of the past. The different personal stories of the war-related events allow us to present, consciously, the different viewpoints of everyday life, e.g. during guiding, lectures and in writing. In other words, based on our "memory bank," we can present the story from different perspectives using the mental images not only of those who were children or adolescents at the time, but also women, nurses, teachers and architects and more at the time. It was not all about whether memories are false or incorrect, or if the memories were traumatic, nostalgic or neutral. The war was also a dynamic process with many parallel happenings. Time witnesses could possibly not interpret or understand all of them. It is also possible to verify and falsify parts of

the information such as dates, names and places (Werner 2000). We at the museum have chosen to focus on childhood and adolescence largely because one of our main priorities is the children and adolescents of today. They often feel more close to the story if they can identify themselves with the characters in the story, such as schooling, meals, games and relationships with parents.

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Summary

The museum of reconstruction for Finnmark and Northern Troms uses personal war memories from childhood and adolescence e.g. in exhibitions, articles and lectures. However, 70-year-old memories are most likely processed and changed over time, and critics often consider memories untrustworthy. Some scholars claim that positive memories stick better than negative memories, while others vice versa. The first research question addresses this problem by asking: "Are good or bad experiences most likely remembered?" Discussing this revealed different factors affecting the memories, such as the desire to honor the parents, the questionnaire design, and more. The purpose of the second research question was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that might enhance or hinder resilience or vulnerability in the face of their war experiences at the time.

Keywords: Oral history, war memories, war experience, Second World War in northern Norway

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