

Peace in Europe

Everyone wants to have a moment of pure joy, whether it's from the birth of a baby, a wedding, or a new car. But how many people can boast the joy that was found in Europe on May 8th, 1945? World War II had been won by the Allies and over six years of suffering was over. On this day, the world erupted in happiness-even for those mourning the loss of a loved one. It was on this day that peace was settled in Europe. Though there are many events in history more paramount than this, I would choose to be a part of the crowd in the streets of London, England when Germany's surrender was officially declared on May 8th, 1945 in order to experience the joy and relief of peace.

While the enormous V-E Day party spread across Europe, Winston Churchill cautioned the people with the words: "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toil and effort that lie ahead . . ." Still, they gathered in the streets, waving flags, wearing red, white, and blue, and feasting on pancakes. The crowd sizes were colossal, and even the royal family was allowed to participate in the celebration when Princesses Elizabeth (now Queen Elizabeth) and Anne descended to the street to enjoy the festivities.

Even those mourning loved ones crowded the roadways, finally having proof that their loss was not in vain. In today's world where no one agrees on anything, to have just one moment of mutual rejoicing would be the most wonderful feeling in the world. Can you imagine the looks of relief on the faces of mothers whose sons were fighting? Can you imagine the soldier who has

lost an arm for his country? Picture a wife whose husband was not there to witness the birth of their baby, who has just realized that he is truly coming home. These are the faces of joy, patriotism, and relief that I would witness.

In the English countryside, families threw open their blackout curtains and turned on their lights. Bonfires were lit across Europe, with everything but the kitchen sink being thrown in. Europe, which had been transformed into a land of darkness by the Nazis, was now filled with joyful light.

People also stuffed themselves with good food they had been living without. It's recorded that 15-year-old Audrey Hepburn made herself sick by consuming a whole can of condensed milk! Another food-related illness resulting from the night was a teenage boy who had never eaten an orange due to rationing. Not knowing to remove the peel, he ate it whole and became sick from eating the peel.

In London, the atmosphere was contagious. Civilians joined soldiers and formed conga lines, dancing through the streets. One reporter stated that she had "the impression that the city had been taken over by an enormous family picnic." Bus drivers stopped their buses and joined the party. Police officers were recorded to be "smiling benignly, while soldiers swung by one arm from lamp standards..." Everyone greeted each other the "V for Victory" symbol, including Winston Churchill himself as he addressed the crowds, saying "This is your hour. This is your victory!"

It was indeed their victory. I am proud to have ties to the war myself with my grandfather having fought in Africa and Italy. It was a powerful day, that 8th of May 1945, and one we shouldn't soon forget. It was a time when differences were cast aside, neighbors came together, and victory and peace was celebrated in a most fitting way.

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