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Week 8 Reading

APA Referencing

Byrski, L. (2015). *In love and war: Nursing heroes* (pp. 38–43). Fremantle Press.

Referencing for Family History

Liz Byrski, *In love and war: Nursing heroes*, Fremantle Press, Fremantle, 2015, pp. 38–43.

5. PAGE TO PAGE

It's almost five weeks since I arrived here and I haven't yet met a Guinea Pig. Bob Marchant, having decided that I am serious and apparently trustworthy, has promised to contact some who may be willing to talk to me. In the meantime I wait impatiently for his call, scanning the newspaper archives in the local library, and filling time wondering how I will begin to find the nurses. It has started raining again. The Met Office has predicted more to come with additional flooding in already saturated areas. All due, apparently, to La Nina in the Pacific Ocean, and the jet stream being further south than usual. There were massive disruptions to Saturday's matches at Wimbledon. Here in Sussex the rain continues with long dry periods, and so far no floods. I mark time by taking the train to London and spending a couple of days in the reading room at the Imperial War Museum.

I am searching for personal accounts of women who either nursed on Ward III, or who were encouraged by McIndoe to do voluntary work at the hospital. Unlike the Guinea Pigs who have a solid network and a mailing list, there is no network for the nurses. While some may have been local women, the rest could have been recruited from, or drafted to, East Grinstead from anywhere in the country. The helpful librarian-archivist at the College of Nursing tells me there are no records in their archives. I have great hopes of the Imperial War Museum where a couple of file numbers sound promising, but when the files are brought to me they are disappointing. They are just short extracts of memoir containing facts I already know, no revelations of personal experience. What I do find though is a long and very detailed memoir of a woman who nursed a burned serviceman in the

nearby hospital at Tunbridge Wells, before he was transferred to McIndoe's care at East Grinstead. And there's another by a woman whose mother volunteered her as a dance partner at a party organised by McIndoe for his patients in 1942. I take copious notes and search for other leads, struggling with the torpor induced by the airlessness of the reading room, and the feeling that I am getting nowhere.

The train home to East Grinstead stops frequently between stations for no explicable reason, and we passengers sit in weird, uncomfortable silence waiting for it to start again. I remember similar journeys on this line, sitting opposite my mother as a child, a teenager, a young woman. What would she think of this adventure into the past? Not much I suspect. She disliked the idea of anything that involved poking one's nose into other people's business. Her fear of disapproval, of seeming intrusive or inappropriate, of being a nuisance, would have made her very uneasy with the purpose of my visit. I did a lot of things she disapproved of, and I suspect she guessed that there were many more that would have horrified her had she known about them. But as I have aged I have come to realise that, in her own quiet way, she admired my difference, my resistance, sometimes perhaps even envied it. I feel her presence strongly in this silent train, parked between steep, grass-covered banks, speckled with cow parsley. Indeed, she has been looking over my shoulder since I got here, reminding me of how I'm supposed to behave. Sometimes I swear I can hear her sharp intake of breath when I cross a line. My mother died more than a decade ago. I still think of her every day, and I still miss her, but here in England, in this train, and in lanes and streets where we walked together, beneath trees whose shade we once shared, in such a different life, I miss her more acutely than ever.

The train gives a jolt, and then another. We passengers shift our positions, hopeful of progress. Slowly it begins to move on, and I hear my phone buzzing in my handbag.

What are you doing on Wednesday? Bob Marchant asks.

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At 12.30 pm on Wednesday I am standing in the lobby at the Felbridge Hotel, an MP3 recorder strung around my neck, a notebook in my bag, half an hour early for my appointment with Jack Tooper who, for the last four years, has been the Chairman of the Guinea Pig Club, and has edited its magazine since the 70s. In the days when this hotel was known as Ye Olde Felbridge, its bar was a favourite with McIndoe's 'boys', and they still return to celebrate their anniversary with a dinner here. But, now in their eighties, this year will be the last for the remaining few. To mark the occasion the club's President, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, will attend. Jack Tooper is coming here today to talk security arrangements with the hotel management. But first, thanks to Bob Marchant, he's going to talk to me.

Jack Tooper's face is familiar—it is one of the most photographed of the Guinea Pig faces captured at various stages of reconstruction: the young wireless operator with a big smile sporting a leather flying jacket and helmet; then Jack the burns victim, his face a distorted mass of burned tissue; and later, on Ward III with his right arm strapped across his chest to his opposite shoulder and tethered, by what looks like a trunk, to the place where his nose used to be. This trunk is McIndoe's tubular pedicle, developed from initial efforts by Harold Gillies in the First War. The pedicle is a flap of skin raised from the soft flesh of the inner arm or the chest where one end remains attached while the other is cut and the flap rolled and stitched into a tube and attached to the face for up to eight weeks. There the pedicle is nourished by blood circulating in the live tissue of the arm until new flesh is sufficiently well established for the pedicle to be cut away and the flesh shaped into a nose, a chin or a cheek. In the next photograph, Jack's pedicle has gone and in the centre of his face is a fleshy lump soon to be built up with pig gristle to look and work as a nose. And then the present day Jack—no longer the stuff of childhood nightmares—a smiling eighty-six year-old face, with a strong nose, broad and shiny lips, scarred and stretched skin, but no longer hideously disfigured. As the owner of that face walks into the

hotel lobby the first thing I notice is not his face at all, but his presence: a man of medium height who walks tall, a man with a warm and open manner and a modest but unmistakable air of authority.

'I was so excited when I went to sign up,' Jack tells me. 'I wanted to fly and frankly I never gave a thought to the danger. Most of us felt the same. As you climbed into those planes there was some apprehension but not real fear. I never thought that I might not come back.'

In August 1943, Jack Tooper, then twenty-two, was the wireless operator on a 166 Squadron Wellington bomber. It was Jack's sixth raid and the flight was returning from its mission to drop incendiaries on Mönchengladbach when the starboard engine blew, sending them into a dramatic spin. The pilot managed to recover from the sudden loss of height within a few minutes and they limped back towards the North Sea heading for home.

'We were close to the coast when we were suddenly caught in the searchlights and that's a terrible feeling because you're just there—totally exposed,' Jack says. The pilot, Pat Knight, took evasive action and they got away but further evasive tactics were needed to get past the enemy's coastal defences. Knight took the Wellington down to just above sea level where the crew jettisoned everything. They crossed the English coast at Clacton-on-Sea and landed in a field where they hit a tree.

'The others bailed out, but someone had forgotten to jettison a parachute,' Jack explains. 'It opened and blocked my exit. I was trapped inside and as I struggled to get out, the line of oxygen tanks blew up in my face.' Jack fought his way out of the furnace, eventually emerging from the burning wreck. People who saw him described him as like a living candle, his face was on fire and six-foot flames shot up from it into the sky.

'Burning,' he says now, 'is such a strange thing. It's so fast you almost don't know it's happening. I lost my nose, my upper eyelids, the top of my right ear, my upper lip, the bottom of my chin and my right cheek—apart from that I was normal,' he

laughs. 'And now here I am, a good-looking old bloke — aren't I?' And indeed he is. Time has transformed disfigurement into character, lurid colour to subtle weathering. Recent photographs indicate that age has been kind to many of these men, but that has come at a cost. It took twenty-six operations to rebuild Jack Toper's face; many of the club members had thirty, fifty or more visits to McIndoe's slab.

'Archie was not only an extraordinarily inspired surgeon, he was a wonderful person. It wasn't enough for him that he rebuilt our faces and hands,' Jack says. 'He wanted more than that for us. He wanted us to cope with facing other people, and being part of the world. He believed it would give us the will to live. More than anything he told us that the way we would get through it all was by sticking together, supporting each other, not only there in the hospital, but beyond that. He gave us faith in the future, and when you have faith you can live and come to terms with what's happened to you.' He rubs his nose. 'Archie gave me a good nose, but he did the pedicle process in stages, taking skin from a hairy place on my stomach, so now I have to shave my nose every two or three days. But that's only a small part of what he did. Human beings can adjust to anything if they are given the right sort of environment, that's what he gave us. We had a safe place to learn how to live again, and to discover who we were going to be at the end of all that.' Jack's hands were also severely burned and McIndoe worked on those, sculpting the remains of his fingers into usable stumps.

We talk about the Guinea Pig Club, how it began and how it grew from a drinking club to become a patient support group and then a welfare body that has supported the men in diverse ways through the postwar years and into a new century. 'Many wouldn't have survived without it,' Jack says. 'The world outside the hospital, outside East Grinstead, was a cruel one for people who looked like us.'

Neville and Elaine Blond, in their wartime tenancy at Saint Hill Manor, not only welcomed the Guinea Pigs into their homes to convalesce but also assisted in McIndoe's plan to get the men back into active service and postwar employment.

Elaine Blond was the sister of Sir Simon Marks, founder of Marks & Spencer, and Neville Blond was a member of the board.

'After the war I was able to get a job with M and S,' Jack says. 'I couldn't believe my luck, but I wanted to work in the stores, I wanted to train to be a manager. But they were afraid I would frighten the customers and so I was sent to the head office in Baker Street. I was told I couldn't have any contact with the public. That was very hard to take and Archie encouraged me to fight it. With his backing, the management agreed that I could do six weeks training on the shop floor and see how it went. Well, the customers and I survived. It was tough though: I had to get used to people staring at me, and to kids either shouting abuse or being terrified of me. But I stuck it out and became manager of the Camden Town store and spent the rest of my working life with the company. The outside world was hard for all of us. Archie turned the hospital and the town into a place where we were at home; people didn't stare, or point and they didn't turn away, but everywhere else it was hard to get used to what people said and did when they saw you.'

He gets to his feet, ready to move on to his meeting. 'Bob told me your father worked for M and S,' he says. 'I remember meeting him, but I can't say I knew him. Good credentials though.' He turns away, then back again. 'I wouldn't change it. If I could go back, I wouldn't change it. I would rather have gone through this than not be a Guinea Pig, it's been the centre of my life.'

Jack's words lodge in my mind. Surely it's just a figure of speech. Surely he can't mean that he would choose to relive the trauma that turned him into a living candle and have his face and hands burned away, to go through months of agonising treatments and twenty-six operations to not having been one of McIndoe's Guinea Pigs? But in the weeks to come I will hear others say the same thing, use the same language and say it with same almost imperceptible crack in their voices, and each time it will bring a lump to my throat, and fill me with a treacherous sense of unease.