

The Lady's Home Journal

Mary Jennings pushed back a stray hair and concentrated on her nightly entry into the journal she started over a year ago, just after her husband, Chris, was shipped overseas to fight in the second big war. Little Christopher was put to bed an hour ago, and this was Mary's time to unwind with a cup of tea and her thoughts.

Margaret, Mary's sister, had fallen in love with a British boy, John Brooks, married, and moved from Boston to London four years ago. Now, both sisters lived in fear of the Western Union telegram, John fighting with a battalion stationed in Dover. If something good were to be said about the state of the Western world at this point in time, it would be that families drew closer, and the O'Leary girls, who were never as close, were now each other's best friend; and link to the other's sanity through letters written on old scraps of their children's used homework pages, paper being hard to come by during the war effort.

Initially, whenever another commodity was added to the OPA (Office of Price Administration) rationing list, it would irk Mary. Now, she actually looked for ways to help with the war effort because doing so made her feel like she was a vital part of the system, involved and actively fighting alongside Chris from her corner of the kitchen.

Since 1942, in America, the government needed to control supply and demand of materials that were necessary to create munitions, guns, planes, and supplies for our men fighting World War II. In the form of red, blue, and various other colored rationing books, commodities were controlled, and the populace made do with what was allocated to them. Different products were rationed at different times and in different ways, according to availability. Margaret, who, in England, had been living like this longer than Mary, would listen to the radio every Sunday for the 9 PM broadcast that would inform about any changes in the rationing system. The next morning, by 6 AM, the line would be around the block for sugar, flour, and milk. Soon, it was dried milk and oleo margarine, as the war raged on.

Mary made note in her journal to let her sister know that she is now recycling any metals, donating her colanders and Christopher's old bicycle tires to be used for tanks. This didn't exactly compare to the extremes that Europe salvaged and recycled in World War II, where housewives would sort through the trash on a daily basis, making several different piles of glass, metals, rubber, and even boiled bones to be made into glue for aircraft, and glycerine for explosives, and rags, which would be unpicked by volunteers who would use the fabric to knit socks and jerseys for the troops. Rita Hayworth, Mary's favorite actress, was just in the newspaper perched atop her car, sans the bumpers, with a sign that read "Please drive carefully, my bumpers are on the scrap heap!". She and Rita had something in common!

Next to Rita's picture, was an article about another sinking of a cargo vessel convoy by a German U-Boat, those frightful under-water submarines that struck without warning in an effort to cut off critical supplies being shipped to Europe via England. Just recently, there was the worst battle concerning the U-Boats, a crucial one for the Royal Navy Fleet, called the "Battle of the Atlantic". Thoughts of the sad loss of lives now, and those of the children that were on the Lusitania in 1915, by German U-Boats, made Mary feel a twinge of guilt over the relief she felt that at least she and Christopher were safe on American soil from those monstrosities.

The setbacks that the sinking of these vessels caused only doubled Mary's determination to do with less as she wrote down a promise to donate the iron railing around their front lawn. Anything to get precious food and needed materials over to her husband and his comrades overseas.

As Mary, Margaret, and other housewives like them tightened their belts, the Black Market thrived for those who didn't share the same consciousness. Food stuff, nylons, cigarettes, alcohol, and other rationed supplies created a market where rationed items could be purchased at a premium. Mary despised anyone whom she knew purchased these precious commodities this way, feeling that they were working against their own kind in this horrible war.

Rationing continued through 1945 in Europe, when V-E Day marked the day of Allied victory on May 8, 1945. It continued in America up until December 31, 1946, when V-Day declared the end of the war with Allied forces victorious, although the rationing of sugar continued in many areas into 1947.

Early on New Year's Day, January 1, 1947, Mary heard the doorbell ring! She held her breath as the Western Union man handed her a telegram...Chris would be arriving the next day on the 7 AM train into Pennsylvania Station! She dropped her journal on the floor as she ran upstairs to tell her son the wonderful news; at the same time, Margaret Brooks was celebrating New Years Eve with her husband for the first time in a long time.

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