

**Little Ruby's Hand: Young Women and the Emotional Experience of Caregiving in
Britain after the First World War**

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The sculpture illustrated in Figure 4.1 shows an Australian soldier and a young girl at St Dunstan's, the hostel for blind servicemen set up in 1915 by the publisher Arthur Pearson. He stands at full height, wearing the uniform and slouch hat of the ANZAC, his face tilted upwards in a proud pose. The girl, her youth accentuated by the difference in height between them, rests her hand gently around his forearm and looks down at the way ahead.

Sculpted in 1918 by Clare Sheridan, a cousin of Winston Churchill's, the statue is suggestive about the role of young women in the aftermath of the conflict. Though only in her early thirties, Sheridan had experienced a succession of personal tragedies. She had taken to sculpting after the death of her child in 1914, and the following year, shortly after she gave birth to another child, her husband was killed at the battle of Loos. Yet this sculpture, created in the final year of the conflict, depicts not death but the fates of the survivors and the responsibilities that would come to lie on the shoulders of the young. The image of the 'generous self-sacrificing woman', which David Gerber notes is common in representations of the disabled veteran, here encompasses girlhood.¹

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<FIGCAP>Figure 4.1 A girl leading a blind Australian soldier from St Dunstan's Hostel.

Model made by Clare Sheridan, 1918. (Imperial War Museum Exhibits Collection, Q 66143.

Imperial War Museum, Q 66143.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205133262>) </FIGCAP>

Sheridan's image was one of many during the war to portray a young girl guiding a blind veteran. Her sculpture bears a close relation to a sketch by the renowned Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemakers of a young girl called Ruby Smith, the daughter of the head gardener at St Dunstan's and known to the men of St Dunstan's as 'little Ruby' (Figure 4.2). Variations of the Raemakers image subsequently appeared on St Dunstan's publications and promotional material, such as postcards, which often bore the caption 'Blinded for You' (Figures 4.3 and 4.4).²

chapter was first given as a paper at the Gender, War and Memory in the Anglo-American World conference at the University of Mississippi in October 2015, and I would like to thank members of the audience for their comments. I would like to acknowledge the help of Blind Veterans UK and the Imperial War Museum in allowing reproduction of the images in this article. The research was made possible by a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship, RF-2016-284.

¹ David Gerber, 'Introduction: Finding Disabled Veterans in History', in D. Gerber (ed.), *Disabled Veterans in History* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2012), p. 9.

² Blinded Soldiers and Sailor's Care Committee, 'Report of St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors for the Year ended March 26th 1916'; 'Little Ruby Drawing. The story

<Insert Figure 4.2 near here>

<FIGCAP> Figure 4.2 Louis Raemakers's image of Ruby. (Blind Veterans UK)

<https://100objects.blindveterans.org.uk/little-ruby-drawing/></FIGCAP>

In 1990, then aged seventy-seven, Ruby recalled her childhood at St Dunstan's:

<EXT>I used to go up to them and chat to them and we'd walk around just holding hands and walking along together. If they wanted to go to a certain workshop I knew them all off by heart and where to find everything ... Some of the Australian chaps were quite tall, well-built men and I always remember how my little hand seemed so small in their big hands.</EXT>³

Ruby's story was not just known by the staff and men at St Dunstan's, but was widely circulated in publicity and newspapers. Her image became a symbolic icon of the charity, and

behind the iconic drawing of Little Ruby'. <http://100objects.blindveterans.org.uk/little-ruby-drawing/>. A further variation of the Ruby theme appears on the frontispiece of *The Queen's Gift Book*, a volume produced to encourage donations to Queen Mary's convalescent homes. Two elegant women frame Hugh Thomson's picture, while a blinded soldier, guided by a young girl, are just visible in the background. Thanks to Gary Haines for drawing my attention to the image. Queen Mary, *The Queen's Gift Book. In Aid of Queen Mary's Convalescent Auxiliary Hospitals. For Soldiers and Sailors Who Have Lost Their Limbs in the War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916).

³ 'Cover Girl 1916. Ruby Crane talking to David Castleton', *St Dunstan's Review* (January–February 1990), 4–6.

she became a minor celebrity, receiving gifts and letters congratulating her on her service to the men.⁴

This chapter is about the emotional expectations that surrounded young women's caregiving after the war, and how the subjectivities of daughters were shaped by caregiving. Seth Koven has written about the 'affinity' between the 'crippled child' and the disabled soldier in wartime, and how the children in institutions for disabled children were drawn into the care of recovering soldiers, being seen to play a key role in the restoration of their morale and the transition from wounded soldier to civilian. That 'affinity' was not confined to the disabled child, however, but is part of the wider history of childhood and adolescence after the war, the care given by children, and particularly young girls, being accorded a special place in the emotional world of the veteran. In the reminiscence above, Ruby describes the relationship from the blind soldiers' perspective of touch, and the feel of her 'little' hand in theirs. It is a personal representation of the social expectations surrounding care after the war, which extolled the capacity of girls to put themselves in the place of the unsighted man, yet to navigate the world he could not see, and relate to him in a manner seemingly uncomplicated by condescension or disgust. Ruby describes guiding the men around the grounds of St Dunstan's 'by heart', her ambiguous phrase suggesting both the conscientiousness and affection that care should entail.

<Insert Figures 4.3 and 4.4 near here>

<FIGCAP> Figure 4.3 St Dunstan's postcard adapted from the Raemakers image. 1916.

(Blind Veterans UK <http://100objects.blindveterans.org.uk/little-ruby-drawing/>)</FIGCAP>

⁴ Crane, 'Cover Girl 1916', 5.

<FIGCAP> Figure 4.4 Six pictorial postcards, St Dunstan's, late 1916. The soldier has become a civilian and Ruby appears as an older girl. (Tony Allen, 'Picture Postcards from the Great War'. <https://www.worldwar1postcards.com/dunstans.php></FIGCAP>

Since 2011 I have been interviewing the sons and daughters of First World War servicemen and women born in the 1920s and 1930s, and in their eighties and nineties at the time of interview.⁵ My focus is on home lives and domesticity, and how war shaped the lives of a generation who had no living memory of the conflict. Thirteen of the thirty-five interviews I completed between 2011 and 2015 were with the children of disabled soldiers.⁶ Although limited in number, the interviews are revealing about the help given by daughters once the disabled soldiers left hospitals and training facilities, became husbands and fathers, and were supported in the home and through their later lives. Drawing on the testimonies of four interviewees who were young girls between the wars, I want to trace the longer history of domestic care of disabled veterans across the 20th century, describing the emotional experience of care and the expectations, tensions, and conflicts that could surround it.

The first part of the chapter discusses the role of children in institutions such as St Dunstan's, and the emotional economies of care within such institutions. As Deborah Cohen notes in her comparative study of disabled soldiers, the voluntary sector in Britain played a

⁵ The interviewees were drawn from regions across the UK including the cities of Bristol, Middlesbrough, and Cambridge, and the rural regions of Norfolk and Essex.

⁶ Fathers' conditions included mental health problems, complete or partial blindness, loss of limbs, and war-related health conditions such as tuberculosis and rheumatic fever. Eight of the thirteen were unable to work.

particularly active role as pension officials sought to limit government obligations.⁷ However, the support of charitable organisations often came with moral strings attached, which included assumptions about gender, age, and the appropriate roles of family members in care. Part two investigates the interviewees' memories of their fathers and domestic care, while part three discusses the longer-term impact of care on daughters. Recorded in late life, the interviews give insights into the experience of caregiving across these women's lives. The daughters of disabled First World War servicemen look back on their childhoods from a present in which girls have greater freedom from domesticity, and in which the obligations of children to help support parents are no longer assumed. Spanning girlhood on the one hand and late life on the other, the interviews extend beyond the usual chronologies of demobilisation, return, and aftermath to reveal how the conflict shaped the life courses of descendants across a century.

<H1>Gender and the Emotional Economies of Voluntary Care

Expectations about age, masculinity, and femininity were inherent to the assistance given by St Dunstan's, a central tenet being to rehabilitate the man and eschew dependence, a credo summed up in the memoir of the blinded soldier 'Territorial' as 'V.O.B.', or victory over blindness.⁸ The imprint made by St Dunstan's was perhaps particularly deep, the charity

⁷ Deborah Cohen estimates that between 1925 and 1930 war pensions took up around 20 per cent of the annual German budget, compared with 7 per cent in Britain. *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 4.

⁸ Fiona Reid, *Broken Men. Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914–1930*, (London: Continuum, 2010); Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 7; Jessica Meyer,

being very successful in promoting its cause and attracting public funds through Pearson's energy, skills, and social networks. Blinded servicemen recount the impression made by his 'jaunty self-confidence' and conviction that the blind should 'not only be as self-reliant as possible but that we should be seen to be self-reliant'.⁹

As an institution, St Dunstan's, many of whose nurses, guides, and family visitors were women, provided a model of domestic arrangements for the disabled soldier. Pearson was the father figure, his position as founder and benefactor honoured by little Ruby in the posy of flowers, put together by her father from the gardens of the Regent's Park property, which she would bring him each week. Pearson had lost his sight before the war, and relied on the help of the Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse Irene Mace, 'the girl who was his nurse, reader and guide'. She exemplified the kinds of cross-generational, cross-gender relationships of care that would later characterise those between disabled fathers and their daughters.¹⁰ Mace went on to marry Pearson's right-hand man Ian Fraser, who took over the running of St Dunstan's after Pearson's unexpected death; the couple were married on the second anniversary of Fraser's wounding in a symbolic act of triumph over misfortune.¹¹ Like Pearson, Fraser attributed the beginnings of his recovery to Irene's care.¹² From its earliest days the organisation extended its reach to the home. Editions of *St Dunstan's Review*

"Not Septimus Now": Wives of Disabled Veterans and Cultural Memory of the First World War in Britain', *Women's History Review*, 13/1 (2004), pp. 117-138. [AU [please add Meyer page range]

⁹ Lord Fraser of Lonsdale, *My Story of St Dunstan's* (London: George G. Harrap, 1961), p. 55.

¹⁰ Fraser, *My Story*, p. 56.

¹¹ Fraser, *My Story*, p. 64.

¹² Fraser, *My Story*, p. 17.

recorded the marriages of St Dunstan's men and the births of their children, and they wrote back about their experiences as husbands and fathers earning a living. Many of the occupations men were trained in, such as basket- and mat-making, or poultry farming, could be done from home.¹³ Pearson's insistence that rehabilitation as a man depended on the capacity to be productive drew wives and sometimes children into supporting the veteran's paid labour. Recognising this, St Dunstan's offered training at its farm in the Midlands to the wives and relatives of men who had taken up poultry farming.¹⁴ In the Lord Roberts workshops where disabled veterans made children's toys—it claimed to be Britain's largest toy maker in 1919—wives and daughters were employed in painting wooden figures, and could progress to more specialist painting.¹⁵

The value of marriage for the blind serviceman was discussed in a special debate among the inmates of St Dunstan's in July 1917, Pearson emphasising the aspect of care when he stated that if a wife truly loved a St Dunstan's man she 'loved him both as a mother and as a wife'.¹⁶ When Walter Burgin's father realised that his poultry farm was too ambitious an enterprise for a single man, he wrote to the matron at St Dunstan's to ask if she knew of an eligible wife, and she arranged a date with a Sister at the Hostel, whom he

¹³ Two of my interviewees had blind fathers who had been trained by St Dunstan's. Brenda Aubrey's father in law used to make coconut matting and Walter Burgin's father had a poultry farm.

¹⁴ *St Dunstan's Annual Report* (year ended 31 March 1917).

¹⁵ *Games and Toys* (October 1915), 232; *Games and Toys* (January 1919), 248.

¹⁶ *St Dunstan's Review* (July 1917), 17.

eventually married.¹⁷ Relationships like these were founded on care that was sometimes professional before it became intimate, combined aspects of marriage and maternity, and could establish scripts that transferred across generations.

Domesticity, then—the help of wives and the solidity and emotional security offered by family life—was integral to the treatment offered to the disabled veteran in repatriation institutions. Yet it was not only women as nurses and wives who figured in the soldier’s rehabilitation as a citizen and man, but children. In part this was for commercial reasons: the charity’s fund-raising postcards of fathers deprived of the sight of their children were intended to solicit the very pity that Pearson and Fraser were otherwise anxious to avoid (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

<Insert Figures 4.5 and 4.6 here>

<FIGCAP> Figure 4.5 ‘The child he will never see.’ Tony Allen, ‘Picture Postcards from the Great War’. <https://www.worldwar1postcards.com/dunstans.php></FIGCAP>

<FIGCAP> Figure 4.6 ‘You’ve not said how I’ve growed, Daddy!’, Thomas Henry, c.1916. Tony Allen, ‘Picture Postcards from the Great War’. <https://www.worldwar1postcards.com/dunstans.php></FIGCAP>

Pearson was quick to recognise that the children of disabled soldiers would need additional support for medical, educational, and other costs not covered by the Ministry of Pensions, and it employed visitors, many of them women, to ascertain the needs of families through its After Care Fund, which was established in August 1918. The charity also

¹⁷ The marriage contradicted his earlier position in the 1917 debate, where he had argued that if he was to marry the man should have known his wife before becoming blinded. *St Dunstan’s Review* (July 1917), 18.

established a children's fund to support the educational and medical needs of the dependents of blinded servicemen, and put on entertainments for them.¹⁸ An interviewee whose father was a double amputee, and who grew up in a South London complex for disabled veterans and their families, envied the children of St Dunstan's men because they went out on day trips, got gifts at Christmas, and gained free admission to football matches.¹⁹ In 1922 and 1923 St Dunstan's ran a beauty pageant for the children's fund. Studio portraits of the winning babies were published in *St Dunstan's Review*, highlighting the aesthetic pleasures that blinded fathers were missing out on.

The value of the child was more than monetary, however. Little Ruby's story is an example of the mobilisation of children into the war effort. As Tammy Proctor and Rosie Kennedy have shown, organisations such as the Girl Guides expanded rapidly during the war, teaching girls to sew, cook, and clean so they could be useful companions to the soldier.²⁰ Ruby's help then was understood as a form of patriotic duty, an expression of the young girl's gratitude towards men who had, as the St Dunstan's postcards put it, been 'blinded for you'. There is 'no act more sacred, none more patriotic' than the care of the disabled soldier, wrote T. P. O'Connor in his essay for *The Queen's Gift Book*.²¹ The care of children, however, was thought to have qualities that could not be found in the adult. Promoting its

¹⁸ Rob Baker notes, 'St Dunstan's – name, function and 'brand' changes', Blind Veterans UK.

¹⁹ Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation*, p. 61.

²⁰ Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 109–16; Tammy Proctor, 'On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 92/2 (2002), 71–2.

²¹ T. P. O'Connor, 'The Blind', in George Goodchild (ed.), *The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Gift Book* (London: Jarrow and Sons, 1918), p. 203.

baby competition, St Dunstan's commended the cheering effect of being among children: 'we all know what a pleasure and comfort children can be, especially for a blind man'.²²

'Territorial', who had lost his sight in 1915, recalled in his memoir the help given by the Boy Scouts, who used to run messages, escort the men to buses and trains, and row boats for them in the park. It was not their *labour* that he appreciated most, however, but how the boys' presence contributed to 'the general cheerful atmosphere prevailing everywhere'.²³

Helpful as the scouts were, in his life outside St Dunstan's it was the unsolicited aid of an eight-year-old girl that made the deepest impression on 'Territorial'. She would appear each morning from a run-down tenement as he was on his way to the tramcar; initially, her brothers would accompany her, but eventually it was just the one girl. He recalled her 'clean and soft' hand in his, and her bravery on one occasion when a herd of bullocks on the loose swept past, and she steered him into the safety of a shop. She had kept her cool and 'never let go my hand', he wrote, recalling how a man in the shop had commended the girl's 'magnificent' sense of responsibility.²⁴

That incident, remarked 'Territorial', had impressed on him the girl's bravery, but simultaneously too his own dependence. The help of a young girl could be accepted without the pity that a disabled soldier—schooled by institutions such as St Dunstan's to prize their independence and eschew victimhood—might feel when offered help by adults. The major initial obstacle to his recovery, wrote Lord Fraser, was his 'fear of being the object of pity and emotional sympathy', and a feeling that this might 'sap this desire to be self-reliant'.²⁵ He

²² *St Dunstan's Review* (April 1921), 1.

²³ Territorial, 'From Ypres to V. O. B.', p. 58. MS, Blind Veterans UK.

²⁴ Territorial, 'From Ypres', p. 127–8.

²⁵ Fraser, *My Story*, p. 20.

found it ‘irritating to have to be helped’, and ‘suffered from the fear that people were looking at me in a pitying way.’²⁶ Representations of the disabled soldier stressed the passive and enervating effects of pity. ‘Don’t pity the disabled man – find him a job’ proclaimed a YMCA poster at the end of the war.²⁷ The magazine for disabled soldiers *Reveille*, edited by the novelist John Galsworthy, described the damaging psychological impact of pity. Hospital routines sapped the disabled soldier’s independence and threatened to turn him into a child, ‘suffering’ from patronage.²⁸ The French pioneer of help for blinded soldiers, ‘Brieux’, thought that adults needed to serve an ‘apprenticeship’ in order to care properly for the men, and he recounted the comments of one blinded soldier, whose guide invariably left bruises on his arm, the helper clutching him too tight in his anxiety that he might fall over. Do-gooding women were also singled out for criticism for their narcissistic sensitivity to horror.²⁹ Adults’ concerns about how to help merely ‘stamp in his mental misery’, Brieux concluded.³⁰

By contrast, children were thought to be natural companions for the disabled man. The facially disfigured veteran Stanley Cohen was wary of going out in public, but felt able to teach at his local Sunday School, the children being curious rather than revulsed by his

²⁶ Fraser, *My Story*, p. 48.

²⁷ Young Men’s Christian Association, ‘The Red Triangle Employment Bureau for Ex-Service Men’, Imperial War Museum poster, Art IWM PST 13211, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/10>.

²⁸ J. Galsworthy (ed.), *Reveille. Devoted to the Disabled Soldier and Sailor*, vol. 1 (August 1918), 8.

²⁹ Godfrey Buckley, ‘From the Man’s Point of View’, in Galsworthy (ed.), *Reveille*, 193.

³⁰ Buckley, ‘From the Man’s Point of View’, 191.

condition. ‘With children he was safe’, remarks historian Juliet Nicholson.³¹ As dependents themselves, children could recognise the disabled soldier’s dependence, and their care was assumed to be free from condescension. The affinity between the child and the disabled soldier was not just ‘representational’, as Koven concluded, but part of an emotional economy of care. For ‘Territorial’, these qualities were not only admired in the help of strangers, but in his own children, and his account of the young girl who had volunteered to be his guide parallels his description of his daughter. She had modelled her behaviour on his from a very young age, tracing her fingers over her books as if reading Braille. ‘Territorial’ had shown his competence as a father by building her a doll’s house, measuring its rooms by touch. She had become an expert guide by the age of three, and he had often enjoyed her ‘sweet company’ when out walking, ‘her little hand in mine’. The help of young girls was assumed to be offered not out of pity, embarrassment, or the wish to be seen to be charitable, but given, as Ruby put it, ‘by heart’. These idealised depictions of children’s caregiving did not necessarily accord with their own feelings at the time, however. Like adults, children might also feel horror towards wounded soldiers and be overawed by the responsibilities of care. Pam Parish, whose story is told by Juliet Nicholson in *The Great Silence*, dreaded the visits of a local veteran with a facial wound, whom their mother encouraged to call by, and would do her best to avoid contact with him when pressed to give hello kisses.³² Parish and her sister found the man repugnant, but her account also illustrates the social expectation that girlhood was an ‘apprenticeship’ for care.

³¹ Juliet Nicholson, *The Great Silence 1918–1920. Living in the Shadow of the Great War* (London: John Murray, 2009), p. 63.

³² Nicholson, *Great Silence*, pp. 49–50. On children’s reactions to wounds see also Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs. Living with the Scars of War* (Sydney: UNSW, 2009), pp. 132–4.

<H1>Daughters, Citizens, and Workers

The changes in the position of young women are much discussed in social histories of interwar Britain, which document the growth of new employment based on their labour, the significance of their contributions to family incomes at a time of insecure male employment, and the emergence of new forms of leisure for girls.³³ Young women were key figures in the rise of the consumer industries, voting with their feet as they left domestic work for factories that offered them higher wages and freedom from the stultifying confines of domesticity. Their incomes and mobility were further increased by the Second World War and the demands of mobilisation. At the same time, the fall in completed family size, improved housing, and the diffusion of labour-saving devices permitted more leisure time for some daughters.³⁴ The interviewees in Clare Langhamer's study of young women's leisure recall their youth as a time of relative freedom compared with their later lives, with 'no major

³³ Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in the 1920s and 1930s', in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Feminist History* (London: Virago, 1994) . pp. 203-225AU: pl. add page range of chapter]; Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Katharine Milcoy, *When the Girls Come Out to Play* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Selina Todd, 'Young Women, Work and Leisure in Interwar England', *The Historical Journal*, 48/3 (2005), 55.

³⁴ Todd, 'Young Women', Milcoy, *Girls Come Out to Play*, p. 42. See also Katherine Holden, 'Family, Caring and Unpaid Work', in I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge), 2014, pp. 134–48. [AU please add full publishing details for Zweiniger-Bargielowska]

responsibilities' and 'nobody to bother about'.³⁵ Sally Alexander has written of the psychological shifts that accompanied the economic and social changes in interwar Britain, a new sense of independence and of glamour, inspired in part through Hollywood idols, and a clear sense of generational difference between daughters and the domestic concerns of their mothers.³⁶

The domestic situation of the daughters of disabled soldiers, however, was often at odds with this picture. Selina Todd notes that the greater freedom afforded to some young women was not just the result of economic shifts, the extent of their support at home arising as much from emotional as financial considerations, typically negotiated with mothers who were keen for their daughters to have more independence.³⁷ But the 'maternal aspiration' to provide greater personal freedom for daughters was less apparent among the daughters of disabled soldiers in this study.³⁸ A key element was the family's economic situation: daughters' incomes were critical in homes where the pension was inadequate or non-existent, and so too was their help around the house. Even in homes where income was not short, disability faced young women with expectations of care that were perhaps more familiar to their mothers' generation than to their own. Bill Swann, whose double amputee father needed help with dressing, washing, and walking, explained the divisions of labour in his family:

<EXT>I think my sister did most of the helping out ... like the girls always got lumbered, didn't they.... Erm ... yeah, I'm afraid I have a guilty feeling about ... I

³⁵ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, p. 50.

³⁶ Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman'.

³⁷ Todd, 'Young Women', 790; Milcoy, *Girls Come Out to Play*, p. 41.

³⁸ The eldest daughters of disabled soldiers in Australia were also liable to become 'mother's right hand', comments Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, p. 130.

don't think I ever did really help as much as I should have done, or could have done – not that I was ever asked to, you know, because that's the point ... I think the way they treated kids, the girl was expected to help out, where the boys weren't.</EXT>³⁹

As they looked back on their girlhoods three-quarters of a century later, the interviewees described the quality of attentiveness that contemporary accounts approved in girls such as Ruby. They had been aware of the impact of war wounds on their fathers from an early age and the memory was still present in their minds. Within the first few minutes of my interview with Marion Armstrong, she told me about the hole in her father's face, caused by an infected shrapnel wound behind his eye.⁴⁰

Brenda Aubrey knew exactly what caused her father problems, and why:

<EXT>BA: I suppose his stump was about that long [measures with her hands]. And he had a white ... they used to send him a white stump sock – he called them that ... I don't know if that's what they were called, you know – and ... erm ... they were fine, but, of course, in the very hot weather, he used to get trouble with perspiration and soreness, you know, but nothing bothered him. He ... he was ... he could ... you know ... hurry and everything, you know, and that's an integral part of my dad, he was ... you know, friendly, and quite a nice ... he wasn't very tall, like me, and quite a nice little man he was really, you know.</EXT>⁴¹

Brenda's description of her father repeats the tensions between compassion and admiration at the overcoming of adversity that had characterised discussions at the end of the war. Her mention of the 'trouble' that her father's stump sock caused him brings an immediate

³⁹ Interview with Bill Swann, 26 September 2011, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Interview with Marion Armstrong, 20 August 2013, p. 16.

⁴¹ Interview with Brenda Aubrey, 13 December 2013, p. 4.

counter-claim that ‘nothing bothered him’. Brenda goes on to stress how active her father was despite having just the one leg, how he could ‘hurry and everything’, and she finishes with an admiring vision of him as a ‘nice little man’ in which his disability is discounted. There are two voices here, one attuned to her father’s difficulties from a young age, the other wanting to counter a negative image of him as a victim and assert his personal triumph over disability.

Dora Kneebone’s account shows how the care given by the daughters of disabled veterans was normalised. They did not necessarily think of themselves as different from other girls growing up in the 1930s. Dora’s father had been wounded in the lower leg during the war. Although the wound caused him some pain and swelling, he could garden, and had had a successful career as a printer in the City of London, walking to the Tube and back each day.

From a young age Dora had helped him:

<EXT>if he sat down when he came in, and ... I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll go in and take his shoes off for him’, just because it was a ... what I said before was ... thinking back, when I told a girl, a woman, a proper woman, posh woman, in Wembley, that I used to take Daddy’s shoes off, she said, ‘You took his shoes off for him, Dora?’ So I said, ‘Yes. Well, he needed to have them taken off, and it was easier for me to do it for him’, and she didn’t say a word, because she’s a ... great church-goer, whereas I skip in and out of church! (LAUGHS) Well, yes, I mean, I ... oh gosh ... no, let’s not say any more!</EXT>⁴²

Dora’s description brings to mind little Ruby and the memoirs of ‘Territorial’, which depict the altruism of young girls. What is interesting in Dora’s account, however, is that the rituals surrounding her father’s return had been entirely private, and she was unaware until late in life that her role in making her father comfortable might not have been shared by her

⁴² Interview with Dora Kneebone, 23 March 2015, p. 43.

contemporaries. She had felt embarrassed to have her care questioned by another; and in a private settling of scores took pleasure in thinking herself more Christian than her church-going companion. She mentioned her friend's comment three times in our meetings, on one occasion remarking rather angrily, 'didn't she know the story of Christ and the washing of the feet?'⁴³

The daughters' narratives of caring for disabled soldiers evoke aspects of what Ilany Kogan calls 'primary identification' among the children of Holocaust survivors, who are highly attuned to how their parents are feeling, and who—in a kind of generational reversal—come to feel a sense of responsibility for alleviating the parent's pain.⁴⁴ These qualities were communicated by sons and daughters alike in the interviews. As historians and my interviewees note, however, domestic drudgery was more often the lot of daughters than sons, particularly when parents were ill.⁴⁵

The experience of adolescence and early adulthood for these daughters was shaped by negotiations with their mothers about care and contribution to the household. They experienced acute tensions between obligation and independence. After Marion Armstrong's father died on her ninth birthday, the family struggled financially, her mother taking sewing and cleaning jobs close to home. As the eldest daughter with two younger siblings, the responsibility to help fell on her. Marion implicitly contrasted her situation with that of her older brother. He had won a place at grammar school and went on to become a squadron

⁴³ Notes on interview with Dora Kneebone, 27 February 2015.

⁴⁴ Ilany Kogan, 'The Second Generation in the Shadow of Terror', in M. Gerard Fromm (ed.), *Lost in Transmission. Studies of Trauma across the Generations* (London: Karnac, 2012), pp. 5–8.

⁴⁵ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, p. 95; Milcoy, *Girls Come Out to Play*, pp. 40–1.

leader in the RAF during the Second World War. Marion had also passed the first half of the entry examinations for the grammar school, but the cost was in her mind throughout and she decided not to complete them: 'there again, you see, this is how it affects a child. I was worried sick for fear I passed, because I knew my mother couldn't afford the uniform.'⁴⁶

She left school at fourteen and began work in a local grocer's shop. During the Second World War, she explained, 'all I wanted to do was go in the Forces, and learn how to drive', but her brother, who was on overseas service, wrote saying 'Please don't volunteer. My mother's got two of us in.'⁴⁷ Her mother was also keen for her to stay at the grocer's because as manageress at a time of rationing she could get hold of 'more or less what I wanted!'. Her wage, moreover, increased the family income by almost a third: 'I remember how proud I was to give her ten shillings, and I kept 2/6d., and clothed myself. And ... oh, she was thrilled.'⁴⁸ The fact that Marion could remember the exact amount of her contribution shows the pleasure she felt in supporting her mother; yet at the same time she also framed her story as one of opportunities missed.

When I asked Marion if she had ever felt frustrated or disappointed about not joining up, her reply seemed to cancel out the feelings she expressed earlier in the interview:

<EXT>MA: I just accepted it. I really did think I'd get called up, but, of course, the War ended ... and, you know, that was it. And the firm wouldn't let me go anyway. But ... er ... no, I didn't ... no. We grew up ... I think ... er ... I think because all the relatives were so sorry for my mother, because she nursed my dad for years, as I say, and it was hard. I can remember having difficulty getting to sleep because he was on

⁴⁶ Armstrong interview, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Armstrong interview, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Armstrong interview, p. 11.

morphia, and he was moaning in the next bedroom – as I say, a little cottage. She had it very hard, and I think all the relatives drummed it into us, ‘Look after your mother, Marion, because she’s had it so hard.’ I think we just knew we had to look after her. I just accepted the fact. I never resented her. But ... we got on well. </EXT>⁴⁹

During our interview, Marion played out the different emotional demands that she experienced as the daughter of a disabled soldier. Having expressed her wish to follow her brother into the war, she then rehearsed all the reasons why this was not possible, and explained that she not only ‘accepted’ her situation but was also proud of the help she gave. Her story is a counterpoint to the interwar history of ‘maternal aspiration’ for daughters, as maternal needs were ‘drummed in’ to Marion by her family, and overrode the personal wish for independence; to such an extent that she found it difficult—even in old age, and an era where women’s career ambitions are more encouraged—to acknowledge that desire in herself.

<H1>Daughters and Care across the Life-Course

To this point I have focused on the impact of war disability on young women, and how its demands shaped families’ reactions to the changing expectations of young women between the wars. Yet the experience of care, and the expectations that were formed in girlhood continued throughout these women’s lives. The gendered emotional scripts surrounding the care of the disabled soldier did not only affect daughters, but their identities as wives and workers too.

⁴⁹ Armstrong interview, pp. 16–17.

<H2>Brenda Aubrey

There were war-disabled men on both sides of Brenda Aubrey's family, her father having lost a leg in the war, her husband's father being blinded. She was recently widowed when I interviewed her late in 2013, and wanted to tell the stories of the two families and of daughters on each side. Her sister-in-law Joan had taken over the care of her father-in-law after her mother's death, father and daughter eventually moving from Bristol to a purpose-built home constructed by St Dunstan's in Brighton. While there, Joan met and married another First World War veteran, George Killingbeck, who was blind and had lost an arm in the war, and who had won a British Empire Medal for his work as a Braille teacher and fundraiser for St Dunstan's. Joan then became caregiver for Killingbeck and her father. The patterns of gendered care established by Pearson in the early days of St Dunstan's, of marriages based on care and daughters as carers, was operating in Brenda's family half a century later.

Brenda's interview reveals the emotional expectations that such arrangements placed on women. She recalled an awkward conversation with Killingbeck (her then brother-in-law):

<EXT>BA: Well, I remember, we went to Brighton, and George could do everything – vacuum, everything – but he couldn't tie his shoelaces, and I said, 'I'll tie them, George', and I bent down, and he said, 'You don't come ... Harold don't come here often enough to see his dad, you know, Brenda', and I said, 'We can't afford it, George'. 'You know we'd always pay him his fare, and there's no need for the three of you to come', he said. And I thought, 'Oh!' But he never told Harold anything, only ever me. He always told me off, you know! (LAUGHS) But he was well thought of in St. Dunstan's, and he was a Freemason, and ... you know, very ... he was the Grand Master once ...

MR: What was his name?

BA: George Killingbeck.

MR: Right ... Did you feel a bit guilty when he said that?

BA: Yeah, of course you did. But, I mean, it was so far. We never had a car then, you know, and we were bringing up Elaine [her daughter], and I wasn't working and ... you know ... Wills' [the tobacco company Wills] money didn't go up too much then. After it did, you know. And you couldn't keep asking them for money, could you – or I wouldn't – not say, 'Could you pay my fare and I'll come and see my dad', you know!</EXT>⁵⁰

Tensions around gender and care permeate Brenda's story about her encounter with George: as an attentive guide: she bends down to tie up his shoe laces, but this memory, which might appear to convey the disabled man's dependence, is immediately countered with assurances of his competence ('George could do everything.'). Brenda was annoyed that Killingbeck had chosen to tick her off rather than Harold, and that he was not sympathetic to their wish to visit Brighton as a family. But she doesn't quite seem able to come out and criticise him, as he was a bigwig in St Dunstan's and a Mason. She is also thinking of her *husband's* dignity: for Harold to have to keep asking St Dunstan's for help would have been demeaning. Brenda's protectiveness towards her husband comes across in the last sentence, when she switches to the first person and imagines the humiliation she might feel in his shoes.

Brenda's situation shows the kinds of emotional relationships that developed around the care of disabled soldiers across the lives of the women. She experiences these first as a daughter, then as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a sister-in-law. Her role in care moves

⁵⁰ Aubrey interview, pp. 31–2.

between the domestic and the institutional, through the relationship with St Dunstan's and her in-laws. Her story shows the personal pressures that the social expectations around care could place on women, vulnerable to criticism that they were not doing enough, and held accountable to other disabled men through marriage. Her story perhaps reveals the effects of changing gender norms too: although Brenda hesitates even now to give full vent to her feelings about Killingbeck, she was probably more able to express her annoyance in 2013 than she would have been at the time.

<H2>Jean Brown

Jean Brown's story also shows how care for the disabled veteran could extend across life, its networks providing both opportunities and constraints for young women. After her father was blinded at Arras in 1917, St Dunstan's supported his training as a physiotherapist and helped him to set up a practice at home, which he ran from the drawing room of the family home in Reading. Jean had watched him working from a young age and decided to train as a physiotherapist herself, taking a job in the Reading hospital. Like Marion Armstrong, her decision to stay close to home was partly a response to maternal needs: her three brothers were all ordained ministers, working in parishes across the UK, and Jean felt that 'my mother needed support really ... so, erm, yes, I felt that was the right thing'.⁵¹

After her mother died in 1963, a home help took over much of the care of her father. Jean had not married, however, and continued to live at home, and when in 1977 the help became poorly, Jean decided to resign her job at the Reading hospital to look after her father, who was then in his early nineties. The more infirm he became, the less able she felt to leave the house:

⁵¹ Interview with Jean Brown, 15 December 2014, p. 27.

<EXT>towards the end, I, I found it very stressful, and my brother in Cornwall, they said I could go down for a holiday if I could get someone to look after him, and I got, erm, one of these nurses ... well, a Gardener's Nurse I think it was. Anyway, erm, so I went on this holiday, and then I wished I hadn't, because it was not long after that that he died, when I ... I came home and, yes, because actually, he said to me, 'I wish you could have another holiday', which was ... you know, it was nice of him to think like that, wasn't it.

MR : And yet, in your mind, it was too difficult because...

JB: Yes.

MR: You, you felt bad that you weren't there?

JB: Well, I said, 'Oh well, perhaps I'll get another holiday next year' ... But I, I was sorry I went, in the end. If I'd have known, I wouldn't have gone.</EXT>⁵²

Listening to Jean at that moment, I was struck by the guilt that she still felt, thirty years later, about the holiday. It was stressful looking after her father and she had needed a break, yet felt bad when she was away. The memory of her father's 'nice' reaction on her return—not resentful, but sympathetic—makes her even more regretful; a feeling then intensified by his death shortly afterwards. As a professional carer herself, she recognised these feelings as inherent to care. After telling me this, she recalled that as a child, trips to London were surrounded by anxiety as her mother 'always felt she'd got to get back home. Yes. Didn't want to be away too long.' The anxieties of care—felt whether present or absent—were carried by two generations, mother and daughter.⁵³

⁵² Brown interview, p. 33.

⁵³ Brown interview, p. 42.

Jean's life until her father passed away—where she lived, her choice of career, and even retirement—had revolved around the family's efforts to support the disabled soldier. Although she did not say so directly, they had affected her capacity to form romantic attachments as well. At the end of our interview, Jean pointed to a photo on her mantelpiece. It was of a man living a few doors away with whom she had struck up a relationship in 2002. For the next ten years they went out and 'and had very nice times together'.⁵⁴ When I asked if she sometimes regretted that looking after her father had taken up so much of her life, she responded, 'Well, not, not now. I think I did at the time. I sort of felt, "When am I going to be able to do something else?" you know. I think I did a bit.'⁵⁵ Having found a way to 'do something else' later in her seventies, she was now less regretful.

As I saw it, the war seemed to have cast a shadow across Jean's life. Yet this was not how she saw it, her concern in the interview about her father's situation revealing her love for him, and her later romance leaving her with few regrets. There is a warning to me here as an historian of the aftermath about the difference between my focus on trauma across generations and the constraining structures of gender in caregiving, and Jean's sense of a life lived well enough.

<H1>Conclusion

This chapter has considered the impact of the First World War through the perspective of the daughters of disabled soldiers born after the conflict and their experiences of caregiving. Their accounts appear to differ from those of men of this generation, whose relationships

⁵⁴ Brown interview, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Brown interview, p. 40.

with First World War veteran fathers had often informed their attitudes to military service in the Second World War and after.⁵⁶ These daughters regarded their help as a domestic matter, done to support their mothers as well as fathers. Care was a *constraint* on their aspirations for independence and citizenship, rather than being felt as a form of service to the nation. It did not carry the ideological freight of pride and gratitude suggested in the Little Ruby image. For these daughters, care was at the centre of economic, gender, and cross-generational relationships that were imbued with emotion. Love was synonymous with obligation. While the women sometimes recalled their frustration at the responsibilities it was assumed they would bear, they were also proud of the help they gave, wanted to do their best, and felt guilty when, in their own eyes, they fell short. What emerges is a rather different picture of young women's lives in the early to mid-20th century than is portrayed in social histories of the period. Where the larger picture is of greater opportunities in employment, leisure, and greater autonomy than the maternal generation, among these women the economic and emotional stresses of disability, the failures of the state, and the moral expectations that surrounded voluntary organisations placed many pressures to conform to more traditional ideals of women's place.

The ways in which demands like these might shape the subjectivities of a young woman are conveyed by the novelist and feminist Doris Lessing, born in 1919, her father an amputee, her mother a nurse. Lessing's autobiographical writings, particularly in later life, from the 1994 memoir *Under My Skin* to the 2007 novel *Alfred and Emily*, convey the place of the war in the psychic landscape of a daughter. She describes how the relationship between her parents was formed in the aftermath, her mother having nursed her father in hospital. She

⁵⁶ Joel Morley, 'Dad never said much but...' Young Men and Great War veterans in day-to-day life in inter-war Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* (2018), 29/2, pp. 199–224, [AU please update this reference if possible]

records her father's manful attempts to flout his disability, riding horses and running one-legged in school races, but also his nightmares and depression. She writes of the discomforts her father's stump caused him with the intimate knowledge of someone who has stood by and imagined just what it felt like to have a stump instead of a leg. She describes her mother's stoicism, energy, sociability, and competence in domestic organisation, an outward display whose cracks were exposed when she had a breakdown. Lessing recalls feeling 'desperately sorry for her', even whilst she planned to run away.⁵⁷

In one sense, Lessing's life of political activism and rebellion against established gender expectations presents a contrast to the daughters of disabled soldiers in this study, who in different ways had sought to accommodate the war's legacies. Yet they all attest to the power of an emotional script that prized the young girl for her capacity to identify with the suffering of the soldier. 'Do children feel their parents' emotions?', Lessing asks in the blurb on the dustjacket of *Alfred and Emily*, continuing 'Yes, we do, and it is a legacy I could have done without. What is the use of it? It is as if that old war is in my own memory, my own consciousness.'

⁵⁷ Doris Lessing, *Alfred and Emily* (London: Fourth Estate), 2008, p. 156. [AU please add

publication details]

