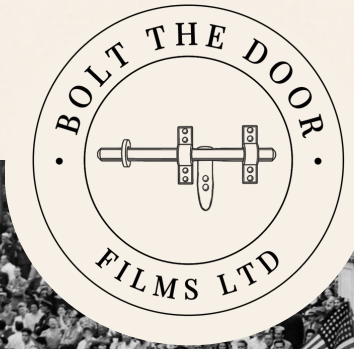




WITNESS

A JOURNAL OF PERSONAL HISTORY

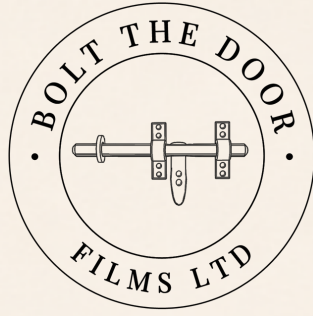
When Big Ben Chimed New York

An Irish emigrant's account of Victory Day

15 August 1945

ISSUE 01

PUBLISHED BY BOLT THE DOOR



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A Letter Home

On the evening of 15 August 1945, as New York celebrated the end of the Second World War, an Irish emigrant named Elizabeth Forde sat down to write a letter home.

She was not a politician, a soldier or a journalist. She was an ordinary woman from Drumlish, County Longford, who had made a life for herself in Manhattan more than twenty years earlier.

Her letter was never intended for publication. It was simply a daughter's account of an extraordinary day, written for family thousands of miles away.

Today, it offers something official records rarely can: the chance to experience history through the eyes of someone who lived it.

“*We Heard Big Ben Chime
Midnight in London...*”

Elizabeth Forde

Born in County Longford in 1905, Elizabeth emigrated to New York in 1923. Like many young Irish women, she found employment as a domestic housekeeper and spent the rest of her life in Manhattan.

Although she never returned to live in Ireland, she remained closely connected to home through regular letters.

On Victory Day, her instinct was not to preserve history for future generations. She simply wanted her family to understand what she had seen and felt.

That ordinary act created an extraordinary historical record.



Women praying at St Patrick's Cathedral, New York, on Victory Day.

When New York Celebrated

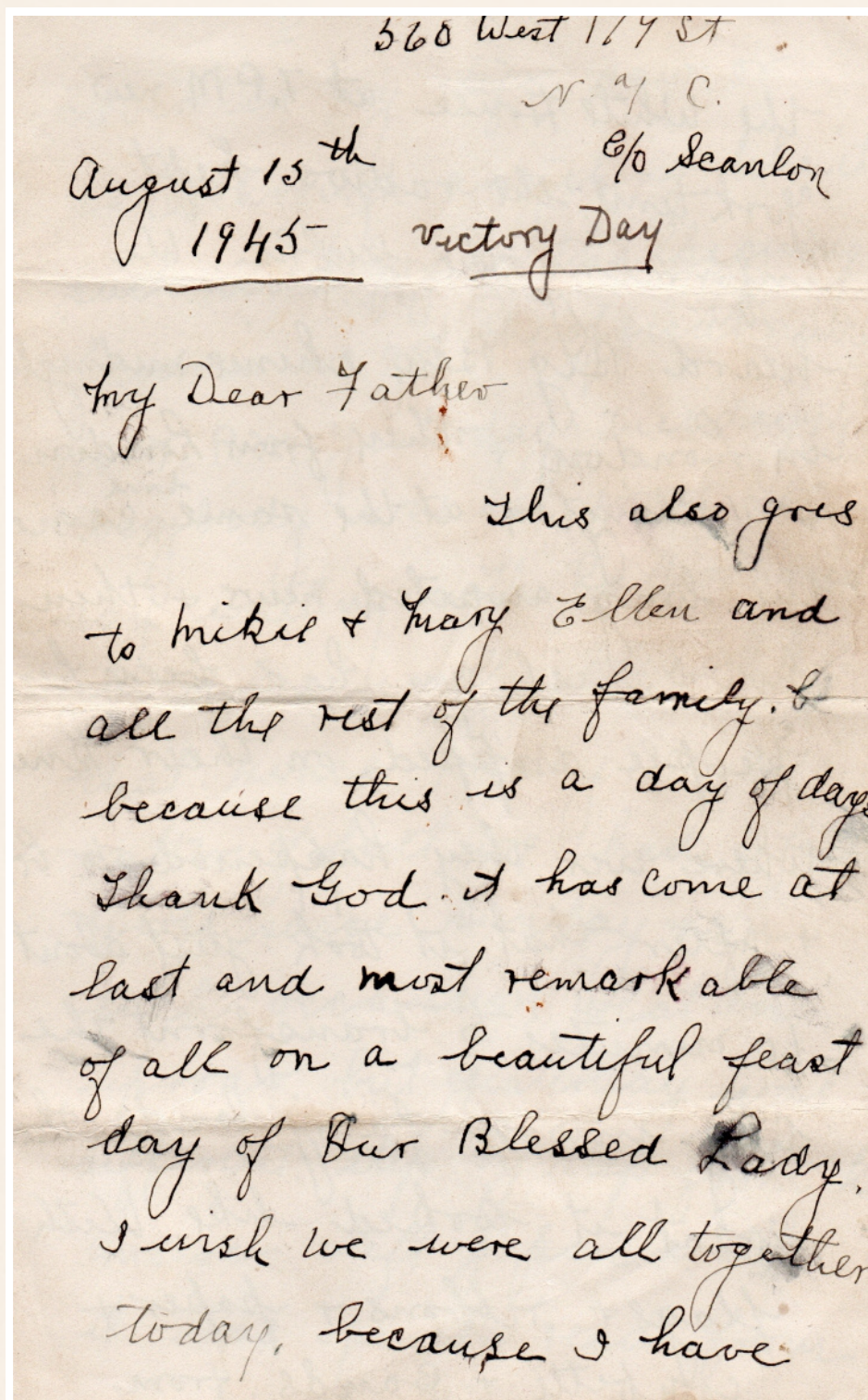
When confirmation of Japan's surrender finally arrived, New York erupted with relief. Church bells rang, confetti drifted from office windows and crowds filled Times Square and Fifth Avenue.

Elizabeth described strangers embracing, people kneeling in prayer and a city united by gratitude rather than celebration alone.

Rather than recounting military events, her letter records the emotions of ordinary people witnessing an unforgettable moment.



The Original Letter



The Original Letter

never in my life, saw or lived through anything like such wild joy & thanksgiving of course we got the official news at 7 P.M. yesterday Tuesday 14 everybody was out doors all day waiting with Radios tuned on. it has really been like that since Friday, as a matter of fact, we had 3 false reports since Sunday & on each occasion what an uproar, but yesterday was different. step by step from the answer left Japan until it was opened & read from

the White House at 7 P.M. New York time. the radios kept informing the public. We heard Big Ben chime midnight in London & they from London & Washington at the same time. Came the long awaited news, & then I wish you had been here people dropped on their knee where ever they happened to be, & after that it took just about 10 minutes to transform the city into a fairy land, the what it looked like. With flags & ribbons & paper & ...

windows & housetops & sky - scrapers - every body out to celebrate, some singing, some crying as the news affected them. But every body wild with relief & joy. all going together, Race creed, or color didn't matter last night. Barrels of beer, rolled out on the side walks wine, whiskey & food, pushed into your hands, as you went along the churches were jammed, all night long devotions & all day today very special services in all of them. I got to St Patrick's Cathedral for mass, I came home to rest a bit &

then I'm going back to church again. We are asked to spend as much time in church today as we can, I thought I could tell you what it was all like, but I'm afraid I can't. It seems quiet outside now, its just around 1:30 noon time, nobody works in New York today, except the sanitation Dept, Police & Fire Dept, all stores are closed & covered with flags, the airplanes are over the city dropping streamers & confetti & Times Square & Broadway is still jammed with people. I don't doubt they will

start the noise making again, I can hear the bands going now. We stayed out most all last night, but nobody could sleep anyway. Thank God it is over & I hope in our life time, we will not have to wait for the end of another war. I will send you the papers. I have saved them since that first atomic bomb was dropped as I thought you might be interested in reading about it, its a horrible weapon, God has been so good, that our enemies, ...

God. It won't have to be used again, its too dreadful to think about. Now I hope you are all well at home, & I hope things will speedily improve for everybody everywhere. I am watching for a letter from home. I am so happy about the war been all over, that I had to just try & share it with you folks at home. It is a happy, wonderful day for us here in America. God has been so good to spare us, I will write

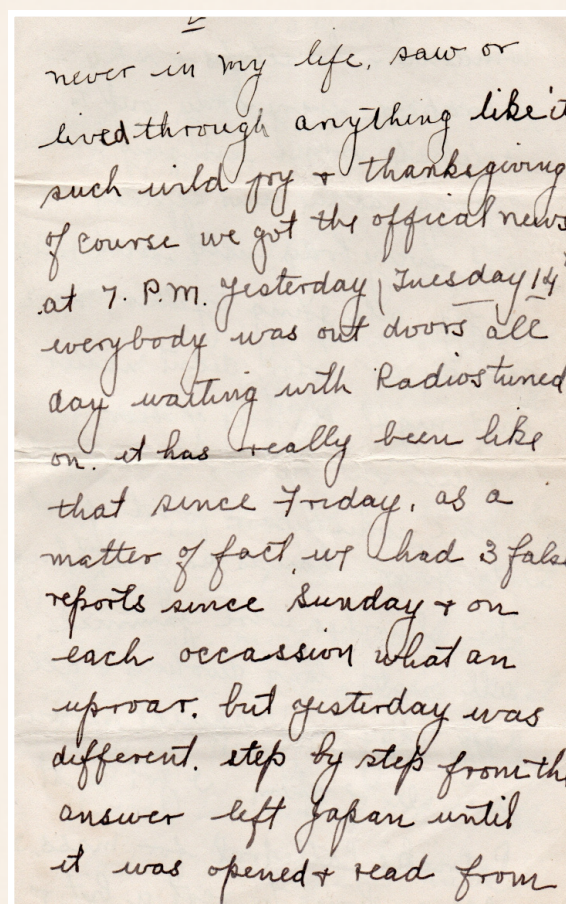
some more later on, when I get over the excitement. I am mailing some old things which you might be able to use, either tomorrow or Fridays, if the post office opens. I will pray for you all when I go to church. in the meantime buy yourself a treat. I hope I will hear from you soon. Best Regards to Mavis, Mary & Ted With all my Love To Father xxxxx From Elizabeth

Listen to Elizabeth's Letter



This journal is accompanied by a complete audio reading of Elizabeth Forde's letter, recorded by her great-niece.

Scan the QR code to listen, explore the full transcript and discover additional archive material online.



SCAN TO LISTEN

History through the eyes of those who lived it.

WITNESS is an ongoing editorial publishing and exhibition series exploring history through original letters, diaries, photographs and personal testimony.

Rather than retelling familiar events through famous figures or official narratives, each edition invites readers to encounter the past through the lives of ordinary people who witnessed extraordinary moments.

History is not found only in official records. It also survives in family collections, handwritten letters, fading photographs and remembered stories.

Each issue invites readers to witness history through the eyes of those who lived it.



ORIGINAL
DOCUMENTS



AUDIO
RECORDING

About The Editor

Matt Sullivan is a documentary filmmaker and founder of Bolt The Door Films. His work focuses on heritage interpretation through documentary filmmaking, helping museums, cultural organisations and historic sites connect audiences with authentic stories rooted in original historical sources.

Bolt The Door Films specialises in heritage storytelling through film, combining historical research with cinematic documentary production to create films that deepen people's understanding of history, place and identity.



