

We'll Meet Again showcases wartime songs and renews old memories



By Brock Weir

When Jo-ann Spitzer was just three years old, a 'stranger' walked into her life.

She didn't know her father until she was a toddler because he embarked to serve King and Country during the Second World War in 1940.

'He used to send home cards, heart-shaped pieces of paper he actually cut out and sent to 'his special baby' and my mother,' she says.

These very personal mementos are still treasured by her to this day and help keep those memories alive. So too does the music of the era, which Ms. Spitzer is set to help bring to life again this Tuesday, June 9, in 'We'll Meet Again', a choral celebration of wartime music hosted by members of Aurora Seniors' Centre's 'Silver Star Singers' at Aurora Cultural Centre.

'That's my bag,' says Ms. Spitzer with a laugh, giving a particular shout-out to the Forces Sweetheart, Dame Vera Lynn, now 98. 'When I was young I listened to what used to be the Old English Music Hall on the radio every Saturday night and I knew a lot of the songs by heart.'

These tunes, often upbeat to keep up spirits at a difficult time, are also very familiar to Bud Spitzer and his wife, Stella, who regularly lend their vocal talents to celebrations at the Seniors' Centre. Although the Second World War brings up difficult memories, they are memories that are important to keep in mind, they say.

Stella's father fought in the First World War, losing part of his leg and several toes when his regiment was shelled, she recalls. When war broke out again in 1939, her brothers enlisted, as did her sister, who served as a WAC.

'When war broke out, I was living in Scotland and I remember being fitted for a gasmask and carrying it to school every day,' she says. 'I also remember walking through the streets of Ayr during the blackout, carrying a small torch with my fingers covering the light a little so as not to attract aircraft. Sometimes the air warden would come to our door to let us know we were showing some light from a window.'

'Our family left Ayr in the fall of 1940 and we travelled to Newfoundland by convoy. The ship was sunk on the return voyage to England.'

'It is something we were brought up with,' adds Bud, of the musical experience. 'As a kid during the Second World War I used to keep track of all the different announcements, raids by airplanes, looking at Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancasters and I was quite enthralled. My dad operated a movie theatre and I would see all the different newsreels of what was happening during the war before the main feature, and I was also a member of the war cadets, marching and firing rifles even though I was only 12 or 13.'

The We'll Meet Again Community Singalong gets underway June 9 at 2 p.m. at the Aurora Cultural Centre. Admission is free, and includes the Royal Canadian Legion Colour Guard and, afterwards, a reception with cake from Hurst Bakery.