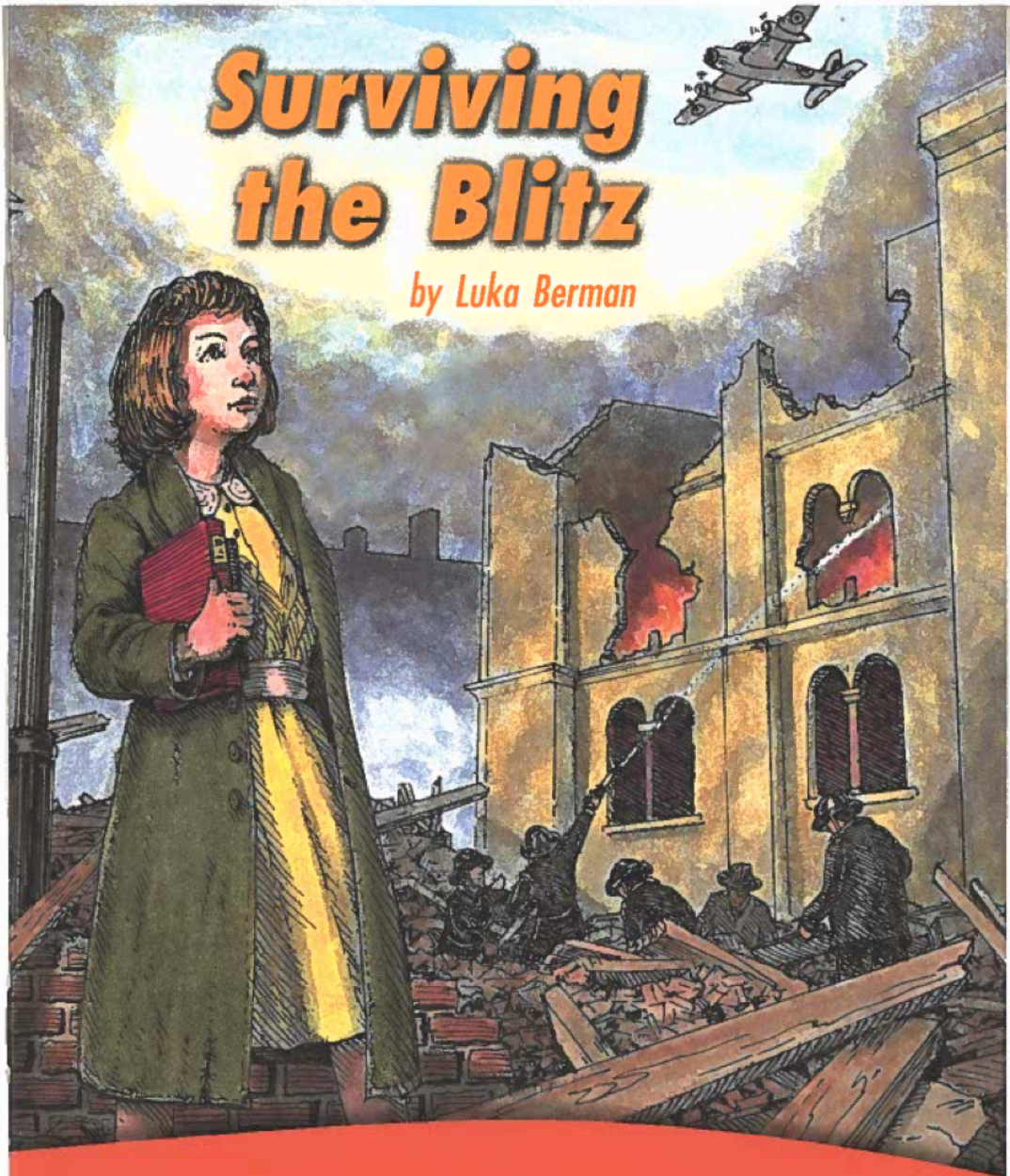


Surviving the Blitz

by Luka Berman



Z

RW 215

E 12

An 11-year-old, Margaret Davies, tells about her terrifying experience during World War II. Read to learn about her memories of the time.

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2



Surviving the Blitz

by Luka Berman

What was it like to experience London's infamous Blitz? I can tell you in one word: terrifying.

Blitz is short for *blitzkrieg*—the German words for lightning (*blitz*) and war (*krieg*). The Blitz was our British newspapers' term for the German bombing that barraged London in 1940 and 1941 during World War II, a war that had begun about a year earlier when France and Britain declared war on Germany. Although World War II ended more than sixty years ago, still the bombs of the Blitz scream toward me and explode into terrifying nightmares.

I, Margaret Davies, was only 11 years of age when the bombs began raining down. (Unfortunately, *blitzkrieg* was an apt expression!) Bombs fell from the sky for 57 days in a row, shattering our lives, pulverizing our homes, and injuring or killing thousands.

Whenever the air raid sirens wailed, my family rushed *en masse* out to the bomb shelter in the backyard—that terrible dark hole in the ground; tiny, cold, and damp—and, sitting there trembling in the cacophony, as the bombs shrieked in and exploded, I felt as though the sky

itself were cracking open. The dank shelter flooded each time it rained, forcing us to hide instead under the stairs in our house, like mice in the wainscoting. ■

The cat that stalked us was fearsome, indiscriminate, deadly, and could strike at any moment, yet my parents always remained calm and comforting, somehow managing to make the most gut-deep fright tolerable, even as bombs blasted and we cowered in the dark.

When we mice emerged, shaken, from hiding, we might find the neighbors' house or the house down the street gone, the people who had lived there wailing in the middle of the road, tearing at their hair and their clothes; or we might see even worse—scenes of carnage that are burned into my brain and that I do not choose to pass on to innocent readers.

The Blitz turned Hell loose on our world, and yet, when I think back, I'm struck by how life carried on, even amidst the chaos.

Father kept up his shipbuilding business, while Mother worked part-time at a factory that made detonators for our own bombs.

My younger sisters and I continued to attend school, although air raids interrupted classes for hours. Our teachers tried valiantly to continue our lessons inside the air-raid shelter, but I can attest that concentration is impossible when the ground is groaning and shaking and Death is dropping from the sky. As time passed, fewer and fewer brave souls showed up for classes.

The Blitz brought shortages of everything, including food. Before work, Mother stood in a long queue, sometimes for hours, to buy our family's ration of meat, cheese, eggs, butter, and sugar. Fruits like bananas and

oranges disappeared from our diets altogether, while the weekly ration of “sweets” was 2 ounces—just one miniscule bar of chocolate for the entire family!

The cinema in our neighborhood was transformed into a crater by a direct hit, but my sisters and I discovered ingenious ways to amuse ourselves. I spent hours staring at the sky and soon became an expert at identifying aircraft, including my favorite, the de Havilland *Mosquito*, a light bomber too fast for the Luftwaffe to intercept. (I admit, it never crossed my mind that these planes might be bombing youngsters much like myself, but in Germany.) My sisters played in bomb sites as I hunted for shrapnel to collect as souvenirs.

We got accustomed to the war—even the bombs. Believe it or not, there were times when I didn’t even think about them.

But those intervals never lasted long. Our family spent most evenings huddled around the wireless (radio, to you), hungrily devouring news about the war. Neither we nor anyone we knew then owned a television.

Thousands were left homeless, but—miraculously—our little house remained standing, and—miraculously—my family and I were physically unharmed. The only scars we carry with us from the Blitz are the deep scars of memory.

