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Amazing Women

Helen Parker

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By Helen Parker

CHAPTER One

Harriet Tubman

1820 - 1913

The slave who escaped and helped hundreds of other slaves to escape.

I escaped from slavery in the south of the USA. I then helped hundreds of other slaves to escape to the north of the USA and Canada. I also freed hundreds of slaves who wanted to fight in the Civil War.

My parents were slaves for the Brodess family in Maryland, USA. I was the fifth of nine children. At the age of 6, I started work as a nursemaid for another family. After that I had to work in the woods and fields. Our owners did not think of us as people. For them, we were like animals or machines. If we did something wrong, they hit us or punished us in horrible ways.

In 1831, at the age of 11, I started to do the same work as the adult slaves. Every day we had to work for many hours in the fields. Around this time, I received an injury, which I never forgot. I refused to stop a slave who was escaping. The slave's owner threw a metal weight at the slave, but it hit me on the head. It hurt a lot and this injury gave me headaches for the rest of my life.

In 1849, I was brave and tried to escape. I was married by then, but my marriage was very unhappy and I hated the thought of another year of slavery. Two of my brothers agreed to come with me. We wanted to reach the north of the USA, where slavery was illegal. I could live there as a free woman.

“We made good progress towards the north, but then we heard some bad news. Our owner was offering \$300 to anyone who caught us. My brothers became frightened and we decided to return to Maryland. We were punished when we returned, but I still wanted to escape.

A short time later, I escaped again. This time I went alone. I travelled at night along quiet roads and paths. Some kind people helped me on the way. They gave me food and a place to sleep. Finally, I arrived in the city of Philadelphia in the north. The journey was long and difficult, but it felt wonderful to be free at last.

In Philadelphia, I got a job and began to earn money. I missed my parents and my brothers and sisters. I was free and I wanted my family to be free, too. Maybe I could help them to escape?

In 1850, I received some bad news. My niece and her daughters were in danger. Their owner wanted to sell them and they didn't want to go to different families. I decided to return to Maryland to free them. I had to help them to escape. We travelled at night and used the stars to find our way to the north.

After helping my niece and her daughters, I helped many other slaves to escape. I offered to help my husband, John Tubman, too, but he didn't want to leave the south. He didn't want to be with me anymore, so our marriage ended.

Soon, a new law made things a lot more difficult for me. It became illegal to help a slave to escape in the USA. I had to find a new route — to Canada, where slavery was illegal.

In 1857, I went on a very special journey to help my parents. They weren't slaves any more, but their life in the south was very difficult. They were very happy to see me again and wanted to go with me to Canada. Our journey was very slow and difficult because my parents were old. We had a big celebration when we finally arrived in Ontario, Canada.

In 1861, the American Civil War started. The Confederates from the south wanted slavery to continue. The Unionists from the north wanted slavery to become illegal. I joined the Union Army, which fought for the north. An army captain, James Montgomery, heard about me. He discovered that I helped slaves to escape before the war. And he wanted my help. He wanted slaves to fight for freedom in the Union Army. I took a team of spies to the south and

found slaves who wanted to join us. It was dangerous work, but we were very successful. On one trip, 700 slaves agreed to escape and they became soldiers.

On 9th April 1865, the war ended. What could I do with my life now? I decided to fight for equal rights for black people and for women. I spoke at public meetings and I tried to help black people who were poor and old.

In 1896, I bought some land and, in 1903, I gave the land to my church. I wanted the church to start a home for black people who were poor and elderly. In 1908, the home opened for the first time.

As I looked back at my life, I was very proud. I was happy that I helped so many people to find freedom.

The Life of Harriet Tubman

Summary

c.1820 Araminta Harriet Koss was born in Maryland, USA. Her parents were slaves for the Brodess family.

1826 She started to work as a nursemaid when she was 6 years old.

1831 When she was 11 years old, she started to do the same work as adult slaves. She was hit by a metal weight. The head injury gave her pain for the rest of her life.

1844 She married John Tubman, a free man.

1849 She escaped for the first time with two of her brothers. \$300 was offered to anyone who caught them. They decided to return to their owner. A short time later, Harriet escaped again and reached Philadelphia in the north of the USA.

1850 She helped her niece and many other slaves to escape to Philadelphia. It became illegal to help a slave to escape in the USA. Harriet found a new route to Canada.

1857 She helped her parents to escape to Ontario, Canada.

1860 She went on her last journey to help slaves to escape from the south.

1861 Harriet joined the Union Army in the Civil War.

1863 She worked for Colonel James Montgomery, a captain in the Union Army. She found slaves who wanted to join the Union Army.

1865 She wrote a book Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman with Sarah H. Bradford.

1869 She married Nelson Davis who was a soldier in the Civil War.

1899 She started to receive money for her work during the war.

“1903 She bought some land to build a home for black people who were poor and old.

1908 The Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged opened for the first time.

1913 Harriet died when she was 93 years old. She spent her final years in the home that she helped to build.

CHAPTER TWO

Emmeline Pankhurst

1858-1928

The woman who wanted women to be able to vote

I campaigned all my life for equal rights for women.

I started a political group which fought for the vote for women in Britain. After many years of protests, we finally won the right for British women to vote.

When I was born in 1858, women in Britain didn't have the same rights as men. Most women couldn't go to school or university. They were only allowed to work in certain jobs. And they didn't have the right to vote.

I grew up in Manchester in the north of England and I saw many problems every day. Mothers had to bring up children in small, dirty houses. Disease was everywhere because of the terrible conditions. And most women only lived until they were around 50 years old. I knew from a young age that I wanted to improve women's lives.

My parents believed in human rights. They believed that education was a right for women as well as men. In 1873, my parents sent me to school in Paris. They wanted me to get a wider view of the world.

In Paris, I was disappointed to discover that women were still not equal with men after the French Revolution. Action was needed and I returned to England to begin the fight.

In Britain, the political situation was quite unusual. Our ruler was a woman, Queen Victoria. She was a powerful leader, but she wasn't interested in women's rights. Our politicians were all men and they definitely weren't interested in political equality for women.

In 1879, I was surprised to discover a man who was campaigning for women's rights. His name was Richard Pankhurst and he was a lawyer. We shared many of the same beliefs and ideas. We got married and started a family.

For almost 20 years, Richard and I fought for political rights for women. Then, sadly, my dear husband died. My daughters and I were very sad, but we

decided to continue our campaign. The two oldest daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, became activists. In 1903, we started the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It was a group that fought for the right for women to vote. Christabel became one of our bravest leaders. Sylvia was an artist and she designed our posters and signs.

The WSPU organized many public meetings and protests. Sometimes the police arrested our members. Christabel was one of the first to go to prison. When our members were in prison, we protested. And when our members came out of prison, we celebrated in the streets. It was very important to get public attention.

Unfortunately, the government didn't agree with our campaign. We had to take more powerful action. Some of our members began to break the law. They lit fires in buildings and broke windows. Our campaign was a war for these women. For me, it was always a fight for equal rights.

Every time I was arrested, I told the judge. 'We don't want to break laws, we want to make new laws.' But the lawyers and politicians didn't want to listen.

In 1910, Prime Minister Asquith, the government leader, stopped a new law that gave women the vote. We were shocked and angry. On Friday, 18th November, I led a group of women to meet the Prime Minister, but he refused to see us. We started to protest in the street and 100 women were arrested. It was a terrible day. We called it 'Black Friday'.

In 1914 the First World War began and we agreed to stop our campaign. Women were now needed as nurses in hospitals and to work in factories and on farms. In 1917, we started a new group with a new name, The Women's Party. In 1918, the First World War ended. The government realized that women were an important part of the victory in the war.

At last, women were given the right to vote - but only women over 30 years old who owned a home could vote. Any man over 21 could vote. We still didn't have full equality!

After the war, I went to live in the USA, Canada and also Bermuda. In 1926, I returned to England. I wanted to become a politician, but my health wasn't good enough. In 1928, only three weeks before I died, a new law gave women the same right to vote as men. It took much longer than we hoped. But in the

end our campaign was successful and at last we won political equality for women.

The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst

1858 Emmeline Goulden was born in Manchester, England.

1860s She became interested in women's rights as a child and went to political meetings.

1873 She was sent to a school in Paris, which believed in equal education for boys and girls.

1879 She met and married Richard Pankhurst, a lawyer. He believed in votes for women.

1886 The family moved to London. They had meetings for political activists in their home.

1893 Richard and Emmeline returned to Manchester.

1898 Richard died, but Emmeline decided to continue the campaign to win the vote for women.

1903 Emmeline and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, started the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which fought for political equality for women.

1905 Christabel was arrested during a protest.

1908 Emmeline was arrested for the first time. She went to prison for six weeks.

1910 Prime Minister Asquith stopped a law that gave women the vote. The WSPU protested and 100 women were arrested.

1914 The First World War started. The WSPU stopped their campaign for the vote.

1916 Emmeline visited the USA, Canada and Russia. She wanted women there to fight for the vote in their countries.

1917 Christabel and Emmeline started The Women's Party.

1918 The First World War ended. Women over 30 years old won the right to vote. After the war, Emmeline went to live in the USA, Canada and Bermuda.

1926 She returned to England and wanted to become a politician. She became ill and could not continue with her plans.

1928 Emmeline died in London a few weeks after a new law gave equal voting rights to women. She was 69 years old.

CHAPTER THREE

Maria Montessori

1870 - 1952

The doctor who discovered a new way to teach children

I was the first woman to get a medical degree in Italy.

I helped children with mental problems to learn. I then created a special method to teach all children. Many schools around the world still use my method.

When I was a little girl, my mother always told me, 'Be kind to others.' Every day, she asked me to make clothes for poor people. We lived in Chiaravalle in Italy and a lot of poor families lived near our home.

Fortunately, my parents had enough money to send me to school. My father had traditional ideas about women. He wanted me to get married and stay at home. So he didn't want me to continue my education after primary school. But my mother was very different and she encouraged me to study.

In 1883, I started at secondary school and after that I went to a technical college. I did well in maths and physics, but later I became very interested in biology. I decided to become a doctor. It wasn't an easy decision to make. Only men studied for medical degrees at that time. Would a medical school accept me?

In 1890, I began a course in science at the University of Rome. I did very well in this degree and at last the university's medical school accepted me. Some of the teachers and students didn't want me to study there. But I worked hard and in 1896, I was the first woman in Italy to become a doctor.

The university had a special hospital for children with mental problems. I wanted to help the children to communicate and to learn. I wanted to improve their lives. But how could I do this? I began to study and give talks about this question.

In 1898, I became a director of a school in Rome for children with mental problems. At that time, people called these children horrible things, such as 'crazy' or 'idiots'. But these children were just different. And they needed to learn in a different way. My teachers and I showed the children what to do.

Slowly, we made progress with this practical method. We showed the children simple actions, such as how to eat or wash or play games. The children copied these actions and then we repeated them again and again.

In 1906, the government asked me to work in a different school for very young children from poor families. I changed the classrooms and took away the rows of desks. We used small tables and encouraged the children to play. We created educational toys that the children could touch and feel. They learned by playing.

Traditional teachers didn't understand this method. For them, the most important thing was to teach. For us, the most important thing was to learn. We also wanted children to help each other and to learn from their own experiences.

Soon people in other countries wanted to know about my teaching method. Montessori schools were opened in many countries. By 1913, there were more than 100 Montessori schools in the USA. Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, believed in my method and became the leader of the American Montessori Society.

In 1915, I was invited to the USA and spoke at Carnegie Hall, a famous concert hall in New York. In San Francisco, I gave a course for teachers. We made a classroom with 21 students and a glass wall. Thousands of people came to watch our classes.

In Europe, the First World War was destroying many lives. I decided to move to Barcelona in Spain where things were more peaceful than in Italy. I lived there for many years and travelled to many other countries to teach people about my method. In 1929, an international organization was started, the International Montessori Association. The organization encouraged parents and teachers to use the Montessori method.

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War started and I decided to move to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. There were more than 200 Montessori schools in the Netherlands at that time. I continued to create new educational materials and give talks. I wanted people to use education for peace.

In 1939, I was invited to India to give talks and train teachers. The Second World War started that year and in 1940 the German army attacked the Netherlands. I couldn't go home to Amsterdam, so I stayed in India for several years and created courses for Indian teachers.

For the rest of my life, I continued to train teachers and improve my method. I was given many honours for my work, such as the French Legion of Honour. I was also nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize because I believed in education for peace. I believed that education could improve people's lives. When I looked back at my long life, I was happy that my Montessori schools were able to do this.

The Life of Maria Montessori

1870 Maria Montessori was born in Chiaravalle, Italy.

1876 She started primary school in Rome.

1883 Maria started secondary school.

1886 She went to a technical college and did well in maths and science.

1890 - 1892 She studied science at the University of Rome and got her first degree in 1892.

1893 She was accepted by the medical school of the University of Rome.

1896 She became the first woman in Italy to become a doctor.

1896 - 1901 Maria studied children with mental problems in Rome University Hospital. In 1898, she became a director of a school in Rome for children with serious mental problems.

1906 Maria was asked by the government to work in a school for young children from poor families. In 1907, the first Casa dei Bambini (Children's House) was opened. Maria started to train teachers in her method.

1909 - 1915 Montessori schools opened around the world. Maria wrote many books during this time, such as *The Montessori Method* (1909).

1915 She was invited to give talks and train teachers in the USA.

1915 - 1936 Maria lived in Barcelona, Spain. She trained teachers and gave many talks about the Montessori Method. In 1929 the International Montessori Association was started.

1936 When the Spanish Civil War started, she moved to Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

1939 She went to India to give talks and train teachers.

1940 The Germans attacked the Netherlands in the Second World War. Maria had to stay in India until the war ended.

1946 She returned to the Netherlands and continued her work.

1947 - 1949 She wrote many more new books, such as Peace and Education (1949).

1949 - 1951 She continued to train teachers and improve her method. She won many honours, such as the French Legion of Honour.

1952 She died when she was 81 years old in the Netherlands.

CHAPTER FOUR

Helen Keller

1880 - 1968

The deaf and blind woman who became a famous teacher

I became blind and deaf before I learned to speak. With the help of several special people, I learned to communicate. I used my communication skills to teach people about blindness. I also fought for the rights of women and workers.

I was born in 1880, in Alabama, in the USA. When I was 19 months old, I became very sick with meningitis, a disease of the brain. I got better after the illness, but unfortunately I couldn't see or hear any more. I found it very difficult to learn and I became very angry. I was able to think, but I could not communicate my thoughts. It was a very difficult time for me and for my parents.

My mother and father wanted to help me but they didn't know what to do. Fortunately, I began to communicate with Martha Washington, who was 6 years old and the daughter of our cook. We created our own sign language when we played together. I enjoyed learning from Martha, but my mother realized that I needed professional help.

In 1886, my mother learned about the work of Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. He was working on the problems of the deaf. Maybe he could help? Bell told my mother about Perkins School for blind people and the school sent a special teacher to our home. Her name was Anne Sullivan.

At first, I was a very difficult student, but Anne Sullivan was very kind to me. One day, we were getting water from the well when Anne drew some signs on my hand. I realized that she was writing the word 'water'. I was so excited! Within a few hours, I could 'read' more than 30 different words. At last, I could communicate with other people and they could communicate with me. Anne helped me to escape from my lonely world.

When I was 8 years old, I went with Anne to the Perkins School for blind people. At the school, I was excited to discover that there were other children like me. We all learned from our teachers and from each other. I learned to read Braille in English and later in several other languages.

In 1894, Anne took me to New York and I studied at several different schools for the blind and deaf. I tried to learn to speak but it was difficult. My voice worked, but I didn't know how to use it properly. Only Anne and a few other people could understand me when I spoke.

I studied hard and, in 1900, I started at university. Anne went with me to every class. She wrote the teachers' words on my hand. In 1904, I became the first deaf and blind person to get a degree. I was so happy and proud. And I knew that I wanted to use my communication skills to help other people.

At first, I worked with organizations that fought for women's rights. Then, in 1912, I started to work with workers' organizations. I discovered that some types of work made people blind. I wanted people to know about this problem, so I wrote a book in Braille about it.

In 1915, I started my own organization, Helen Keller International, which still teaches people about blindness. I wanted everyone to know that in many cases, blindness can be prevented.

For many years, I travelled around the world and talked to groups of people about blindness. I communicated with Anne. She then spoke my words for me. Our talks became very popular and sometimes we earned up to \$2,000 a week. We gave the money to organizations that helped blind people.

When Anne became ill, Polly Thomson became my guide. Unfortunately, in 1936, Anne died. She did so much for me and I never forgot her.

With the help of several special people, I wrote 12 books about my beliefs. I became famous because of the talks and the books. Important people wanted to meet me. I even met the King of England and the President of the USA.

Polly Thomson helped me with my work until she became very ill in 1957. After that, Winnie Corbally became my guide and travelled with me to teach people

about blindness. Our work was helped by a theatre play, The Miracle Worker about the life of Anne Sullivan. In 1962, it became a popular film.

In 1964, I won an important award from the President of the USA for my work. The year after that, my name was added to the list of the most successful women in the USA - the Women's Hall of Fame. The names of my guides - Anne, Polly and Winnie - should be in that list too. In 1968, at the end of my life, I remembered Anne, Polly and Winnie. I felt proud of our work, which helped blind people around the world.

The Life of Helen Keller

1880 Helen Adams Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA.

1881 Helen became ill with meningitis (a disease of the brain) when she was 19 months old. She became deaf and blind because of the disease.

1882 She started playing with Martha Washington, a 6-year old girl. They created over 60 signs to communicate with each other.

1886 Helen's mother asked Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, for help. He told her about the Perkins School for blind children. The school sent Anne Sullivan to teach Helen. Anne taught Helen to communicate with other people. Anne stayed with Helen and helped her for 49 years.

1888 Helen went to the Perkins School for blind children in Watertown, Massachusetts. Anne helped her to read and write in Braille.

1894 Helen moved to New York where she studied at several different schools for the blind and deaf.

1900 Helen started university at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

1904 She became the first deaf and blind person to get a degree.

1915 She started Helen Keller International, an organization to teach people about blindness.

1924 She started to travel around the world and give talks about blindness.

1936 Anne Sullivan died. Polly Thomson became her new guide. They travelled around the world and talked to groups about blindness.

1960 Polly Thomson died and Winnie Corbally became her guide.

1962 The Miracle Worker, a play about the life of Anne Sullivan, became a popular film.

1964 Helen received an award for her work from the President of the USA.

1965 Her name was added to the list of the most successful women in the USA - the Women's Hall of Fame.

1968 Helen Keller died at her home in Easton, Connecticut, USA. She was 88 years old.

CHAPTER FIVE

Eva Peron

1919 - 1952

The actress who helped poor and sick people in Argentina

I was a famous actress in Argentina. I helped my husband, Juan Peron, to become President. I used my power to help sick and poor people. I also helped women to get the vote for the first time in Argentina.

I was born in 1919 in Los Toldos in the Argentinian countryside. My mother was a poor country girl, but my father was a rich man from the city. Unfortunately, my father died when I was very young and life was very hard for my family. My mother worked hard to earn money. She made clothes for other people.

Four years after my father died, in 1930, we moved to a small apartment in the city of Junin. Life was very difficult at first, but my brothers and sisters were growing up. Soon they got jobs. With their money, we moved to a larger home and I was able to start school.

I enjoyed school very much, but my favourite lessons were singing and acting. In 1933, I won a role in the school play - I was so excited! From that day, I knew that I wanted to be an actress. It was my dream.

In 1935, when I was 15 years old, my mother found me a place to live in Buenos Aires. It was exciting for me to be in this amazing city, but it was a time of great economic problems. Many people didn't have work and everywhere I went, I saw poor and hungry people in the streets.

Luckily I found a job so I had enough money to pay my rent. During the day I worked and, in the evenings, I joined a theatre group. Soon I was given my first role at the Comedias Theatre and, in 1936, I travelled with the theatre company around Argentina. I also got my first part in a film. I was only 17 years old and I was already an actress!

In 1937, I started working for Radio El Mundo on a popular radio show. Radio El Mundo was the biggest radio company in Argentina and soon my name was well known. Then Radio Belgrano asked me to work for them on their show,

Great Women of History. On the show, I played some famous roles - Queen Elizabeth the First of England was one of them.

I was no longer a poor girl from the countryside. Important people wanted to meet me and, by 1942, I had my own apartment in one of the best parts of the city. But then something happened that changed my life forever.

In January 1944, an earthquake hit the town of San Juan. It was terrible because 10,000 people were killed and many more were hurt. Juan Peron was an important political leader. He organized a concert to help the people of San Juan and I was invited to be in it.

After the concert, I talked to Juan Peron and learned about his political ideas. From that day, I had a new dream - I wanted Juan Peron to become the President of Argentina.

On the radio, I talked every day about Juan's work and his ideas. Unfortunately, Juan had powerful enemies and they found him and put him in prison. On my radio show, I asked the people for help and, on 15th October 1945, 300000 people came to the Casa Rosada (the President's house) in Buenos Aires. I stood on a balcony of the house and spoke to the people from my heart. Soon everyone was shouting, 'Free Juan Peron! Free Juan Peron!'

Two days later, Juan was free. And the following day, Juan and I got married - we were so happy! We travelled together around Argentina and we both spoke at political meetings. I told the people that Juan could help them and their families. I also asked them to call me Evita (little Eva). We were a great success and, in 1946, Juan Peron became the President of Argentina.

Suddenly, at the age of 27, I was the President's wife and the 'First Lady' of Argentina. I wanted to work hard and help the people. In 1947, Evita City was built to give homes to poor families. And, in 1948, I started the Eva Peron Foundation, an organization to help poor and sick people.

By 1950, the Foundation had received over \$200 million and had 14,000 workers. We also gave out thousands of shoes and cooking materials and built hospitals and schools. I worked day and night and met with thousands of sick and poor people. I wanted to give them hope.

I also wanted women to have more political power. When Juan became President, women weren't able to vote. Juan and I fought to change this and I also started a new political party for women. It was called the Female Peronist Party. By 1951, the party had more than 500,000 women members. With the help of these women, Juan Peron became President for the second time.

Many people wanted me to have a bigger political role, but I had to say no. I was already working too hard, sometimes more than 20 hours a day. And the problems I saw every day were making me ill. My husband asked me to take more rest, but the poor and sick people needed my help. I couldn't stop.

I was taken to hospital several times and lost a lot of weight. I was also in a lot of pain and the pain got worse and worse. I wanted to help my husband, but it wasn't possible. I wanted to see our country become a better place, but unfortunately this didn't happen. I was only 33 years old when I died, but people around the world still remember me. And many people in Argentina still think of me as their Evita.

The Life of Eva Peron

1919 Eva Maria Duarte was born in Los Toldos, Argentina.

1926 Her father, Juan Duarte, died in a car accident.

1930 Eva moved with her family to Junin, Argentina.

1933 She was given her first role in a school play and decided to become an actress.

1935 She moved to Buenos Aires and won a role with the Comedias Theatre company.

1936 She travelled around Argentina with the Comedias Theatre company. She also got a part in her first film.

1937 Eva began working as a radio actress with Radio El Mundo. Later that year she started working for Radio Belgrano on their show, Great Women of History.

1942 She bought her own apartment in Recoleta, one of the richest areas of Buenos Aires.

1944 10,000 people were killed in an earthquake in San Juan. Eva was invited to be in a concert to help the people of San Juan. After the concert, she met Juan Peron for the first time.

1945 Eva talked about Juan Peron's political ideas on her radio show. On 9th October, Juan's enemies put him in prison. Eva spoke to 300,000 people from the balcony of the Casa Rosada. Two days later Juan was free. A day later, Juan and Eva were married.

1946 Juan became the President of Argentina.

1947 Evita City was built to give homes to poor families. Women won the right to vote for the first time in Argentina.

1948 Eva started the Eva Peron Foundation, an organization to help poor people.

1951 Juan Peron became President of Argentina for the second time. The Female Peronist Party had more than 500,000 members by this time. They helped Juan to become President again.

1952 Eva Peron became very sick and died. She was 33 years old.

CHAPTER SIX

Nancy Wake

1912 - 2011

The woman who became a spy in the Second World War

I fought with the French Resistance against the Germans in the Second World War. I got weapons for the Resistance fighters and helped fighters to escape. I was part of the final victory against the Germans in 1945.

I was born in New Zealand, but I grew up in Sydney, Australia. When I was 16 years old, I left home and got a job as a nurse in the Australian countryside. In 1932, I received a surprise - 200 pounds from my aunt. It was a lot of money at that time and I decided to spend it. I went to Sydney Harbour and bought a ticket to North America.

I enjoyed the journey on the ship and then travelled around the USA and Canada. When I wasn't travelling, I worked as a waitress to earn some money. After a while, I moved to Britain. I wanted to work on a newspaper, so I studied to become a newspaper reporter.

I got my first job on a newspaper in Paris, where I learned to speak French. I went to Germany and Austria for the newspaper. I saw the terrible things that Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party were doing in their country. I realized then that the Nazis were very dangerous. And they wanted to rule the whole of Europe.

In 1940, the Germans attacked France and occupied most of the country. I was already living in the south of France, where I married my first husband, a businessman, Henri Fiocca. We both hated the Nazis and wanted to help in the war against them.

I began to work for the French Resistance in Marseille. I delivered secret messages to the Resistance fighters and I also helped fighters to escape. The Germans tried to catch me. I used false papers and changed my appearance so they didn't recognize me. In 1943, the Germans caught me, but luckily I escaped.

It was too dangerous for me to stay in France. I had to leave my husband and go over the Pyrenees mountains to Spain. From Spain, I escaped to London and joined the British army. I was a little surprised when the British wanted me to

become a spy. They wanted me to be part of a secret army, which helped the French Resistance.

The training with the British army was very hard and I worked night and day to learn the special skills. I learned how to look after injured fighters. I also learned to kill. And so I became a spy and set off on my first mission to France.

I arrived in France on 29th April 1944. At first, the French Resistance didn't believe that I could help them. They didn't think that a woman could be a fighter. A Resistance leader told one of his men, 'This woman could be an enemy. Ask her to go for a walk with you. When no one is around, kill her!' They didn't realize I could speak French. I understood everything.

When we went for the walk, I told the man, 'If you attack me, I will kill you first.' He believed me and took me back to the camp. At last, the Resistance allowed me to join them. I got weapons from Britain and also took part in their attacks against the Germans. We blew up railway lines and stole German weapons. On one occasion, I killed a German soldier. On another, I killed a Resistance fighter who was working for the Germans.

Our attacks against the Germans were very successful, but it was difficult to keep everything secret. Many local people were frightened of the German soldiers and sometimes they gave the Germans information about our plans. On one occasion, someone told the Germans about our secret radio transmitter. Our radio operator destroyed our codes so the Germans didn't discover our secrets.

I cycled 500 kilometres to get new codes. When German soldiers stopped me, I told them, 'I'm going to visit my aunt who's very ill.' After three days, I got the codes. Everyone said that I was very brave, but I didn't think about that. I had to do it. It was part of my job.

With the new codes, I could send secret messages to Britain. We could receive new weapons and start our attacks again. Our attacks were important. They stopped the progress of around 50,000 German soldiers. These soldiers weren't able to fight the British army, which was arriving in the north of France.

In September 1944, I received orders to go to Paris. In Paris, I helped the British and French armies in the final months of the war. On 8th May 1945, we heard the wonderful news. The war was over and the victory was ours!

I wanted to return home to my husband. I was shocked to discover that he was dead. He was killed by the Germans in 1943. It was time for me to start a new life.

I went back to Australia and tried to become a politician. I wasn't successful and life seemed boring after the war. I then moved to the UK for several years and I got an office job with the British secret service.

I was happy to receive many honours for my work in the war, such as the George Medal from the British. And at the end of my life, I felt proud to be part of one of the most important victories in history. The victory brought peace and freedom to Europe.

The Life of Nancy Wake

1912 Nancy Wake was born in Wellington, New Zealand.

1914 Nancy and her family moved to Sydney, Australia.

1928 She left home and worked as a nurse in the Australian countryside.

1932 - 1936 She received 200 pounds from her aunt. Nancy used the money to travel around North America. She then moved to London, where she studied to become a newspaper reporter. She got her first job on a newspaper in Paris. She visited Germany and Austria and met Adolf Hitler in 1933.

1939 The Second World War started. On 1st September, Germany attacked Poland. Two days later, Britain and France began to fight against the Germans.

1940 Nancy joined the French Resistance in Marseille. She delivered secret messages and helped Resistance fighters to escape from the Germans.

1943 Nancy was caught by the Germans, but she escaped to Britain. She joined the British army and trained to be a spy.

1944 On 29th April, Nancy arrived in occupied France and worked with the French Resistance. On 11th September, she was sent to Paris to help the British and French armies.

1945 The Second World War ended. Nancy received many honours after the war, such as the George Medal from the UK.

1949 Nancy returned to Australia. She tried to become a politician in Sydney, but wasn't successful.

1951 - 1958 She moved back to England and got an office job with the British secret service. In 1957, she married a British army pilot, John Forward.

1960 She returned to Australia with her husband.

1988 She won Officer of the Legion of Honour, one of the highest honours from the French government.

1997 Her husband died after 40 years of marriage.

2001 Nancy moved to London and lived at the Stafford Hotel.

2011 Nancy died in London, England. She was 98 years old.