

**Book Review:****“Tales From My Grandmother” - a thoughtful child’s doorway into World War II England****By Jean Bartlett****ARTS CORRESPONDENT****Ran Pacifica Tribune April 15, 2009**

“Tales From My Grandmother” - Memories of a Child in World War II England written by Pacifican Surrey Blackburn ([www.talesfrommygrandmother.com](http://www.talesfrommygrandmother.com)) and illustrated by Gabhor Utomo, is the kind of book a child might reach for when the grownups are talking and a “quick” look-see might be just the thing for a case of the fidgets. But the thing about Blackburn’s “Tales From My Grandmother” is that from the first page of the book’s twenty tales, the read is like a lovely fall down a rabbit hole where everything has a sort-of Saturday morning feel from the reader’s own childhood. Immediately all thoughts of a quick look-see evaporate. Instead there is a great deal of urgency, both curious and emotional, to discover the next page.

Born in Bristol, England in the late 1930s, Blackburn was too little to be aware that Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. However as Bristol was blitzed in November of 1940, young Surrey would soon enough discover the War had come to her front door. In January of 1941, her worried parents brought their little 3-year-old to live with acquaintances who had a farm in the countryside. They would return for Surrey as soon as Bristol was safe. What neither Surrey nor her parents knew was that this farmer and his wife did not like each other at all and neither was much interested in talking to a little girl. For nearly a year, the lonely child created wonderful imaginary friends who kept her company until the “Yanks” entered the War in December of 1941 and Surrey’s parents, now filled with optimism, returned and brought their little girl home.

This tale titled “Evacuation” does what all the tales in this thoughtful charmer do, it reads like a first-rate skip into adventure until the words sink deeply within and you realize (especially the adult reader) - how absolutely devastating this lack of genuine affection or extra kindness must have been for a little girl quite used to being loved. Once she returned home, the near 4-year-old discovered that air raids, gas masks, ration books and at least one tale of incredible bravery were all part of the daily doings of a child growing up in World War II England.

On the 4th of April, Blackburn held a book signing at Florey’s Book Co. here in Pacifica. Very well attended, the author took on all requests, including repeated ones, to read stories from her book. Some of the attendees had also experienced gas masks and ration books from their own World War II childhoods and the crowd conversed like a group of old friends. But when the author read aloud, her audience of all ages listened and laughed and occasionally dabbed at their eyes. Gently yet informatively, Surrey Blackburn’s “Tales From My Grandmother” guides the reader into a time in history that must not be forgotten, nor should it ever be repeated. Perhaps it is only through a child’s garden of memories that grownups can be reminded just how foolish grownups can be.

Artist Gabhor Utomo has created vibrant and exquisitely detailed watercolor illustrations that are a sort-of pastoral time camera, with a view directly into the author’s childhood. You’ll have to pick the book up yourself to see the special contributions of Blackburn’s granddaughters, India and Annika Cale. But do pick the book up and read it to all the important young people in your life – including your own younger self.