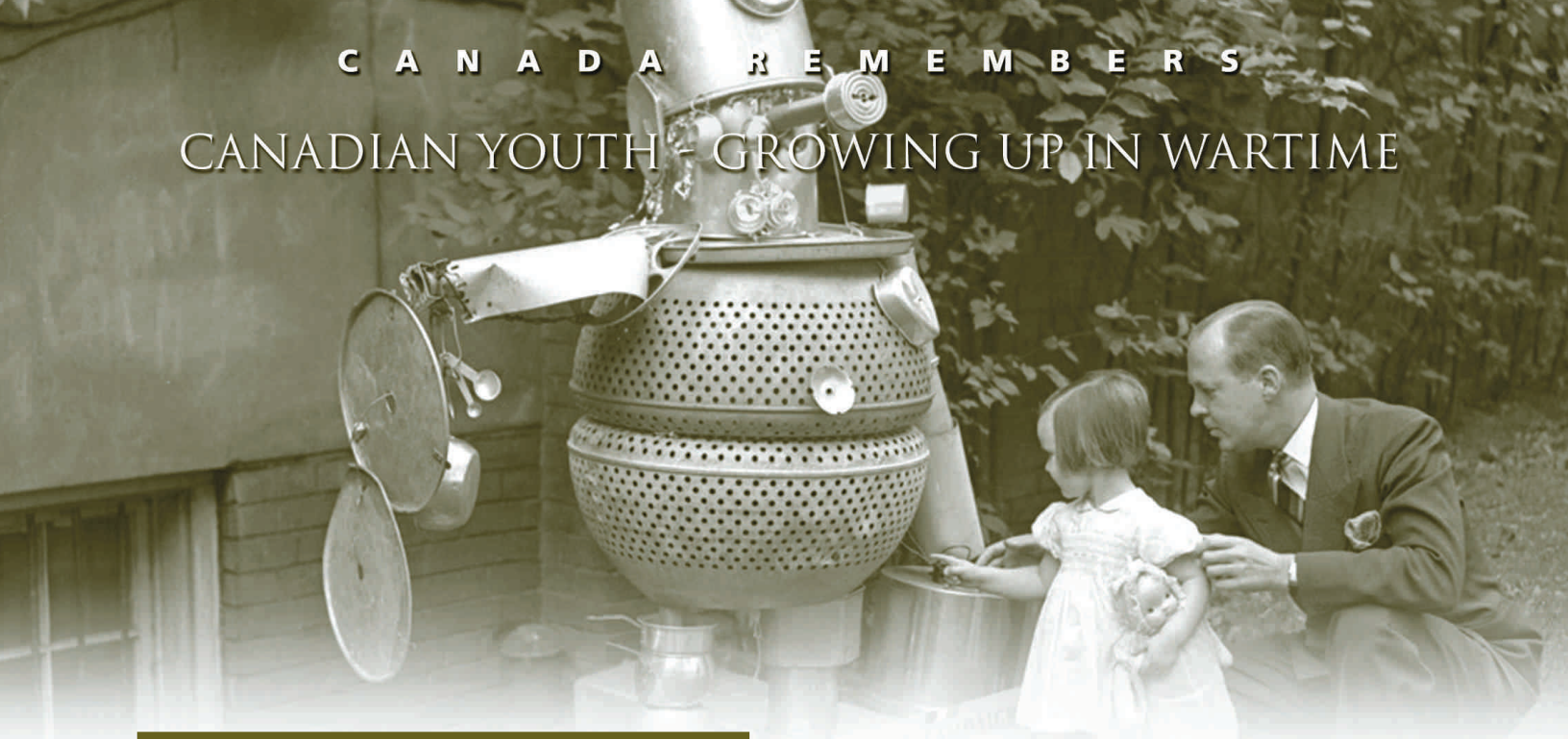


## CANADIAN YOUTH - GROWING UP IN WARTIME



## INTRODUCTION

Canada's children and teenagers played an important role in Canada's war effort. They filled many of the gaps left by male family members and other able-bodied men in Canadian society who left to join the armed forces and also provided other sorts of valuable support to those overseas. Young people's selfless drive and enthusiasm earned them the respect and admiration of a country.

## THE 'BOYS' IN UNIFORM

Many Canadian soldiers were just teenagers themselves. Numerous nineteenth, eighteenth and even seventeenth birthdays were celebrated in uniform. Their willingness to fight and sacrifice everything for peace and freedom was an inspiration to all those who supported them at home.

- Approximately 700,000 Canadians under the age of 21 served in uniform during the Second World War.
- Sometimes boys as young as 13 would lie about their age and attempt to enlist in the military. The underage volunteers who looked old enough were often accepted while many of those who were rejected ended up serving in the Merchant Navy, where they supported the war effort in a different way, transporting troops and materials overseas.
- Outside of Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery in France is a monument commemorating Private Gérard Doré, the youngest Canadian soldier

to die in the Battle of Normandy. The Quebec teenager, who was only 16 when he died in action in 1944, serves as a solemn example of the kind of service Canadian youth made to their country.

## LIVING WITH WAR

During the war, Canadian children contributed and sacrificed in many ways.

- Youth were constantly encouraged by their teachers, family and friends to support the home front effort.
- With most able-bodied men overseas, there were not enough farm workers to harvest the crops. Countless young people worked long hours on farms to ensure a steady food supply for Canadians and our Allies.
- To encourage students to help with the harvest, many schools did not count attendance or introduce new material in classes until after the crops were in.
- The government lowered the minimum age for obtaining a driver's licence to 14 so that children could legally operate farm trucks and other vehicles.
- Many children saw themselves as junior soldiers. They prepared for war by memorizing aircraft silhouettes and building ship models. Many high school students joined cadet corps and learned how to march, perform arms drills and fire weapons.

Photo: The Aluminum Victory Campaign, 1941 (man and girl looking at sculpture made out of aluminum). Gordon W. Powley. Archives of Ontario C-5-1-0-18-1



- Teachers often had children write letters to Canadian military members overseas, telling them about what was happening back home.
- Canadian children were joined by hundreds of British refugee children ('guest children') who were sent by their parents from bomb-ravaged Britain to Canada for their safety. These children lived with Canadian children and went to school with them.

### SCRIMPING, SAVING, AND SCAVENGING

Children learned to scrimp and save to raise money for the war effort. They learned to recycle and collect materials, such as metal, rubber, fat and grease, that were in short supply and could be reused to produce useful products. Encouraged by incentives such as free passes to movies, Canada's children became ardent scavengers.

- Children collected tons of scrap. Some even donated their own toys for metal salvage drives.
- Children used their hard-earned money, bringing their nickels and dimes to school, to buy War Savings Stamps which they stuck into special booklets for post-war redemption.
- Boy Scouts and Girl Guides conducted many fund-raising activities. As an example, the 10<sup>th</sup> Toronto Scout Troop collected 510,000 pounds of salvage and used the money they earned to buy a truck, an ambulance for the Royal Canadian Air Force and Victory Bonds.
- Of the \$5.5 billion raised in Victory Loan appeals, millions were contributed by children.

### "CANADIAN WHITES"

To save scarce U.S. dollars, the government barred all non-essential American products from entering Canada. This embargo included children's much-beloved comic books. The Canadian publishing industry stepped in to fill the void, but they could not afford colour printing so they published black-and-white comic books which became known as "Canadian whites".

- In the summer of 1941, the first Canadian comic book, "Wow No.1" hit the stands, and all 52,000 copies were sold.
- Canadian comic book heroes included Johnny Canuck, Freelance Dixon of the Mounties, and Nelvana of the Northern Lights.

### THE LEGACY

The broad range of sacrifices and achievements made by Canadians during the Second World War provide us with a proud and lasting legacy that will continue into the country's future. The considerable efforts and sacrifices made by the young people of that time serve as a lasting reminder of what Canada's youth can do when they put their mind to it. To learn more about Canada's role in the Second World War; please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca) or call 1-877-604-8469 toll-free.

