

The outbreak of World War I in the Summer of 1914 ended a period of history, not only for my parents, but also for Berlin; for Germany and for the whole World. It was the first war in modern times when the civilian population suffered as much, if not more, than the military forces.

For my parents it meant separation for several years, with my father called up for military service, posted as a doctor to various military hospitals in Brussels and other parts of German-occupied Belgium. They had a personal tragedy, a son born in 1914 survived only for a few days. They tried again, and I was born in August 1916. As my father was called up only in April 1917, I think that he must have assisted, or at least was present, at my birth.

It certainly produced a complete change of life for them. I cannot imagine that my father was content with military discipline and with the need to attend to patients who were completely unknown to him. In his Berlin practice, he was always in close personal contact with those who had consulted him. This fact was recently confirmed to me by a former child-patient, Marianne Feilchenfeldt, née Breslauer, a very well-known photographer in her younger days. Later she became equally distinguished as an international art-dealer in Zurich, and she told me again and again how much my father's visits meant to her when she was a young girl.

My mother had a more difficult time. She had to give up most of her work as a sculptor, as she had to look after a baby, with constant worries how to find and prepare suitable food for it, let alone for herself. Hunger was then an everyday concern in Berlin for all, and the scarcity of meat, vegetables and even potatoes was overruling everything else. In addition, she had an aged mother to care for and help her family, who were apparently not as adapt as she was in coping with the difficult war-time conditions of 1914-1919.

The civilians in the whole of Germany learnt what war really meant in World War I, and this was a lesson to be repeated in a far more horrendous form during World War II. There is no doubt that other European women in other belligerent countries also suffered greatly from German aggression, and this extended to many people in Asia as World War II spread. Only American civilians escaped, although their country was involved in both wars and heavy casualties were inflicted on members of their armed services.

I was able to learn much about my parents during these difficult years, from the many letters and cards which they had exchanged frequently. Miraculously these have come down to me, lovingly preserved by my father. To read this correspondence after an interval of 80 years was profoundly moving for me.