**War-time Homes**

*During the Second World War, Michael Caine and his brother Stanley, like other children, were moved out of London to live with families in safer parts of the country*.

Stanley was sent to live with a district nurse and I was taken in by a couple who were just plain cruel.

My mother couldn’t come to visit straight away because the Germans were bombing the railway lines.

When she eventually managed to get down she found me covered in sores and starving. There was

an allowance to cover the costs of taking in evacuees and my hosts were out to keep as much of it as

possible; I’d been living on a tin of pilchards once a day. Even worse, they used to go away for the

weekend and leave me locked in the cupboard under the stairs. I’ve never forgotten sitting hunched

in the dark, crying for my mum and not knowing if anyone would ever come to get me out; time had

ceased to have any meaning. That experience was so traumatic that it has left me with a lifelong

fear of small, enclosed spaces and a burning hatred of any cruelty to children; all my charity work is

aimed at children’s charities, particularly the NSPCC. Anyway, back then I decided I’d rather risk

the bombing than be locked up in a cupboard again. Happily, my mother agreed and took Stanley

and me straight back to London, determined not to be parted from us again.

By now the Blitz on London was happening in earnest. The bombs got closer and closer and my

mother had had enough. My father was called up to serve in the Royal Artillery and she took us to

North Runcton in Norfolk, on the east coast of England.

Sometimes I think the Second World War was the best thing that ever happened to me. Norfolk

was a paradise for a scrawny little street urchin like me, coming from all the smog and fog and filth

of London. I was a little runt when I went there and by the time I was fourteen I had shot up to

six foot, like a sunflower growing up a wall. Or a weed. Wartime rationing meant no sugar, no

sweets, no cakes – no artificial anything – but we had good food, supplemented with wild rabbits

and moorhens’ eggs. Everything was organic because all the chemical fertilisers were needed

for explosives, so I was given this unexpectedly healthy start in life. We lived with another ten

families crammed together in an old farmhouse, with fresh air, good food and, best of all, the

chance to roam free in the countryside. I went round with a gang of other evacuees; the village

mothers wouldn’t let their kids play with us because we were so rough and our language was a

bit suspect, to say the least. Now I look back on it, we must have been a bit of a nuisance but

my experiences there changed my life. I appreciated the country because I went there and I

appreciated London because I’d left it behind.

1. Why were Michael and Stanley moved out of London?
2. Why was their mother unable to visit them?
3. What food was Michael given by his host family?
4. What has been the lasting impact of Michael’s treatment as an evacuee?
5. What action did his mother take once she saw how he was being treated as an evacuee?
6. What does the word ‘earnest’ mean in this context?
7. Why did his mother decide to leave London?
8. What does the word ‘scrawny’ mean? What can we infer about Michael’s appearance?
9. What technique is used in the phrase: “I had shot up to six foot, like a sunflower growing up a wall” What are the connotations of this image?
10. Why does Michael Caine feel that: “the Second World War was the best thing that ever happened to [him]”