

EVERYONE HAS A REASON FOR OBJECTING

You will hear people call me a coward, a spineless traitor. You will see white feathers at my doorstep and glares and scowls aimed right at me. My name is Hamish Gray, and I am a Conscientious Objector. I live in Cape Reinga, with Martha who is my dear mother, Rosie my younger sister of four and Eva my older sister who is now engaged, and has just moved away from home. I have never been intrigued by the thought of being a conscientious objector, but when you hear my story you will know why. On Thursday 28th June 1942 we received a telegram.

It was a day like any other day, caution was in the air. But the street was absolutely silent. I ran out the door to get the mail when I was stopped by a bulky officer. "Halt!" he bellowed, I was quite taken aback. The officer had seemed to notice, and softened the look on his face.

"Are you a part of the Gray family?" he inquired.

"Yes sir," I replied. He handed me a small rectangle, accurately spun around on the ball of his foot and was off marching back down the street. Clutching the paper rectangle I handed it to Mother. She'd glared at me as if I was missing something... *The mail!!!* I quickly sprinted back outside.

When I'd arrived back with a handful of bills. I heard sobbing from the kitchen, it sounded like mother. I rushed into the kitchen and found her in a crumpled mess on the ground. Beside her is the telegram. I didn't have to ask why she was sobbing, I'd seen the letters on the telegram. His name, my father's name *Johnathan Gray* and in big bold letters the acronym **K.I.A.**

I couldn't even explain how I felt afterwards. It was just like something had snapped inside of me. Something against war, against fighting. Something that realised the prospect of war from a different angle, how it is cruel, dark and wasteful. It was no big adventure that I wanted to join.

So this is where I stand now, hands behind my back, comments and rude remarks about the path I had chosen, but they didn't know. They didn't realise the pain and suffering it meant. To have someone that close to you perish into embers that easily. From one shell thrown, from one shot triggered. Someone can die, that man was my father. Johnathan Gray no longer exists in this world. Only in our photographs and in memory.

"Gray? Gray!" the colonel roared at me with a scowl to complete it.

"Were you listening to me soldier?" questioned Cl. Tucker.

"I'm sorry but haven't I told you before? My name is Hamish, Ham if you like, and I not one of your soldiers that you boss around and treat like dirt!" I hadn't even realised that I'd raised my voice. Tucker looked appalled. He'd obviously never been spoken back to with such ferocity before. He'd obviously expected a cowering conchie. Not an 18 year old boy who'd be giving him the orders.

"I said you have a chance before we have to go through with this. Give up this cowardly nonsense, and serve for King and Country," he said this with precise and crisp words which made me think he'd said this many times before.

"Everyone has a reason," I replied confidently, "You have yours for serving in the Armed Forces and I have mine for squandering about with my, as you say 'Full of nonsense thoughts.'"

"What kind of an ans-" I cut him off.

“The answer is no, Colonel, and here I was thinking you could tell.” I said.

In that moment I was roughly shoved against the wall. “Careful!” I warned the soldiers holding me hostage. They pulled my hands out behind my back and the familiar feeling of cold metal was around my wrists once again.

I was shoved and bullied right down to the wharf. “Thank you gentlemen, that will be all,” the Colonel had said. The well-dressed soldiers politely saluted, spun on one heel and marched away. I gazed upward, there in front of me was a colossal ship named the ‘*HMS Amethyst*’. A bit rusted and worn around the stern, but in other words it looked deadly. “Go on,” the Colonel ordered. So I took my first step towards the plank leading upwards and that was what started my journey.

“Oi, Gray,” the Colonel pestered, “I forgot to give this to you, i-it’s from your mother.” He handed me an envelope and marched me off to the train which would take me out to the country.

As soon as I get there I am roughly yanked into a cell in an internment camp. As we were at the door of my cell one of the escort soldiers, opens the door and the other violently shoves me onto the concrete floor inside the cell.

“Watch where you’re going conchie,” the one who had shoved me snared, “You never know when you and your fragile beliefs are gonna break.” I glare at them with as much force as possible, but they just turned around and laughed down the passageway, not even giving me a second glance. I have to admit, I was thoroughly glad that they had left. It gave me a chance to read the letter from mother. I gingerly opened the rustling paper as not to rip it and here is what I read;

Dear Hamish,

If I was to tell you we were okay and surviving I would be lying to you (heaven forbid it). The truth is we are almost close to starving. Eva has come down to support little Rosie and I for the time being. All of us are barely surviving off the profits that Jacob (Eva’s fiancé) is sending us from the war. Eva is struggling to find a job because of the occupation you hold. She is still trying though and is determined to support us. Our house however is a different thing. In the night it was vandalized and I woke up to a house covered in red paint spelling COWARDS all over the walls. Our grass at the front garden has been teared up as well. I hope you are okay and well. I shall write weekly to you, and inform you on how we are holding up.

I miss you and wish you all the best.

With love Mom, Rosie and Eva.

Tears formed in my eyes as I realized what I had been putting them through and I could not, would not let them continue to live like that. All of this was because of my beliefs. I had a reason though. No, I couldn’t take it anymore and decided to stop and join. I decided that I could not fight, but I could help care for the wounded. I would resolve what I have done and support my family with the little money I earn from the war.

I had made up my mind I would join the war. My father would have wanted me to. Although now that I think about it he would not want me to fight for King and Country, he would want me to help for my family’s survival and support them in anyway I could.

Finally the Colonel came for me at what I thought was around 6:30 in the morning. “Gray!” he grunted, “Be careful what you say boy. This is your last chance to give up those foolish beliefs of yours.”

I gulp and carefully follow him out of the cell door.

There were no escorts this time, just Cl. Tucker, the NCO and cowardly, lonely, shoved around me.

“So Gray, what’s it to be? The trenches or the execution yard?” the NCO questioned looking like he already knew the answer.

“I would like to be a stretcher-bearer in the trenches,” I requested, trying hard not to laugh at the appalled looks on their faces. The NCO gave me a doubtful look, but I nodded to reassure him.

“As long as I receive income,” I added quickly. The NCO nodded.

“Of course, of course,” the colonel said, “But if you don’t mind me asking. What made you change your mind?”

“May I repeat myself again colonel? Everyone has a reason. I have my beliefs about how war is a wrong and cruel way of solving conflict and I will hopefully never change those beliefs. All war does is bring sadness to others who have lost loved ones and fear to those who will have fought and survived to tell others of the so called ‘Great Adventure’. I will help those who can live another day and if I die, I will die doing the right thing. Yes, I could die for the soldiers dying on the battle-field, but I would also die knowing that my family is surviving,” and that was the answer I left them with.



We were kept in an Internment Camp.
Some like me were mistreated. But others
were lucky and had that little bit of freedom
that I never got.