



## **Don't Let My Past Be Your Future**

*Harry Leslie Smith*

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**'Harry Leslie Smith is a vital and powerful voice speaking across generations about the struggle for a just society'** Jeremy Corbyn

**THIS A CALL TO ARMS FOR THE MANY, NOT THE FEW: DON'T LET THE PAST BECOME OUR FUTURE**

Harry Leslie Smith is a great British stalwart. A survivor of the Great Depression, a Second World War veteran, a lifelong Labour supporter and a proud Yorkshire man, Harry's life has straddled two centuries. As a young man, he witnessed a country in crisis with no healthcare, no relief for the poor, and a huge economic gulf between the North and South. Now in his nineties, Harry wanders through the streets of his youth and wonders whether anything has actually changed.

Britain is at its most dangerous juncture since Harry's youth - the NHS and social housing are in crisis, whilst Brexit and an unpopular government continue to divide the country - but there is hope. Just as Clement Attlee provided hope in 1945, Labour's triumphant comeback of June 2017 is a beacon of light in this season of discontent. Britain has overcome adversity before and will do so again - a new nation will be forged from the ashes of grave injustice.

Moving and passionate, *Don't Let My Past be Your Future* interweaves memoir and polemic in a call to arms. Above all, this book is a homage to the boundless grace and resilience of the human spirit.

## Don't Let My Past Be Your Future Details

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## **From Reader Review Don't Let My Past Be Your Future for online ebook**

### **Andy Haigh says**

'I am an ordinary man who lived through extraordinary times. I am one of the last remaining voices from an era when Britain was savage and brutal to all those who did not have wealth'.

Harry Leslie Smith, Don't Let My Past Be Your Future.

Harry Leslie Smith with his latest book, part scathing political polemic, part memoir and part warning, demonstrates that nobody is ever 'too old' to become a writer.

Whilst there might be plenty of books detailing Britain's history, in particular the wretched conditions that the poor and the working class had to endure in the years before the NHS and the welfare state were established, none of them are as affecting, harrowing and moving as Smith's recollections. The drudgery of child labour, rummaging through bins for food, being haunted by the anguished screams of those who couldn't afford morphine for their ailments, having to leave decrepit slums under cover of darkness to avoid landlords wanting money and witnessing the way poverty devastates a family, it's almost Dickensian but all the more impactful because it's not merely a story but real life.

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### **Richard Derus says**

Harry Leslie Smith, 1923-2018

He died this morning, 28 November 2018, after a struggle with pneumonia. Please watch the video linked above. Your votes in 2020 will set the course for the entire rest of your life, no matter how old you are. #IStandWithHarry

Please, you stand with him as well.

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### **Mark says**

Quick read. Doesn't say anything new. Inequality breeds civil unrest, which can lead towards populism and war. He sees austerity measures against the welfare state and the growing animosity that breeds from those economically struggling as necessary ingredients for a repeat of today's populism leading towards more world war.

He sees politics as a constant battle, since the French revolution tackled the ancien regime, between those who have and those who don't. Those in power have the status quo those against have #s and justice. Dont let liberal battle be lost to remake the old and perilously poor times.

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## Alex Morritt says

Harry Leslie Smith is a rare phenomenon. A sage in his mid nineties with the lucidity and clarity of purpose to warn us of what may become of us if we do not take remedial action soon. Based on his first hand knowledge of another era with frighteningly similar social, political and economic characteristics to those of today, he interweaves his boyhood experiences of abject poverty growing up in the north of England with the UK's current worsening economic position for the majority of its citizens due to either sustained and unnecessary austerity measures since the 2008 financial crash or more recently the sharp rise in inflation and the pronounced devaluation of sterling as a result of the EU referendum result. He also lays bare the utter hypocrisy and shameful opportunism of today's crop of third rate politicians such as Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson, reminding us that if charlatans of this ilk can be voted in, they can also be voted out, and that it is our duty as members of society to become more engaged in and energised by politics in order to avoid the catastrophes of the late 1920's and 30's rather than merely assume that we are powerless to bring about positive change. A wake up call, a call to arms, but also a reminder of the strength of the human spirit when confronted by seemingly insurmountable challenges.

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## Kahn says

It's not often I have two books on the go at once — in fact, this was the first time — but something told me I was going to need something 'lighter' to offset Harry Leslie Smith's look back at the rise of fascism in the 1930s.

And I wasn't wrong.

In fact, this was the first book I couldn't read before going to sleep because the life Harry was brought up in was just so soul-crushingly grim.

But I could not leave this book unread. I only had to read about the slums and squalor of Yorkshire, Harry grew up in it.

And that's what makes this book an important one to read now.

As the world edges ever closer to ecological and financial meltdown, it would serve us all well to remember what happened the last time we danced on the edge of the cliff.

The Wall Street Crash, The Great Depression, a government that didn't give a toss about the poor, no NHS, mass unemployment, people surviving (barely) on stolen scraps, borrowed slices of bread and the charity of a driver at the Weetabix factory... but this isn't a tale of Victorian England. No. This is England in the 1930s. A little short of 90 years ago.

We turned things around back then, sure. The rising tide of fascism was stemmed (with the loss of millions of lives), the NHS and social housing were created (don't believe the lie that this can't be done), and an impressive period of prosperity unfolded.

Sadly, we might not be so lucky this time around.

Harry is looking back at his own life in minute, personal, painful detail, drawing regular parallels with the cruel and unnecessary austerity ideology the Tory government brought in after the financial crisis of 2008. A man uniquely positioned to see both events from the same vantage point, he can see where cutting government spending ends. And unless you're already rich, it's not anywhere pretty.

At times over-written, at times far too personal, *Don't Let My Past* is a grim but vital essay on the how a certain political ideology leaves nothing but pain and suffering in its wake.

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### **Anthony Peter says**

Being a baby-boomer, and a middle-class one at that, I found this a real eye-opener, and it helped explain the significance of Labour Party/socialism to someone who's always been that way inclined but without realising the extremities of experience that have shaped people's adherence to the politics of the left.

Needs reading by lots of people. I'll be passing my copy on.

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### **Owlseyes says**

"This August resembles too much that of 1939"

in: In 1939, I didn't hear war coming. Now its thundering approach can't be ignored  
by Harry Leslie Smith

in: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis...>

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### **Ann says**

An amazing book written by 94 year old Harry Leslie Smith. There is a chilling message in the title. Harry compares much of what is happening today with his childhood in the 20s and 30s - soup kitchens/ food banks, his family's constant struggle to find decent/any housing with the plight of refugees - I can confirm this, as grandmother was told to sell her house when she applied for welfare when my grandad was out of work in the thirties. Hard times which are coming back thanks to Austerity and will be much worse because of Brexit.

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### **Diane Holland says**

I loved this book, despite the fact that much of what he wrote, particularly about his childhood, I had already read in "Harry's Last Stand". There is so much in this book that resonates for me and there are so many passages that I would love to share in this review, but that would make this almost as long as the book itself. There are many lessons to be learnt from what Harry tells us, especially if we want to change this world and make it a better place for future generations.

The following pieces are extracts from this book which particularly resonated with me:

"UKIP is a fraud. It can no more offer political salvation to the disenfranchised masses than a television evangelist can fast track you to heaven with a £100 donation to his dodgy ministry. And it is time the media and other political parties stopped paying lip service to their twenty-first-century variant of Mosley's fascism. As for the Tories, their concept of aspirational politics is a cruel deceit. Toryism is no more than an elaborate

pyramid scheme where they convince everyone to steal from the lowest to keep their place in the hierarchy."

And the last part of the final paragraph of the book:

"..... Without a doubt, we will see another general election very soon and we should accept, owing to the volatility of politics today, that all bets are off. What is essential between now and the next election, if we wish to end austerity and prevent my past becoming your future, is that Labour increases its outreach to the young, the disaffected and the hard-pressed middle class. Labour has a real chance of forming the next government and returning economic and social equality back to this country. To do so will not be easy. It took almost thirty years to destroy the welfare state, and its rebuilding will be a long and arduous task. But, as I saw the foundations dug for a progressive society in 1945, I know we can do it again, although only if we don't succumb to the lure of the Tories and their media, who divide us, cheapen our dignity and make us less civilised."

So, take note everyone: read this book, take note of what Harry is telling you and don't let the Tories, UKIP and the right wing press persuade you that they are on your side - because they are not!!!!

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### **Sally says**

Sobering as well as inspiring to hear the voice of a man who actually experienced the appalling poverty familiar to many during the interwar period. An important and timely reminder of how the Welfare State was won and a cry from the heart not to lose it. We are already on the slippery slope with increasing use of food banks, rising housing costs and the gig economy. Harry is still an activist in his 90s, which should inspire more of us to get involved. The indignities and pain heaped on the poor which he remembers are bad enough - but what's worse is that this was once considered an unavoidable fact of life. Don't let that attitude return to this country. This book is a mixture of personal reminiscence, political awakening and facts about today's society that will make you very uneasy.

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### **Erick says**

While the message here is wonderful, the book takes a little too long getting to the meat of comparing what happened before and after World War 2 to what is happening now. The author instead gets a little too caught up with raging on about the modern politicians at first. But once he gets down to the actual comparisons of past and present, his arguments shine and the real substances of this book shines through. It just takes a few chapters to get their.

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### **Judie says**

Thank you Harry - it was a pleasure getting to know you through your writing - you will be missed. Rest in peace and hopefully your struggle will be carried on through your young readers.

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## **Liz Milner says**

Don't Let My Past Be Your Future: A Call to Arms (Kindle Edition)

by Harry Leslie Smith

A Negative Spin, but it Works!

Any good publicist will tell you that a negative spin is the most difficult spin of all. In this book, which is part autobiography and part political tract, Harry Leslie Smith attempts to sell us on the Welfare State by describing his impoverished childhood in a Northern English slum (Barnsley, Yorkshire) during the Great Depression.

Without the protections of life, health, education and dignity conferred by the Welfare State, Smith and his family lived grim lives of unrelieved squalor. Neglect, abandonment, exploitation, and violence were daily experiences for Smith and his siblings. At the age of seven, Smith began his first job dragging a beer barrow through the slum. Compared to this memoir, Frank McCort's *Angela's Ashes* is a fun-filled romp through a Hibernian Wonderland.

A strange thing happened to me while reading Smith's narrative. Though I greatly respected Smith for the articles he'd published in *The Guardian*, I became desperate to believe that he was a dirty, bare-faced liar because the world he depicted was so cruel. His childhood world was one without compassion, without human agency and without hope ? in the words of Charles Wesley, "A world of deepest shade/unpierced by human thought/the dreary regions of the dead/where all things are for naught..."

I've always had a backhanded admiration for the Ayn Randian romantics who argued that the "Nanny State" was depriving people of creative opportunities, though I recognized that they usually did this with support from Nanny State institutions such as universities. Smith's book provided a salutary correction to this. It forced me to realize that doing time in a garret may be fine for booshie romantics such as myself, but it is no place for children, the sick, the old and the vulnerable.

Surveying the rise of austerity, inequality and "alternative truths," Smith writes, "History, is repeating itself but it is not coming back as farce but retribution for our own irresponsibility at not defending our stake in a just society."

Though his writing is at times melodramatic, Smith makes his case forcefully and well.

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## **David Swanson says**

This is an angry book. Of course, that forces the question, is the anger justified, and the answer is yes, it is justified. The problem is that such anger easily overwhelms the message. Mr Smith has certainly lived through hard times and, rightfully, doesn't want others to experience his hardships. It is valuable and admirable that Mr Smith has written this book but the tone of the book will prevent his message being widely heard. Financial inequality is widespread; life is not fair; politicians are, for the most part, rubbish at fulfilling their responsibilities. Unfortunately, this is not the call to action Mr Smith was aiming for but it is quite a rant.

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## **Martin Adams says**

This book has reinstalled a confidence in political involvement and humanity in me that had become jaded by the effects of uncaring governments, Harry Smiths warnings need to be heard everywhere in the UK before the next general election, the young voters need to take heed of his warnings of failure to engage and work actively to reestablish a socially responsible form of government before the wealthy few commit the many to privation and servitude, desperation and hopelessness

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