

Life during the Blitz and after

By

Marjorie Pryor (Nee Collins)

I was born in 1934 at Thorpe Coomb maternity hospital in Forest Road, Walthamstow. From there, I lived with my parents (Jack and Lil Collins) in Edinburgh Road over a sweet shop. We moved to 37 Hazelwood Road in Walthamstow to a ground floor flat.

My sister, Iris, was born in 1938. I was five years old when war broke out in 1939. I had just started school at Coppermill Lane when one afternoon in 1940 an air raid occurred. All the school children were led to the school shelter until the "all clear" sounded. At the end of that school afternoon my mum had failed to collect me. Instead, my aunty Bess (my father's sister) was waiting for me. She took me home with her. When we arrived, my mum and sister were waiting in aunt Bess' living room, covered in black dust. Iris was crying. We had been bombed and had lost everything in our flat. Mum and Iris had been in the Anderson shelter at the time and the blast from the bomb blew away the shelter door, hence their covering of dust and dirt. The lady who lived above us had died during the raid. Her little girl wanted a drink and so she had taken a chance to go and get her a drink during a lull in the raid, but suddenly the "Ack Ack" guns started up. My mum had shouted out to her to come down but it was too late. She had left two little girls.

I, mum and Iris were later evacuated to the country in Bedfordshire where we lived with two elderly sisters who were spinsters. They had their own maid. This was a bad experience for us as they used to make us have our meals in a summerhouse at the end of the garden. They were very strict and I remember one day playing in the garden and accidentally stepping onto the clean sheets hanging on the washing line. One of the sisters shouted at my

mum and I. This incident caused my mum to write to my dad to come and collect us and take us back home to Walthamstow.

We returned to 102 Blackhorse Road, an upstairs flat where we had to share an outside toilet with an elderly gentleman who lived downstairs with his bedridden wife. Outside our living room we had steep iron stairs that led down to the garden and to the Anderson shelter. Every night the siren seemed to sound. My dad would wake us up and carry us down to the shelter where mum would make up the beds. It was cold, damp and smelled of earth. There we would stay all night or until the "all clear" went. Life went on but it was very frightening.

We also were evacuated to Peterborough for a few years with my aunt Bess but this did also not work out due to mum not getting on with her. We then went to stay in Galston in Yarmouth with my aunt Violet Riley and her twin daughters Doreen and Jean where they had rented a house in Bull Road. I do not recall having any schooling during these evacuation years.

My dad was in The Home Guard and on most nights he operated an Artillery Gun firing at German planes as they bombed us. The noise of falling bombs was horrific, a high pitch whistling, shaking our shelter as they exploded. I would still have to go to school the next morning, and the following year I started a junior school in Tavistock Avenue, just off Blackhorse Road where I became friends with Doris Smith who lived in Winns Avenue.

From 102 Blackhorse Lane we moved to 39 Pembroke Road, another flat with no bathroom and an outside toilet. I was sent to Maynard Road Junior School. I made friends with some girls who lived in Pembroke Road, Gwen Goodwin, Pat Hart and another called Jean. We used to meet up after school and play "knock Down Ginger." We made grottos on the pavements and asked passers by for pennies which we soon spent at the local sweet shop. The war

was nearly over at this time although we were still getting rockets coming over. These were silent. You never knew when one hit until you heard the explosion. They caused a lot of damage and killed a lot of people.

My second sister Irene was born in 1946, and from Pembroke Road we moved back to 37 Hazelwood Road, a two bedroom flat which had been rebuilt after the bombing. I went to Tavistock Avenue Senior School and left there in 1947. I was fifteen years old and started work as a Trainee Machinist at L.S.J Sussman, making shirts from 8am to 6pm every day. I earned 35 shillings a week. I gave mum £1 a week and I had 12/6 for myself. I would go to work on my bike or by bus which was 1 and 1/2p fare each way. Whilst working I met a friend, Florence Bond. We used to go to the cinema and visit the market every Saturday buying clothes or make up if we could afford it. We used to buy nylon stockings which were very fine. If we laddered them we would take them to be repaired at the dry cleaners. We couldn't afford new ones every time. I met Florence's brother when he was an unknown youngster playing football for his school. His name was Billy Bond and went on to become a well known professional footballer. Florence lived in Higham Hill Road with her family. Jiving was all the rage and Florence and I would jive together at work in our lunch break whenever they put on the radio to practice for a dance which would be held at our Town Hall in Forest Road or Leytonstone Public Baths. No beer or spirits were allowed, only soft drinks. We really enjoyed ourselves.



Above: Me as a teenager

I also had another friend, Edna Green who also worked at Sussmans. Edna lived in Durham Road, near the Crooked Billet. We both had bikes and used to go cycling most evenings down to the river Lea and then back to her house for a drink. I had to be home before 10pm or I would get a telling off!



Above: right, myself and Edna

I married my first husband in 1954 (Tom Ochiltree) and later moved to Harlow New Town in Essex where I live to this present day.

Marjorie [email](#)

