

Written by Betty Jessie Batchen

I was born in 1935 in Dagenham Essex. The year our father came out of the Royal Navy after 22 years. The Royal Arsenal at Woolwich SE18 required him to work there on research as a Fitter and Turner. We all moved to Woolwich in 1938, to be near his place of work, Mother, Father, and five children. I was then three years of age.

1939 and the war broke out with Germany. I was then only four, and unless your Mother went also, I couldn't be evacuated under five. Mum needed to be at home, our father always came home for dinner lunch time, so I remained in Woolwich.

My youngest brother Brian was born in 1943, a surprise for Mum and Dad!

September 1940 arrived and on a warm sunny afternoon, without any warning s delayed action bomb that had fallen in Monk St. a mere street or two away, went off! The two bomb disposal engineers who were trying to defuse it went up with it.

What goes up...comes down, and I was hit as I played in the back alley to our home, with my friend June who lived next door. The shrapnel passed straight down the left side of my face, then hitting my shoulder as it passed.

My father ran from the house immediately picked me up and ran, a jeep saw him and signalled to climb on as he too was covered in my blood. They raced to St. Nicholas Hospital in Plumstead SE18, (now gone)...and rushed me into surgery. I was given only two hours to survive, but I'm told that on opening my eyes I told my Mum and Dad that 'I wasn't going to die, like Auntie Hilda had, and she was in a bed like this'...Well, how lucky or blessed can you get, since the hospital was hit while I was there, but it was not my wing that came down.

After six weeks I returned to school. Mother had shown me my reflection in the mirror and told me I'd had an accident...after that I went about happily playing and going to school (gas mask over shoulder of course). It seems I told people I'd fallen down the stairs...a delayed action bomb was too much to say!

I loved life then...and I still do. The children in my Ward at the time? I hope they are all ok too.