

**Written by Norman Sampson**

## **Summer Holidays World War II**

School had closed for the summer holidays, I believe that it was the summer of 1944. I was sitting on the steps at the bottom of Elvin house, the block of flats that I lived in with my parents, talking to a couple of my mates, about what we could do in the rest of our holidays, nobody went on holiday during the war, and nobody could afford to, with most of the men away in the Army. We usually spent our days playing over Victoria Park, but we were getting fed up, hanging around our estate playing football, knock down ginger, and Tin can Tommy, with so much time on our hands, nowhere to go and very little spending money, one of my friends suggested that if we could get the money off our parents we could go and see Tarzan tomorrow in the Hackney Pavilion, we agreed, as long as we could get the money. The next morning I was up and out early knocking on my friend's doors to see if they could get the money to go to the flicks, they couldn't, so the prospects were of hanging around the flats all-day.

I still wanted to see Tarzan, but I knew that my parents would not let me go alone as they had not allowed me to do this in the past, but I thought that it was worth another try. My mother worked in a ladies clothing factory in Belsham Street, just five minutes walk away from where I lived. I had been there before, all the women who worked there used to make a fuss of me, some of the women who worked there had American soldier boyfriends and would always give me some chewing gum that they got from their boyfriends, this was a real treat, as we never got much sweets as they were on ration.

When I got to the factory, I asked my mum if she would give me the money to go and see Tarzan, she asked me what other friends I would be going with, when she found out that they could not get the money she was very reluctant to let me go alone. After moaning and groaning that I had nowhere to go, and that it was the school holidays, and that I was bored, I knew that I was getting on my mum's nerves, while she was trying to do her work and so she agreed to let me go and see Tarzan.

As it was my mum's dinner break, and as the Hackney Pavilion was just up the road in Mare Street, she decided to take me to the cinema, buy my ticket, and made me promise that as soon as the film finished, I was to hurry back to the factory where she worked, and then we could go home together.

As I sat watching the film, I was in a world of my own world of make believe, watching the jungle plants, the colours, animals, scenery, Tarzan swinging from tree to tree. I was there in the jungle, a nine year old boy alone with his dreams.

There was an enormous bang, it hurt my ears, shook with fear, the whole cinema shook violently plaster fell from the ceiling, everything was coated white with plaster dust, people were

screaming, sheer panic took over as people rushed towards the exits, climbing over seats to get out quickly, the swing doors swung uncontrollably, to and fro, to and fro at speed, pandemonium reigned, and then it was quiet, coated in plaster dust I did not know what to do I sat back in my seat to watch Tarzan, through a haze of dust, it was all quiet now, too quiet. The film had continued throughout the panic, I now felt uncomfortable as I sat watching the film, I turned around to find that I was the only one left in the cinema, I got up and ran towards the exit, as I ran through the swing doors, and down the stairs that led into Mare Street, I saw a column of smoke rising skywards from behind the Hackney town hall, and my mum all flushed was running up the stairs of the cinema to see if I was alive as she had been told that the Doodle bug had hit the cinema, you could see the relief in her face as she flung her arms around me.

As we walked home together I was telling her all about Tarzan, and how disappointed I was that I did not see the end of the film.

As I am writing this sixty years after the event, I can imagine how my mother must have been feeling at that time, and was happy and relieved just to see me alive.