**Coventry**

We (mother, father and I, aged 7) were living in Coventry when war broke out. I was evacuated to my grandparents in New Bradwell (nr todays Milton Keynes) for the first six weeks of the war but that first year was very quiet and I was soon home.

We were all issued with gasmasks - I understand that in fact they would have been pretty ineffective in the event of a gas attack, and were awfully smelly. We had gas mask drills at school to get used to them. They had to be taken everywhere and came in a brown cardboard box with string on to wear over your shoulder. Going out at night became quite a business as you also had to have a torch (partially blacked out) to see where you were going. Windows had to have dark curtains so no light appeared on the outside, and were also criss crossed with tape in case of bomb blast. Another thing we all had were Identification cards and we all had to memorise the number - I can still quote mine though often have trouble remembering our phone number.

My school was at the top of our road and probably not very far though it seemed a long way in those days. My mother was always reminding me that if the air raid siren went then I had to knock on a door and ask for shelter until it was all over - can you imagine telling a child that today? We had air raid drill at school when we all went into the shelter, read comics and ate our Horlicks tablets - it beat lessons any day - and the shelter smelt very musty and damp. As so many schools were bombed we had to share our school with others which meant half day schooling - not that we minded that. Also if there had been an air raid and it started before a certain time, then we didn't have to go in so early

One occasion I still remember well was when my mother took me to the cinema one afternoon to see a Deanna Durbin film - half way through the siren went - and no-one moved. Then there was a couple of loud thumps and the audience rose as a man and quietly made their way out. We were just in time to see the German bombers dropping their bombs on the Standard car factory - which was very exciting (I thought). Another time we were having a picnic and several German planes flew overhead. All wartime children could recognise our planes and theirs. At no time can I ever remember feeling frightened - in fact we all thought it was pretty exciting. For boys, carving planes from balsa wood was a favourite pastime.

During November Coventry had three very big air raids. Each night when the siren sounded we went into the Anderson shelter which was shared with the family next door - grandma, two wives, two girls and a rather smelly terrier - the budgerigar was left inside! Being the smallest I slept in a hammock - great fun. I had a special "siren suit" (like Winston Churchill's) in bottle green and there was always a packet of Marmite sandwiches. During a lull in the bombing we would go outside to see the sky lit up like a gigantic firework display, but mostly I slept through it all - good training as it still takes a lot to wake me up once asleep. I never gave a thought to how worried the grown-ups must have been - not knowing if their husbands were safe - they were both air raid wardens - and never knowing where the next bomb would drop. And the amazing thing is their fear never transferred itself to me - either they were very good at hiding it or else I was totally insensitive! After one raid my mother insisted we walk into the city centre as she had taken a pair of shoes to the repairers and wanted to make sure the shop was still standing. As no buses were running it was quite a long walk - but the shop was still there and the sight of the cathedral burning will stay with me forever.

Then my mother decided that her family in Rugby would be worried about us so we cycled the 10 or 12 miles over to Rugby though I think my Dad must have pushed me most of the way.

.Food was rationed of course and when I see the small amounts we had in those days I can hardly believe it. Everyone dug up their flower beds and planted vegetables instead to eke out the rations. My mother made sponge cakes with dried eggs - they rose about half an inch and were like lead to eat. But we were never hungry though now I wonder how little my parents ate so that I shouldn't go hungry. It does make you wonder how they kept going - never getting a decent night's sleep, constant worrying, days without gas, water or electricity. I'm not sure we would cope as well as they did.