

## **My memories of the War – Sonia Price (now aged 95)**

When war broke out I was 11 or 12, and living in Salcombe in Devon, having moved away from London.

To begin with we were all told the new rules!

At first, there was an occasional German plane on its way to Plymouth. We were warned to take shelter if we were outside – ie getting back inside the house if we were near enough - otherwise we should knock on any door, and we'd be let in. We were instructed to get back home as soon as we could. The intention was then to maybe to move to Wales where my father was stationed. He was in the RAF, not as a pilot, as he was too old at 39.

Shortly after this fairly quiet period, we began to see French sailors who had been rescued from their boats. My mother told me that I was absolutely NOT allowed to practise my French on them. We also saw more planes coming back from their bombing raids over Plymouth. We often had to take shelter or hide somewhere in case we got shot at. It was really scary!!

We had to get used to the blackout. All the windows had to have heavy window curtains to prevent any light giving the German Bombers clues that there were houses below that they could drop any spare bombs before returning back. Their planes could blow up if they landed with spare bombs on board.

We had food rationing. I noticed it straight away, with virtually no butter to spread on our sandwiches. It was in Salcombe that I heard my first bomb. It was at night, and we were staying with my mother's friend, who had a very substantial staircase that we could shelter under. I admit it terrified me and I suspect most others because it sounded so near. The bomb fell on the village school. Fortunately, it was night-time, but I don't know what the pupils did after that because the very next day we started the journey back to London. At the time there was rumour that both we, and the Germans would not bomb the Capital cities.

London seemed to be still safe when we arrived and for a few days nothing happened. On the following day, we (my Mother, me and baby sister) were due to leave London again to travel to the Midlands to join my father who was now stationed up there. But this was the night when the Nazis decided to start bombing London. We were staying at 9 Cromwell Road, Kensington. Just opposite the Natural History Museum

I woke up in the middle of the night to hear a plane flying over us, then another. Then I was knocked unconscious. When I woke up sometime later my legs were really hurting, but I managed to get up and looked for the light switch, but couldn't find it, and none of the doors would open. Although I was shouting out there was no reply. I sat on a basement windowsill and eventually fell asleep. When I woke up later, I heard a voice saying, "You better start shouting," but there was no one there, however I started shouting for help again. After about 30 minutes someone heard me and got help from some men who were looking for survivors. One of the men, who was the bravest man I've ever known dug through the rubble and got me off the windowsill and got me to a tunnel he had made. He told me to crawl though on my stomach. He then went back through the same tunnel and found my baby sister still asleep in her cot. He also rescued her. He was the bravest man I've ever met. I sincerely hope he got lots of medals!

I was in hospital for about 4-5 months until my legs healed. My sister, me and my Uncle and Aunt were the only survivors of the bomb that hit the house. My mother and grandmother were both killed.

Shortly after leaving hospital my father was told, he was being sent to South Africa (they were training pilots there and also in Canada). We went to South Africa with him and went to a British boarding school that had opened in South Africa (Rodean)

The war was still on when I returned to England to be with my father again as a sixteen-year-old in 1944.

*Additional note from her daughter:*

*If you go to Cromwell Road by the Natural History Museum, you can see a magnificent terrace of houses. Halfway along is a modern flat sandwiched in between. Although I knew my grandmother had been killed in the war and that my mother has scars on her legs, she never really talked about the bomb dropping on their house. It wasn't until my daughter was asked at school to ask their Grandparents to tell their War Memories, that my mother told us her story and we went to look at 9 Cromwell Road with my mother. A few years ago we went with my mother to find her Mother's grave at Cuffley in Hertfordshire. She said it was the 1<sup>st</sup> time she had seen it. 70 odd years later!!*

*Like many of her generation, she can be quite matter of fact about her experiences. They locked them all away.*