



Brief insights

Maureen, 72, London Blitz survivor, now in Lincolnshire

I was a “street urchin”, playing with the other kids where we lived in Jersey Road, Customhouse, near the London docks. The day we heard about the war was bright and sunny. Everyone came out on the street, talking about it. It didn’t mean a lot to me, being very young. My family didn’t want to be evacuated so we stayed. We lived in a self-contained flat, sharing the front door of the building. In the old houses the bugs used to crawl out of the walls at night and suck your blood while you slept. One day we walked over to Stratford to visit my mother’s sister and it was awful, bombs falling, noise and dirt everywhere. St Mary’s Hospital was bombed and all the patients were brought out onto the pavement. It was a dreadful sight, lots of blood, people lying about. At the church, an ARP warden said: “You’d better come inside, it’s too heavy out there.” So we waited inside until the raid stopped. When we got back home there was no house: it had been hit by an incendiary; there was nothing left.

We went to Raynham in Essex, to a lovely house with an indoor bathroom and toilet. There was a garden as well, It was lovely. We thought it was real countryside. But we couldn’t stay there because my dad couldn’t afford the travel to work from Raynham to Bow. So we went back to the East End, Plaistow. We had gas lamps We spent most of the time down the shelters, down the tunnel at Stratford with trains running through it. You’d go and wash and change, then it was time to go down the shelter again. I saw London burning, St Paul’s with all the smoke and flames round it, terrible sights. I hardly went to school because of all the raids. A whole school was bombed. But you just had to get on with life, no time to mope or grieve, not like today.

End

Bill Stephenson, born 29 December 1923, No 14352698 Welch Regiment



Joined up 1944 at Brentwood from a Norfolk farm. I’d had mumps and could have stayed home in the Home Guard (known as LDV). I was a runner for the Army in Norfolk and wanted to join up. After six weeks infantry training in Essex I went to Tilbury for D-Day 3.

Near the French coast we cut engines and drifted to Corneilles, then down rope ladders onto barges to Caen, then Bayeux by jeep. Spent my twenty-first birthday in the Ardennes in December 44.

I married in 1947 and had three sons.

End