

Mrs Hilda Ward

R: Could you tell me how old you are?

H: I'll be 92 on the 3rd June.

R: You were telling me just now about VE Day. Could you tell me that again what VE Day was like for you at the end of the?

H: My father was dying in the hospital, the nurses had put decorations in St Charles hospital they were decorating the ward because the war was ending and he died early the next day because the war was ending, to me that the end of the war. But my brother-in-law he lived in Shoemont Road, that was my sisters husband, he was in the Summerset ?????? Retreat he won the military medal, and his mother and two sisters got killed in Tumer Road in a bomb.

R: And did he know that at this time?

H: Not then he didn't but when he came home on compassionate leave to see them he went to the cemetery and there was a grave with about 60, people in it all been killed by those V bombs.

R: Where were they were they in the house at home?

H: I don't know but anybody ??????????, I was a young woman then I use to go out to work and I use to wait for the warning to go, wait for the all clear, but as I got of the bus, I work for Boots I was one of the clerical staff in them offices, anyway as I got of the bus all I done was run run run, I was running over broken glass, by the time I got there everyone was screaming, they all said I was very brave the way I run with all that blasting behind me.

R: Where you running away from the bomb?

H: Yes.

R: Do you remember where that was?

H: Stanford Street, do you no Stanford Street?

R: No, no because I am not from here.

H: Oh ????????????

R: Where you working there all of the war?

H: I done car watching.

R: Where was you based car watching:

H: Where I worked, we would leave off work at 5 O' Clock and sign on at 5.30 for fire watching, it came a turn around every ten days and we split it because it was a big building and there was eight on each fire watching, it was a nuisance sleeping in a room all night wen they were sending bombs down.

R: What would you sleep on?

H: We had little beds but it use to if your turn came around you had to turn up on a Sunday night as well.

R: Was it all night you fire watching?

H: Yes.

R: If there was a raid what did you do?

H: Well fortunately we never had one but we had to learn how to put the ????? bomb out.

R: How did you?

H: We were trained for and there was eight of us in that building every night, there was men as well but they were in basement and we were up the top.

R: But you were working in the same company all of the war?

H: Yes, yes, yes, Boots the chemist but it was called still a drug company then.

R: At the very beginning of the war do you remember the day the war broke out?

H: It was on a Sunday, is that right?

R: Yes it is, what where you doing?

H: It was on a Sunday afternoon, and I remember we had the warning soon afterwards which was a false alarm, and in the evening one of my neighbours went by and he a decontamination suit on and he frightened the life out of me.

R: You thought you were being gassed already?

H: Yes, and we prepared for every thing, and apart from that we were almost staved, 1 egg a week, 2oz of butter, every body had a rashon book.

R: How did you go about cooking with the rations?

H: You had to share them out, but the rations were terrible.

R: Did you have any children at that time?

H: I haven't got any children I only have a step son and he was in the air force.

R: You don't remember or do you remember children being evacuated?

H: Oh yes I do remember, all them gas masks boxes around there necks of course I do, I can remember all of it.

R: Could you tell me about that about the children being evacuated?

H: Well were nice children some ??????????, I got relations that lived in Kent, although that was????????? and came straight over there put those planes were terrible it was secret weapon wasn't it, but then we got the rockets, with a fly bomb you heard it coming and when it cut out you just waited for it to go of, but the rockets just came over there was no sound with them at all.

R: The evacuees did you see them leaving, the children being evacuated?

H: No not really cause I was at work, all the little kids with there boxes of gas masks, every body has gas mask box around there necks, but I know people that had them because I had relations that live in the country then.

R: Were you married during the war, or were you already married or did you marry during the war?

H: Oh yes I was married yes.

R: And what was your husband doing?

H: He died in 1959, he worked in a hospital.

R: During the war?

H: Yes, Charring Cross Hospital he worked.

R: So he didn't have to drop out he was to old to join the forces anyway was he if he was about forty if he was about your age.

H: Yes I suppose he was, Charring Cross he worked and he died in there. I do remember my father died that night that was the Saturday, the nurses were decorating up the ward because the war was ending.

R: What do you remember of the air raids.

H: Well I think they was ??????, there is a photo graph of me up there some where, see that green paper there , there I'm there look.

R: So you were Hilda Ward.

H: I'm by the air raid shelter.

R: So there was a shelter in you garden was there?

H: Yes, yes.

R: And did you go down it often?

H: We never went to bed.

R: You never went to bed you were always in the shelter?

H: Well you were afraid to go to bed because all these ?????????? as they were called kept coming over.

R: So right the way through the war you use to use the shelter at night?

H: It wasn't until the warden started those air raids as they arrived after VE Day.

R: So during the blitz in 1940 did you also spend time in the shelter there?

H: Oh yes well there was so many people losing there lives, you did feel safe to go there.

R: How big was the shelter?

H: My husband brought me a rubber bed to lay across so I was comfortable.

R: How many people would sleep in the shelter?

H: About four.

R: Where they family or who?

H: No to tell you the truth ??????????????????????, we were all separated my sisters husband my sister was I think we were only living in Peckham and that was in the ?????????????? wasn't it?

R: Yes, can you describe Peckham during the war to me?

H: A bit like it is now, no its a bit different.

R: In what way is it different?

H: A much better class of shops and coloured people there.

R: But the shops were nicer?

H: Oh yes, Jones and Higgins that's a well known shop that was and ?????, C and A's but no coloured people in those days that's how London has changed, I thought you might like this photo.

R: Yes I would love to use that photo.

H: I t even ?????????????? you about himself.

R: We could borrow it and have you got an envelope I could put it in please, I could borrow that is your name on it, yes excellent, would you like me to give you a piece of paper to say that we have got it.

H: Yes.

R: What did you do for entertainment or fun during the war?

H: Don't think we had any.

R: Really?

H: We didn't have enough to live with to entertain.

R: Did you ever go out to restaurants or to the British restaurants or Limescorn House or any of those places?

H: No I don't think so.

R: Or did you always eat at home?

H: Yes, yes.

R: Did you have any favourite radio programmes?

H: We didn't have television then all those years ago. I know that going to work that morning when the bomb and I was running over broken glass all the way by the time I got in there I was on the verge of collapse, I was working at Boots in Samber Street I was on the clerical staff and some of the girls families had turned over in hysterics, but we had the nurse over and she told them all you giving up all this fuss and this lady was out in it and that was it I was the one who was out in it.

R: Do you remember there being the Italian prisoners of war?

H: They had a place on Peckham Rye didn't they?

R: Did you see much of them?

H: I know they was on Peckham Rye.

R: Well perhaps you didn't see a lot of them?

H: Well perhaps, how old would I have been then?

R: About 40 I think.

H: Well perhaps I was to busy.

R: Yes maybe.

H: I can remember the war ending and they had the ????? Boat Troubles do you remember them?

R: Well I know of them I wasn't alive then but yes.

H: Some of them got put to death didn't they, there was one called The Beast of Belson the woman.

R: Was there a woman I didn't know that? Do you remember any other bombings apart from that one where you had to run through the glass?

H: It was a Sunday morning and I was shelling peas for Sundays dinner. I lived in Keston Road, then it came over this flying bomb about dinner time and in the house, the front room. I turned around to my husband and said, "Harry's mother lives over there," not knowing that that was the one that killed her, and my sister had to go and identify them to get him home on compassionate leave, and she saw half a foot.

R: Half a foot and that was all they had of her?

H: Someone told me that was the hardest identification they had, because there was what you had to eat, 2oz of cheese, 1 egg, quarter a pint of milk all we had were our rasyon books.

R: Did you know about the black market were you able to get things on the black market?

H: I had a relation and she kept a shop, and she kept me supplied in sugar.

R: What about an allotment did you have an allotment?

H: No, no.

R: Because quite a lot of people did. Did you ever get away did you ever get out of London?

H: Working at Boots I was telling you they built this house for us and it was for the people that had been in the bombing incident and I went away for a week with that.

R: Where was it?

H: I think it was in Little Ainswirth.

R: I've never heard of that I didn't know companies did that sort of thing.

H: It was only for the five days, if it had been more than five days you would have had to ??????? your rasyon book, five days was the limit and I went away for the five days because of the bombings.

R: Was it pleasant?

H: Very very nice, I met a couple down there that lived and they were complaining that they had something blown off their roof, and I said, "Well your lucky, we had the whole roof blown off!" laughing. ???? celebrations this summer.

R: Probably yes.

H: But I was more affected by the first war though, cause we lost so many relations in the first war.

R: Did the second war make you feel any differently about German people?

H: It must have done.

R: How do you feel about them know?

H: Its all one we are big family in Europe now aren't we.

R: So it doesn't really matter now there are all new young people is that how you feel?

H: I am to old to be ??????now, but I know my father use to come around and share my house shelter cause he ain't got one, and my sister she met her husband in the town shelter with his mother that's how they met. When my father use to come round sometimes he would have the torch and he would shine the torch up and we would have to tell him off cause every thing was black out, no light showing any were, all your windows were blacked out.

R: Were you ever told off or told to turn the light off?

H: Well sometimes you would hear someone call out Put that light out and every one was looking around who's left the light on, it was a crime to leave a light on.

R: Did you know of any accidents happening because of the black out?

H: Well I said I use to work at Boots and we had a terribly foggy night one night, we came home altogether all the way home. What is all this for?

R: This is for a book we are making and an exhibition of peoples memories of the war.

H: Am I doing all right?

R: You are doing brilliant, thank you.

H: I have been noted to have a good memory even though I am old. I remember the first war as well, at eleven on the eleventh day of the eleventh month we all packed up work and we came home.

R: This time because of your father dying you didn't join in any celebrations?

H: No not really no, no he died he was in a coma.

R: His dying was nothing to do with the war presumably?

H: No, no, the thing upset me to think he had gone through all that, coming down our shelter every night, being patient with all the food and then he never lived to see the end of it that was the only thing., cause he was in a coma he died of cancer, but the first war we were more affected because we lost so many relations, it was the young people that got killed in the first war, I had a cousin killed, a uncle killed.

R: The second war didn't affect you in the same way?

H: No, no.

R: Do you remember the American thing her?

H: Of course I do.

R: Did you see much of them here, they weren't based here where they?

H: Well they liked the West End of London.

R: Did you speak to them much?

H: Working at Boots as I did a lot of them got married and on there way back to America with them, there was nothing to lose, the Americans wait outside for some girl to come out.

R: Did you know girls who where friend of yours who married Americans?

H: Yes, yes, there was two sisters who I worked with one married an American, and one married an Canadian, so they had plenty of husbands.

R: Was it possible to have fun in the war do you think?

H: I don't think people did, because it wasn't fun in those days, I mean you would have these flying bombs come over and everyone was scared of them, and when the rockets started there was no sound attached to them they just went off.

R: I think we will leave it there.