

I REMEMBER.....

by Beryl Kennedy

This article first appeared in the Christ Church South Manchester URC newsletter "Crosstalk" December 2010 / January 2011 issue.

Having read the various letters in this magazine recently on memories and knowing we were coming up to the 70th Anniversary of the Manchester Blitz (the nights of 22nd/23rd and 23rd/24th December 1940); I thought it might be of interest to recall my memory of that Sunday night, 22nd. Not a good memory, but nevertheless one that will live with me forever.

At that time I was a schoolgirl and lived with my mother and father at 12, Westcroft Road which joins Kingsway to Parrs Wood Road at the Fog Lane Park entrance. My older brother, George, also lived there, but he worked away all week in Audlem, near Nantwich, coming home on his bike for just one night at the week-end.

That evening began like many others, with the horrible wailing sound of the siren. My parents had decided months before that we would join with the Potter family who lived at No 10. going in their shelter one raid, and in ours the next. No. 10 was not joined to us but was half of the next pair of semis. Mr. Potter was the A.R.P. warden for the area and there was his wife, Audrey, his 5 year old, Frank 17 and Irene 20, a lovely tall, slim blonde, who I had the most awful "crush" on! We three made our way to their shelter; Audrey and her dad were already there. Mr. Potter told us Irene had been in bed for the past few days suffering from the 'flu and thought it better to stay in bed, her Mum insisted on staying with her, and Frank had said "If she is not going out, I'm not."

There were lots of planes going over and sounds of flak falling. Mr. Potter did his rounds of the area and told us it looked as if Manchester was being targeted. He then joined us for drinks and eats. It was very noisy and we had been told they were probably after the railway, close by. Then a louder bang than usual and more bricks flying and still planes going over. When the noise subsided somewhat we opened the shelter door. I shall never forget the view. Instead of seeing the back of the Potters' house, we could see right up Mossbray Ave, opposite. Stupidly, I couldn't take it in at first. Mr. Potter, Dad and I, climbed out, Audrey was asleep on my Mum's lap. I was soon sent back into the shelter; my Dad soon after. Mr. Potter, along with many searchers continued. They later came back to tell us the dreadful news. It had been a direct hit so the blast was contained in the two semi's. The Potters must have been killed out-right, and also the old couple next door. The Potters' house has fallen sideways onto ours.

We didn't know at this time that George, my brother, had arrived on his bike from Cheshire a while before. He was not allowed down Westcroft but could see what had happened from the corner and was told there were two houses down and five dead. He was directed back down Brayside, along Parrs Wood Road to the park entrance, and went to 21, Westcroft, to his girl friend's house. They had no more news than he had. When the "All Clear" went we were allowed out of the shelter but told not to go

in our house; we couldn't get in anyway. Neighbours offered us room for the night, but we went across to No. 21, Mary's house, where my brother was waiting for news. He was almost incoherent when he saw us and we were exhausted. We were given drinks of tea with whisky in, which Mum and I thought revolting. The calmest person was Audrey and I couldn't believe how resilient she was, both then and in the days following. She and her dad went to friends in Burnage.

We didn't sleep much, of course, not really believing what had happened. Next morning we were allowed into our house very briefly, to collect a few clothes and essentials, but were told we couldn't sleep there until it was safe to do so - a couple of weeks later. Even then, we had to sleep downstairs for ages. The Potters' things were scattered far and wide and I was horrified to see Irene's diaries, pages scattered everywhere. A friend and I spent hours collecting and burning them. I had admired her so much and couldn't bear to think of her private life being on display. I guess it was just something to do. It was then I decided to stop keeping my own diary, which I had done since learning to write. I still hate the sound of a 'plane flying low.

My Mum was what was known as "a tough guy" who kept her cool and was cheerful under most circumstances, but a day later Mrs. Johnson (Florence Ward's Mum) came across from Burnage Lane to see how we were, and to offer help of any kind. I was frightened and horrified to see my Mum crying as if she would never stop.

Was it that war or the 1914-1918 catastrophe that was reckoned to be "The War to end Wars"? I don't remember, but it doesn't seem to have worked, does it?

Beryl Kennedy (née Harrison)