

**Written by Norman Sampson**

### **The day that altered my life**

It was a Sunday morning in the 1940s, had just finished my breakfast of tea and toast and wandered from the kitchen into the living room where my father was listening to the wireless, as soon as he saw me he told me to go and buy him his Sunday newspaper which was always the News of the World. This was an errand that I had done every Sunday morning without question for more than a year, I was approx 7 or 8 years old at the time (I was born in 1935) and was too afraid to refuse, but on this Sunday morning I just did not feel like going "I don't feel well I said" my father not believing me insisted that I went and bought his newspaper, I started to cry, my mother on hearing me cry came into the living room to find out what was happening, I told my mum that I didn't feel well and that my father was shouting at me, my mother putting her arms around my shoulders said that I would have to help her in the kitchen, and said to my father that I would get his paper later.

Once we were in the kitchen I realised what my mum had done to stop my father shouting at me, now she said we have to wash up our breakfast things, a few cups, saucers and spoons, do you want to wash or wipe my mum said "I'll wash up" I said, my mum was walking out of the kitchen saying that she was going to get a clean tea towel, when she had gone and I had stopped crying, I suddenly noticed how sunny it was, the sun was streaming through the kitchen window which was directly in front of the kitchen sink, the birds were singing, and the church bells were ringing, I can distinctly remember how much at peace I felt as this was a very rare feeling in those days with frequent air raids and bombings in the east end at that time.

As I stood just in front of the kitchen window there was an enormous flash..... I felt the block of flats where I lived move, I could hear breaking glass, and a loud noise.....and I screamed and screamed and screamed as loud as I could, my mother came running into the kitchen "Stop screaming" she shouted at me, but I couldn't stop, stop screaming she shouted again and again, my father came running into the kitchen "what's happened" he said, my mother was shouting Norman won't stop screaming, my father who had never previously hit me smacked me around the face....hard, I stopped screaming, my throat hurt, I was shaking like a leaf.

My parents ran out onto the balcony to see if they could see where the bomb had dropped, I followed seconds later, from our fourth floor balcony we could see a large column of grey smoke rising skywards, it was a direct hit on my school Morning Lane junior school (THANK GOD IT WAS A SUNDAY) but it had also obliterated Matthews news agents which was situated right next door to my school, where I would have been had I not refused to get my father's News of the World, and this was the first time that I ever disobeyed my father.

On returning to the kitchen we noticed that all the glass that had been blown out of the window frames that was in front of me before the explosion, which was caused by a V-2 rocket was

deeply embedded in the wall behind me, this glass must have passed me at a terrific speed missing me by the shortest of distance and I am sure would have killed me if it had hit me.

So it would appear that I was a very lucky boy on that day, I could have gone and to buy my father's newspaper and surely died, had the glass from the kitchen windows hit me I am sure it would have been the end for me, and if that rocket (V-2) had hit my school on a week day I would not have been here to write this account of a sunny Sunday morning in the East end of London in the 1940s.