

## June

### Her Wartime Story

June was born on June 25th 1931. On the outbreak of war in September 1939 she was 8 years and three months old.

At that time living with her parents and brother in a rented house, No.98 Ridley Road, Forest Gate, London attending Godwin Road School.

Upon the declaration of war schools in London were closed, as an immediate bombing campaign was anticipated it was thought undesirable to have children concentrated in any one particular building. To continue some form of education small groups were assigned to private houses with an allocated teacher.

This stop gap measure was quickly replaced by an evacuation plan whereby children were offered accommodation ( and billeted on householders ) in what was thought to be safe areas. Evacuation was not compulsory.

In London domestic air raid shelters were made available in two forms; an outdoor version k.a. an Anderson ( Named after Sir John Anderson the Home Secretary ) of inverted U shape construction of corrugated steel sunk to at least half its height in the earth with the spoil spread over the upper surface.

an indoor version k.a. a Morrison ( after Herbert Morrison by then the Home Secretary ) two feet in height, of steel roof and uprights with steel mesh infill. The intention being to either use them as kitchen tables or to fit under such.

In January 1940 Mr. Pridmore was 60 and retired due to ill health. Mrs. Pridmore decided to visit the coast with the thought of moving the family, she selected Lancing, Sussex. Having found a suitable house the family including George moved to North Farm Road in May 1940. June attended North Farm Road School.

Lancing was still in a pre-war mode with open beaches and such practises as children being allowed to attend saturday morning cinema continued. June remembers seeing Fantasia, Gullivers Travels. Each Sunday neighbours would take June to the beach in an attempt to teach her to swim. Another neighbour, a keen gardener provided June with vegetable seeds to create a small vegetable garden. This may have been the formation of her love of gardening..



However the war soon caught up with coastal towns such as Lancing, June remembers engineers arriving to erect anti invasion structures, barbed wire being strung and the beach closed to civilians.

An announcement was made at school that greatly excited June, this was to the effect that pupils could be evacuated to Australia. Her hopes were dashed as her parents turned it down flat.

The anticipated bombing of London had not materialised as this was still in the period dubbed " the phoney war " so in early August 1940 the Pridmores who were homesick for London decided to return.

Mrs. P. once again " took the train " and found a house, 80 Marlands Road, Clavhall (off the Clavhall Avenue near Woodford Avenue)

Neighbours :-

at 78.. the Fowlers ( Builders merchants of High Road Stratford (still there, the son Alan has the business)

at 82.. the Holtons ( butchers of Woodford Bridge, now no more but the site is the part of the row of cottages)

June tried to enrol at Park Hill School but the roles were filled, no doubt due to the shortage of teachers, most able bodied men having been called up. So it was necessary to await a vacancy.

80 Marlands had an Anderson. It was the custom to rush to the shelters upon the air raid sirens ( located on each police station roof ) sounding. The Holtons not having a shelter, shared that of NO. 80.

The interior of such shelters varied but the supplied equipment was thought to be two tiered bunks each side of its length sufficient for an adult to lay full length with some form of cross bunk at the rear end, long enough for a child. In the Pridmore case a double bunk was fabricated out of an old cot. Margaret Holton usually occupying the lower and June the upper.

With the Holtons plus the Pridmores there was insufficient room for all to lay down so the top bunk was not used and the adults sat upright.

These shelters were by their very location in clay, were damp and if left entirely alone would flood. Lighting was by candle. No heating.

It was customary to erect some form of blast wall to protect the front entrance and a removable panel was located in the rear of the shelter as an emergency escape exit but this itself was covered with earth.

Residents without shelters or access to shelter were able to resort to a tube station after the trains finished for the night and were permitted to sleep on the platforms having to clear out by 8 a.m. In areas without gardens or tube stations, above ground reinforced concrete shelters were erected ( looking rather similar to porta cabins of today )



Initially the bombing was by day but the losses forced a change to nighttime missions with a separate raid around dawn to 7 a.m. so as to disrupt sleep as much as possible. An anti aircraft battery was located to the north of Woodford Avenue, near the site of the Beal School and mobile guns used the Woodford Avenue itself, largely it is now thought more to boost morale than in hope of hitting any aircraft.

By October 1940 the continued blitz persuaded the Holtons to evacuate to Frith, June went with them on their survey visit, this would have been a rare treat as to have a car and more particularly to be able get petrol sufficient for joy rides was usually restricted to black marketeers as all fuel was severely rationed.

The Holtons having moved to Frith provided more room in the shelter which enabled June to sleep on the lower bunk which is the very reason that you are able to read this, as if she had been in her usual position on the top bunk she would have been killed as a bomb fell in an area between the shelters of No. 80 and 78 Marlands Road bringing down steel supports, concrete and earth onto the Pridmores shelter.

The bomb threw up debris which completely blocked the front entrance of the Pridmore shelter. George due to an accident to his leg was unable to navigate the rather tortuous route into the shelter so had remained in the house, which was largely undamaged. He summoned the A.R.P. rescue crew who dug a route to the rear escape hatch. The Pridmores were uninjured, June remembers being offered and refusing a lift on a mesh stretcher.

The Fowlers were not so fortunate. Being in the building trade their Anderson shelter was greatly extended, in the event this proved a death trap. They had offered spaces to relatives who lived in more dangerous parts of London ! In all there were eight in the shelter of whom four were killed and two severally injured .

On subsequent nights June's family slept on a platform at Redbridge Underground station until they realised that to walk home each morning during the morning hate raid was probably more dangerous than staying put, so they resorted to spending the nights in the stair well. The fact that the toilets..some form of dustbin arrangement .. may have caused the underground to have failed the " June good loo guide "

During a later raid a bomb which failed to explode fell nearby in, Chadacre Avenue this necessitated the family being evacuated to Monega Road, Forest Gate to relatives ( the Ellis's, June's paternal cousins ). There for a week awaiting the all clear at Marlands Road. The bomb was not recovered as one was discovered at this site in the seventies.

In July/August 1941 Mrs. P once again took to the train, this time to Worthing: the family ex George who had now been called up, moved to Alveston Road, Worthing. June attended school and was given extra tuition by a Mr. Hunphries.



Because of the London approach defences some German bomber pilots tended to reach the coast drop their bombs and turn for home or finding the opposition too stiff at London outskirts turned and offloaded. This caused the Pridmores to use the Morrison shelter which was installed at Alveston Road. June also vividly recalls diving into shop doorways to avoid a machine gun attack by a low flying aircraft.

Whilst the bombing of London continued in 1942 , the constant nightly blitz had petered out, so in May/June 1942 Mrs P yet again took train, this time the family moved to 10 Beaufort Gardens, Ilford.

June attended Highlands school for two weeks, finishing out the term and subsequently Dane Central School.

10 Beaufort possessed a cellar and this was the place of refuge during the bombing raids of 1942/3 and for the doodle bugs ( V 1 's) 1944 and rockets( V 2 's) 1945.

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June remembers troops being billeted in the large houses along Cranbrook Road building in numbers and then the surprise to find one day they disappeared, no doubt this was D Day minus 1 or 2

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Her last memory of the European war is that of celebrating in Cranbrook Park on V.E. Day with late in the day both Mr. and Mrs. P standing at their front gate looking for their " little girl ".

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The above information was gained during many interviews with June Brown ( Nee Pridmore ) at 2 Searles Cottage, Copford Green and other locations in the Colchester area during December 1992 and compiled by Dad as a " stocking filler " for present giving time after lunch at 17 Knighton Drive for Gordon and Nigel on Christmas Day 1992