

Intensive Care

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On the morning of Thursday, 7 July 2005, four Islamist extremists separately detonated three bombs in quick succession aboard London Underground trains to target civilians using the public transport system. One bomb was later detonated on a London bus. 52 people were killed and over 700 more were injured in the blasts; Thérèse

Harrison's 29 year old daughter Susan, was one of the tube train survivors. A decade later, this is her mother's story.

Raised in the Christian tradition, Thérèse Harrison attended a Catholic primary school until the age of eleven. At senior school, the Catholics attended a different act of worship, which Thérèse described

as "a bit strange." She said, "I did start to question my faith which I felt had been forced on me when I was younger, but I also felt as though I had sinned if I didn't go to church. Deep down, I knew I needed some sort of faith."

Working as an administrative temp for a while, Thérèse needed a full time job. The Diocese of Rochester advertised for a full time three month secretarial post to assist the Assistant Diocesan Secretary. She said,

"I started the job expecting to be in it for three months and I stayed for 21 years!"

Working for the Church of England brought a huge learning curve for me – I had no idea what people were talking about! Most of my day-to-day dealings were with church wardens and archdeacons and I remember worrying about how to address them; back then, it was all very proper."

Thérèse moved to a new department and worked for the Director of Ministry and Training, enjoying more contact with vicars and people in the front line. She said, "I attended more meetings and they often started with prayers. My faith was always with me, but this was a new context. The first time we turned to each other to 'share the peace' I was horrified! I didn't know what I was doing, but I never felt any pressure at all."

On the morning of 7 July 2005, Thérèse's daughter Susan was on one of the London underground trains targeted by Islamic terrorists. It seemed like an ordinary day, save that instead of going to work at Great Ormond Street Hospital on her usual train, Susan was on her way to a course. Thérèse said, "The day it happened, it



never occurred to me that it may affect me. Susan worked as an operating theatre technician and we knew her hospital was taking casualties. We were waiting and watching as the story unfolded on the news, but we assumed we hadn't heard from Susan because she was working."

Susan's boyfriend Mike called and said he couldn't get in touch with her. The family didn't know that at the time, Susan had been caught in the blast on her train, and she was very severely hurt. Thérèse said, "Although we came to understand that Susan had been badly injured, nobody knew which hospital she had been taken into. She had lost her jacket which had been given to another woman with Susan's Oyster card in the pocket. This lady was also badly wounded, but was initially incorrectly identified because of what she was wearing. There was a lot of confusion and it was quite hard to cope with."

Mike made his way to the new Intensive Care ward at the University College of London

Hospital which wasn't properly open at the time and had just six beds. There was one unidentified woman there and the Oyster card compounded the confusion. Mike correctly identified Susan and called the family to let them know.

Thérèse said, "We found out that she had lost a leg and we drove to London in silence. It was very eerie when we turned up at the hospital because only part of it was open. The press were outside and the police didn't want to let us in until we explained that our daughter was injured and inside. Once we arrived, we were initially told that she wasn't there but Mike and the liaison officer confirmed that she was. Susan was hard to identify because she was badly burned and didn't really look like her description."

From a day that had started like any other, Thérèse's family were catapulted into a day like no other. She said, "We were able to see her immediately, but the fact that she had lost her leg didn't register straight away. She was surrounded by

nursing staff, police, tubes, wires; hospital paraphernalia. The plastic surgeon was brilliant. He took us away and explained what had happened. He told us there was no choice, he couldn't save the leg and the other one was also badly damaged with a tendon exposed. It never really registered with me.

I was in shock but I knew she was a fighter and she would survive.

She was young and fit and training for a run. Mike and I virtually lived at the hospital for two weeks."

Susan had tied a tourniquet around her own leg after the blast. Thérèse said, "Russell Square is deep, deep down and paramedics did their best to help people. Susan actually said to someone,

'Don't take that off me, it's saving my life!' and she told others to conserve their energy. Susan was never angry. I am very proud of her. She never blamed anybody."

The Rev Canon Jean Kerr was a colleague, a friend, and she characteristically came to visit Thérèse and Mike. Thérèse said, "I was very angry. I said to her,

'Don't even mention God to me! I can't see God anywhere.'

I was really angry with him and I was just thankful that Susan was still alive."

Sedated for two weeks, Susan's injuries were considerable, and throughout it all, Mike kept a vigil by her bedside. She spent four weeks in hospital and Mike learned how to change her dressings. Thérèse recalled, "It was really strange. I was still in

my work clothes but I wore her sweatshirt and it was a comfort to me. Her right Achilles tendon was exposed and she needed skin grafts and the scarring was a worry for her. One day, she started crying and said,

'It's Mike; he won't love me anymore. I'm disfigured for life.'

I told her Mike had hardly left her side and that had he wanted to leave, he would have done it weeks ago."

Heather Mills McCartney visited Susan in hospital as a response to an email from a friend. Thérèse said, "She was lovely. Susan was able to ask her lots of personal questions."

As Susan began her long journey to recovery, Thérèse was to have another life-changing episode in her life. She said, "My mum told us she was ill in September but she died in October. I spent three weeks with her in another

hospital. After she died, I remember being really angry with her and I couldn't forgive her. I was thinking, 'I need you mum; how could you desert me when I need you the most?' Work was amazing though. I was given compassionate leave; I couldn't fault them."

Grief-stricken from the loss of her mother and the devastating events that had almost taken Susan too, Thérèse couldn't see herself returning to work. She said, "People at work said that they didn't know what that was, and oddly, that helped; just being able to talk. Then Jean Kerr took mum's funeral for me. I spent a week in London, and when I came home to Rochester I opened my front door to lots of cards, with one from my local church.

There was a card from Princes Park Church of England Church that just said 'let her know we are praying for her.'

I kept getting cards from the office and Bishop Michael (Nazir-Ali) handwrote a letter to me asking if there was anything he could do. It was all so genuine but I'm not sure I appreciated it at the time."

Thérèse did return to work in the December. She said, "One of my colleagues said something and I flew at her. She phoned Jean Kerr and said, 'I think Thérèse needs you' and I burst into tears. This was the beginning of my depression and my breakdown. I thought I was losing my mind, but my employer arranged some Christian counselling which was brilliant and by January 2006 I was ready to go back to church. I felt much stronger but I was still angry with my mum; I just wanted her to be with me, but I found comfort in going back to church. I knew people already so that helped and **church is still a big part of my life. It was meant to be. I can sit back and recognise that love and support.'**



Susan married Mike around 2008 and they now have two lovely daughters, Amelie and Anais and Susan works for the NHS as a complaints manager. She has been involved with Disability Snow Sport, worked for Oxfam, who do a South Downs walk and she has been able to complete some of that. Thérèse has retired from her busy job in the Diocese of Rochester and is now a supporter of the St Justus Church food bank. She said,

"My faith is part of the work I do with the food bank. I also love to see people growing through the licensed lay ministry programme. I get great satisfaction in my retirement from working with people in the church."