

Sandra Aranha

Account of the IRA bomb on Ebury Bridge Road, London, on 10 October 1981

I was in Ebury Bridge Road that fateful day on 10 October 1981. The service station across the road from where the van containing the bomb had been positioned, was being renovated and when the bomb went off, my first thought was that the service station had exploded. It wasn't until soldiers from Chelsea Barracks showed up a few minutes after the explosion that I realised it was an IRA [Irish Republican Army] bomb.

I worked at a travel agency called 'Capricorn Travel' and we had two offices in the small strip of shops – one at No. 37 and another at No. 27 Ebury Bridge Road – directly opposite 'The Rising Sun' pub.

In fact, that morning around 9.00 am on my way to work, I met John, one of the proprietors of the pub. He was helping a couple of guys to push the van (which had the day before been parked on the corner of St. Barnabas Street beside the pub), to its final position on Ebury Bridge Road.

After being showered in shattered glass and other debris, and flung across our office floor at No. 27, I was outdoors in seconds and tried to help as much as I could. I first checked on my colleague at No. 37, the closest shop to the van. Even though he was in terrible shock and had sustained some cuts as a result of the office window shattering inwards, he was very lucky to be shielded by the walls of the building.

I think Nora Field passed away on the footpath. I recall holding her hand for a moment or two but then went to assist a soldier that was in great distress, off the targeted bus. He was bleeding profusely from the head (his scalp had blown off) and when the ambulances arrived, I helped him (and his scalp) into one.

It was so sad to hear of John Breslin's death; he sometimes washed our cars for a few extra pounds in his pocket. I'm pretty sure he was there that morning to collect our car keys for the same purpose and I recall seeing him and bidding him good morning just a few yards from the van just before the explosion.

I recall running to the hairdresser, which was the first shop in the row at the opposite end from No 37, and after assisting the hairdresser and her elderly women clients to get away from the mayhem, I grabbed as many towels as I could and handed them out to the injured that needed them.

In the aftermath of the incident I was one of the people interviewed by ITN for a news item broadcast on 11 October 1981.

These days, I still struggle sometimes from the aftermath of that horrible Saturday morning and wonder how Nora and John's family have coped with their loss. It's good to see that sites like CAIN try to keep their memory alive.

As a 21 year old Indian born Australian, I had no relatives in the UK at the time, so felt quite alone. For ages afterwards I ducked under my desk at the slightest loud noise in the street.

I was in a car accident in 2006 – someone had back-ended me – and when the rear window of my car shattered all over me, my first thought was I had been in yet another bomb attack. Soon after the bombing in 1981, I developed a hideous nervous eczema and after the shattering glass incident of my car accident, I got exactly the same eczema once again.

I now live in Byron Bay, NSW Australia and am a stand-up comedian and columnist.

Sandra Aranha; Account written on 23 March 2012.