

On the fifth anniversary of the 7/7 bombings, victim Beverli Rhodes, 49, tells *Bella* how she's coping in the aftermath of the atrocity that horrified the nation



CCTV footage of three of the bombers in Baker Street station

I'LL NEVER forget the screams...



Shoving my money at the man behind the ticket office window, I grabbed my Tube ticket and ran down the escalator to the London Underground. 'I can't be late today,' I was thinking, as I darted through the commuters struggling to get on the Piccadilly Line. I worked as a security consultant for a large London

firm, and I had a feeling today, 7 July 2005, would be hectic. The day before, London had secured the 2012 Olympics and my team would be flat out helping the Government with the preparations. I was looking forward to the first day of the project. My partner Steven was really proud of me, and I couldn't wait to tell my four daughters, Cyan, then 25, Cristina, 20, Eleanor, 19, and Shannyn-Lee, 17, my big news. 'Made it,' I thought with relief as the Tube doors shut behind me. It was 8.50am. The carriage was packed with commuters and we all jostled together. 'Morning,' said a commuter who I saw every morning. I was just about to reply when everything went black. When I opened my eyes, my first thought was that I'd fainted. But as I came round I realised the carriage was dimly lit and filled

with a choking, grimy fog. Then I tasted blood and could feel my teeth were loose inside my mouth. As I staggered to my feet, I heard screams through the smoke and I suddenly realised people were lying on the ground. 'There must have been a fire at King's Cross,' a voice ahead said. Then another, choking voice cut in: 'I think it was a bomb.' 'A bomb?' I thought. But I hadn't even heard a blast... My thoughts were interrupted by a searing pain burning through my face and skull. 'Let me help you,' a woman said, taking my arm. Just then a torch flashed and I heard another voice say: 'Follow me, this way.' I headed towards the light and joined a line of other people. As we clambered along the wrecked carriages, I was in such a state of shock I didn't think about

the bodies strewn around me. 'Keep calm and stick together,' everyone kept saying. Finally we made it to the escalators and up into daylight. All around me, there were people on stretchers and everyone's faces and clothes were black with soot. I noticed one woman in a grey suit with her face completely covered in bandages. It was like a scene from a disaster movie. Was this really happening? As I staggered along the road, I saw dozens of police cars, fire engines and ambulances. My first thought was: 'I've got to ring work to say I'll be late.' Hands shaking, I phoned a colleague. I hadn't even said 'Hello,' when there was a terrifying blast. Instinctively, I crouched down and burst into tears. 'It's another bomb!' I heard someone shout. 'A bomb's just gone off in Tavistock Square!' my colleague was yelling down the phone, and then he hung up. 'That's just outside our office!' I thought. All I could think of then was getting home. Staggering towards a taxi, I mumbled: 'Enfield.' The driver,

clearly shocked by how bloodied and battered I looked, rushed me to Chase Farm Hospital in Enfield. I was so dazed I don't even remember phoning Steven. 'Thank God you're safe,' he gasped, as we met in A&E. I could hardly speak from shock. After getting cleaned up, I was given a brain scan. 'The bomb must have catapulted you through the air into a pole,' the doctor explained. 'We think you were unconscious for about 12 minutes.' Although I had a fractured jaw and severe facial injuries, I was discharged for the time being. Back at the house my girls, who all lived away from home, phoned me, frantic with worry. 'We thought you were dead,' cried Eleanor. 'I'm fine, don't worry, stop fussing,' I said, still shell-shocked. The days after were a blur. I pored over all the media reports – it chilled me when it was revealed

that four suicide bombers had struck in the capital, killing 52 people and injuring nearly 800. Three bombs had been detonated on underground trains: one each at Liverpool Street and Edgware Road stations and a third on a train travelling between King's Cross and Russell Square – my train. The final explosion on a bus was the one I heard while I was phoning work. 'The whole world's gone mad,' I sobbed. Over the following days I had terrible nightmares about people screaming for help. Three months later, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. But the nightmares continued and one by one I pushed my family away. 'Let us help,' pleaded Cristina. 'I'm fine,' I snapped. I withdrew into myself and returned to work just three months after the tragedy. There was no way I would ever travel on the underground again, so I commuted by overground train. No one else at work had been caught up in the bombings and I struggled to fit back into office life. My injuries had left me prone to dizzy spells and slurring. 'Are you drunk?' a colleague joked, as I swayed. 'No,' I fumed, upset by his lack of sensitivity. It was clear that I couldn't be the old Beverli any more, so in the end I gave up my job. Without my income we couldn't afford our home so we moved into rented accommodation in Maidstone, Kent. The Government gave me some compensation, but so far I've received just £12,000. Two years passed in a haze of antidepressants and painkillers. I was told that I'd have to wait 18 months for facial and dental reconstructive surgery on the NHS. I was in so much pain I couldn't bear to wait that long so all our money went on private treatments. Steven was my rock, but my

panic attacks left him shaken. Nearly a year after the tragedy I'd insisted that I could travel into London by myself, but when I saw two ambulances and police cars I knew it had been a mistake. Listening to the wailing sirens, I was taken back to that day... Then, to my horror I wet myself with anxiety. As I stared down at my soiled skirt, I felt so ashamed. Sobbing, I hailed a taxi that took me straight home. 'I'll never get past this,' I wept to Steven later. 'Give yourself time,' he said. Soon afterwards, I got in touch with other survivors through the 7 July Assistance Centre. I met Veronica four months after the tragedy. 'Where were you?' I asked. It was the question all survivors greeted each other with. 'On the King's Cross train,' Veronica replied. 'Me too,' I said. Slowly we pieced together what had happened in our separate train carriages. I was relieved to find out that, like me, Veronica was obsessed with all 7/7 news coverage. And although I wasn't ready to share my own story with the media yet, I read about all the brave survivors who had. But however much I learnt about the terrorist Germaine Lindsay, 19, who detonated the bomb on my train, I'd never understand how someone could knowingly cause so much devastation. Now it amazes me that it's been five years since that terrible day. I still have problems with my balance and memory, and my jawbone will never properly heal. Steven, 50, and I are stronger than ever though, and I wouldn't have made it this far without the support of my family. My memories of 7/7 are still fresh, and I wish they'd just fade. Whenever I feel hot air on my face or smell burning I'm taken back to that Tube carriage. But I owe it to myself and to my loved ones to live each day to the full. However hard that may be.

For more information about Beverli's support group The Survivor Coalition Foundation email survivorcoalitionfoundation@googlemail.com.