



## **Alison Pollard - Torquay, Devon**

Alison Pollard and her family are lucky to be alive today following a kitchen fire that almost claimed the lives of herself, her partner Lee Stevenson and her four children, Natasha, 11, Jordan, 5, Cheyenne, 2 and Demi Lee, 8 months.

On 6th November 2002, Lee had come round to Alison's to celebrate his birthday. They shared a bottle of wine and settled down to watch TV. The kids were all in bed and Alison decided to go up leaving Lee on the sofa.

Lee, feeling a bit peckish, went to put some chips on. He put the hob on to heat up the chip pan, but decided against chips in the end. He turned the hob off but left the pan on the ring, which was still hot.

Lee went back into the lounge and fell asleep on the sofa. The next thing the family knew they were being noisily roused from their sleep by their smoke alarms. The chip pan had heated up and exploded into flames filling the house with black, noxious smoke.

Lee and Natasha were the first to wake. Lee rushed into the kitchen to try and put out the fire by smothering it with a damp towel. Unfortunately the fire was so severe that it just burned through the towel.

In the meantime Natasha had woken Alison who was confronted with a house full of smoke. She started to run down the stairs to see what was going on and saw Lee running out of the kitchen shouting to get the kids out as the fire had really taken hold.

Alison, Lee and Natasha got the smaller children out of the house. They then flagged down some passers-by who called the Fire brigade. All of the family had to be taken to hospital and treated for smoke inhalation. The baby had to be taken back in a few days later as she had suffered so badly from the effects of the smoke.

Alison says of the experience:

"It was just the most terrifying and unreal experience, especially with the kids in the house. You never think something like that could happen to you. We are so lucky to be alive thanks to our smoke alarms. I would never use a chip pan now and I am so careful in the kitchen, especially with a young family - it's so easy to become distracted and forget that you've left something on the hob'.

The family were put up by their neighbours that night and then spent time at Alison's mothers while the house was being redecorated. The kitchen and dining



room were totally gutted and everything needed to be replaced. The whole house suffered from smoke damage and much of the soft furnishings had to be thrown out.

Unfortunately the family had no insurance. Having just moved into the house it was something that Alison had not got around to sorting out. Thanks to the kindness of others Alison managed to scrape together some bits and pieces for the kitchen, but the fire has cost the family dear.

Peter Denford, community fire safety officer, from Devon Fire and Rescue says:

"This incident illustrates exactly why chip pans are so dangerous. It only took a minor heat source to turn the kitchen into an inferno. We would also strongly advise people against cooking when they are tired or have been drinking. This family were very lucky that they had smoke alarms fitted and that they were in working order. It just goes to show that they really are life savers".