



Glynis Davies's story of

Phyllis



My grandmother's firstborn died at birth. To be expected Grandma's broken heart was inconsolable. Baby furniture, clothes, nappies, etc were removed from the house only to be replaced by a determination never to have another child. Fortunately, a year later Grandma did have another child. Convinced her new baby would also be taken away Grandma treated the arrival as if it were only temporary. My mum Phyllis Mary Wright born 1929 in Kings Norton, England slept for the first few weeks of her life on a worn out towel inside a laundry basket.

When Mum was two months old, she and my grandparents moved to 22 Findley Road, Gloucester. I know little of Mum's early years. She doesn't talk much about herself prior to the war. WWII didn't frighten Mum; it fascinated her. It was much different then, because we knew who the enemy was. Once the war had simmered down a quiet rage developed between Mum and Grandma, but Mum recalls, in those days teenagers didn't revolt. We just did as we were told. Mum didn't have a brother or sister; she didn't have anyone to share her thoughts; she kept those to herself. Mum was raised to be obedient and work hard — Very important for a woman to know how to clean a bathroom properly and make a bed with precision.

Mum was extremely close to her father who died when she was twenty-four. Shortly there after Mum went to a private secretarial school and became skilled at typing and shorthand. She was a social woman, beautiful, with long wavy dark hair. The spirit that flew out of my grandmother the day her first child died must have taken refuge inside my mother. Mum was a sparkle.

She met a man, a British Flight Lieutenant. They were to be married, but the man disappeared two days before the wedding, never to be seen again. That's all I know, because Mum doesn't like to talk about it. She buried that disappointment and moved on. She met and married my dad sometime later. Dad moved in with Mum and Grandma. My sister and I were born in the back bedroom of 22 Findley Road, and we lived there until I was one and Helen was two.

We moved to Coventry. Mum became pregnant again, but the pregnancy resulted in a miscarriage. Eventually my brother Ian was born. Mum was complete. She had her boy. Busy with three children her life was hopping. Dad was studying to become an engineer. Using his writing skills, he became the editor of an engineering magazine. Mum worked out of the home as a typist; she was once asked if she'd be interested in transcribing someone's short stories, which turned out to be pornographic, so she decided that was enough of that and didn't work again until her children were old enough to look after themselves. We moved from Coventry to Melton Mowbrey.

Grandma came to visit occasionally until she was diagnosed with cancer; and then she moved in with us and spent the rest of her life at our house. Grandma was not a woman you could get close to. Mum did her best. One afternoon Grandma was taken to the hospital, Mum sat by her bedside all night long. We stayed at home with Dad. When Mum came home the next morning, she told us the story of her mother's death as if it were something she had only just read about in a Woman's Weekly magazine. She kept her tears to herself. Mom was never one for emotional displays. Shortly after Grandma died we moved to Wissendine, a small village in Rutland County. I remember the sound of horse hoofs clapping past the house. I remember lambs in the back yard, haystacks to jump over in the field behind the house and a new bicycle.

Not long after we moved to Wissendine, Dad decided it was time for us all to pack up and move, again. I guess about a year later we put Dad on a boat bound for Canada. The plan was Dad would go first to get us a place to live (he already had job prospects), and then Mum, Helen, Ian and I would follow within the next three months. Waving goodbye to my dad at the shipping wharf in South Hampton was the saddest

day of my life. I can only imagine how Mum must have felt. After that day, I don't think I ever saw Mum laugh the way she used to. She became frazzled and overwhelmed having to move three young children to another country. But like always, she managed.

We arrived in Toronto in the winter of 1967. Dad found us a house on Royal York Rd. Our packing boxes arrived. Inside those boxes were broken valuables; bent silverware, smashed crystal, wedding presents, air-looms etc. Mum had been shaken inside out by the move. I was insufferable. I hated Toronto. I hated school, and I wanted to go back to Wissendine. Mum told me years later that she was so worried about me she had very nearly taken me back. Mum had not only a new country to contend with, a miserable daughter and more snow than she'd ever seen in her life, but my dad had begun to suffer various illnesses that later developed into a forty year bout of depression.

We lived in Toronto for one year before moving to Clarkson, Ontario. There we lived in a suburban semi-detached house. We must have needed the money because Mum took a full-time job and to be expected walked right back into herself: Manning the phones, typing god knows how many words a minute, smoking Rothmans all day long and loving the social/intellectual challenge Crouder Manufacturing offered. We eventually moved to a much bigger house. Dad had worked for McLean Hunter for many years until he was, 'let go' to be replaced by a younger man. Mum was once again thrown for a loop and forced to use her wherewithal to keep the kids well fed and 'looking smart'. Dad eventually found a new job, but the change prompted another move. This time back to Toronto. To date Mum and Dad have moved fourteen times. Mum refuses to ever, ever move again; but she knows too well that we do move on that nothing is forever and that it's all so very temporary.

In 2004 Mom suffered a mild stroke. We were shocked and scared. For a moment we thought we were going to lose her. But Mum sprang back. She phoned me not long after the stroke to say – No matter what, when I'm gone, I don't want you children wasting your money on funerals and caskets and god knows what else. Do not weep at my grave... she said, I don't want that. I want you to know that I shall always be free; I shall be with flowers and the wind and the trees and the snow. And you will know that I have always loved you.

My mother is devoted to life and its ever-changing patterns. Her faith doesn't come from what I would call, God. She rarely uses the word except to say, goddamn or for god's sake. Her faith comes from life's beautiful details: Her never fail Yorkshire pudding, affection from her kids, flowers, birds, the daily news, changeable weather patterns and a good book. That's what gives my mum courage. And for that I'm truly grateful.