

My mother, Gladys Eveleigh, was born Gladys Jordan in Portsmouth, Hampshire in 1926, the youngest daughter of Henry Alfred Dore Jordan and his wife Rose Emma.

Gladys was the youngest, and it is said that there may have been 14 children in total with some not surviving into adulthood but there were eleven that we know of. Gladys came from a working-class background, with her father Henry who was known as John (no one seems to know why) a Marine Store Dealer buying and selling bits and pieces for boats at the time of her birth, and her mother Rose what we would today call a homemaker.

Growing up Gladys enjoyed being part of a large family, and was especially close to her slightly older brothers, John and Fred.

The family was not especially religious, but Gladys did go to Sunday School. At school she wasn't particularly academic but the lessons she liked, such as reading, writing, poetry, spelling, and arithmetic, she did with enthusiasm.

Gladys was only 7 years old when her mother died on 29th December 1933. Afterwards she was looked after for a while by her father but eventually went to live with her eldest sister Flo.

When war broke out in September 1939 Gladys was 12 years old, and a student at Omega Street senior school in Portsmouth. Along with some 1.5 million other children and adults, Gladys and her classmates were evacuated very soon after, in their case to the Isle of Wight. The theory was that due to the threat of aerial bombing, vulnerable people including children should be moved away from cities to areas thought to be safer.

On the Isle of Wight Gladys was housed with the Daish family at St Helens on the eastern side of the island and went to the local school. She got on really well with Mr and Mrs Daish and their daughter Alexa who was older than Gladys. The house and the village were like a different world to Gladys after the grime and relative squalor of Portsmouth. In the house Gladys had her own bedroom for the first time ever and the school was much smaller than those that she was used to. Outside there was room to roam and adventures to be had.

This was the period known as the Phoney War and not much was happening over the Solent in Portsmouth, so Gladys was brought back to the city by her father a short while before she was due to leave school. Ironically the bombing of the city was about to begin.

Portsmouth had been bombed on 11th July and 12th August, but Gladys remembered the air raid on Saturday 24th August 1940 when 40 aircraft dropped 67 bombs on the dockyard and the city centre. This was her first near miss – the first of many. She had been due to go shopping to buy groceries that afternoon to a shop called Clark's on the corner of St James's Road. It received a direct hit and all inside at the time were killed.

On 20th December 1940 she left school, and in her school report her Headmistress, AE Collins, wrote: "Gladys is well-mannered and trustworthy. She should prove herself successful at practical work. I feel sure that she should do her best to give satisfaction". It seems Miss Collins' aspirations for a not very academic Gladys were not very high!

Gladys did a variety of fairly menial, low-paid jobs after leaving school. Her first was working in a ladies' hairdresser sweeping hair cuttings, and cleaning mirrors and basins. She also went

out doing wholesale deliveries until one day in 1941 (thought to be one day after the infamous "First Blitz" raid on Portsmouth of 10th January of that year) when she was unceremoniously laid off.

It was during that raid that Gladys had her second near miss. In the memoir which she started writing in 2001 she wrote, "My brother John and I were playing cards. Dad had gone to the pictures. It seemed the sirens always went at 6 o'clock [in the evening. In fact the first bombs dropped at 5pm] and then you would hear the whoom whoom of the [aeroplane] engines, so we went [around] to the underground shelter at St. Peter's Church in Somers Road. We were sitting near the entrance when a bomb dropped, the wooden bench [we were sitting on] collapsing under us and the floor [turned] to earth, and the smell as of gas, it was very frightening. All the while Portsmouth was getting it badly."

Gladys found this a very frightening experience as any 14-year-old would and shortly after that she started having nightmares, so her father sent her out of the city to her Uncle Bill's house in Cowplain.

Gladys enjoyed her time in the country but was lonely, and shortly after returning to Portsmouth she got a new job as a shop assistant in a grocery shop in Southsea. She was very happy there and was involved in all aspects of running the shop.

Gladys' brother John passed away on 28th January 1942. He was only just over 18 years old when he died. She said that she missed him dreadfully as he had looked after her as a child, and even though they had little spats at times, they were always together, and so there was a strong bond between them.

After about 18 months of working at Butlers the grocers, Gladys and her friend Lil decided to get another job to earn more money. They started work at a camouflage factory, which had previously been Linnington's, a car showroom, near the Guildhall. It had changed over to war production making camouflage nets. Gladys found the work challenging because she had to work to a specific pattern and however hard she tried she could not get the hang of it.

She didn't stay there long and worked as what she described as a general dogsbody in a ladies dress shop called Silverman's in Commercial Road and at Gaiman's grocery shop in Charlotte Street.

When her father became ill late in 1942 Gladys went to live in Fratton with her sister Flo. A short while after that her dad passed away on 16th November.

During 1943 Portsmouth changed dramatically. Servicemen from many different nations and their heavy equipment began to be seen more and more building up for the much-rumoured invasion of occupied Europe. All through 1942, 1943, and 1944 the air raids continued and at some point Gladys, Flo, her other sister Dolly, and their children – Flo had 3 and Dolly had 2 – decided to start going up to Portsdown Hill to the public shelters that were tunnelled into the hillside. It wasn't quite as noisy and far less dangerous than being in the city, so it was felt it was worth the inconvenience.

Sometime after November 1943 when Gladys turned 17, she got a job working in the Royal Navy Dockyard as a messenger with the Senior Naval Stores Office. The work consisted of

delivering papers and mail to many different offices throughout the dockyard and collecting from the outgoing trays. They were then taken back and sorted into pigeon holes for different departments. Sometimes there were important teleprinter papers, and once a week one of the messengers had to walk to the Admiral's house to take papers that were in a fair-sized box and sealed. These were believed to be secret papers and for the Admiral's eyes only.

On Friday evenings Gladys and her friends used to go dancing, which was her main form of entertainment at this time.

When she was 18 she was sent to work in No. 18 Store which supplied ships and Royal Navy establishments with hardware type equipment. Her job was to replenish and keep the bays tidy and get whatever was needed for the orders at the counter.

She was eventually made redundant from the dockyard as the men were beginning to return from the war and when VE Day came along soon after she was working in another grocery shop.

Early in 1946 her brother Fred came home from the war. He was in the Royal Army Service Corps and had served in Egypt, and possibly elsewhere I'm not sure. Flo had had her 4th child in June 1945 and shortly thereafter she became very ill and Gladys looked after her, her brother Fred, and 3 of the children. The baby being looked after elsewhere. It was shortly after this that Gladys met my father, Bill. Bill had worked with Fred before the war and came calling when he too had returned from serving in the army abroad.

Gladys was dating someone else at the time but was soon smitten by Bill and they began a relationship that was to culminate in their marriage.

On 3rd May 1947 the bottom fell out of Gladys' world when her sister Flo died at the age of just 34. She like many members of Gladys' family had succumbed to tuberculosis. It's hard to believe that by the age of 21, 9 members of Gladys' family had died during her lifetime, and there were others that died before she was born. It must've felt like the family was cursed. What makes this even more shocking is that her siblings' average age at death was not even 26, and even her mother and father died before she was 16 at only 47 and 58 respectively. The family members Gladys lost were: Brother Charles William died 1930 aged 21, Sister Violet 1931, aged 15, Mother Rose Emma 1933, aged 47, Sister Alice May, known as May 1936, aged 24, Brother John Arthur Dore 1942, aged 18, Father Henry A D 1942, aged 58, Brother Alfred Henry 1942, aged 24, Sister Rose Louisa 1946, aged 41, and Sister Florence Cecelia 1947, aged 34.

Gladys and Bill were engaged to be married soon after, but before that Gladys had been told by her doctor during a routine monthly check up that she had early signs of tuberculosis and that she had to be admitted to the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight for rest and treatment. The engagement was on Gladys' 21st birthday – 29th November 1947 and it was planned that they would marry at St Mary's Church, Portsea in January 1948. However, she was refused permission to leave hospital to marry in Portsmouth and so it was decided that they would marry at the parish church local to the hospital. The wedding eventually took place on 7th February 1948 in St Lawrence, Ventnor, Isle of Wight.

Gladys being in hospital was not the best of starts to 52 happy years of marriage. Gladys was

eventually discharged from hospital and later my brother was born in 1949 and I was born in 1956. She was not completely free of lung related health issues, but together Bill and Gladys looked to the future and put their pasts behind them.

My dad died in 2000 and Mum was bereft. They were reunited 5 years later when Gladys died in the year 2005. The bombs never got her, but her lifetime of relatively poor health eventually did.