

My Grandma's tales WWII

From Miss Ogunyemi

Unfortunately my Grandparents are no longer with us, so I have had to rely on my faded childhood memories of my paternal Grandma sharing her 'tales of trouble' that my Grandad encountered during his time in the Navy during WWII. My Grandad never shared his stories with anyone- so I am lucky that my Grandma did!

The 1st tale happened during his training before actually serving at sea. My family are from Newcastle, & my Grandad's training took place in Scapa Flow- a body of water in the Orkney Islands of Scotland. It was the UK's chief naval base during the First and Second World Wars as it was sheltered by many Islands. My Grandma emphasised this, stating how this should have been a safe, maybe secret place for training where they would be undetected by the enemy. So you can imagine my surprise to hear that the ship my Grandad was training on was detected by submarines and not only hit but sunk. A scary start for any young sailors who hadn't even left for War yet. I remember imagining how this would be in their minds in the years ahead out there in the middle of the vast oceans.

Indeed several of the ships he served on were hit, but as they sailed in fleets, he was always lucky to have been rescued.

The other story that has remained with me all these years, although could have been embellished by my young imagination concerns a particular return journey home after months of being at Sea. Some, including my Grandad, returning with precious gifts from wherever they had docked. I say precious, in terms of how special this must have been to be receiving a gift from abroad and during the war (something that we can now take for granted today!)

So on this particular trip home, their ship was unfortunately struck by a torpedo resulting in the crew swimming for their lives in the cold ocean waters. My Grandma went on to explain that all the presents were therefore lost at sea or ruined. I imagined hundreds of packages either floating on top of the waves with sailors using them as floating aids or sinking to be lost for ever.

I obviously knew my Grandad had survived this scary encounter, as he lived for many years after the War and brought up his children (my father & Uncle) but the tale didn't end there... (This is where I wish I had more details to share) My Grandad caught sight of a stingray, the sting of which could kill a human. I could only imagine the absolute horror of this close encounter and thinking how lucky he was to avoid its deadly sting.

I recall not even thinking about the torpedoed ship with thick black smoke and fire, even the ship sinking or even how they were rescued- I just imagined this stingray becoming my Grandad's only focus for survival.

I never did find out how they were rescued, maybe I didn't ask and maybe my Grandma didn't think of explaining - maybe she thought I would only be interested if the tale was exciting? I'll never know.

So my advice to children today would be to listen carefully to your Grandparent's stories from their past, ask questions and maybe record their stories for your older self in the future. Their stories are important, they can help cast a light on things we may not fully understand or appreciate when we are young or simply be an interesting tale you will want to pass down to your own families one day!