

OUR GRANDMA. The best of the best.

There was the time that all 5 of Grandma's children were at home on a Friday afternoon.

Grandma had prepared the fish to fry for Saturday's supper, after Shabbat had gone out and Grandpa Kaye returned from Shul. (He gave up going to services when his back became very painful and it was difficult for him to walk long distances).

Grandma was Dutch and the Dutch Jews were not overly religious. Grandpa came from Poland. He called himself Russian because Poland was ruled by Russia at that time. The Polish Jews were much more religious and Grandma kept a strictly kosher home for his sake.

Grandma saw that she had run out of matzo meal. She left the children playing in the 5th floor flat (without a lift) at Hughes Mansions, Valance Road, Whitechapel, went down to the local grocery shop and bought the meal.

When she returned to the building, she saw lots of fish fillets on the ground. She said to herself, "oh dear, some poor woman has dropped her whole family's dinner".

She went into the flat to find her three sons fighting, two daughters egging them on and no fish to fry.

The boys had played a game with the fish and thrown it out of the window.

And then there was the time that Grandma owed quite a large sum of money to a Tally Man.

These men would sell goods, usually to housewives, going door-to-door and returning at the end of each week for money. The goods were bought on an instalment arrangement. In the working-class areas, the families had little money and could only afford things like household or fancy goods, by paying a small amount each week.

Our Grandma must have been the Tally Man's favourite as she could never resist whatever they were selling, be it cheese graters or junk jewellery, no matter, she loved to buy.

However, she was quite deeply in debt when the Tally Man turned up one Friday afternoon, wanting his money. She hid behind the front door and told Reuben to tell the man that his mother was out.

The man's reply was that Reuben should tell his mother to take her feet with her next time she left the house. Her feet were sticking out under the door.

Many years later, all the children were married, with children of their own, Grandpa had died and Grandma was living with Marie, Sid, Stephen, Rosina and Michael in Harold Hill, Romford, Essex.

Tally Men were still selling door-to-door and Grandma was still buying.

Once again, she had bought too much and was in debt. She had to confess to Marie

and Sid that she owed a goodly sum. Actually, it was about £5 pounds but at that time, that sum stood as a week's salary for many working-class people.

Sid called a family meeting. All five children and their spouses were there and Grandma was brought into the room to listen to the solution to her problem.

They all chipped in and Sid held the money ready to pay the debt, which he did on the next Friday. Grandma cried and promised to never get into debt again.

The very next Monday Marie and Sid went to work, leaving Grandma at home, as usual. She was always there for the children when they returned from school and she prepared dinner for them all.

Marie and Sid arrived home to find Grandma outside the house, smiling and waving excitedly.

She said, "I have a lovely surprise for you. A new kettle. Only a shilling a week".

Grandpa Kaye was a kind and generous man. Very quiet, he never spoke much but he loved his children and his grandchildren. He loved Grandma but was undemonstrative. He had been a very hard worker until his back gave too much trouble. Standing in a bakery throughout 6 nights per week was hard on the health. He also suffered from the Kaye's affliction of eczema and asthma. He smoked a whole carton (200 cigarettes) every 2 days and it was Reuben's task to take the carton to whichever bakery Grandpa was working. Grandpa was a jobbing baker.

Grandpa chain smoked. I think he used one match per day! His fingers were stained dark yellow and so were his teeth. That he died from lung cancer, at age 54, was no surprise. He would fall asleep with a burning cigarette in his hand. He set fire to the bed several times. Grandma was usually nearby to take the cigarette from him the instant he fell asleep. On wakening, he would first light a cigarette and then say, "cup of tea missus". He never called her by her name.

After he retired, about age 50, because his back would not allow him to stand in the bakery for a full shift, his greatest pleasure was to go to Reuben's bakery/shop, sit and watch the customers coming and going.

One day a very irate man came into the shop. He was holding a bread roll and declared that the round, burnt thing stuck to the bottom of the roll was a beetle. He said he was going to the Ministry of Health to make a formal complaint. Grandpa shot out of the chair and grabbed the roll from the man's hand. Grandpa said "It's not a beetle it's a raisin and I'll prove it". He then bit into the roll and swallowed the black thing. The man was furious that Grandpa had eaten his 'proof'.

We all asked how he could have been sure and what if it had, in fact, been an insect? Grandpa said that no way would he allow anyone to damage his son's business and, anyway, the thing had been cooked to a crisp to no harm was done.

Grandma was heartbroken when she lost her husband. She adored him and put him above all else. She had defied her family by marrying him, a poor baker. Her family were wealthy and looked down on him. When she determined to marry him, they more-or-less cast her out. None of them ever offered help and even when they

saw her going through very hard times, they chose to ignore the situation.

One time when all 5 children had chicken pox, her father came to visit. He brought 5 oranges. Grandma immediately peeled them and gave each child an orange. The father was furious. He said that she should have given each child a quarter orange and made the rest last the whole week. Not Grandma's style.

She once was given a small amount by one of her brothers, Myer. This money was to pay towards outstanding rent. What did Grandma do? She bought cream cakes for all the children and a steak for Grandpa.

When Grandma told stories about her childhood, they were usually about how tight-fisted her father was. He insisted that lunch and dinner started with two bowls of soup. That way, nobody could eat very much for the next course. However, he had two large dogs, she thought they were Great Danes. The dogs sat by the father's chair each meal and he fed them better than he fed his children.

She always said that her mother, Douvye, which means little dove, was gentle, sweet and loving. Sadly, she died very young, having had too many children. He remarried a very hard woman that they all had to call Madam Sophia. She didn't like the children and they didn't like her.

Carole, Sandra and Valerie are all named for Douvye. Our second names all begin with the letter D.

Grandma's main interest in life consisted of her family, cooking the foods that Grandpa, and then each child liked and thought nothing of preparing 4 or 5 different dishes for whoever was eating at that time. I have wonderful memories of special treats that she made for me, such as knickerbocker glories.

When Grandma and Grandpa lived in Tredegar Square, Bow, once a week my mother, Freda, would take me there. On that same day, Millie would bring Carole. Grandma had hair curling tongs that she would heat in the open fire and Carole and I would have curly hair, which lasted a few days. We also toasted crumpets on a long toasting fork held in front of the fire. She always had pears ripening, wrapped in newspaper, in the bottom drawer of the kitchen cabinet and bars of Cadbury's peppermint cream in the middle drawer.

Earlier the family had left Hughes Mansions and moved to a rented house in Harley Grove, Bow. When Len met Cecelia, he told her where he lived but she misheard and told her mother that he lived in Harley Street. Her mother then had the impression that he was from a wealthy family, probably doctors. She was not pleased when hearing the actual address.

I was told many times how they spent musical evenings in Harley Grove. Ralph played the piano, Reuben played the harmonica, Reuben's friend, Dave Mablin, who practically lived with them, also played piano and Derek, who desperately wanted a drum kit, had only the sticks and would keep time on the furniture and bannisters.

When WWII started Reuben was called into the army, then Len, Ralph and the friend Dave. Reuben claimed them all as brothers so that they served together.

When Derek, the youngest joined up, they claimed him as a brother too and for a time he was stationed with Reuben.

Derek hated getting up early and was often in trouble with the officers. When he had pack-drill, as a punishment, Reuben would do it with him, to make sure he was safe.

Marie was the youngest child and was often sent to bed when all the others were enjoying the music-making. She longed for the day that she could join in, wanting to sing. War broke out, the boys all left home and she had nobody to sing to. She complained about this loss right into old age.

The house in Tredegar Square was full of the Kaye family. Grandma and Grandpa lived in two rooms in the basement; Marie and Sid lived in the ground floor front room and Rosina was born there; Millie and Ralph live on the first floor at the front of the house and Allen and Carole were born there; Derek and Elena lived on the first floor at the back of the house and Sandra was born there; The second floor had two rooms in which Grandma's friend, known as Dutch Annie, lived, with her young daughter; Dutch Annie's sister, Clara, lived in the attic.

One day, soon after WWII ended, the landlord said that he wanted to sell the house and offered it to our family for £250. Even then, it was a good price. Sadly, between the lot of them they couldn't raise that sum so they all moved out and found other premises.

Millie and Ralph went to Ilford; Ralph's widowed mother owned a house near to Tredegar Square and she rented the ground floor to Grandma and Grandpa. They lived there until he died.

Marie and Sid were given a council house.

Dutch Annie and her sister moved to Hackney.

Elena and Sandra went to live in Italy until Derek bought a house in West Ham and then they returned. Daniel was born there.

The Kaye children were very protective of their parents and after Grandma was widowed, they insisted that she leave the rented accommodation and live with one of them.

She went to Millie and Ralph but because she and Millie had always had a difficult relationship, it was not a success.

She went to Reuben and Freda, who lived above the bakery in Cambridge Heath. She shared a bedroom with me (Valerie) and it was one of the best times of my life. She loved tell stories and we would have sing songs. I adored her.

Fortunately, she took over the cooking. My mother had never liked to cook and was not interested so when Grandma wanted to be queen of the kitchen, my mum was very happy and so were my dad and I. My mother enjoyed working and her domain was the shop. Grandma also liked to serve in the shop and quickly became a confidante of several customers. I can recall some very interesting, quite lurid,

conversations when they didn't know I could hear them.

She was also quite a character during that time.

For instance, a lady wanted to buy a plain madeira cake. We had sold out and only had a cherry cake. Grandma said, "how many cherries do you think there are in this cake. Pick them out". The lady went off with the cake quite happily.

All three Kaye boys started as bakers. Len and Derek worked for Reuben. Eventually, Len's allergy to flour, which caused dreadful eczema, forced him to leave baking. He first became a Tally Man and then a taxi driver.

Derek was the pastry cook and his doughnuts were to die for. I used to wake up each morning to the smell of baking bread and frying doughnuts. What more to wish for?

He stayed at the work until Reuben sold the business in 1958. His varicose veins, caused by standing hours on end, were giving him grief and he too did the Knowledge and became a taxi driver.

We were supposed to emigrate to Israel at that time but things went wrong and we ended up staying here. So, my dad decided to follow his brothers and he too drove a black cab.

They were all much better off and, compared to baking, were having an easy life driving.

Because we were, supposedly, leaving the country, Grandma, once again, was homeless so she went to live with Marie and Sid. She loved it there too and was thrilled when Michael joined the family.

There is a Stephen story. One Yom Kippur Marie, Sid and children went to shul. Grandma couldn't walk that distance so she went a little later by bus. When she entered the service, Stephen called out, "Did you bring any nosh?"

Marie and Sid emigrated to Israel and that left Grandma homeless, yet again.

Len and Cecelia, Denise, Michelle and Susanne were then living with Cecelia's mother, Mrs. Schaffer, in Clapton. Grandma went to live in a room at the top of the house. This was not a good arrangement and Grandma decided that she preferred to go to Nightingale Lane Retirement Home.

Grandma had a very easy-going nature and could settle down anywhere. She was happy in Nightingale Lane and found romance.

A man called Jack had lost his wife, had no children and moved into Nightingale Lane. He didn't like it and wanted to move back into his house but wanted a new wife. Grandma told the family that she loved Jack and wanted to take care of him. The Kaye children loved their mother and were not going to allow her to start washing, cleaning and cooking for that old man. She listened to them. Jack left the Home. No, I don't know what happened to him. She was very sad indeed.

Whenever she visited any of the family, she always brought Jack with her and they

would sit holding hands.

There was a funny system going on at the time that Grandma was in Nightingale Lane. Most of the family visited her regularly, usually on Sundays. If you said to Grandma that you liked something, perhaps her earrings, a scarf, a bag, or whatever. She would insist on giving it to you. Likewise, if she admired something of yours, you gave it to her. When the next person admired that particular thing, she would give it to them. When you saw the person with your object, you told them and they would return it to you. Bits of jewellery, handbags, small mirrors, all sorts, went round and round the family. You always knew that you'd get back what you had given even though it may take a few months.

Grandma's every waking thought was her family. She was happiest when we were all together, no matter which house. Whenever a gathering was planned, she would check all the names to ensure that all her family would be present.

She made the best cheesecake and apple strudel in the world. It didn't matter who turned up or when, one of those delicacies was always ready.

When her children were young, all their friends were welcome and there was always food to share. Bakers didn't earn much but they were allowed to take home flour, oil, yeast and sugar. This helped to eke out the income.

One of her best stories was when she would make chips. There were easily 12 people at the table because each child usually brought a friend/boyfriend/girlfriend, plus the parents. She could only make enough chips for one person at a time. The first person would get his plateful. Everyone would 'borrow' a chip. The second person got his plate but had to give back a chip to No1. plus lend a chip to each of the others. And so on. So, by the time the last person got his chips, he had to repay all the others and, usually, ended up with nothing.

At the dinner for Allen and Joyce's wedding, the tables could only seat 10 people but Grandma wasn't allowing that. She insisted that the waiters moved tables and chairs until all her family were together. She was told off by Millie on that day because she insisted on clearing the table of dishes, etc.

She encouraged sing-songs, stories, jokes and games. We had good times.

I hope she knows that we get together each year. She would like all the younger generation to join us but understand that it's not always possible.

I'm sad that the younger children have missed knowing that wonderful woman.

On the day of Grandma's funeral, all the family gathered at Millie and Ralph's house in Gants Hill. In the evening, we all told 'Grandma Kaye' stories. We laughed and cried and Millie said,

"Such a pity Mum isn't here. She would have enjoyed this".