

Family Ties

Father-in-law and Son-in-law

I couldn't understand why our Sandra and Alan never got together. Nice bloke, lived three or four doors down the road in the house with the lovely display of shrubs. No, she preferred that streak of light, Tyrone. Tyrone, I ask you.

First time I saw him he seemed to be so keen to please me and her mum he never sat still for a minute, reminded me of a puppy we had years ago. Course, Joan liked him on sight. What do women see in him? He is a good dad, loves little Alice and baby Pearl and Sandra is as happy as Larry. But then she doesn't have to watch football with him.

He seems to think I'm as fascinated by football as him. Even at school, I avoided anything to do with sport or the playing field when I could, so the rules of the beautiful game are a mystery to me. I can't say how often he's explained the off-side rule or how many referees have massive failings, all of which ruined his teams chance of glory, or for that matter how many hours I've spent in front of the TV in his 'den'. Our Sandra is a nice little cook and Joan and I like nothing more than Sunday dinner with them and the grandchildren. But as soon as we finish eating I am expected to go and watch whatever match there is on his great big flat screen, I won't put those 3D goggles on for anything though, he has to keep those for when he's alone.

Our Joan encourages him, tells me to go on and spend a bit of 'Man Time' with him! Gordon Bennet!

If it's not football I am expected to go to the Ball and Socket for a drink. Now I like a nice riverside pub or a place with a view but their local is as featureless as a pub can be, added to that I don't drink alcohol, I've got nothing against it, I just don't like it so while the babies have their bath and bed time story I'm standing with a coke while he drinks his beer and indulges in football talk. Funny thing though, when he buys my drink he seems to delight in ordering my cola, even odder he says to the barman, something like, 'a pint of working man's dog' or whatever he drinks and the usual for 'my dad'. I've given up asking him to call me Brian.

The Son-in-law's tale

When I met Sandra's mum and dad I knew we'd get on. Dad is just so much on my wavelength and her mum's great, makes a smashing cup of tea. And they both love me. He really likes to watch a game with me on the telly, and we go to our local sometimes, he always wants to buy me a drink but it gives me a kick to ask for a pint and a coke for Dad.

I never knew my dad, he wasn't around after I was about five or six, so, having a chance at sharing Sandra's is great. He likes nothing better than to talk footie and meet the guys down our local especially if we can escape the kids' bath-time, my job all week, so Sandra does it at weekends. Mind you, sometimes I would rather just sit and chat with Dad.

Grandpa

He insisted that they promoted him not because he was a good soldier but because of his cooking. Grandpa Frank served in the First World War, enlisting on his seventeenth birthday although he said he was eighteen. All the young men in the village went off together, according to my grandmother, including her eldest brother Bill, and several cousins. I do not know how many returned, both Bill and Frank did, although, Bill was wounded 'got a Blighty One' so Grandpa said and was never the same afterwards.

Grandpa told me that they all the went to train somewhere in Suffolk, just as though they were off on holiday, he said, singing and joking and playing cards arriving tired but still excited, late in the evening. Before they could go to bed, though the huge bell tents had to be erected and food cooked for their meal all in the feeble lights from Tilly lamps set on wooden poles around the edge of the field where they would stay for the following six weeks. Grandpa's group was told to join the catering fatigue, they would have to peel the heap of potatoes which had been emptied from three hessian sacks on to the ground outside the small Kitchen tent. It took them a while to realise that their first job would be to put up that tent.

Grandpa didn't say a lot about the fighting, he mentioned to my brothers and me that it was 'no picnic' and how he hated the rats and mud but it was Granny who told us about the flea bites on his skin and how after three days journey on his rare leaves home that his boots were still damp. Grandpa said that so many officers were killed that they had to promote him but was sure that the real reason he was made a captain was because of the steamed pudding he became famous for made using liver salts as raising agent was reason he had been made a Captain.

Grandpa and me

Of course I loved him, it was Grandpa who took me to the chicken run in my new shoes and let me run around while he suspended a big green cabbage for the hens to peck at. I wasn't a bit bothered about my filthy footwear but my Grandmother was very bothered by the new word I'd acquired. Apparently I lifted my dainty little black patent clad foot and told Granny "It's shit."

It was Grandpa who on a hot summer day, let my brother paint the shed wearing only his underpants, It took a lot of turps to get the green paint off Joey and my granny was furious. Not about the effect of turpentine on a toddler's skin but that the underpants were beyond saving, although they came in useful as a cloth for Grandpa's brushes. He showed us how to put the ladder up against a wall which we climbed up until we were too scared to go any further, where we could find stagnant water to make mud pies and the hole in the hedge we could go through to his neighbours garden to retrieve lost tennis balls, because Mrs next door just kept our balls, returning them only to Granny.

Family Visitors

Oh no, there's a car, visitors. Sunday, it'll probably be the grand-children, I thought I could smell chocolate cake this morning. I shall make myself scarce, the study door's ajar, I'll just stay here until they realise I'm missing and they call me.

It isn't that I don't like visitors, Liz and Bill are very welcoming always inviting people. It could be Maggie that's Liz's sister and her husband, they quite often come at the weekend

wouldn't believe it would you. Liz and Maggie, course there that generation. Or Sandra. Now Sandra is my sort of woman, when you sit next to Sandra it's like cosying up to a well upholstered sofa, not that Liz is keen on me sitting on the sofa but Sandra never minds. No they come in the week, Tuesday or Wednesday. We go to them as often as they come here, despite them living in Earlswood. Nice house they've got and Sandra has my taste in food, she loves sausages and chocolate, not at the same time like me but as long as she leaves off the ketchup I'm happy.

Ah they're calling me, I'll take a slow walk down and show myself, it *is* the grandchildren, that was Oscar's voice, any luck, they'll be at the table for tea. Yep, all ready and waiting, I'll sit near little Jessica she's most likely to drop something.

So, it sounds as though the next holiday's being discussed. I like Cornwall the fish and chips are pretty good and I like a dip in the sea, once a year. Not Cornwall, France! The last time I went there I found the others on the beach impossible to understand. Just a mo! I won't be going but I always go. Hang on. It's O.K. I'll be staying here, with Sandra and Bill, did I mention Bill? He takes me for what he calls long walks, to his local, suits me. So, that's why I have to stay in Reigate, there isn't enough time to renew my 'Pet Passport'.

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