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MY MOTHER. Gladys Minnie Euinton.

25. October. 1902 - 11. April 2001.

All her long life known as 'Glad', my mother was born as Gladys Minnie Westwood, the youngest daughter of William Charles Westwood and Minnie Sarah Charlotte Westwood. There were four living members of the family; Doris the eldest, 1898 - 1958, regrettably died of Liver Cancer weeks before her retirement due in 1958, William Charles (junior), the eldest son. Actually there were five children, that's why I referred to 'living' members earlier, Earnest died a couple of days after he was born. Then, in sequence is my mother Gladys and last but by no means least is Bernard who just made his three score years and ten who died in 1975 at the age of 70.

Mother was 31 when she married my father, Wilfred Reginald Euinton from Luton, in 1932. I, Barry Euinton, 'came along' in 1933 and my younger brother Roger Henry in 1935. Equally regrettably he died in 2006 of the same 'problem' as his aunt Doris - Liver and in addition in his case, Kidney Cancer.

The Westwood family ran what was the Red Cow Public House at the top of Wheathampstead Hill. It was able to support the family because in addition to the Licensed trade there was also a Grocers shop and a bakery and I well remember my mother helping Nan, (she was never Grandma), making the Faggots which used to go down well with the local community and people used to come from far and wide to sample Nan Westwood's Faggots. My dear Nan Died in November 1944 shortly before her 80th birthday and it wasn't until years later that my mother told me about the debilitating problem Nan had. It appears that in her Teens she was seriously ill and had to have a Kidney removed. That wasn't the end of the tale though, because the wound never healed for the rest of her life. This didn't stop her getting married though and having five children. However it was my Mother's responsibility, once she was old enough to daily re-bandage the wound and she carried the responsibility for doing this for the remainder of Nan's life. This was in addition to looking after my father, brother and myself after she was married.

My Mother and Father saw to it that my brother and I were well educated and I left St. Albans School at Easter 1950. My father was able to get me a job with the Eastern Electricity Board, initially at Hatfield and subsequently at Welwyn Garden City until the time came in October 1951 when I had to do my National Service, which I was fortunate to do in the R.A.F. It would take too long to tell that story now, suffice it to say that I was demobbed in October 1953. I went back to working for the Electricity Board until the beginning of April 1955 when I left and joined the Weights and Measures Dept. of the Herts

County Council at their Watford Office. I can hear you saying, "I thought this was a story about your mother", it is but the story is very inter-twined. It was only on the 28th April that year, barely a month after I started my new job that I came home in the evening and found my father dead on the floor of our living room. He had taken his own life. It is fair to say that he had been quite ill as he had had an allergy, picked up from one of the plants in his greenhouse, (He was a keen gardener), and it had finally got the better of him. At this time my Mother had been in Luton visiting some relatives; you can perhaps imagine the shock she received when I was finally able to tell her what had happened. However she was a strong lady and she was able to cope well with this disaster but we had to go through the trauma of a post mortem and the subsequently delayed funeral.

As always, I suppose, life settled down and was quite calm until, just before Christmas 1957, my Aunt Doris became ill and told us that the hospital doctors had pronounced that she had cancer. My mother immediately made arrangements for her to come and stay with us here at our home at 31 The Hill, here I must say that my Aunt had never married and had lived in various places. Once again my Mother took up the reins and nursed her sister until almost exactly 12 months from the date of diagnosis she succumbed to the dreaded disease. The doctor's comment was that apart from the cancer she was an exceedingly strong woman and would have undoubtedly lived to a great age had fate not been so unkind.

I thought that this experience would have knocked my mother sideways. However she proved she was made of sterner stuff because only about 12 months after Doris had died, William (always known as Bill) her elder brother who had come to live with us, fell and broke his ankle as he walked down the hill from the bus stop. That, reasonably soon mended but the doctor came and saw Mum and told her that Uncle Bill had leukaemia. So yet again she had to take the responsibility of looking after a member of her family. I have an input here. Bill had to go into hospital regularly to have blood transfusions. On the one he had just before Christmas the hospital was going to keep him in; however the doctor finally decided that, if on Christmas Eve morning he was well enough he could come home. We were told, any sign that he was not feeling well to ring them and they would immediately send an ambulance to take him back in. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day he was fine. On Boxing Day morning I took him his morning cup of tea and he said he was not feeling well. I immediately phoned the doctor at the hospital and an ambulance was sent to pick him up. When it arrived, the Medic was on his own and he asked if I could go to the hospital with him to make sure that nothing happened to him on the way there. So along I went. When the doctor came out of the ward to appraise me of the situation. He said, "Look you might as well go home, it's going to take me two or three hours to complete my examination, we will call you immediately if anything happens. The Ambulance man who was still there said, "I've actually got to go back to Wheathampstead again now and I can give you a lift home but if you want to take advantage of a lift you must come now. Well what a quandary, but the thought of having to walk to the bus-stop to go home from the hospital and the promise of the doctor to call us if anything went wrong I made the decision to accept the lift. WRONG. I had just got home when the telephone rang and it was the doctor who said he was very sorry but Mr. Westwood had just died. It also turned out later that Uncle Bill was conscious for about the last five minutes of his life and there was no one there he knew. I have lived with that thought for the rest of my life.

Though there was my Mother's younger brother, Bernard, at that time still with us, he was married. When he was ill and then died, at least the burden did not fall directly on my mother's shoulders though, true to form, she helped as much as she could.

From about 1975 on, we seemed to live without anymore of these tragedies and in 1993 I finally retired having completed twenty years in Weights and Measures then transferring to Environmental health and completing twenty years with them. I took voluntary redundancy and with the investment of the larger proportion of my Redundancy money plus my council pension Mother, who by this time was nearly 90 years young we managed to live well enough. My Brother who had a caravan in Somerset let us use it frequently and Mother loved to go down to St. Audries as often as we could and it enabled her to see her younger son, her Daughter in Law Jean, the grandchildren and later the great grandchildren who started to arrive.

I suppose this is the difficult bit. We stayed with my brother and Sister in law for Christmas and New Year 2000 and after we came home from Newton Abbot in Devon where they lived, on the 21st of January 2001 at about 2 o'clock in the morning I heard what I can only describe as a disturbance in Mum's bedroom, I went immediately to see what was wrong. Obviously something was very wrong and I called for an ambulance and she was taken to Queen Elizabeth's Hospital in Welwyn Garden City where she was diagnosed as having a congested heart condition. Roger, my brother came up to see her and true to form, as always, she got better with the excellent treatment she got from the Doctors and Nurses. She did come home. She wasn't allowed to climb the stairs so I got a single bed and from then on her bed was in what we call 'the front room'. For the short time she was there I think she began to like it. People she knew would tap on the window and wave. But it didn't last. All those years that she looked after me, (I never married), and I couldn't do the one thing that she said that she always wanted to do and that was die in her own bed at home, just like her mother. On the 30th March 2001, she was obviously not well again so I called the doctor. Unfortunately our doctor was unavailable and a lady locum called. She was very very good and took the responsibility of telling Mum that she thought that she had, had a little stroke and that a hospital visit was necessary to confirm that and give her whatever treatment was necessary. She really didn't want to go. But the doctor phoned the hospital and she was on her way there in minutes. Just as well, she had had a stroke and what is more she had another whilst we were waiting for her to be examined. That, as they say, is the end. She was a fortnight in hospital and though at one stage it looked as if she might make it home again it was not to be and she died at 9.30 am. on the 11th of April 2001. She never had a really big stroke such as I've seen other people have, she just kept having a lot of little ones and it 'Did' for her in the end. As she didn't die in her own bed at home, I got the Funeral Cortege to stop outside the house on the way to the church. We all felt that she would have approved.

She was a good mother to us boys and my only hope is that she, wherever she is, thinks we repaid her in some small measure.

'God be with you mum and see you sometime in the future.'

Your loving son Barry.