

LOVE, MARRIAGE, BABIES, THE WHOLE DARN THING.... EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

GLADYS' STORY

LOVE: Gladys found love. His name was John. She had met him at one of the Service Club Dances during the Second World War. He was in the Air Force and so was she. Both were South Australians. She was from a small country town. John's family was from Adelaide.

Gladys' family were of farming stock. Gladys was born in 1923, the youngest of five children. Her father was an invalid pensioner so times were tough, especially in the Depression of the 1930s. He was renowned however for his amazing horticultural feats and Gladys remembered the wonderful fruit and vegetables that were a feature of her early life.

John's family also consisted of five children. John was the second youngest, born in 1920. However his upbringing was very different to that of Gladys as his mother had been a teacher and his father had been a ship's engineer. The family valued self sufficiency especially in the Depression years and the family had a cow and poultry.

But the Second World War changed all their lives. John became a pilot in the Air Force. Gladys also enlisted in the Air Force and became a clerk working in Central Adelaide as well as being sent to Melbourne for a few months. Gladys was thrown into Service life, a life of uniforms, shared facilities, marching duties and being billeted in Melbourne.

Gladys was very shy and lacked confidence but was lucky to meet another young woman in the Air Force who became a firm friend. It was through her that Gladys was able to widen her horizons; go to the theatre, restaurants, the cinema and, to the Service Dances!

MARRIAGE: Gladys and John married in October 1945 when the war was over. It was a modest wedding typical of many during and after the war. They went to Kangaroo Island for their Honeymoon which was a happy time. Gladys had been only twenty two when she had married and had been very nervous when she met John's extended family. She was even more nervous when she found she was to live with her in-laws, especially when she found out she was pregnant!

BABIES: Their first son was born in July 1946, a bonny, good natured baby. John by this stage had a job as a pilot with a commercial airline. Gladys was still in the Air Force when she was pregnant but was finally released. John had been told that with his new job he was to be posted to Melbourne. He had to find somewhere for his young family to live and housing in the immediate post war period was a problem. When Gladys and the baby joined him in Melbourne, John had only been able to find lodging for them in a series of holiday rental properties, a long way from the Aerodrome where John flew a range of commercial passenger aircraft.

Finally, after great difficulties in securing a new house, they had a house built not far from the Aerodrome. They moved in and six weeks later their first daughter was born in 1947. In 1950 another boy was born followed in 1951 by another daughter. In 1953, the day after Gladys' thirtieth birthday, another boy was born. The cream satin night dress Gladys wore for all her confinements, has survived.

THE WHOLE DARN THING... Gladys was incredibly busy with five children born within seven years especially with her husband often away interstate. Luckily the neighbours were all very friendly, with young families themselves, so a support network grew up amongst them, especially helping if a car was needed. Few of the neighbours had quite so many children, and quite often Gladys found she had a yard full of her own children, plus everyone else's – the thinking being that she would not notice the extras! But they had fun in the early years with social occasions, parties, card nights for the men, and later, when the children were at school, social tennis for the ladies. Gladys made some firm friends and even when they moved away, she still corresponded with them for many years.

The house was very small having only two bedrooms and one bathroom. Initially the pan toilet was in the backyard until the sewer was connected to the inside toilet. John, who was very inventive, and extremely good with his hands, had made a sturdy swing set, a concrete sand pit and had part of an aeroplane framework as a 'jungle gym' for the children to play on. The backyard had enough room for a shortened cricket pitch, and enough lawn for games of badminton etc. Gladys' father – in – law had come over from South Australia to help John add another bedroom and a sunroom onto one end of the house. The sun room had a particularly well stocked toy box so at least Gladys had somewhere for all the children to play, especially on rainy days!

EXPECTATIONS: In 1938 Gladys was nearly fifteen when disaster struck. Her beloved mother contracted polio, the only case in northern South Australia, and Gladys was sent to stay with relatives elsewhere. She never saw her mother alive again. Gladys was traumatised by this tragedy for the rest of her life. Even though she was a very good student, the many hours spent travelling to high school on the rail car became tedious, especially now there was little support at home as her father was chronically ill. Joining the Air Force improved her life, especially after she met John.

REALITY: With her husband flying interstate, Gladys was kept very busy with the children. She remembers noticing something moving under the window one day when she was at home alone with the young children. Imagine her relief when it turned out to be a stray cow! Few people had cars in the late 40s and 50s so John initially rode a bike to the aerodrome – then flew aeroplanes! Bread and groceries were delivered to the house, and picking mushrooms and blackberries was a popular, and cheap, outing. The family had 'chooks' and a 'vegie' garden and Gladys had a busy and fulfilling life caring for her family. Ever vigilant over the health of the children Gladys had the support of an experienced and trusted doctor who made house calls whenever he was needed.

In 1954 a polio epidemic swept Melbourne. The trusted doctor was away on holidays and a locum doctor did not pick up what was wrong with the children. Two of Gladys and John's children were hospitalised and in quarantine. The eldest recovered but the

second daughter, aged three, was badly affected. She was sent to a clinic in Townsville for two and a half years. When she did return John was able to invent and construct aids for her.

The children eventually completed their schooling and went on to careers in flying, teaching or administration and management. All went on to higher education.

John was an airline pilot until he retired at sixty, but he had always retained an interest in farming. He bought some land, built a house on it and spent a lot of his time at the farm managing the land, and his stock. Sadly Gladys did not share his enthusiasm for farming. She longed to return to her home town and luckily managed many visits, especially when her oldest sister was still alive.

By the mid 90s John's health had begun to fail. A bad heart condition, even with a pace maker, and undiagnosed diabetes, reduced his activities severely and compromised his quality of life. In July 1996 his heart and general health finally gave out and he passed away. Gladys still lives in the house he had built sixty one years ago surrounded by memories of her busy and rewarding past.