

The Existence of Keith Francis Stedman Finally Acknowledged

Before I start my story I would like to give a huge amount of thanks to 'Brief Lives Remembered' and Paula in particular who helped me trace a Brother's grave who died at a young age. I wasn't even aware of his existence until a few years ago.

Mine is a strange story to tell and is a cross over between finding a lost family and 'Brief Lives Remembered'.

I was born in January 1944 and lived with my parents in Newport. My parents split up and I was looked after by my paternal Grandparents and later adopted by my uncle who lived in Bassaleg. After many years having no contact with my Mother's side of the family I received a phone call in work from a friend who I had met in the late 1950s early 1960s. This



friend I had told that I had always wanted to meet my mother, one particular day in Newport in 1971 my friend came across my Mother in Newport (they were old school friends). Through my friend I arranged to meet my Mother at the address I was living in at the time. It was the first and only meeting I ever had with her as an adult. She told me she had remarried and had two children by this marriage and that I also had a half-brother from a previous relationship she'd had and that he was living in Newport. No mention was made of my Brother Keith. She explained to me that she hadn't said anything to her present Husband about me and that it would be awkward if we had any contact - so we went our separate ways.

Having finally traced my Father I had contact with him in 1978, I discovered that he denied to people that he had any children. However, when I knocked on his door the colour in cheeks went a vivid red, I assume his throat had dried up because he had difficulty in speaking to

me through embarrassment. In the kitchen was his Godson who was obviously under the impression that no blood children of my Father's existed. I will leave the reader to imagine what was said after that! Over the years of seeing my Father from time to time the relationship was a strange one in as much as he couldn't ever get rid of the embarrassment of his eldest son being in his life. At no stage did I feel any love for him. In all the time I lived with my Grandparents and Uncle no mention was ever made about the existence of any other children. Once when I went with my Wife to visit my Father he told her that there had been another child, but because my Father couldn't always be believed and I had never said anything about having a sibling my Wife didn't believe him and said nothing to me.

I want to now tell you about who I am and what life was like for me living with Grandparents and being adopted by my Uncle (my Father's Brother). From what I can remember of my childhood it was spent living in a village named Bassaleg. Life living with Grandparents and my Uncle was not how family life was in most cases. My Grandparents were from the Victorian Age with principles that were 'strict' in the truest sense. I sat at the table and spoke when spoken to, I found it as well how difficult it was for my Grandparents to speak of the word love and to show me any. I cannot remember having a cuddle or a kiss off them. I was looked after in the sense that I was given good clothes and food, but this was no substitute for love and affection. Growing up from an early age around 1954 I became a Chorister in the local church of St Basil's Bassaleg. I can remember it now going to choir practise twice a week and I even became a Bell Ringer. The Vicar was well known to us Choristers and I can remember him vaguely coming to the house to speak with my family. My friends that I made throughout my formative years, I used to visit their houses but I can never remember my friends coming to my house.

I can remember visiting with my Grandmother someone in Newport every Saturday and also going to Machen to visit a lady and gentleman who lived there. It stuck in my mind this the person in Newport had a grocery in Newport and the lady in Machen had a huge Apple Orchard at the time I didn't have a clue as to who they were.

My Uncle adopted me in 1952 he did his very best for me whilst he was a single gentleman and had no wife. My Uncle was my Father's Brother and I never saw them speak to each other. I found out before my Grandmother passed away that they had, had a big falling out. Sometimes in life you get a feeling for something that has happened and you begin to get some answers as to why something had gone wrong, hopefully I have put two and two together to make four and I believe one of the reasons was because my Grandmother had to come to the house in Newport where I was living and take me away - that was in 1945.

Having left home I eventually joined the Royal Navy in 1961 and after a brief career left in 1964. I then met my Wife in 1965, the year we got married, all the events of my childhood I left behind me and we raised a family of our own.

If I can take you now to the year 2013 my Wife and I went on holiday and as one does you get talking to different people, and we shared a table with a lovely lady and one of her hobbies was Genealogy. I explained to her about my life and that I would love to trace my half-brother and half-sister but had had no luck in doing so. She took what details I could give and offered to look into it for me. We exchanged addresses and telephone numbers and within three hours of my Wife and I getting home she had found the details of my half-brother and half-sister. The lady gave me a rough idea of where in the country my half-sister lived. So I then went into the local library and looked for my half-sister's name in the Electoral Roll and Telephone Directory for the area. The lady that I mentioned is now a firm friend of my Wife and myself. It is quite right to point out that through the good work and efforts of our friend she has managed to find out for my Wife and myself details of our respective family members of years gone by. In doing so we are much in the knowledge of who our families were - we will be eternally grateful for this help as it has given both of us closure on our family histories.

Earlier in my story I wrote about a lady in Newport and a lady and gentleman in Machen, and I said that I did not have a clue as to who they were as my Grandparents never talked about them to me, but I

have since found out with the help of our friend that the lady in Newport was in fact my Grandmother's Sister and the lady in Machen was my Grandfather's Sister. As a result of the information our friend gave me it turns out that my Grandmother had six Brothers and two Sisters and my Grandfather had four Sisters and one Brother, and I again say I did not have a clue about this.

Armed with the information I wrote a letter to ask this lady at the address that I had managed to find if she was my half-sister giving her as much detail as I could. She emailed back to confirm that she was indeed my half-sister and told me that I also had a half-brother who was living out of the country she also asked me if I knew about a full brother that I had whose name was Keith. No-one was more surprised than I to find out I had a full Brother. My half-sister and half-brother had been trying over the years to trace me but had had no luck, because I was adopted they kept hitting a brick wall. When I met my half-brother he told me that he'd tried to look through the Telephone Directory for Newport and rang various numbers with no luck - but as we were X-Directory he didn't have much chance. Over the time of keeping in touch with my Brother and Sister I have discovered that I have many Nieces and Nephews. I met my half-sister once when I went to visit but because of the distance it is difficult to get there as we have no transport so we keep in touch by emailing, and my half-brother I have met when he came down to Newport to visit and again because of the distance we keep in touch by email.

My half-brother and half-sister whilst attending the funeral of our other half-brother in Newport were told by cousins of ours that I was dead; and of course I can understand the willingness was there to try and find me but armed with the understanding that I was dead there was no point in looking for me any further. I also am aware, now, that I had many Aunts and Uncles as well as my Grandparents on my Mother's side who live locally who were aware of me although I was not aware of them. I have met a few of my cousins on one occasion but we are no longer in contact.



To the reader what I have written about may have raised a question as to why I did not get in touch or try to find things out when the people in my story were alive. The plain and simple reason was that I did not want to upset the apple cart and cause problems for people.

My baby Brother Keith Francis Stedman was born on 24th February 1945 and after a brief illness died on 24th December 1945. I tried various avenues to try and locate his grave including the local cemeteries in Newport and I had had no success. I was looking on the Internet for some information that would help me to locate Keith's resting place when I came across a Website called 'Brief Lives Remembered'. Filling in information that was asked of me and explaining the difficult circumstances I found myself in, Paula from 'Brief Lives Remembered' came back to me and said that she would be able to help me - bearing in mind that this was the first time that she'd had to work in such scatty details that I was able to give her Paula was able to locate that Keith was laid to rest in St Basil's Churchyard in Bassaleg. Paula had been in touch with the Vicar who confirmed to her that there was a record of Keith being buried in St Basil's but because the Church Records at the time were not properly kept together he could not tell Paula the exact position of his grave.

I understand from a cousin that I met Keith and I were sleeping together in the bottom drawer of a chest of drawers at one time. Being so young at the time I have no recollection of this and find it hard to come to terms with that I never even knew that I had had a brother. I often wonder what it would have been like if he had survived and we could have been Brothers and done many things together - but it wasn't meant to happen. I am glad that I have found his resting place and that he is resting in peace - at least someone cares about him.

My wife and I have visited St Basil's Church on two occasions. The first one was to introduce ourselves to the Vicar who very kindly gave me a copy of my Christening/Baptism entry in the Church Records and allowed us to take some photographs in the church. The surroundings brought back poignant memories of my childhood, the Vicar very kindly said that he would have Keith's name inscribed in the church's Book of Remembrance and invited us back to view the entry. We have recently

been and seen this entry and took some photographs accordingly. My wife had a hunch about Keith's Christening/Baptism not being in St Basil's records and that it was possibly in another church's records where my Mother and Father got married in 1943. This proved to be correct but the church is now a derelict building.

To bring my story to an end I have always asked myself 'why did my Grandmother and Grandfather as well as my Uncle and Father not say one word about Keith, not many words about my Great Aunts and Great Uncles?' Even the Church Members' and the Vicar at that time never said anything to me; furthermore it wasn't as if I was invisible when walking about the village that no-one mentioned Keith to me. I have listened to people that I have spoken to about the situation that I was told nothing only spoke when I was spoken to - why was this done to me? -, it has been suggested to me that the break-up of my parents' marriage was an embarrassment to them along with Keith's death. It was, apparently, in those days 'the done' thing when family tragedies happened you never discussed with any-one, including the members of the family, what happened. I have been asked what effect, if any, this could have had on me in my life. In answer to this I think perhaps it has made me a character who sometimes has been and still is hesitant, unsure about what to do. It has made me very insecure in trusting people. In the case of my Paternal Family I often think of the saying 'you can choose your friends but you cannot choose your family'. Finally now, I hope I haven't been overly critical of my Grandparents and Uncle who did their best to bring me up.

In writing this I am not looking to put blame anywhere I am just glad that I have at long last found some family members that I can relate to and feel that I belong somewhere to someone.

By John Stedman