

The older person who has inspired me

My father, James Jolley, was born 1913. He had an older sister and a stepsister. The family lived in the corner shop Church Road, Bradmore, Wolverhampton. His father, William, was a lean and bony man who had lost fingers in an accident at work, was a founder member of the workingman's club across the road, a charge hand in a boot-making factory and respected locally. James' mother ran the shop, took in sewing and ran the family quite strictly.

James (Jim) and his sisters attended the tin school just a few doors from their home and were involved with Church of England Sunday School, choir and such-like toward the other end of the road. Jim was a happy, bright boy and passed the examination for a free place at Wolverhampton Grammar School. He did not take it up as his mother felt the extra expenses expected of families would be beyond their means. Jim was content in Church Road, played with friends, explored the countryside, camped out in the summer and courted local girls.

He left school at 14 to join his father in the boot and shoe trade. It was through this that he met Hilda, who was to become Mrs Jolley. His mother had ambitions for him beyond the shoe factory, so that he joined The Prudential Assurance Company. White collar, trilby hat, and dealing with figures and finance rather than designing and cutting leather.

1939 took him to volunteer for the RAF in the year that he married. He remained in the RAF until 1945 – never more than a Leading Aircraftman (LAC), serving mainly as a driver – chauffeur, motorcycle messenger, troop and goods transport. He drove throughout the UK and Europe, including Germany. Our home included a very few photographs of him in uniform, his kitbag and gas mask satchel. He spoke very little about those years. Was glad to have survived, grimly sad at the loss of some friends who had been killed. Accepting of all this as part of what life had given him.

Back in Civvy Street, he could not settle with 'The Prue' – 'hounding people for money they could not afford' – and so he found (Blue-collar) employment as a driver for the British Oxygen Company (BOC) – quite big vehicles, delivering medical gases to hospitals across the Midlands. He loved to meet the people, to see the towns and countryside and to be part of the effort to make healthcare available to everyone. Later he worked in the depot and he was often asked to join 'The Staff' (White-collar), but he would politely decline, being pleased to be recognised as a good worker.

He loved mum. He loved my brother and me. His mum and dad came to live in our cul-de sac, his sister and her family just around the corner. Mum's father, sister and brother all came to live within five minutes' walk. We were in each other's houses daily – a shared street life.

Dad was clever, caring and modest. He lived for others, especially family. He rejoiced in our successes, bore the errors which we made, and their consequences, and forgave us – Always making it clear how glad he was of our love.

David Jolley August 2023

Dr David Jolley is a retired consultant psychiatrist and the retiring chair of Christians on Ageing