

War children's search U.S. dads gets urgent

By Edward Colimore
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Beth Guyver never knew her father. For most of her life, the London resident believed he was a British pilot, killed during World War II. She thought he had died just before her birth in 1945.

The truth came out at a family Christmas dinner in 1990. Her mother looked across the table at one of Guyver's sons, then 18, and made a startling observation: He looked just like an American GI she had known in 1944 . . . just like Guyver's father.

The revelation changed Guyver's life.

For nearly two decades since then, she has been searching for her father, David Greene, a Pennsylvania man who was stationed at an Army Air Corps base in Chelveston, Northamptonshire, in the fall of 1944.

She has spent thousands of British pounds, filled up nine two-drawer filing cabinets with correspondence, and traveled to the United States, even knocking on doors in Philadelphia as she tried to find him.

Today, Father's Day, is emotional for her. Time is running out. Every day that passes makes her long-anticipated reunion less likely.

"Half of me is missing," said the 63-year-old clinical psychologist. "I don't feel a complete person."

Guyver is one of tens of thousands of children across Europe and the Pacific who were fathered by American GIs during World War II.

They are in England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and elsewhere.

The sons and daughters are in their 60s and the fathers in their 80s or 90s, giving the search a now-or-never urgency.

"I would like to know what he did with his life," Guyver said. "Where did his family come from? I did my family tree to 1295 on my mother's side, and I went back to 1442 on my husband's side. But I can't do anything on my father's side."

Guyver said her mother and father had met a few times at dances in Chelveston in October and November 1944 while he served as an Army dispatch rider, probably in a support unit of the 305th Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force. She served in Britain's Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

"He told my mother he had been in the police force before," Guyver said. "It might have been in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. He said he went out on a domestic call one

time and was hit over the head with a frying pan. My mother thought that was quite good."

People from many backgrounds were thrown together during the war and struck up quick friendships. Guyver's mother used to see Greene riding his motorbike around the air base. He was a striking GI, standing 6 feet tall, weighing about 160 pounds, with an athletic build.

"During World War II, life was so different in Great Britain. . . . You could be bombed at any time and be gone," Guyver said. "You could be dead just like that. You lived for the moment."

Guyver's mother became pregnant, gave birth, tried unsuccessfully to find the GI, and ended up marrying a member of the British navy. Even now, the 87-year-old - whose identity was withheld by her daughter - keeps her GI secret, not wishing to carry the stigma of giving birth to a "war babe."

"She just wanted to forget him. She doesn't know if he survived the war," Guyver said. If he's living, "my father doesn't know he has a daughter, two grandsons, and four great-grandchildren."

Some of the GI children have joined support organizations such as Transatlantic Childrens' Enterprise, known as TRACE (www.tracepw.org/), a British group founded by a GI war bride, and www.gitrace.org, which offers tips for finding fathers and useful online links.

The music of "Somewhere Out There" plays over the gitrace Web site, and poems express the feelings of those still looking for their fathers. One, by Janette Taylor, reads in part:

I've longed to know my father

the heartaches never end I've missed his love and

comfort my broken heart he'd mend!

Part of me is missing I'm feeling incomplete Oh Lord look after daddy until the day we meet.

Guyver listed her father on the site's search list, hoping to hear from someone who has information about him. She also has written countless letters and made innumerable phone calls looking for leads.

In 1997, she flew to Philadelphia to follow up on a tip from a friend in Hatfield who had information from a Philadelphia police officer that seemed promising: the city address of a David Greene who had been on the force.

It turned out the man had died the previous year. She knocked on neighbors' doors and found they weren't sure whether he was 60 or 80 years old.

Undaunted, Guyver headed on to Pittsburgh to check more leads, later returning to England without an answer.

Today, the search of the war babies continues. This weekend, one of Guyver's friends is looking for leads on his father at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

"Some have been lucky and found their fathers," Guyver said. "There are many like myself who are still searching. None of us feel that we are a complete person as we have no knowledge of 50 percent of our genes.

"Some, like myself, have medical problems," added Guyver, who has a blood disorder, "and it would be a great help to our treatment if we had our paternal family history."

Guyver thinks of her father often and tries to picture him. "I imagine he would be like my son because my mother said he looked like him when he was 18," she said.

"She gets very frustrated, and I see it," said the son, Gerald, 37, a database employee for the Metropolitan Police at New Scotland Yard. "She does have her moments.

"She sees everyone else finding their parents, and she's the one who can't find her father."

But Guyver is not giving up. "I feel like I will find him," she said. "I'm a determined person. My mother said I'm like my father.

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Elizabeth 'Beth' Guyver