

Reflection on Genesis 32,22-31: 2nd August 2020: Dave Kitchen

Today – August 2nd – would have been my mum's 97th birthday. For some reason I keep counting even though she left us nearly a decade ago. If you'd met her, you never forgot her because she was such fun when there was a crowd around. At other times though, she struggled.

Born into a comfortable middle-class life she grew up in the twenties and thirties, almost untouched by the Great Depression. She went to church, tolerated school and dreamed of becoming a professional dancer. Instead, being only five foot tall, she became a secretary just as the war was beginning. Dad was a bank clerk she met on a blind date and far too unsophisticated for her ... although there were a couple of evenings out.

Then dad went off to drive tanks in Burma, mum joined the WRENS and the years went by. When the war was over, they were both very different people and having someone cool and sophisticated no longer seemed so important. When, to everyone's surprise, they married, my maternal grandmother said to my father: "You know she'll need a lot of looking after." He nodded and smiled – it was a price worth paying.

As usual my nan was right. Mum struggled bringing up two lively boys and her thyroid made the job all the more unmanageable by going into erratic overdrive. It was the start of a long line of health hiccups. But, for all the moments of tears and frustration, there was also lots of laughter.

The Old Testament reading for today is about Jacob wrestling with God and it has this curious sentence in it: "You have struggled with God and with men and you have won." It doesn't mean that Jacob has won in the way you win a football match or a quiz. It's more that he's held on and come through.

In these times that should be enough for any of us. My mum never became a dancer; she was never able to work full-time. Life wasn't easy. But she knew she was loved by a husband who would never let her down just as she'd heard in Sunday School about a God who would always be there. When she left us, I wrote this:

Fragile and frail and uncertain,
In a world that had grown harsh and loud,
She'd stumble so easily, muddle through clumsily,
Get in the way in a crowd.

In her youth she would party the night away,
In her age the nights kept her awake.
What she feared most was to be in the way
And the helpless impression she'd make.

She'd do all she could not to burden them,
Go as fast as her legs would allow.
The years being passed by ended this morning:
She dances with angels now.