

## **Leslie John Hubbard**

### **REUNITED BY A MIRACLE**

By Jessica Doust, Great, Great Niece of Leslie Hubbard

Imagine falling in love with an 18 year old when you were 21. Imagine proposing to her. Imagine her turning you down because she thought she was too young to be married. Imagine departing from her as you trudged off to war. Imagine being reunited with her after over 50 years. Imagine realising that even after all those years, your feelings for one another had not changed. To some this would be a fantasy; a dream; a miracle; but in the case of my Great, Great Uncle Les, it is the story of his life. Reality.

Les was the third child of Albert and Alice Hubbard. He had an older brother, Keith, and a younger sister, Jean. Les lived the first 6 years of his life in Broomehill, a small town near Katanning in Western Australia's Great Southern region, where his family lived on a farm. The house was typical of the era; small with few luxuries. After moving a few more times, the family moved to Applecross, which was then, a somewhat isolated southern suburb of Perth, by the Swan River. Here, Les's parents ran the local tearooms at Applecross jetty. After the dry, hot wheatbelt, the river was a dream come true. After Les attended Applecross School, the family relocated to Meckering, where they ran the newsagency. Here he finished his schooling, played football for the local team and helped out in the shop until he joined the navy.

"John Simpson will never be forgotten!" is a quote from my Uncle. With footy and war, Les had many friends, but John was a special mate from the navy who became a prisoner of war for 3 years, during which he was forced to work on the Burma Railway line, which was infamous for the inhumane way the prisoners were treated by the Japanese army. However, John survived the ordeal and recently died at the age of 85.

Les believes that being brought up by strict parents gave him a set of values in life. His mother was a Christian who sent him to Sunday School until he was 14 years of age. He joined the navy at 18 years of age, in 1939, and I quote, "It was an entirely different life!" In 1942, he was in the Mediterranean in the midst of war. They were bombed by German planes and ships were going down all around them. Les vividly recalls seeing Australian soldiers jumping into the sea, trying to escape their burning ships, while under attack from German aircraft. Nine years in the navy was a huge influence on his life. "It makes a man of you." He also says he learnt many skills and discipline.

While on leave from the navy in 1944, Les met an 18 year-old girl named Jean, who shared a brief romance with him, before he was shipped away for 9 months on the HMAS Shropshire. During this time, he corresponded with Jean and they met again on his return leave. They spent the next 3 weeks together and he

proposed to her, but she felt she was too young to be married and the relationship ended.

After the war, he settled in Melbourne, where he met a lady called Hazel. They were soon married and had two girls, Robyn and Bronwyn. After many years of marriage, Hazel sadly passed away in 1989, and Les felt very alone. By this time, his two girls were both married and living away from home.

In 1999, he decided to put an advertisement in the newspaper, asking for anyone who knew him from his days in the Navy during the war, to contact him. Amazingly, Jean was advised of the advertisement and made contact right away for old time's sake. She was now living in Donnybrook and was long separated from her husband, with three daughters of her own. Following nightly phone calls between Melbourne and Donnybrook and a few visits, Les and Jean soon realised that despite the many years they had spent apart, their feelings for one another had not changed. They are now together, more than fifty years later and the flame to their love is burning stronger than ever!