

Arnold and the Photo

Arnold never had what he would describe as a real home or a real family. His parents died before he was old enough to have any memory of them and the only tangible thing that he had of theirs was an old creased up photograph. The photograph was permanently with him, taking pride of place in his wallet and worth much more to him than any amount of money that he may be lucky enough to also have in there.

The photograph was of a small family group – two adults, obviously the mother and father, a young boy of probably two or three years old and a much younger child. The father was standing behind the mother who was sitting on a rather old but very nice wooden chair whilst holding the youngest child and the older boy was standing at her side. On the reverse of the picture was the name and address of the photography studio where it was taken, but nothing more.

Arnold had visited the address on the back of the photo but was devastated to find out that they had moved out some years prior and try as he may, he could not find another photographer of the same name anywhere.

He had spent all of his early years moving from one foster home to another but at no time did he ever really feel part of the family that were looking after him. He had also spent periods in a couple of children's homes and that had been even worse than being fostered out.

At the age of 18 he moved into his first home, a small bedsit in East London, and for the first time he felt at home. He knew he could come and go whenever he liked, he could eat whatever he fancied and wear whatever he felt comfortable in but he was still so alone and he longed even more for the feeling of warmth and security that only a family could give him.

With this new peace of mind he spent even more time and energy trying to trace any members of his family and then to find out why he was put into care and why nobody had ever come looking for him, he still didn't really know who he was.

By the age of 23 he had come to accept that he had no family and he set about creating a position for himself within society. He enrolled at college, having failed miserably at school, and also gained a Degree at University and even found a job at a firm of Surveyors in Central London. But although the future looked good he still felt cheated that he had grown up alone and people who he could share his life with.

At work he was placed under the supervision of an older surveyor who had been with the company for about five years and they became good friends and often went for a quick drink after work prior to catching the train home.

Then one Friday, Mark the older surveyor, mentioned to Arnold that he was having a party at his home to celebrate his 30th birthday and he invited Arnold and a couple of the other colleagues. He told them that if the weather was good enough they would also have a barbecue in the garden.

Mark was married to his childhood sweetheart and they had two children so the party was to be a family affair starting at around 3 pm in the afternoon until whenever it finished.

Arnold felt quite shy when meeting new people so he arranged to meet the other two guys before the party so that they could all go together and they arrived at about 4pm. The party was already in full swing with the smell of the barbecue rising and music pumping out of two very large speakers.

Mark seemed really pleased to see Arnold and quickly introduced him to his neighbours and his children but they couldn't find his wife.

Mark thought she may be in the kitchen preparing the rest of the food so he asked Arnold to follow him into the house. They entered the kitchen, via the back door but Hannah was not there so they walking through into the living room thinking she may be putting the food onto the dining table so that people could come in and help themselves.

As they were walking through Arnold mentioned that he thought Mark had a really nice house and a lovely garden, and Mark thanked him politely.

When they arrived in the living room, sure enough Hannah was there, apron on and setting out all the various plates of hors d'oeuvres, sandwiches, cakes and salad on the table.

Mark immediately introduced the two of them but Arnold had been distracted by the splendour of the room the likes of which he had ever seen before and then his eye was taken by a portrait hanging over the fireplace. It depicted a family, a father, a mother and two young boys and Arnold could do nothing but stare at it. Then he spoke.

"That picture" he said "it look familiar, I think I've seen it before".

"I doubt it" replied Mark, "that's my father and mother and me and my younger brother. The others all died in a car crash not long after the original photograph was taken. I had the portrait painted especially because all I had to remind me was a creased up copy of the original photograph and I wanted something better to remind me of them".

"Can I show you something?" Arnold asked.

"Yes, of course you can" answered Mark.

"It's in my wallet, it's is all I have ever had to remind me of my family. This picture never leaves me, I take it everywhere" said Arnold as he handed it Mark the photograph.

To say Mark was lost for words is an understatement. He took the creased up photograph from Arnold then, from his own wallet, removed another photograph. They were identical and he showed them both to Arnold. "So if that little baby is you, you must be my little brother and we must be brothers" said Mark.

"Yes," said Arnold "Yes I suppose I must be and I must have a family after all".

Hannah merely stood, tears rolling down he face, whilst the long lost brother silently hugged each other.