

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Grandma Bluma

by Lou Beckerman

18<sup>th</sup> January, 1962

My dearest daughter Lio,

Your grandma Bluma came from a land so far away that no-one noticed when it was eaten into and then gobbled up by its neighbouring provinces. And now it doesn't exist. It was a place where fiddle-players balanced unsteadily on rooftops and the people were poor, but their ways of life rich beyond worldly goods. That is, until the wild and unruly winds of change grew and blew. Then to stay there became impossible.

Bluma: she was a flower of hope and sweetness blooming in a time of turmoil.

When grandma with her parents, four sisters and two brothers arrived in London, in 1884, she was three years old – seven years younger than you. At sea, as buoyant as a bubble, she had beamed and giggled all the way on their long and arduous voyage of dreams and aspirations.

In the new land she was called an alien; an immigrant.

But to those closest to her she was affectionately known, in their own acclimatising language of Yinglish, as Bluma SmeylingHarts or SmilingHeart.

As she grew, a deep-throated laughter grew with her. Gaiety tumbled and cascaded and sprayed out of her like a sieve. She was a fount of merriment. And in turn, good humour found its home in the hearts, lungs, mouths and eyes of everyone around her. It was difficult to be unhappy in her presence.

'If you ever want to find her just listen...' her friends would say. You could always hear her before seeing her. Wherever there was a riotous cacophony of chuckling and chortling she would be at the heart of it.

Your grandpa, Samuel Nessowitz, came from another land where ill winds also blew. On arriving in London, to blend in, the family name was trimmed to 'Ness'. In the old language 'ness' meant 'miracle'; in the new country it was an ancient word for a headland projecting into the sea.

So, in one moment in time – in a name – age-old histories were exchanged. And as Sammy Ness grew into adulthood it was his disposition to live life as the miracle of solid ground in a flowing seascape of uncertainty.

When Sammy met Bluma he was entranced. They were both seventeen. She taught him all about gaiety and playfulness. He became the rock-solid foundation for her light-heartedness. She learned to play the fiddle, though not on rooftops – she was sure-footed in her new world. The love between them deepened and their inevitable marriage was a truly wonderful union.

Your grandma and grandpa were blessed with five babies, of which I was the youngest. To Bluma, despite hardship, everything in life was an opportunity for delight and excitement, especially her beloved children: three girls - Tender Ness, Sweet Ness Still Ness, and two boys: Bright Ness and then me.

Their pet cat, panther-black Dark Ness, was cheap to keep. She survived, and thrived, on mice and pests.

So I write this letter to you as a reminder of your forebears - there well before your mother, Leah, and I welcomed your brother, Busi, and you into our lives. Your first cry, Lio, was a roar of strength.

You are not known as an immigrant. You are not called an alien. Yinglish is no longer spoken, though understood and fondly remembered.

May the forever swirling winds of change breathe favourably upon you.

May you always be aware when similar unkind winds stir unrest in the lands of others, with the resultant upheaval of communities.

Like Bluma, may you roar with laughter from deep inside. And may you never forget you are as strong and as fearless as your name. You are Lio Ness.

I adore you.

Your loving dad,

Wit (Ness)