

My Formidable Mum and Dad: Dan Coyle



Two of the most influential and formidable parents. Memories of Mum and Dad and how people keep asking me about my Mum and Dad, and how they met with them both being blind. Well here's a little more insight into their early life and work.

Dad had retina pigmentosa and it took most of his sight in 1929 when he was 19. But in 1939 he was conscripted into the army, naturally he had to turn up and was given a medical or he would have been arrested as a conscientious objector. Dad passed the medical and was sent for training, complaining all the time that his sight was bad. After 4 weeks someone said "this man is almost blind." Dad said "I have been trying to tell you that for the last month," and he was medically discharged.

As for Mum she was blinded with a snowball aged 6 in 1923 and never saw again. Mum was sent to Tapton Mount Blind School in Sheffield as a live-in pupil. She stayed there until she was 17, only going home at weekends and school holidays. In 1940 she was seconded to an armaments factory in Coventry, checking for cracks and anomalies in ammunition with her enhanced touch due to reading braille.

After the war Mum went to work at Sharrow Lane Workshops for the Blind in Sheffield, travelling from Dinnington which is 15 miles away from Sheffield, on her own. Anyway Dad whose sight had finally gone altogether was already working as a basket weaver. Now Mum made socks on a knitting machine when she met Dad. She always said "I didn't see him, he didn't see me and we just bumped into each other and we've been together ever since."

They never had a guide dog, just a white cane and lots of tenacity, plus lots of cuts and bruises. Has they say, the rest is history.

Dan Coyle © 2024