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FINISHED? Now, from the top, list the letters in the yellow squares for the winning word! Write it on the entry coupon, enter online, phone or text. See page 57 **Our Lives**

A few letters

For years we had tried to uncover the secret in Mum's past with no success. Then my hubby had a bright idea. By Gemma Mearns, 43

stared at the screen before letting out a sigh. 'Why can't I find him?' I said.

My mum Pam had never known her dad.

All she knew was that he was an American serviceman called Clyde Shaws.

He'd been stationed in England during the Second World War and got my grandmother Ray Ray pregnant, then left for America.

She didn't hear anything from him again.

Ray Ray had passed away

when I was nine. And ever since Mum had explained this all to me when I was a teenager, I'd tried my hardest to find him.

'All I really want is a photo of him,' Mum told me. 'I'd love to see what he looked like.'

Every few years or so, I tried to research him, just to see where he was and maybe put Mum in contact with him. My brothers had tried too, as well as Mum's best friend, all with no luck.

Then one day, as I began searching again, my husband Neil said: 'Why don't you try changing the spelling of his name?'

Quick as a flash, I turned back to my keyboard and changed his surname from Shaws to Shores.

And up popped a war memorial website with a Clyde Shores from Georgia. All of the dates lined up it had to be him.

Scrolling down, I gasped. There was a black and white photo of him and Mum was the

spitting image! 'Neil, look!' I cried. 'I think I've found him!'

He rushed in and looked at the screen. 'Oh wow, you did

it!' he said. I couldn't believe it. I was ecstatic, and rang Mum right

'Mum, you won't believe it!'

'What is it, love?' she replied.

'I've found your dad!' I told

'What?' she asked, stunned. 'We'd been spelling his surname wrong all these years!' I said. 'There's a photo of him too, let me send it to you quickly.'

As she waited for it to load, I was fizzing with excitement.

Clyde Shores

'I can't believe it,' Mum said. 'There he is. I feel a connection with him right away, just by looking at him.'

With the correct spelling, I continued searching and found that he'd sadly passed away in 2011.

But his obituary revealed something else.

aunts in America!' I told Neil. **Want** is I sent her the of her own.

That meant Mum had three half-sisters. obituary, and she did some detective work

'I've got all these

'Your dad has messaged one of the sisters, Vickie,' she explained, when she rang me back. 'We found her on Facebook and thought we had nothing to lose.'

'She took it really well!' Mum said. Although it must have

been a bolt out of the blue to hear from Mum, Vickie remembered it being

mentioned in the family vears ago.

She also said Clyde had told them before he died that there might be someone looking for him in England.

He'd had a photo of Mum as a baby too, but that sadly got lost years ago.

'We got talking and we might even go out there and visit them in Tallahassee!' Mum said.

I was thrilled that at 70 she'd finally found her dad.

When I looked up my new aunt on Facebook, she looked just like Mum.

They're practically twins! I thought.

A year later, my parents flew over to Florida to finally meet Mum's long-lost family.

They spent a fortnight with them and I kept in touch with Mum while she was out there.

'When I arrived, they met us at the front door with balloons and a sign that said, Sisters found 2015!' she told me.

'Oh, Mum, that's amazing!' I said.

Mum had the time of her life, as she bonded with her new-found family.

A year later, Neil, our son Freddie and I left our home in Maidstone, Kent, and flew out to the US for a visit too.

'We've all been dying to meet you!' Vickie said, as we hugged.

We all headed inside where

she introduced me to my other aunts and their families.

Me and Mum

'We actually have something to give you,' Vickie explained, holding out a framed, folded American flag.

'This was given to us when Dad died,' she said. 'We think vour mum should have it.'

I started tearing up. 'Vickie, this is amazing,' I replied. 'Are you sure?'

She nodded. 'Thank you,' I said, as I held it.

When we next visited Mum, I handed her the frame and explained:

'It belonged to your dad.' 'Oh, love, this is amazing,' she whispered, gazing at it.

Over the years, we've kept in regular contact with our long-lost family from across the pond. We hope to arrange

And to think, it was just those few little letters keeping us apart from my grandad.

another visit soon.





44 Take a Break