



This card was sent by 13 year-old Olga to her father, on 17th June 1934. He was 42 years-old. She wrote "Darling daddy, wishing you many happy returns of the day and many more to come".

This floral card, with the greeting 'Happy Birthday Hours Father dear', was given by Dawn to her father, on 17th June 1941, his 49th birthday. At 5 years-old she wrote, in her best pre-school hand, "Darling Daddy I Love You".



BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

from the

KATHIGASUS

-by Ian Anderson

Historically birthday cards come under the general heading of Greetings Cards, the sending of which by post diminishes every year with the ever-increasing use of electronic messaging. History relates that it was the ancient Chinese that invented the sending of greetings as a means of spreading goodwill for their New Year celebrations. Other races soon picked up the practice and before long greetings cards, which often crossed racial and religious boundaries, became big business with the first card company being founded in America in 1856. Established by Louis Prang, a German immigrant, it specialised in the production of Christmas cards. Today the practice of sending cards to celebrate the Spring Festival does still prosper, but interestingly, the oldest known greeting card is English, not Chinese. It is a Valentine's Day card from the 1400's and is on show in the British Museum.



This postcard, written by Olga (17 years) and younger sister Dawn (almost 2 years) to their mother, to wish her a 'Very Happy Birthday' on 3rd September 1938. She was 39 years-old. On behalf of the affectionate daughters Olga wrote, "Our own darling Mummy. With all our best wishes for A Very Happy Birthday and May you live to spend Many Many more Happy Birthdays in our midst".



This card, written by Olga (15 years-old) to her grandmother, Beatrice Mathilda Daly, on 23rd August 1936 has the greeting "To My own darling Grana, wishing you Many happy returns of the day, and many more to come".

The Effect of Technology

Of course as technology increased greeting cards changed in shape, size and style. From a single sheet of handwritten text they have graduated through folded foolscap or card to postcards, gloriously embossed masterpieces, pop out cards and even those that play music. A great step forward in their popularity was the invention of the world's first postage stamp, The Penny Black, first introduced in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 1 May 1840. Followed quickly by many other countries, the concept significantly reduced the expense of sending cards. The introduction of colour printing in the 1930's further increased their popularity. But today, many prefer the electronic or e-greeting cards as they are a quick, cost effective solution. Thus the receiving of birthday cards by post has become quite rare.

The Kathigas Family

The Kathigas family were a close-knit Ipoh family, led by Dr Arumugam C. Kathigas and his wife Sybil. They sprang into fame during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. As the Japanese invasion advanced down the Peninsula and the bombing of Ipoh began (on 15 December 1941), the family of six, comprising Arumugam and Sybil, with their adopted son William (24), daughters Olga (21), Dawn (6) and Sybil's mother, Beatrice Daly, fled from their home above the doctor's clinic in Brewster Road, Ipoh, to No. 74, Main Street, Papan. Dr Kathigas was slightly wounded during the bombing, but the rest of the family got away unscathed. It was here that they became part of the underground anti-Japanese movement, relaying news of the war, gleaned from BBC broadcasts from their illegal shortwave radio. Sybil, a nurse and midwife, also quietly supplied medicines, medical services and information to the resistance forces. In 1943, she was caught and Sybil, followed by Arumugam and William were arrested and tortured by the Kempetei, the Japanese Military Police.

From Interrogation to Prison

Despite being interrogated and tortured (which for a time also included 7-year old Dawn) Sybil refused to provide any information of the resistance and after being severely beaten, was thrown into Batu Gajah jail.

Meanwhile, after severe interrogation in Ipoh, Arumugam and William were incarcerated in Taiping Prison while Olga became the mainstay of the family caring for her grandmother and little sister.

Medals and Awards

After Malaya was liberated from the Japanese in August 1945, Sybil was flown to England for medical treatment. Here she received the George Medal for Gallantry from King George VI at Buckingham Palace.

In 1946 there were more awards for the family; Dr Kathigas received the MBE and Dawn (at 11 years old) a 'Card of Commendation' from the British Government.

Burial and Reburial

Sadly Sybil's injuries were too great and she passed away in Lanark, Scotland on 12th June 1948. Initially buried at Lanark her remains were brought back to Ipoh the following year for reburial in St Michael's Church Cemetery alongside her mother. The funeral procession on 21st March 1949 was one of the largest ever seen in Perak. On her final journey, Sybil, the Ipoh heroine, was treated in royal style as the people of Perak turned out to say goodbye.

The reburial in Ipoh was entirely Olga's idea, who wanted her mother and grandmother to be buried side by side in St. Michael's Church. Their grave is sited in the old cemetery alongside the church. The coffin was shipped to Penang, where it was met by Olga and her father, and came by road to Ipoh, where it laid overnight at 141 Brewster-Road. The funeral took place the next day. Her headstone matches her mother's and reads, "In Ever Loving Memory of Sybil Medan Kathigas".



This post office telegram was sent by Sybil to Olga, at 141, Brewster Road, Ipoh, from Swiss Cottage, London, on 26th February 1947. The message sent was "Happy Returns Mummy" to her daughter Olga. Olga's birthday was on 26th February.

A Loving Family

The Kathigas were a loving family never missing special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries and according to Olga, they always gave birthday greetings to each other. These were almost always delivered by hand rather than the use of impersonal post, no doubt with the traditional greeting of "Happy Birthday. Today we are pleased to feature a small selection of their birthday greetings given to ipohWorld by Olga a short while before she passed away in 2014.

THE KATHIGASU FAMILY



Grana,
Sybil's mother



A.C.,
Sybil's husband



Sybil



William,
adopted son



Olga,
older daughter



Dawn,
younger daughter