1. **Your story must start and end with the same sentence.**
2. **Your story must feature something being inflated.**
3. **Your story must include the words FLAG, FLAME, FLASH and FLATTER.**

Dad was always one to flatter. Not that you could blame him really. He came from a family full of nay sayers and misery. So for him to come out on the other side, always seeing the bright, sunny side of life, it was a major prize when he caught Mum’s eye and managed to lead her down the aisle. With her by his side his ego was well and truly inflated. He spent our childhood ensuring our ego’s were similarly inflated with his constant flattery.

Watching my brother Hugh carrying Dad’s coffin, along with our cousins and Uncle, I could see he was thinking similar thoughts, his eyes on Mum as she looked stoically ahead.

We had debated long and hard about whether to allow the flag to drape across the coffin. Dad had fought in the Vietnam War, but he never spoke about it, and we were lost as to know whether he would have wanted the recognition or not. In the end it was Mum who put her foot down, and said it wasn’t for him, it was for all his mates coming along who had also served.

For all the desire to be low key there was still an extraordinary amount of people at the service who I didn’t know. Hugh reckoned there was sure to be a few of Mum’s old flames come along to see if they could take up where they had left off. That made me shudder, but I had a sudden flash of a memory of a man coming to the house, I was probably only about 3 or 4 years old at the time, Mum coming out the door shooing him away, looking guilty to check none of the family were watching. I shook my head and the memory disappeared.

It wasn’t an easy couple of days after the service. Hugh and I tried to go through Dad’s papers with Mum, but she kept zoning out and walking into the garden. We ploughed through box after box of his notes and card and letters, coming across what must have been his letters to Mum during the war.

We sat her down with a cup of tea and asked her about them, yes, he’d written during the war, she’d kept them all. Yes, we could read them, learn of the young man our father had been.

So, we did, my brother and I, we sat at the table until the light faded, reading letter after letter, imagining life for this young man, recently engaged, leaving his beloved girl at home, trying to ensure she didn’t get won over by some other man, that she’d be waiting for him on his return … oh yes, Dad was always one to flatter.