

A Sailor's Saga — A 50 Year Riddle Solved

by John Adair

Back around 1975, I was visiting with my grandmother Beba who was reminiscing over photos. She showed me one album in particular with a picture of a young man dressed in a naval uniform and hat ... underneath the photo appeared a name: John P. Iredale. Then pointing to the picture, she said to me in a soft voice, "*Este es tu papa.*"



The only photo I ever saw of a father I never knew

On the afternoon of Sunday, July 20, 2025, I found a direct link to my biological father through his daughter, Torunn—she is a half-sister I never knew existed. We share the same dna through our father, John Paul Iredale! I learned many things about Iredale on this day. He was a career naval officer—a captain in the U.S. Navy—and a veteran of two wars, and he stood at 5'8" and weighed 155 lbs.

"Looks like she just stepped off a Viking boat"

Torunn and myself were both ready for this moment. Had we been younger, maybe we wouldn't have appreciated it as much, but at this time in our lives, we both embraced the matter openly, honestly ... and respectfully. We exchanged dozens of photos. We spoke several times over the following days and weeks. There was a 'buzz' of excitement and curiosity—neither one of us slept very well on that first night.

When trying to describe my half-sister to friends and family I said, "*She looks like she just stepped off a Viking longboat.*" Torunn's mother was 100% Norwegian, a beautiful woman who in her younger years was often mistaken for the actress Doris Day.



A Portrait Emerges

Photo: Torunn w/daughter Ahnalisa

Through Torunn, I'm able to start piecing together a portrait of a man whose bloodlines I inherited. He was mostly Irish, but this I knew—my mom told me towards the end of her life, "*Your father was Irish and Scandinavian.*" I learned that he spoke four languages: English, Spanish, Norwegian & Swedish.

Iredale joined the Merchant Marine after graduating high school in 1942. Later in 1949, he was commissioned as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy. He served on the USS Juneau until 1951 during the Korean War .. followed by three other tours, all in the Pacific Fleet. Still later, he saw action in Vietnam. Torunn told me he assumed command of the USS



O'Bannon during the Vietnam War in June, 1968. It was a destroyer—(DD-450), nicknamed the “Lucky O”. It was the U.S. Navy’s most decorated destroyer during WWII.

So, we start to get a picture ... John Iredale was a man who dedicated a good part of his life to maritime endeavors and a stellar military career. He was also an American patriot.

Is Torunn really my half-sister?

Well, the jury is out now, but initially, there were two ways I knew. One of the photos she sent was of Iredale in a dress naval uniform and hat. It was the same picture, or one very similar to the one my grandmother showed me in her album. Second, she has the Final Judgement of Divorce dated June 30, 1953 between my mother and Iredale ... but what really clinched it for me, was when reading mom’s name from the document, she said, *Gladys* ... I knew then. Mom hated that name and hadn’t used it since the late 50s! She always went by Coco or Margarita. So I knew this was the real deal.

Then on Oct. 7, Torunn sent me three pictures of a little boy: two are school portraits .. in uniform, as a cadet at Mt. Lowe Military Academy (7th grade); in a third picture, I’m wearing a school sweater with the SV logo on it while at St. Victor Catholic School (2nd grade). The photos were found along with a letter sent by her grandfather who says in the letter, “.. and *John Robert* is a fine looking lad.” This means that mom was staying in touch with Iredale’s family, especially the grandfather Michael, long after the divorce.



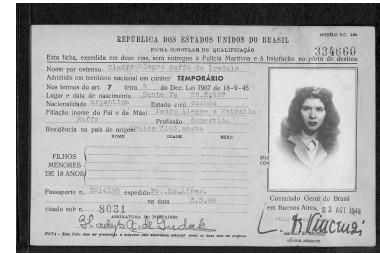
A red-headed gringo

I am light-skinned. When I was little—too little to remember much—maybe about two, mom took me to Argentina to show me off to her mother and father, her brothers and sisters and the entire family. Everywhere she went, she heard people say, “*Vaya, mira el gringuito*” (“*My, look at the little gringo*”). Truth is, I was a carrot-top .. a redhead ‘till about age five. Also, I had a nickname I didn’t like—Mickey. I was told it came about b/c I liked Mickey Mouse cartoons, but that was pure fiction. My dad Bob Myers told me it was because I was the son of an Irishman, and Mickey is the diminutive form of Mick, a popular Irish name for boys.

Torunn also has light skin. She was a ‘strawberry blond’ with freckles as a child, and she has pale blue eyes. It turns out we both have had multiple “Mohs” surgeries to remove skin cancer. With our skin types, we have to be careful. We are victims of our genetics.

Where did they meet?

It appears mom was applying for a temporary visa on a consular qualification form. Her stated name: *Gladys Alegre Raffo de Iredale*. This was a Brazilian consulate document issued in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Under marital status, it states: *married*. The form is dated Aug. 23, 1948, has an official seal and is signed. So we believe they married either that year, or the previous year in 1947, and they met in Argentina, or possibly Brazil.



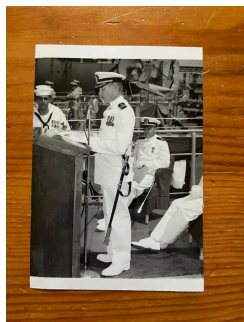
We also learn three things from a Final Judgement of Divorce in Torunn's possession.

- the *plaintiff* was Gladys Iredale, and the *defendant* was John Iredale.
- there is no mention of a child,
- the document is dated June 30, 1953

So we know from these two documents that they lived as “Man and wife” for just shy of five years. Maybe six years based on another temporary visa dated Jan. 29, 1947, about 17 months earlier. We also know their divorce finalized 7.5 months after I was born. But why no mention of a child then? Could it be they had pre-agreed that mom would take full custody of *their* child, with no repercussions or legal entanglements. Maybe.

I know that with my father, Bob Myers—the man I always considered my father—mom never pressed him for alimony/child support after they divorced. She was very good that way ... jealous as hell, but good in that sense. When dad would come and visit with us, (we were already teenagers) she would joke around and pull a notebook from a drawer, “*Let's see, Bob, you now owe me \$396,760 as of Aug ...*”

Where did they live?



My sister Simone recalls mom telling her that they met in Brazil, then later met up in Havana where they left together and lived in Japan where he was stationed. Bear in mind, this would have been post-war Japan. Still later, they would move again to Hawaii.

Toward the end of her life, mom had gone to the Hall of Records in downtown Los Angeles and obtained a copy of her marriage certificate with Iredale. So if they married in L.A., it's entirely possible they lived there too. Plus, Iredale had two brothers who lived in CA, so they must've lived in L.A. ... even if for just a short period.

Mom added, when showing me their marriage certificate, that Iredale was “smitten” with her. While she didn't say so, I'm sure mom was equally enamored of the handsome young, blue-eyed, blond-haired “officer and a gentleman.”

Our mother did live in Hawaii for a while and was a friend of actor John Wayne's wife, Pilar, who was also from South America. They hit it off since they were both Latina women. Mom had actually thrown a party for John Wayne—maybe he started filming one of his movies; *Sands of Iwo Jima*, or *Big Jim McLain*—and this is really neat, I had a photo of John Wayne holding me when I was a baby.

So what happened?

Photo: Beba, mom & me

It's hard to say. Would have to interview some of mom's closest friends from that era—just a few still alive—Eugene Iglesias or Ava Simon ... and even then, they may not know. Torunn would have to do the same. On the surface however, it appears that they had a whirlwind romance filled with love and adventure and plenty of travel. What makes their story even more compelling is the period they lived in—the post-World War II era.



But the question remains. What happened? Was there an argument or a fight? Jealousy? We know they were both young and beautiful .. mom was 20 and Iredale 23. We know they were married, and then a baby arrived —toward the end of their union. Perhaps a baby was not part of the plan.

Destiny had charted their courses

If you believe in destiny, then their individual trajectories had already been charted. Our mother would marry six more times, bear three other children, get involved with women's fashion, and would travel to over 80 countries throughout her life. Captain John Iredale by contrast would devote 30 years of his life to maritime adventures and a fast-tracked naval career. He too would marry again and raise three beautiful girls. He was a veteran of two wars, on the way to becoming admiral, and a researcher who never stopped learning.

A Noble Parting

I would like to believe they parted on noble terms. Maybe mom came to the realization that she wasn't cut-out for the life of an officer's wife ... yes, she was married to the dashing young sailor, but being alone while he's on six-month deployments must have been a wake-up call. Mom was not the sitting around type. And maybe Iredale came to the conclusion that deep down inside, more than anything else, he loved his life at sea. There was that 70's hit song, "Brandy" by Looking Glass that goes: "*What a fine wife you would be, but my life, my love and my lady .. is the sea.*"

Doing the right thing

The evidence we uncovered now suggests that mom and Iredale indeed broke-up with a

mutual understanding and that Iredale acted in an honorable way.

The letter/s and photos are telling. Why did mom call and send photos of *their* son John Robert to Iredale's father .. 10-12 years after the divorce? In the letter sent by the father, he said, "*Gladys had called and announced that she was in town, was looking successful .. and divorced again.*" Was mom trolling the waters to see if she might rekindle what was once a passionate love story? Perhaps, but she would've found out that Iredale had remarried again. Or, was mom receiving financial support from the family? Torunn's older sister Anne told her niece Ahnalisa after learning that her sister was traveling to Las Vegas to meet me, "*Oh yea, Papa paid for the boy's education.*" We now believe this is what happened. It must've been an amicable and mutually agreed-upon break-up. John Iredale was an honorable man ... he did the right thing!

A Generation Prone to Secrecy

I think it's fair to say that mom and John Iredale were both fearless in their approach to love and life. Remember, they married either in 1947 or 1948, so they were just 20 and 23 years old respectively. Obviously, they both moved on with their lives. Would I like to have known my father? Of course! He led a fascinating life .. and I understand that when you move on with your life like this, it's difficult to turn back especially when you've started a new family and all. It's complicated. I get it. Would I like to have heard about mom's love story with my true father while she was alive? Of course! He was an important part of her early life, and therefore an important part of mine.



Photo: Iredale w/ new bride, Analise (Torunn's mother)

By perpetuating the false narrative that Bob Myers was my true father, mom had backed herself into a corner. All of her closest friends knew, everyone knew except me. I finally learned the truth from one of mom's closest friends, Maria Val, when I was about 18.

Sadly, Captain John Iredale died at the end of the Vietnam War—in 1972. He died of melanoma cancer ... he was 49 years of age. What's so strange, is when my grandmother Beba showed me that photo of him all those years ago, my father had already passed away three years prior.

As Torunn and I have discussed, that generation was prone to secrecy. There's a lot of stuff we'll never know. I'm elated to have found Torunn, and get to know my father through her eyes. She is a good and honorable person. She's funny too.

Sabor a Mí

Photo: Mom & Herb Adair

A final thought. Our mother was a romantic to her core. She once told me after witnessing my younger brother Danny coming off a string of a dozen girlfriends over an 18 month period, *"Your brother is in love with love."* An astute observation, but also an apt description of herself. Mom had a love affair with life .. with many loves in-between.



There's a Mexican bolero, "Sabor a Mí", one of the most beautiful songs ever composed in the Spanish language, and whenever I hear that song I think of my mother .. and I get nostalgic and sentimental. The song best captures her romantic spirit. Basically, the song says, *"You will carry a taste of me."*

There are many things about their love story that will remain a mystery, but of one thing I am certain, the song's message holds true not just for John Iredale, but for my mother too; she always carried *'a taste of him.'* Mom past away in 2001 from complications of an auto-immune disorder. She was 74 years of age.

How it all came to light

On a recent business trip to Salt Lake City, I attended a "network mixer" arranged by a personal friend, Mike Hart, pictured below. It was a four-day trip, filled with business meetings, and on the last day of the trip, Mike invited us to the Genealogy Museum. It's across the street from the Mormon Tabernacle which we had visited earlier that day. I did not know this then, but Mike is a Mormon, and, one of his passions is genealogy. He's been doing it for 30-years ... and he's really good at it.



While on the computer in the museum he pulled up the Iredale name... only 5 entries came up—it's not a common name in the U.S.—and two of those names he was able to disregard because of the dates ... born in 1896 and 1885 ... so he was left with three names. Through the process of elimination, he came up with one veritable name; John P. Iredale. He looked at me square in the eye and said, *"John, I'm certain this is your father."* Wow, that's insane. Then on July 17, he sends me an online photo of Torunn holding a baby; *"John, this very well could be your sister."* Just three days later, I rec'd a text that read: *"Your sister would love to talk with you. Please call her."* It had her name and phone number attached. Crazy stuff ... I called her within the hour.

Mike, a sincere note of gratitude my friend. You are truly amazing. Thank you!! You helped Torunn and myself find each other, and tell a Sailor's Saga while solving a 50-year riddle.