

Miracle baby was an answer to prayer

Isle of Wight worshipper **Sue Leeson** has seen God work in many ways during her life - including at several of our diocese's churches

IT was an especially poignant moment when Sue Leeson's grandson Raphael was born 15 years ago.

Sue saw him as a miracle baby. Her daughter Gina had been diagnosed with cancer back in 2008 and told she would never have children. So when Raphael unexpectedly came along, it was an incredible answer to prayer.

Gina rallied for a while, but sadly died in 2012 aged 37, surrounded by love and prayer. Raphael Cattrell is now a teenager and helps to lead worship at All Saints Church, Ryde.

For Sue, this is just one of the many ways that God has worked throughout her life. Now aged 82, she lives in Freshwater and attends St Andrew's Church, Chale. And she thanks God for all those who have prayed for her and for her family along the way.

"God has been so good to me," she said. "I do pray every day and read the Bible. I couldn't live without my faith, and I talk to Father God all the time. Most days God speaks to me through a hymn or a song."

Sue was not raised in a Christian home. Her mum was an atheist and Sue was never baptised. But Sue did go to St Wilfrid's Church in Fratton for a while with a family who lived in her road, in the Copnor area of



Sue Leeson in the loft where she prays and reads the Bible

Portsmouth. When Sue was 10, she did respond to an evangelist who suggested that people gave their hearts to Jesus.

She left school at 15 and was married to a Royal Marine by the age of 20. They were sent to Singapore for more than two years in the 1960s, and when they came back to the UK they bought a home in Portchester. The couple had two girls - Louise and Gina - but were divorced in 1978.

"The marriage had started to break

up and I was obviously searching for something at the time, as I found myself attending a spiritualist circle," she said. "They thought spiritualism would help me. In this circle, they asked me to describe what I felt or saw, and I said I saw Jesus on the cross dripping with blood. And they said 'Bring a record to play' and I brought 'One day at a time, sweet Jesus' - which is probably not what they expected!"

"I cannot over-emphasise the fear I went through with spiritual influences at home. My family had



Above: Sue Leeson her garden in Freshwater; left: her daughter Gina on a boat

influences had to go. My girls, who were only small, noticed the different spiritual atmosphere in the house almost immediately. They were christened, went to Sunday School at Portchester and Louise joined the choir."

previously held seances, which was scary, and at this time there were all sorts of disturbances in our home. I didn't know people in St Mary's Portchester were praying about this group at the time. I don't think I was equipped at that time for the spiritual battle I was in.

"Meanwhile I met this chap Henry at a divorcees club, and he knocked on the vicar's door because he was worried that I wasn't christened. That's when I first met Canon Michael Thomas, the vicar of St Mary's Portchester.

"He gave me a book about searching. I joined a prayer group and ended up being baptised there in 1980. I felt the Holy Spirit during that baptism service, while Henry felt some healing in his knee. Later in that year I was confirmed by the bishop.

"I went home after my confirmation and said: 'I am safe in the blood of Jesus' and I really was. The evil

The family moved to Funtley for three years and then went to the Isle of Wight in 1985. They originally had a house in Merstone where they kept chickens and sheep, having been attracted by the rural lifestyle.

'Most days God speaks to me through a hymn or a song'

Sue and Henry then moved to Niton for 10 years and worshipped in the parish church. Among other things, Henry at one point bought the pier at Totland Bay. Sue worked in education welfare and special needs.

Then they moved to Gurnard in 1997 and joined Holy Trinity Church, Cowes. It was while they were there that Gina first became ill, with cancer in her liver and bowel.

Gina found this out two days before her wedding at Carisbrooke Priory in 2008. Gina ended up having half her liver and some of her colon removed, and was told she wouldn't become pregnant.



"God has been so amazing in our family's life and it was an incredible thing when Gina became pregnant," she said. "Of course we had questions about why she was ill, but Gina herself had a strong faith. She believed she would be healed.

"When Raphael was two years old and Gina was in the Mountbatten Hospice, the Rev Kelvin Burke met

her there and suggested that she write some letters to her loved ones as a way of saying goodbye. She did do that, which was incredibly moving, and then she died in August 2012. She was singing just before she died.

"Gina's sister Louise took on the care of Raphael, and they are now in Ryde. Raphael has done incredibly well and now plays the bass guitar in the church worship group."

Sue moved to St Lawrence, where she joined St Andrew's Church In Chale, but ended up having to move out of that house because it was slipping into the sea. She had a hole opening up under her bedroom. While she was living there, her husband Henry died.

She now lives in Freshwater, but still travels to church in Chale. And she converted the loft of her bungalow to become a prayer space, where she now reads the Bible and prays most days.

"I recently discovered that my great-great grandparents lived on the island and were married at St Mary's, Carisbrooke, where Gina was later confirmed, which was such a surprise," she said.

"I am grateful for all the places I've lived, especially for the people who gave me their time in Portchester, and I feel I am where God has put me."