

[The “missing” chapter draft from *The Jones Girls’ Bounty: A History of the Gwen and Edna Jones Foundation*, by Janet M Paisley.]

THE SECRET

In 1940 an incident occurred that was to change all their lives irrevocably. Since Jessie’s death, twenty years before, Robert Jones and Miss Wilson, the housekeeper, aided by the Robinson relatives, had done their best to involve Gwen and Edna in a normal country social life. Lacking a mother to organise hospitality this was not always easy. Fortunately, in those days, the church provided a centre for social life in the district. Robert was a shy man and, without Jessie’s out-going influence, did not initiate social gatherings. He would have, however, been comfortable for his girls to be involved in those organised by the local Presbyterians. He also offered his woolshed for dances when the trustees of the Grasmere hall refused to let it for dancing!¹ Miss Wilson, competent housekeeper and loyal supporter of Robert and the girls though she might have been, was not, according to family legend, equipped to teach Gwen and Edna the niceties of life. It is also said that she would have liked to have been more than just a housekeeper to Robert. That was not to be and, when the family moved to ‘The Union’, Miss Wilson retired to Ballarat.

In 1935 Gwen and Edna were in their mid twenties. They left the close proximity of the Robinson clan and their friends and the social life of Grasmere. Woolsthorpe, although just a short drive from their old home, was a different community. Moreover, the homestead, unlike Maes-y-Porth, was two miles from the front gate of the property. As Alice Lindsay had found, it was necessary to be able to drive a motor car, or be an enthusiastic horsewoman, to have any independence.

With the outbreak of war came disruption of these tight little communities. Older people remembered the Great War and the swathe that it had cut through the youth of their district, scarring many of those left behind.

For young people, however, not all the changes that wartime brought were depressing or difficult. There were exciting effects too. Many young rural men, like their counterparts in the cities, important though they were to the production of food on farms, could not resist the calls to “join up”. As in the Great War, some of them seeing only the excitement of challenge of war, were lured by the promise of joining their mates in a great adventure.² Then there was the glamour of the uniforms. Although the rural areas experienced nothing like the transformation of Melbourne during the invasion of the U.S. forces, there were local lads, home on leave, who brought excitement to the fund-raising dances in the local hall.

In the summer of 1940 Gwen and Edna were swept along into some unaccustomed gaiety and Edna, escaping the watchful eyes of Gwen and her father, found herself with a young man, alone and unprotected. He was most probably not a stranger and most likely lived in the district. Whether or not she was a willing partner in what took place the consequences were to haunt her for the rest of her life.

A few months later Edna knew she was in deep trouble. In those days the worst thing that could happen to a young girl was to become pregnant outside marriage. Without reliable contraception wartime romances led to an increase in the numbers of illegitimate babies. Lacking the alternative of safe abortions, many girls who found themselves in this predicament and were unable to marry took desperate measures to bring on a miscarriage. For others the only alternative was adoption, either within the family or through a hospital or a local doctor. Unable to cope with the shame that pregnancy outside marriage might bring upon the family some parents sent their pregnant daughters “on holiday” or even turned them out of the house to seek refuge in hostels for “fallen women”³ or to take to the streets.

In the 21st century, when many young people choose to rear families without the “benefit of marriage”, it may be difficult to understand the stigma attached to unmarried mothers in bygone generations. Gone also is the silence surrounding the inheritance of adopted children.

Although it has been rumoured that she went “on holiday” Edna appears to have remained at home. If the minutes of the local C.W.A. meetings are to be believed, she attended every monthly meeting in 1940 and the loyal community of Woolsthorpe, aware of her condition, kept her secret.

With Edna’s pregnancy an open secret in the neighbourhood it is unlikely that the baby’s father could have remained ignorant of the situation. However, he may not have felt responsible for her pregnancy. While Edna kept silent he was safe.

On October 28th 1940 Edna’s baby daughter was born at the Epworth Private Hospital in Melbourne. Dr Roberta Donaldson, who had presumably delivered the baby, arranged the adoption. Dr Donaldson knew the adoptive parents, Adrian and Amie Lenne (nee Stevens) of Ardmona in the Goulburn Valley, and Amie’s sister-in-law, Chrissie Winifred Stevens (nee Bell), had attended Strathcona with Edna in 1926. So this was, as was quite common at that time, a private adoption. It would seem that Edna knew something of the couple who were adopting her baby. The baby stayed at the hospital for six weeks until the documentation was complete and the Lennes could take her home. Adrian and Amie named their daughter Marilla Jayne. Shortly afterwards a beautiful finely-knitted layette arrived in the post.

Meanwhile Edna went back to The Union and resumed her rather restricted life. Although she was taught to drive it gave her no freedom. It was always Gwen who was in charge of the car. Life had indeed changed for the confident little girl who, at the age of nine and unable to speak, went without Gwen to boarding school. The birth of her baby was never to be mentioned again.

Robert Jones’ deathbed request to Gwen to look after Edna for the rest of her life may well have been influenced by a fear of a repetition of the unfortunate event in 1940. This

promise was to limit Gwen's social life – and was possibly another reason, besides the fear of being married for her money, for her to put aside thoughts of marriage.

Edna never lost her love of children. It was she who connected with the little boys and girls who visited The Union and knitted little matinee jackets for all their neighbours' and friends' babies. As her mind was destroyed by Alzheimer's disease, blind to the fact that her Baby would now be middle aged, Edna began her search for her baby. She searched in Swinton's when on shopping excursions with her carer; later, in residence at Koroit Nursing home, she ran up and down the corridor calling in vain for "my baby".

MARILLA

Marilla was brought up on the orchard property in a happy family with an older, adopted sister, Diana, and four younger siblings.

When Marilla was seven and Diana was ten years old, Amie produced the first of her own babies. As one baby arrived after another – four in three and a half years – Marilla was in her element as "Mother's helper". She attended Ardmona Primary School and Shepparton High School, joining the workforce at fourteen as a telephonist-cum-Girl Friday at the Ardmona Cannery Office.

As she grew, Marilla's likeness to Edna became remarkable.

In 1956 Adrian Lenne suffered a heart attack from which he never completely recovered, dying in 1977, from Parkinson's disease.

Marilla had decided on a nursing career and, by 1961 had gained her General Nursing Certificate. The next year she spent at the Royal Women's Hospital, studying for her Midwifery Certificate. Then followed more Nursing qualifications culminating in a Bachelor of Allied Science in Nursing Science. By this time Marilla was working in the Intensive Care Unit of the Royal Canberra Hospital and rising to become the Deputy Director of Nursing at the newly established Woden Hospital and then the Inaugural Director of Nursing Community Health for the A.C.T.

When her partner, Tony Keiller, retired in 1991 they moved to Bateman's Bay and looked forward to a long and more leisurely life together. Unfortunately Tony was diagnosed with cancer and in 1993 he died.

Marilla threw herself in the local community – taking part in many cultural and sporting activities, setting up Meals on Wheels and becoming a Board member of Maranatha Lodge Aged Care. She took advantage of the local U3A classes and became their treasurer. Marilla had inherited Edna's love of the theatre working on scenery and at the front of house for the Bay Theatre Players. Significant of all, however, was her love of travel. She determined to see as much of Australia and foreign countries as her health and her pocket would allow.

THE SEARCH

Marilla had known from an early age that she was adopted and that her birth mother came from the Western District of Victoria but it was to be half a century before Edna's daughter set out to discover her identity. By then, although she did not know it, it was too late.

“On many occasions I wondered who my parents were, whether they were alive and what characteristics I mimicked, if any. I did not know my mother's identity until 1995 when, through developments in the law, I was able to trace her through the Victorian Adoption Information Service. I was motivated [to do this] after reading Suzanne Chick's book *“Searching for Charmian – The daughter Charmian Clift gave away discovers the mother she never knew.”*”

In 1984 the Victorian Adoption Act allowed access of natural parents to contact their adult children and those adopted adult children to choose the type of contact they wished to have with their natural parents. Since then articles in magazines and newspapers have brought out into the open the desire of particular adopted children to know the identity of their birth parents. Mothers whose babies were taken away for adoption, whether or not they agreed to this at the time, have also searched for their offspring. Some of these searches have ended happily but others have not.

By 1995, when Marilla wrote seeking to contact her birth mother, Edna was failing fast. She was in the last stages of Alzheimers. Gwen replied, truthfully advising Marilla against visiting her mother. It would have been too distressing. Even after Edna died Gwen did not wish to rake up old memories. She made the decision not to see Edna's daughter. Through her solicitor she asked Marilla not to come. However, in October 2000, while on a visit to the Grampians with her walking group, Marilla called into 'The Union.' She was greeted by Kevin Bowman, who was working in the garden, and learned that 'Miss Gwen' had died two days earlier.

In 2001 Marilla was invited to see various pieces of the Jones' memorabilia, shown over house and garden of The Union and was given contact details of people who knew Edna. She was given three of Edna's school text books and some pieces of china. It was a frustrating ending to a diligent search for identity. What Marilla really wanted was to be recognised as a member of the family. But above all she wished to have met her mother and done her best to set Edna free from the unending search for “her baby”.

“FATHER UNKNOWN”

When the adoption legislation changed, Marilla was able to see her birth certificate and discover who her birth mother was. However Marilla was disappointed to read in the space for the baby's father – “Father Unknown”. It appeared that the secret of the father's identity had been buried with Edna. There were rumours of course – “a visiting serviceman”, “one of the neighbour's sons”, “a Yank” and so on. As no details of a lasting relationship surfaced it was said to have been a brief affair. A “one night stand”.

There were people in the district who knew who that baby's father was, but they were not willing to tell. The secret was holding tight. As was common at that time while the mother had to bear the blame and the shame, the father's reputation was unblemished. Moreover, he was rumoured to have been killed in the war.

Eventually one name kept surfacing – Allan Keith Jenkins of Rosebank, Grasmere.

Keith Jenkins joined the RAAF in 1941, a year after the baby was born, and was killed in the air over northern France in December 1944. He had achieved the rank of Warrant Officer. The Jenkins family had known the Jones girls and their father all their lives. Until 1935 when The Union was bought, they were neighbours, living in a small farming community where any social life centred on the local church. The Union was two miles from Woolsthorpe village and far enough from Grasmere to be dependent on Robert to drive the Jones girls to take part in social activities. Otherwise they would have been obliged to ride their horses. The Joneses still owned and farmed Maes-y-Porth at Grasmere. Perhaps Keith and his siblings occasionally rode over to Woolsthorpe to join in the social occasions there – but we shall never know, since, although many local people knew of the baby's existence they kept silent and Keith's name was never mentioned at The Union. Moreover, any written information about him, as in the 1945 Grasmere Presbyterian church newsletter, had been destroyed. This vital piece of evidence turned up elsewhere, by chance, amongst a collection of old books.

Besides a photo of the roll of honour of young men from the church the newsletter published the text of Keith's "last" letter to his mother which he had sent to the Presbyterian minister in the event of his death while on active service. In this Keith wrote that if he had his life over again "you'd find me doing the same things again. I've no regrets."

The only sure way of proving the identity of the baby's father was through DNA testing. To do this a near descendent of Keith would need to agree to be tested. Fortunately many family members both Jenkins and of Keith's mother lived in the neighbourhood. The DNA test was expensive so it needed to be a close descendent to ensure an accurate result.

Marilla was in Cape York in 2010 with a tour group. Bored with conversing with her fellow travellers, she approached a man who was using his mobile in this remote place and asked him where he was ringing. "Warrnambool", he answered. "My birth mother came from near there", said Marilla. "She was a Jones from The Union in Woolsthorpe. My father was rumoured to have been a Jenkins." At that critical moment Marilla was called to return to her tour group.

That evening the man, who, incredibly, was Halley Jenkins, intrigued by the possibility of his relation to Marilla went looking for her in all the caravan parks in Cape York. Because he could not find her, when he returned to Warrnambool he tried a different

tack. He visited Jamie Tait, the chairman of the Gwen and Edna Jones Foundation to discover what Jamie could tell him about Marilla.

From this enquiry by Halley and through a series of phone calls, Marilla learned that the man she had met in Cape York was Halley Jenkins, the nephew of the man rumoured to have been her father and that he too was intrigued to know if she was actually Keith Jenkins' child.

So began Marilla's friendship with the Jenkins family, her uncle's children.

DNA testing became more common and a little less expensive and when Marilla decided to ask Halley if he would consent to be tested, he agreed. The result was everything that Marilla could have hoped for. The tests showed that Keith Jenkins was definitely her father.

At last and after years of painful research and set-backs Marilla knew who she was. But, apart from having met neither of her parents while they were alive, her greatest disappointment was not being recognised by the Foundation set up by her mother and aunt.

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¹ There was nothing written to ban dancing in the hall. It was an unwritten rule.

² As an ex-serviceman said, he was very concerned that the war would end before he was old enough to enlist. Like others he "put up his age" and was only prevented from being whisked into battle by the intervention of his parents.

³ One such place was run by the Sisters of the Community of the Holy Name in Cheltenham, Melbourne during the 1940s where the pregnant girls worked in a laundry.