

Features

Search for sisters has happy ending

By ELIZABETH GALVIN
The Herald

Not many people would fly all the way to Winnipeg to meet two perfect strangers. Colleen Brown would, however, and plans to do just that on Dec. 4.

They aren't just any strangers, however, they are two women whom Colleen has searched over a year to find. They are her sisters.

The girls' mother, Suzanne Kehler, put each of her babies up for adoption shortly after they were born. They were all adopted by different families and lived for more than two decades without knowing of each other's existence.

Suzanne Kehler died several years ago.

One of 12 children of an old Russian Mennonite family, she divorced after almost three years of marriage. That is when she put her three-year-old son and three-month-old daughter up for adoption and they were welcomed into a Manitoba family's home. The boy died suddenly at 18 and Debbie, now 29, lives in Matlock, Manitoba.

Colleen was born in 1964, about three years after Debbie, and was placed for adoption in Toronto. A Georgetown family adopted her.

She now lives in Acton with her husband and two children. Her adoptive parents waited until after the turbulent adolescent years to tell her that she was adopted, said Colleen. "They wanted to wait until I had children of my own."

About one year after Colleen, came another little girl, Cathy. She was put up for adoption in Toronto as well but she went to a family in the United States. She found out about her adopted status when she started working for U.S. Military Intelligence. She put her name on Parent Finders in her state hoping to get some information.

"If it wasn't for Parent Finders, we would never have found each other," said Colleen, referring to the roadblocks she encountered with the Toronto Children's Aid and the Canadian Federal law.

When she first approached Children's Aid (C.A.), they told her that she would probably have to wait five to 10 years before they would be able to help her.

Her birth certificate said Manitoba, so she contacted Children's Aid in that province and in March, 1989, found Debbie. The oldest sibling had put her name on the Manitoba C.A. list in 1985 after finding out that she was adopted but had since given up thinking that it would do any good.

Looking for Cathy, their American sister, was a little more tricky. Because Cathy is an American citizen, she has no rights as a Canadian citizen, explained Colleen. "We couldn't access C.A. information in the States," and Cathy couldn't ac-



Colleen Brown waits patiently for December 4, when she will fly to Winnipeg to meet two sisters she discovered only one year ago. The Acton woman, adopted at birth, is about to begin a search with her blood-sisters for other long-lost family members. (Herald photo)

cess the information in Canada. All Colleen knew was that her sister was in one of those 52 states.

So she took her case to a tight-lipped social worker in Toronto. "Until federal laws are changed, they won't tell you anything," said Colleen, who had known that the file folder in that social worker's hand held the information she needed.

Sensing Colleen's desperation, the social worker remarked, "She could be in New York or anywhere." Colleen thought the woman was just making matters worse by reminding her that the United States is a big place and said, "She could be anywhere." The sympathetic social worker answered, "Yes, but she COULD be in New York."

"That's all she could tell me without losing her job," said Colleen, but that was all she needed. Toronto Parent Finders contacted their New York State chapter and the women contacted each other in March of this year.

The three women made plans to meet, without their families, in Winnipeg on Dec. 4. They are not really strangers, though, because "right from the first phone calls, we knew each other," said Colleen.

After more conversations and letter writing, they found that they are alike in many ways.

All three are smokers and they all wear glasses due to astigmatism. None of the women drink heavily and they are all within one half inch in height of each other. They have

similar personalities: assertive, outspoken, and bad-tempered but they are all extreme pacifists.

The three are also all animal lovers and have all worked in the health care profession; Debbie as a paramedic with the Ministry of Health, Colleen as a St. John's Ambulance volunteer and Cathy as a Registered Nurse's Assistant in the military. Colleen is convinced that for three people to be so alike, "there must be something genetic."

In Winnipeg, "we'll either kill each other, in which case we really are sisters," joked Colleen, "or we'll just get along great."

They plan to swap stories, pour over pictures and look for any other Kehlers living in Manitoba. "There are 59 Kehlers listed in Altona, Manitoba," said the amateur detective, smiling, "and a Mennonite community in the area."

Other relatives may be able to help with some unanswered questions. Such as why their mother left Manitoba and what exactly caused her death. And why Debbie and Cathy's legal names are the same but Colleen's is different.

"In the sixties, naming was not legal," said Colleen. It is much

more regulated now.

That's why she wants to tell her story, she explained, "to let people know what they are up against. The whole point is to tell people not to give up."

If you are dealing with the Toronto Children's Aid, "don't hold your breath," she warns. "Contact Parent Finders," a non-profit organization run by volunteers.

"People think that Parent Finders is only to find parents," noted Colleen. "That's not true. They will help you find any blood relations."

"I have great admiration for people who help children in need and more people are needed for this, volunteers and foster parents," she said.

As for her adoptive parents, Colleen noted they were a bit "intimidated" when she began her search, afraid of what she would find or that she would abandon them. There is probably no chance of that however, as Colleen feels that her "true" family is in Georgetown.

"Parents are the ones that raise you and spend time with you, not the ones who give you birth," she said.



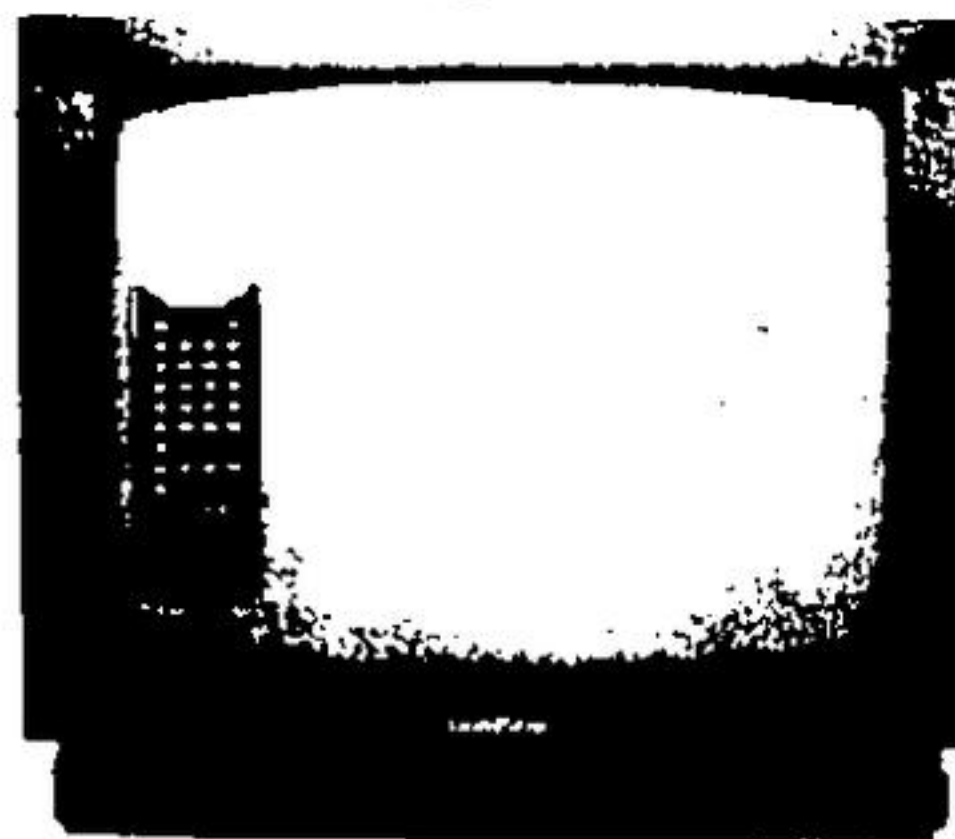
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North Halton Scouters
take Wood Badge trainingBy JEAN LAYMAN
Herald Special

Scouters from North Halton District and Yellow Briar District spent last weekend taking part in Wood Badge Training at the Jack Smythe Centre, Terra Cotta.

Beaver Section leaders were Evelyn Owen, Elaine Hannah, Andrew Kayess and Dawn Lockhart.

Scout Section leaders were Steve Thompson, Dennis White and Bob Baird.

Part 1 Wood Badge Training is for leaders 18 years of age and

over, designed to provide scouters of all sections with additional skills and training.

Divided into three parts, the training consists of Part 1 which is a weekend course in section and group sessions. Part 2 training is a week long or three weekends spent in active training. Part 3 is a period during which the scouter puts into practice what he or she has learned.

The experience of Wood Badge Training will have lasting memories. New friends are made and all with at least one thing in common—scouting.

Participants will be better

trained from this course and in one year will be able to take part 2.

Participants in the Colony section were Pick Boychuk, Susan Grierson, David Hughes, Elgan Hyatt, Tim Jackson, Fred Maiezza, Dave McGourty, Dianne Pantin, Sue Perlman.

Participants in the Cub section were Paul Alexander, Ed Burton, Mike McCallum and Iris Stiehl.

Participants in the Scout section were Lynn Clark, Dave DuBreuil, Gery Frei, Alex Furness, George Stull, Phil Wilson and Clive Midwinter.