

**Third Edition
2005**

CHAPTER ONE

Tuesday, March 17th, 1992

Today we awoke to cloudy skies, but soon the sun appeared and we knew that we could look forward to a bright and cheerful trip with a happy ending. It will be the fruition of a thirty year search and suddenly.... tomorrow was here! All the heartaches and all the emotional ups and downs were at an end.... it was a brand new beginning. It was a beginning that should have happened over forty-three years ago.....

CHAPTER TWO

When Karren was but four years old, she had tiptoed silently down the stairs from her bedroom, to see the tricycle that Santa Claus had left for her. There it was, red and white, standing by the brightly-lit fireplace. She glanced quickly around the room and saw that she was alone. Stealthily she crept over and sat on it. She remembers this moment as though it happened yesterday... she also remembers that tears were running down her face and that she was sobbing.

She can hear her parents in the kitchen.....

'What are they saying?'

'What's the problem?'

'Something was definitely wrong!'

What indeed were they saying?

What could have upset a little four year old girl so much, that over forty years later she can still remember it crystal clear?

Could it be that even at that age, she knew that something was desperately wrong with her parents?

It was nine years later.

Karren is now thirteen years old and she overhears a conversation between her Aunt Ruth and her Uncle Fred, that every kid alive would dread the thought of. Again, she can still remember that night as though it was yesterday.

Ruth was saying, "Mon shouldn't allow Jimmy to treat Karren the way he does, she didn't ask to be adopted into the family, so he should protect her a little more". She paused and then continued, "I don't agree with the way Mon's handling it and if he doesn't tell her soon, I'm going to do it".

'Adoption?', Karren thought.

'What do they mean?'

'Could they be talking about ME?'

'Why me?'

**She spent a sleepless night, tossing and turning, constantly dreaming of that dreadful conversation and continually asking herself....
'WHY?'**

And then, a few night's later, she suddenly thought to herself, 'could this have anything to do with that baby book I found in the attic?' She had been looking for baby pictures of herself for a school project.

Her Dad had sure acted strange when she asked questions about this baby.

"Don't ask questions," he had said, "and put that book back and never open it again!"

He was furious.

'Why?'

She had flown upstairs to her room in tears.

'Who was it?' she asked herself.

'Who had been born on December 7th, 1947?'

'Who was this baby who had looked, quote: "Just like Mon with brown hair and blue eyes"?'.

'Why was this normally wonderful Father, treating her like this and why wouldn't he answer her questions?'

And so it went on, week after week, festering in her mind as she bottled up those nightmare recollections. That was, until three months later, while having a typical teenage tantrum following a fight with her brother, Jimmy, she blurted out to her Father, "I don't have to do what you tell me, you're not my father, anyhow".

"What do you mean?", he replied.

"Well, I'm not your daughter and Jimmy's not my brother, so I can fight with him all I want!", she cried.

Her Father didn't realize, as he was breaking up this typical brother/sister fight, that there was three months of brooding, three months of anger and three months of all those unwanted recollections to deal with. He quietly sat her down on the chesterfield and tried to explain to her that she was indeed adopted and that she was, quote: "a chosen baby"... a phrase she still

detests to this day. Then he told her that both she and Jimmy were adopted! Both were given the same birth date and raised as twins, as both babies were about the same size, even though Jimmy was over three months the elder. Her Father also said, in an effort to make her feel better, that he and her mother, Lois-Ann, had paid the sum of \$1,000 each for both she and Jimmy. This made things even worse, to think that she had been bought. He tried to explain to her that the money was for medical bills etc., but it was no use. It was a devastating day for Karren. She crawled up stairs to her room sobbing and cried herself to sleep, feeling very much alone in the world.

That night, thirty years ago, she vowed:

**“IF IT’S THE LAST THING I EVER DO,
I WILL FIND MY MOTHER!”.**

CHAPTER THREE

We had driven to the Vancouver International Airport, parked the car and waited to board the plane. We were to take a shuttle flight to Seattle to change planes. When we finally arrived in the Emerald City, it was a typical northwest day of dreary skies and heavy drizzle. We had left the sunny skies of British Columbia behind.

'A two and a half-hour wait', they tell us - just enough time for Karren to get apprehensive and to wonder what tomorrow will bring. Time to sit back and recall what happened over forty years ago.....

CHAPTER FOUR

It was early July 1947, in post war Seattle, that a young twenty-one year old girl entered the maternity home. She was very frightened and very alone and such a long way from her family and friends. The baby was due in the first week of December and this was where she was to spend her confinement for the next several months. Nobody knew she was going to have this baby, except for her Father and he had made all the arrangements for her to stay in this home. He also had talked her into having this baby adopted. Life was very unpleasant there, made even more so by the owner. As each day went by, she hated her and the home more.

December was fast approaching now and just last week she had talked her Dad into letting her keep the baby and bringing it home. For the first time in weeks she was happy, as there was now, so much to look forward to and it made the loneliness so much easier to bear.

The elation of bringing the baby home however, was short lived, as on December 7th, the baby came into the world, but was pronounced dead at birth. She was devastated and returned home with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

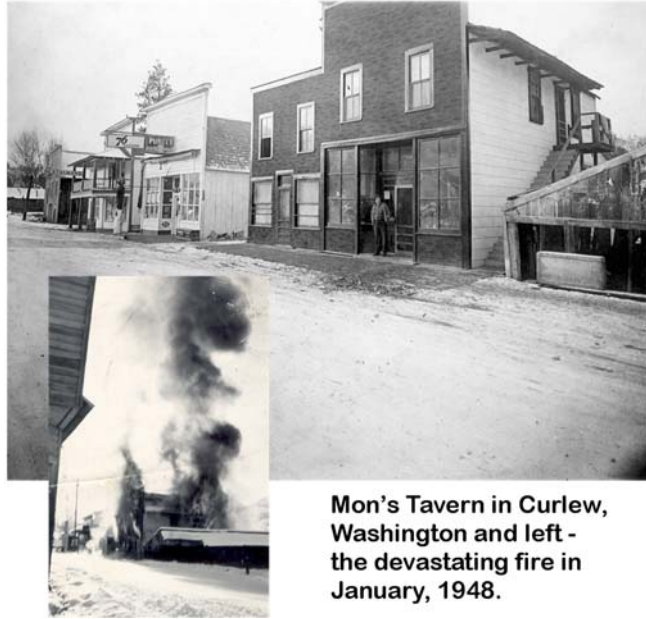
The wait for our flight connection is over and we boarded our plane for the trip to Los Angeles. The weather, they promise us, will be better there, as it is now pouring with rain at the Sea-Tac airport. We soar into the sky and into the inevitable sunshine above the clouds. Mount Ranier looks magnificent, as it's crest juts out of the clouds making for an incredible sight.

Karren closes her eyes, laying her head back on the headrest and inhales the warmth of the sun through the window. Once again her mind goes back in time, remembering how it had all started so many years ago.....

CHAPTER SIX

Christmas 1947, Karren arrives home, the Almstrom home, for the first time with her Mother Lois-Ann. Her Father, Monroe, and her twin brother, Jimmy, welcome her to Curlew, a little border town, northwest of Spokane on the Washington/British Columbia border. Monroe, or Mon as everyone called him, ran the local bar in town called 'Mon's Tavern'. The family had rooms in the back where they all lived, until that dreadful night, one month later, when the tavern burnt to the ground. It was a cold, snowy January night. Lois-Ann was in the process of lighting the propane stove when suddenly it exploded in her face. She was stunned and slumped to the floor. Across the street at the local store, Bill Helphrey the owner, saw smoke coming from the corner of the tavern. He ran across the street and told Mon and together they found Lois-Ann and managed to pull her to safety. By now the fire was raging and there was no way to get into the nursery for the twins. Fortunately, there was an outside door into the nursery, which was located at the rear of the tavern. Together, Mon and Bill, were able to reach the children and get them to safety. Neither Karren nor Jimmy was hurt, but Lois-Ann had to be taken to hospital where she recovered from her burns.

It was learned later, that the fire insurance on the tavern had not been renewed. They lost everything in the fire and times now for the family were to be very hard. Mon was forced to seek employment in other fields. which included logging, mining and even for a time as a fire warden.



Mon's Tavern in Curlew,
Washington and left -
the devastating fire in
January, 1948.

CHAPTER SEVEN

*"Would you like a snack, Ma'am?"
Karren startled herself awake.
It was the airline hostess with the food tray.
"Yes, please", she answered.
It seemed to her that hours had passed by, but in
reality it was only about fifteen minutes.
Together, we ate our biscuits and cheese,
swallowed an ice-cold coke, before once again
laying our heads back to rest....."*

CHAPTER EIGHT

It is now four year's later - September 1951.

Mon and Lois-Ann have moved across the border to Grand Forks, British Columbia. Mon had secured a job there logging and the schooling was better for the 'twins'.

Grand Forks is just a stone's throw from Curlew. It was a sleepy little town that had seen it's bonanza days many years before. At one time it had the largest copper smelter in the British Empire and had many railway lines leading into town. Hotels were in abundance everywhere, as people came to make their fortunes. But that was way back when and in 1951 (as it is today) Grand Forks was just another nice little interior town. Karren and Jimmy grew and started school and things around the Almstrom family began to improve with regular pay checks coming in.

In 1956, tragedy once again reared its ugly head. The 'twins' were only eight years old, when Lois-Ann fell ill and died in her sleep at the age of fifty-one. It was a heart attack they said. Mon was devastated by this turn of events and although in the years that followed he looked after the 'twins' to the best of his abilities, raising two children that young, was very difficult. His sister, Ruth, would come to stay during the summer months, while his other sisters, Esther and Virgie, across the line in Northport, Washington, added their support. Mon by now was in and out of work and the money began to dry up, making life very difficult. Karren and Jimmy would make frequent trips to the family ranch in Northport, run by Esther and her husband, Bill, where both the 'twins' had many happy days at play.

Two years later, when Karren was ten, she went to live with her cousin Wayne, Esther's son, and his wife Betty in Arden, a little hiccup in the road, south of Colville, Washington. She stayed a year, completing her Grade 6 there, in a little one-room country school. Time however took its toll and she became homesick, so she then returned home to her father and brother in Grand Forks.

It was at this time during Grade 7, that she made the devastating discovery about her adoption. Although she had vowed at that time - "If it's the last thing I ever do, I will find my mother" - she also made a promise to her dad, that she would keep the adoption a secret from Jimmy.

The following year she returned to Wayne and Betty's home, where she studied for her Grade 8 at the David Thompson Junior Secondary School in Colville. These were good times for Karren with lots of happy memories from her days in the country. On her return to Grand Forks the next summer, her Aunt Ruth whisked her off to California for a three-month vacation. She was based in Escondido, where Ruth and her husband Eric Latty, had made their home after their marriage earlier that year. She had a great holiday visiting such places as Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, Balboa Park and Oceanside. Suddenly, at the end of August, Ruth packed up the household and moved north to Seattle, leaving Eric and her marriage behind. Karren then moved back to Grand Forks to finish her schooling.

Early the next year, with the winter's snow behind them, Karren found, (what turned out to be) the most important piece of information that her adoption search, would require. Of course, she didn't realize this at the time, but fortunately it stuck in her memory, to be reclaimed more than twenty-two years later!

It all started, not too surprisingly, with a dream. Karren had always had the most vivid dreams, sometimes scarily true, as in foreseeing the deaths of both Lois-Ann and her Uncle Fred. (Fred Gotbehuit was Aunt Ruth's new fiance).

(In other more recent dreams, she has actually visited with Lois-Ann and Mon, who in the dreams, are leading normal 'living' lives. She has also held intelligent conversations with them, all the time knowing full well that they are dead and most certainly could not talk to her.)

And so it was, five years after Lois-Ann had died that Karren had the dream.

Her mother came to her bedroom and Karren asked her about the adoption. Lois-Ann told her to go downstairs to her bedroom and in the top drawer of her dresser, under the newspaper lining, were the documents she was seeking.

The dream ended, but that little bit of information has consistently stuck in her mind. The next morning she investigated. Karren remembers this morning very clearly. It was bright and early. Nobody was around. Stealthily, she crept into Lois-Ann's old bedroom. Sure enough it was there exactly where her mother had told her it would be. There was a large, white envelope. She opened it and found two sets of papers. Quickly, she glanced through the documents.

On one, it had the words: 'said child, Taber'.
On the other: 'said child, Dale'.

She put them both back into the envelope and replaced it under the newspaper lining.
'Now I have something to work with', she thought, 'I'll leave them here until I need them'.

That was a big mistake, as that was first and the last time she ever saw those papers.

**Karren, Jimmy
& Mon- 1948**



**Karren, Jimmy
& Santa - 1951**



**Karren & Jimmy
1954**



Karren 1957



CHAPTER NINE

“Fasten your seat belts, please”. The stewardess’s voice came over the loud speaker system.

We are just coming into Los Angeles International Airport. The sun was out and it was a lovely March afternoon. We rented our car and joined the evening rush hour traffic on our way to Palm Springs. The traffic was heavy all the way through San Bernardino, but then eased off, leaving just the drone of the car to make Karren’s eyes heavy.....