

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The California dessert had completely engulfed us now, with its inevitable sand, rocks, cactus and brush - and all the time the mountains were in the distance!

Suddenly, with very little advance warning, we were on top of the State Line and the border checkpoint. We were held up for only about two or three minutes, then we were on our way again.

We were now in Arizona and we looked at each other and realized that we weren't far now from our historic meeting.

Karren was driving now, so that I could take some movies of our trip through the dessert.....

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

We are on our now - Jane did her searching and we did ours. Our first step was to buy a book on the Taber family history. This duly arrived and to our dismay it came with 2,597 addresses of people in the United States and Canada with the name Taber. 480 of those people resided in the states of Washington, Oregon and California. We couldn't believe how many Tabers there were, but through some sort of elimination, mainly guess work; we started writing to Tabers all over the North American continent.

One of those letters led us to a wonderful couple named Reese and Bess Taber, who live in Ferndale, Washington. Karren and I traveled down to see them on several occasions after the initial contact. They had telephoned us on receiving one of our 'search' letters and although they didn't know of a Bernita Taber, if we'd like to come down and visit, they might be able to help, or at least give us some Taber history.



Bess & Reese Taber

Some of the listings in the Taber book also gave us phone numbers and our phone bill got quite a work out.

One of those calls was to San Bernardino in California. The answerer referred us to her ex-husband, who said after contacting him, that he had a cousin named Bernita Taber. He said he had to locate her phone number and would call back with the information. Shortly, he returned the call and we made that call to Rialto, California. As you can imagine, our hearts were

beating ten to the dozen as we waited for her to reply.

She was a very nice lady, with three sons, the eldest of which was born in January of 1949. She told us that she had been born in 1929 in Michigan and had moved to California in 1977. When she described herself it included the fact that she had red hair, which fitted in with the description Mon had given Karren. (He had always claimed that her mother had red hair). Everything she told us fitted, except for the fact that she did not have a baby in 1947.

This was quite a set back for us. To think that we had located a Bernita Taber - two most unusual names especially put together - and to find out it was not the right person.

This was a big blow!

We thought of this person many times over the next few months, wondering if she was really telling us the truth, or did she want her past hidden? So many things jived - the right age, the right colour hair, the fact that her first born was just over a year after Karren was born and most importantly, she had the right name. We kept wondering, could this possibly be - our Bernita?

Most of the other returned letters claimed not to have any information, although many were very nice and offered either help or were very supportive. All in all, of those written to, about 50% returned a reply.

The summer of 1984, proved to be a lucky one for us, as Karren won the first prize on a raffle ticket. Air flight plus accommodation for two in Waikiki, Hawaii for two weeks was the windfall. We were very excited about our win and we took that trip in October and had one very interesting occurrence take place while we were there.

Before we had left, Karren was looking through

her Taber book and found the address and phone number of a Taber living in Oahu. So we decided to look him up and met with him at his office in downtown Honolulu. His name was William Rhett Taber and he and his family came from the state of Georgia and he went on to tell us a most interesting and fascinating story.

Apparently, his family was a descendant from whom the novel 'Gone with the Wind' was based on. The character, Rhett Butler, was supposedly taken from one of his ancestors, namely Rhett Taber. This Rhett Taber then married into the 'Ashley' family (another family in the book) and his branch became the Ashley-Taber line. He continued with many stories and he made them sound very authentic. He even looked the part, as he was dressed very elegantly and acted in a most debonair way, almost to the point of re-enacting the role made famous by Clark Gable. We left his office having been wonderfully entertained, not really knowing whether the stories we had heard were true or not, but knowing full well that he was not part of the Tabers we were looking for.

Another of my scathingly brilliant ideas (!) came as a result of that trip. Karren didn't have a passport for the flight to Hawaii, taking only her birth certificate and her landed immigration papers as identification. When the customs officer saw the difference in the birth dates, our trip was almost in jeopardy. Luckily, we were able to satisfy him as to her legality and much to our relief, let us pass and onto the plane.

The problem that this caused, gave me the idea, that if we applied for Karren's American passport it might cause problems with her two differing birth dates in her identification and therefore might help us with our search. We duly made our way to the American Consulate in downtown Vancouver, B.C., to make the application. You can just imagine how stunned we were when they accepted both papers, no questions asked and processed her request.

We were even more stunned, two weeks later, when the passport arrived! We just couldn't believe that it was so easy to get an American passport, especially with two differing pieces of identification.....

Stumped again!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

On and on we traveled through the Arizona dessert, mile after mile of nothing but wasteland. We kept trying the radio dial to find a station that would come in clearly. Suddenly, loud and clear, came the strains of 'All I have to do is dream', the old Everly Brothers classic hit from the fifties. We had found a golden oldies station that was transmitting from Phoenix.

We changed positions again and I resumed the driving. We knew we weren't far away now.....

CHAPTER TWENTY

Several months later with no news coming from Seattle and the inevitable depression setting in, Karren spotted, while in the book store next to where she worked, a magazine called 'People Finders'. The magazine was mainly devoted towards adopted people, which instantly caught her attention. She was fascinated by the stories and read all the advertisements, just in case something pertained to her. Weeks past by and finally she decided she was going to put her own ad in it. We composed a simple little two-line ad, which read:

TABER: Bernita. Need info. I was born at Bess Gilroy home, Seattle, Washington, 1947

Over the next few months, we received three replies. The first, was a letter from a little old lady from Massachusetts, who wrote with very shaky handwriting. She had no information to offer, but wanted to wish Karren good luck with her search. It was a nice little letter and gave us encouragement.

The second was a phone call from Medford, Oregon. A Bud Loftus was interested in information about Karren's birthing in the Bess Gilroy home, as his mother also had given birth there and he was trying to find his sister. Several letters and photographs were exchanged, to no avail. They weren't related.

The final reply was from a William Fisher who lived in Puyallup, Washington and his letter turned out to be very informative. After the initial exchange of letters, he sent newspaper cuttings from the 1948 Seattle Times and The Post-Intelligencer. It contained articles on the arrest, trial and conviction, as well as the subsequent imprisonment of one BESS GILROY! It was the same Bess Gilroy who had owned and operated the maternity home that Karren had been born in. Fisher also had records and documentations dating back to the 1930's, copies of which he

sent to us, as well as letters from other 'Gilroy' babies. We read the articles from the newspapers and couldn't believe what we were reading. It turned out that Mrs. Gilroy had been dealing in BLACK MARKET BABIES!

She had the girls spend their last few months of their pregnancy in her home, then after birth, arranging their adoption. Apparently, all the records, if in deed there ever were any records kept by Mrs. Gilroy, were all destroyed, making the trace of any of hundreds of 'Gilroy babies', next to impossible.

Can you imagine how Karren felt after reading this?

"Me, a Black Market Baby!?"

But she knew it was probably true, because Mon had told her that, he and Lois-Ann had paid \$1,000 each for her and Jimmy.

The following are parts of newspaper clips we received:

'Baby Brokerage' Facts Revealed Before Court

WOMAN BOOKED IN BABY CASE

Pests Bond



MRS. BESS E. GILROY
Accused in Baby Case

'Baby Market' Facts Revealed In Court

(Second of Series)
By William Schulse

Half the time the parents of girls who dispose of illegitimate children through a Seattle "baby market" don't know their daughters are in tragic difficulties.

This is one of the little-known facts about unwed mothers laid bare earlier this month in juvenile court hearings on a "baby brokerage business" operated by Mrs. Bess E. Gilroy at 1129 18th Ave.

Judge Long Astounded Over 'Baby Mart' Case

"One of the most astounding situations ever brought to the attention of this court," is the way Superior Judge William G. Long described a "baby market" case Friday which he had tried in King County Juvenile Court.

"For the last 16 years, petitioner, Bess E. Gilroy, has been operating a so-called 'Maternity Homes' for unmarried mothers," Judge Long said in a memorandum decision. Mrs. Gilroy, whose home is at 1129 18th Ave., reported a certain baby could not be placed for adoption because of its physical condition and asked that it be made a ward of the court and be supported by the state.

"From her (Mrs. Gilroy's) description of her plan of operation, the institution might be more accurately called a 'Baby Market' or a 'Baby Exchange Business,'" Judge Long said in his decision.

ARGUMENT—

"Those who contend or attempt to justify the maternity home business, as exemplified by that of Mrs. Gilroy, may argue," Judge Long said, "that it would be inequitable to hold her responsible for the support of this unadoptable baby on the ground that she is rendering a commendable and necessary community social service to unfortunate girls.

"But the invalidity of such argument would seem to appear from the fact that right now the people of King County are conducting the annual campaign of raising funds for the Community Chest which supports those publicly-approved agencies that provide fully adequate services for all such unfortunate girls.

"Under these circumstances, there just is no social necessity whatever for the commercialized maternity care of unwed girls or the commercialized placement of their babies.

"Accordingly, with reference to this specific case, if Mrs. Gilroy enjoys the profits derived from disposing of adoptable babies, is it not equitable (at least as between her and those who pay taxes) that she be charged for the expenses of caring for this de-

fective one which she has turned over for public care?"

Judge Long found, in his decision, that Mrs. Gilroy advertises in the newspapers, offering free care for expectant unmarried mothers. In 1943 she obtained 34 such "customers," Judge Long said, and up to September 7, 1949, she had obtained 30.

"When these expectant mothers come to the maternity home, arrangements are made in advance that they will turn over their babies to Mrs. Gilroy for placement for adoption to whatever persons that Mrs. Gilroy in her discretion may select," Judge Long continued.

HEARINGS NEED—

The court found that, from Mrs. Gilroy's testimony, "she is able to pay for the support of this child."

Judge Long's decision followed lengthy and exhaustive hearings in juvenile court, beginning last May 18. When a Post-Intelligencer reporter appeared in juvenile court September 7 to take notes on the proceedings, Ronald W. Meier, attorney for Mrs. Gilroy, objected strenuously that the hearings were "closed," and "confidential."

"We have a rule here," said Judge Long, "that the press is welcome in any case where the court feels that the presence of the press doesn't embarrass the child or its family." (The Post-Intelligencer is not revealing the name or address of the child or its mother).

In calling the attention of the Gilroy case to Prosecutor Charles E. Carroll, who subsequently filed criminal charges, Judge Long cited a state law requiring a certificate of approval from the state director of business control for homes such as her's, and that such homes make reports to the director. Mrs. Gilroy testified she has no such certificate and has made no such reports. She does have, she said, a license from the state health department.

Although some of the writing in the photocopy is indistinguishable, the general idea of the articles is obvious. We also received copies of her Warrant, her check for bail and a copy of the Judgment.

We sent this information down to Jane in Seattle, but many months went, after the Gilroy discovery, with very little contact with her. We did very little searching during this time and Jane had hit a brick wall too. However, some time later, she was at a meeting, when she was introduced to a lady sitting across the table from her, named Bernita. Jane's interest was immediately peaked, especially when she looked somewhat like Karren. With so few people named Bernita, she initiated a conversation. She learned that she was Bernita White and that her maiden name was Barr. She had arrived in Vancouver, Washington to marry a Curtis White and now lived in Olympia, Washington. Jane and Bernita arranged to meet again the next week at another meeting. Jane was excited and called Karren with the news.

You can imagine the excitement; everyone was bubbling with enthusiasm.

Bernita failed to show for that meeting, so Jane called her to follow up her investigation. She later found out that she had been born in Saskatchewan, Canada and that she had moved to Vancouver, B.C., as a youth. She won a nursing scholarship there and after graduating, moved to Seattle, Washington. During the course of this conversation, Jane found out that she had worked for a doctor who was apparently trafficking in babies. She seemed to think that one of the 'mothers' had used her name. Jane was really getting excited now, but just when everything was beginning to fit into place, it all came crashing down. She discovered that this Bernita spelt her name with a U, instead of an E. Thus Burnita. Although she did follow-ups on this lady, it was obvious to Jane that this was not the person we were looking for.

The reports from Jane were now getting far and few between and it was a long eight months before she got her next lead. She wrote Karren, saying that she had located two marriage licenses for TWO Bernita Tabers in the state and place of her mother's birth and that she had sent away for these. Also in the letter, she said that she had found three death certificates of Tabers, who could be her grandparents. She would investigate further. (We never did learn what happened to that part of the investigation, but obviously it was yet another dead end.)

This was the beginning of a very quiet period in our search, every phone call to Jane, was always answered with the 'no luck yet' response. A big black cloud now hung over the subject of 'the search'.

We began grasping at straws and started finding something positive in almost every conceivable situation. It even came down to looking for a person who looked like Karren! When we found one, we would ask each other the question "Is that your Mom?" or "Could that be my Mom?". You can just imagine how ridiculous this became and we too, saw the funny side of it and it almost became a game. Somehow, it seemed to relieve the tension of the situation.

One night, Karren had one of her famous dreams. She actually put a face to her birth father. This was; of course, just fiction, but it triggered memories of a night many years before, when she was living with Frank. She related the story to me:

Frank was into a bottle that night with a friend of Mon's called Howard Sipple. During this binge, the story emerged from Howard, that Karren's older brother, Paul, (the son of Lois-Ann from her previous marriage), was Karren's father. Frank told her of this revelation the next morning and she immediately called Mon. He was vacationing

in Sitka, Alaska with his niece, Nondyce (Ruth's youngest daughter) and her husband, Ray Minstrell.

Of course, Mon's reply was predictable. "Don't be silly, there's no truth to it," he said, furiously. "Don't believe anything Howard has to say," he raged, "especially when he's been drinking".

Karren didn't believe him, based on his past performances when asked questions on that subject. So she went to one of Mon's old cronies, a Morris Peterson, a Grand Forks resident and posed the same question to him. He confirmed Howard's story, that Paul was indeed, Karren's father. She didn't stop there. She went to Curlew and met with Bill Helphrey, the guy who had pulled the 'twins' out of the tavern fire, when they were just a few weeks old. Again she posed the same question - and again the story was confirmed. With three people now saying the same thing, she once more attacked Mon on his return from Alaska. But again, he steadfastly refused the story. Not to be denied, Karren called Bernice, Paul's ex-wife in Portland, Oregon to see if she had a phone number or address for Paul. Bernice said she did have a phone number and got in touch with Paul, who in turn then called Karren. She invited him to come to Grand Forks on the pretense of seeing an ailing Mon.

During this waiting period, Karren's imagination started working overtime. 'Could Paul possibly be her father?', she continually asked herself.

Three weeks later, Paul arrived in Grand Forks to the delight of Karren, but to the extreme displeasure of Mon. It seems as though there must have been a big argument between the two many years before and they had not spoken or seen each other for over twenty years. In fact, the last time had been at

the funeral for Lois-Ann. After the funeral, it was discovered, when the will had been read; that his mother had only left Paul the sum of \$1. (Maybe that was the trouble between them. We have never found this out).

An argument ensued between Karren and Mon and it was several days before relations between Mon and Paul warmed. During this period of warming, Karren took Paul for a car ride and told him of the stories, which had been told about him. He listened very intently but in the end, he never denied, nor accepted the fact, of his being her father. All he would say was, "If you can prove it, please do".

Karren ended her story to me and we decided to re-hash this whole scenario. We weren't getting anywhere with the search for her mother, so maybe we should look into this story of 'Paul being her father' and continue the search from that angle.

We had spoken to Aunt Ruth (Mon's eldest sister) many times about the adoption, so now we brought up the subject of Paul to her, but she couldn't help us. The same was true with conversations we had with her cousins, Ambrose and Francis. (Ruth's sons). We again visited with her cousin, Wayne (the son of Esther, Mon's sister) and his wife, Betty and posed the same question to them. Again, no luck. While in the Colville, Washington area, we decided to take a trip to the 'family ranch' in Northport. It was the scene of many childhood memories for Karren and we hoped it might re-ignite some old thought or recollection. The ranch had long been out of the family and indeed was up for sale again when we visited. It had changed a lot from Karren's early days, but we decided to take a walk around and look through some of the windows. I could tell she was re-living a most important part of her life, but unfortunately however, nothing came of this visit, just nice memories.



**Betty & Wayne
Covey
at Colville, Wa.** **Ruth Latty
at
Issaquah, Wa.**

We spoke again with Morris Peterson in Grand Forks, as well as Bill Helprey in Curlew and both re-iterated the same story they had given many years before. Bill went further by suggesting we get in touch with another old time Curlew resident, by the name of 'Speed' Brixner. A letter, followed by a visit to him, corroborated the stories of Messrs. Sipple, Peterson and Helprey.

Now was the time for Karren to write a letter to Paul and once again ask him the possibility of him being her father. But the same reply came back. "If you can prove it, please do". Surprisingly, later that year, Paul paid us a visit and he stayed with us for several days. It was a most enjoyable visit, but of course, the inevitable questions were asked. Only more of the same noncommittal answers came back.



Karren with Paul in 1986

A short time later, we made a trip to Portland, Oregon and stayed with her cousin, Ambrose and his wife, Dorris. During our stay, we also visited Paul's ex-wife, Bernice, to see if she could shed some light on the subject. The visit however, was short and the conversation brief and somewhat strained. She claimed she couldn't help us at all. As we were leaving, one thought kept gnawing at our minds, where she was concerned.

It was her name.

Bernice, like Bernita, was such an unusual name.

If Paul was indeed her father.....

and Bernice sure sounds a lot like Bernita.....

could there be a connection?

Maybe, just maybe, Bernice could be Karren's mother!

Questions, questions.... and never any answers.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

"Sun City, next exit", Karren heard me say.

The wasteland of the Arizona dessert was beginning to change a little. We had gone through endless miles of barren land, saguro cactus, dried-up riverbeds and as usual, the inevitable mountains in the distance. Human life was beginning to enter the scenery, especially in the form of many, huge advertising billboards on the side of the freeway. They were promoting numerous hotels, motels, R.V. parks, restaurants and various entertainment spots in the general area.

Civilization was now upon us and we took our turning northward.

"Sun City, here we come!"

We were close, oh! so close.