

Preface

The story of baby deaths and black-market adoptions in Nova Scotia surfaced in the fall of 1988, when Malcolm Phillips, a reporter with a local paper on the South Shore, contacted the CBC television newsroom in Halifax. He said he knew of a secret baby burial ground in the area, and that babies buried there had died of neglect at the Ideal Maternity Home more than fifty years earlier. People in the Chester area had told Phillips about the burial ground, but he felt the story was too legally sensitive for him to write about. As a reporter with CBC Television News at the time, I was assigned the story.

My research put me in touch with numerous people who had been connected with the Home. Over a period of months I travelled across Canada and the United States to find women who had stayed there and who had been born there. Some of the people I located — acquaintances of Lila and William, former employees, adoptive parents and birth parents — were reluctant to talk about their experiences. They have been given pseudonyms and appear in this book as Stella Mulgrave, Vivian Brown, Anna MacKenna, Eleanor Marriott, Kate Davidson, Freda MacLaren, Mary Barton and Cyril Covey. The identities of other valuable sources will remain private, as requested.

Stella Mulgrave, an elderly woman living in Chester Basin and a former employee at the Maternity Home, confided in me about “atrocities” she had witnessed there, but was afraid to be interviewed at length. Throughout the course of my research, I spoke with Stella on the phone several times and visited her once, briefly. She was always edgy, always reluctant

to talk. Finally, she agreed to an in-depth interview, but before it took place, I received a phone call from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Chester asking that I have no further contact with Stella. Someone had threatened to harm her if she spoke to me. As I drove past Stella's house on my next visit to Chester I noticed I was being followed. I decided Stella's safety should come first and abandoned the interview idea. Stella's experiences at the Ideal Maternity Home have never been told.

The toughest interview was with Joy Young, Lila and William's daughter, who lives in a small fishing village outside of Halifax. Tormented all her life by allegations against her parents, she was not surprisingly unwilling to be interviewed. I visited Joy on a cold winter morning in January 1989. For two hours we sat uncomfortably at her kitchen table sipping tea and making conversation. She finally opened up, but so feared publicity that she asked that certain statements remain off the record. I have respected her wishes.

During my research I read countless newspaper clippings, court documents, letters and other valuable material. Unfortunately, the Youngs' personal papers and adoption records were lost in a fire in 1962, so details about the Home's operations, particularly in the early years, have been lost. My research was made easier, however, by the discovery of papers in the walls of the East Chester Inn, Lila and William Young's former residence. In 1989, in the midst of renovations, workmen found an assortment of bills and letters written to the Youngs years ago by girls who stayed at the Ideal Maternity Home. Some letters, on thin, yellowed paper, were barely legible; others provided valuable information. Many of the letters and documents contain spelling and grammatical errors; they appear unchanged in this book.

The Public Archives of Nova Scotia offered a wide range of documents, including the Youngs' advertising brochures from the 1930s and 1940s. These pamphlets yielded crucial insights as well as photographs of the Youngs, their supporters and the

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Maternity Home. In the absence of certain trial records, I relied on newspaper stories and archival documents to help re-create the court cases. For the 1947 libel trial, for example, I took advantage of almost verbatim testimony in the daily newspapers.

But in the end it was the cooperation and assistance of the people throughout Canada and the United States who survived the Ideal Maternity Home that made the telling of this story possible. To those men and women I wish to convey my most sincere appreciation.

— Bette L. Cahill
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Prologue

A young woman in Nova Scotia gives birth to a child out of wedlock. A childless couple in New Jersey desperately searches for a baby to adopt. These people never meet. But their lives become forever linked through a tiny baby girl. Natalie, that baby, spent the first two years of her life at the Ideal Maternity Home on Canada's rocky east coast. She was adopted in August 1945 by Louis and Mabel Goldman of Newark. Her father was a lawyer, her mother a teacher, both loving parents who called Natalie their chosen child.

Natalie was only six and living with her parents in Maplewood, New Jersey, when she threatened to run away and find her birth mother. It was then that her mother informed her that her biological mother had died when she was an infant and her father, a pilot, was killed in a plane crash during the war.

In the years that followed, Natalie learned to keep silent about how she imagined the Queen of England to be her mother, how she had nightmares in which her "real" mother would snatch her away from the only parents she had ever known, how she longed for a photograph that would let her see herself in another's face. Natalie grew up hiding feelings of abandonment and guilt, loss and sorrow.

As a mother of two in her early fifties and living in New Jersey, Natalie finally decided to confront her past. She hired a private investigator, who, in a short time, delivered the devastating news that Natalie's birth mother was dead. Violet Hamilton had been living in New Brunswick and had died just eleven years earlier, in 1986. "The pain of that loss was overwhelming.

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There had been a window of opportunity when I could have known her, if only I had searched earlier.”

Joy began to overshadow pain when Natalie learned that after fifty-three years she no longer had to consider herself an only child. Four of Violet’s children, three brothers and a sister, still lived in Canada.

Natalie felt as though she had won the Olympic gold four times over, one medal for each sibling. Natalie, it turned out, was the baby of the family. Before long, telephone lines were buzzing, photos were exchanged and meetings arranged. Natalie says the real treasure for her was finding her older sister Shirley, who, when she learned about Natalie, got in her car and drove directly to New Jersey, where the two spent the July 4th holiday together. “She became my sister, my mother, my best friend, my confidant. I cherish her to this day.”

The sisters kept in touch and met again the following month, at the 1997 reunion of survivors of the Ideal Maternity Home in Nova Scotia. “In Canada, I found myself,” she says, a

ORIGINAL
TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

No. 6886825

Petition No. 88991

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth September 26, 1943 sex female
complexion fair color of eyes hazel color of hair brown height 3 feet 9 inches
weight 44 pounds visible distinctive marks none
Marital status Single former nationality Canadian

I certify that the description above given is true and that the photograph offered heretofore is that of myself.

Natalie Goldman
Jane Louise Goldman
Mabel Nease Goldman
(Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

Be it known, that at a term of the
The United States District Court
held pursuant to law at Newark
on June 12th, 1950
NATALIE GOLDMAN
the Court having found that
she residing at 14 Rynda Road, Maplewood, N. J.
and desiring to reside permanently in the United States (to whom required by the
Naturalization laws of the United States) had in all other respects complied with
the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be
admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and she was
admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 12th
day of June in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and
and seventy-fourth.

WILLIAM H. TALLEY,
Clerk of the U. S. District Court
By *St. Johannes* Deputy Clerk.

It is a violation of the U. S. Code and
punishable as such to copy from photograph
or otherwise illegally use this certificate.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Document confirming Natalie Hamilton’s U.S. citizenship, issued in 1950, when she was seven.



Natalie Hamilton's reunion with her family in Nova Scotia in August 1997. Left to right: David, Shirley, Jim, Natalie and Kenny.

little teary-eyed, “and I think that’s where I was. I was always there.” While in Chester, Natalie visited the Casa Blanca Guest Home and discovered Mabel Goldman’s name in an old registry. The elderly owner of the guest home, Isabel Marshall, told Natalie how adoptive parents walked between rows of cribs — girls on one side, boys on the other — and picked out their babies as if they were picking out apples at the supermarket.

Natalie paid tribute to her past by laying a wreath of violets and roses at a monument to all of the Ideal Maternity Home babies, living and dead. The violets represented her birth mother’s name, the roses her adoptive mother’s favourite flower. After the memorial dedication, Natalie watched her sister Shirley wander off alone toward the adjacent property, where the Ideal Maternity Home once stood. “I was crying for myself because of all I had gone through,” Natalie recalls. “I had tears of sadness and joy. My sister was crying silently, not for herself, but for our mother and all she had gone through as a young woman forced to give up her baby and dying so many years later, never knowing what happened to her.”

Natalie’s three brothers also attended the reunion in Chester that summer. They comforted her as she shed fifty-three years worth of tears. She had finally come home to confront her new reality. “Well little girl,” her eldest brother said, “it took you a very long time, but you finally found your way home.”