

Phone call opens bridge to the past

George Gamester

So here's George Faulkner minding his own business up in Port Elgin, and the phone rings.

"Hello," he says.

It was fate calling, person-to-person.

Sounds corny, doesn't it?

Well, read George's story.

Then you be the judge.

We begin in Stratford, Ont. The fall of 1909.

A 12-year-old from England, Arthur Faulkner, has been placed in an orphanage called Miss MacPherson's Home with a farmer in Alberton named James Stewart.

This is the deal: Stewart will provide room, board, clothes and schooling for Arthur until he is 14. In return, Arthur will do whatever farm work Mr. Stewart requires.

Sounds like a kind of slavery. But that's how it worked in Edwardian times, when thousands of homeless British children found new lives in Canada as "Dr. Barnardo Boys and Girls."

But six months after Arthur arrives, James Stewart dies.

Now the boy has to move on. The dead farmer's 8-year-old daughter is sorry to see him go.

She likes him. And will never forget him.

When World War I breaks out, young Arthur Faulkner enlists to do his bit.

The lad is badly wounded on the Western Front, and he will never regain full health.

He marries and fathers three children. The youngest, George Faulkner, is born in Hamilton in 1921.

Arthur has had a rough life. His wife dies young. His war wounds keep him in and out of Christie St. Hospital. He drinks and smokes a lot.

Meanwhile, a pleasant young woman named Janet becomes a kindergarten teacher in Hamilton.

A spunky type, proud of her Scottish heritage, she keeps track of Arthur but does not contact him directly.

Janet finally marries a wealthy widower when she's in her 50s. Her husband leaves her well off.

Last December, Janet dies. Hamilton lawyer Douglas McCallum is executor of her will.

"One of her bequests was \$10,000 to each of the three children of Arthur Faulkner, who died in 1969," McCallum says.

"I had no idea where they might be, so we called Terry Howes."

Terry Howes is a delightful character. An Etobicoke-based sleuth whose business is called Locator of Missing Heirs.

He discovered that only one of the Faulkner children was still living—in Port Elgin. That unsuspecting fellow was entitled to \$10,000—less finder's fee.

Which brings us to that phone call.

"Quite a surprise," says George, a 69-year-old Bell Canada prisoner.

"Imagine. That farmer's daughter, Janet Stewart, leaving that money after all these years.

"She and my dad were friends, I guess. It's a bit of a mystery to me.

"But the odometer on my old '68 Monte Carlo has gone around three times, and I sure could use new wheels.

"Funny, how things happen."

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