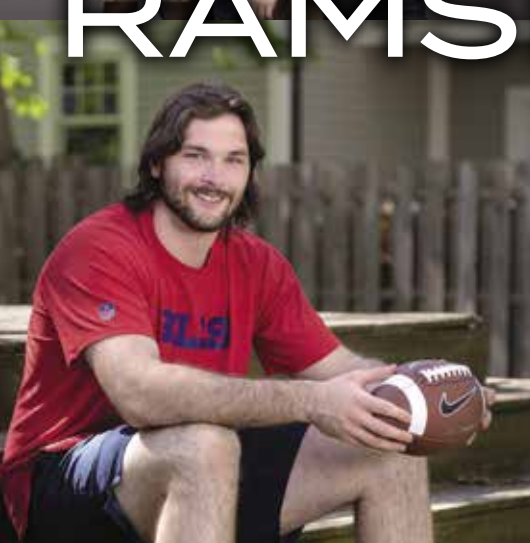


# RAMSEY Neighbors



AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE CONNECTING AND SERVING THE RESIDENTS OF RAMSEY

COVER PHOTOS BY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKY, CHRISTOPHER BOUDEWYNS, JENNY GRANT PHOTOGRAPHY & JENNIFER ROSE PEARL

APRIL 2022





# "I Called Her Mary"

## ONE FAMILY'S STORY OF FAITH, HOPE & LOVE

By Lauren DePaul Schreiber Photos by Kat Yannaflo, Photography by Sky

As it says on the back of the book, "I Called Her Mary" is a story of "faith hope and love." It is a family love story more than 70 years in the making, and one that was finally told after many years of thoughtful reflection.

Peg Holland became pregnant as a teenager in a conservative village in 1950s Ireland. Peg was poor, young, unwed and didn't have a lot of options. Her parents sent her to Sean Ross Abbey to deliver the baby. But after Peg returns home with her daughter, Mary, they are both shunned, outcast, and ridiculed. After a harrowing nine months, and faced with nothing but impossible choices, Peg makes the gut-wrenching decision to give Mary up for adoption, a sacrifice so that Mary can have a better life. With nothing left for her in Ireland, Peg leaves home and flees to America, where she works as an indentured servant for a family. She meets the love of her life, Mick, and together they raise four children. But Peg never forgets Mary and thinks of her every day. Then 50 years after Mary's birth, Peg receives a phone call that would change her life. Her daughter, Mary, was looking for her and wondered if she wanted to meet.

This incredible story found its way to the pages of Ramsey Neighbors by way of Peg's daughter, Margaret O'Hagan Gorman (Maggie), who is a gym teacher at Ramsey High School. Margaret and her husband Tom implored Peg for years to tell her inspirational story. Finally on Christmas Eve in 2015, Tom asked Peg one more time and she knew that she was ready. Her husband Mick had passed away, and she felt comfortable enough to share her story with others. Peg's memoir, "I Called Her Mary" is a compilation of interviews of Peg and Mary. Tom Gorman captured all the stories and authored the memoir. Mary, Peg's daughter who was given up for adoption, also tells her tale in the book. Ramsey Neighbors met Mary, Tom and Maggie on a windy day at Ramsey High School and was blown away by their collective tale of choices, consequences and happy endings.

### MARY BOLER

After her adoption, Mary was raised in GlenEllyn, IL in the western suburbs of Chicago. She now resides in the suburb of Wheaton, IL right next to Glen Ellyn. She graduated high school at Glenbard West Class in 1973 and went on to receive a BS in Education at Illinois State University. In 1978 Mary married Tom Boler.

Mary taught second grade for six years at St. Irene in Warrenville, IL. After giving birth to her first child, Meghan Elizabeth in 1984, she decided to stay home. Meghan was joined by her brother Alexander Thomas, in 1988. After ten years at home, Mary went back to teaching middle school at St. Matthew School in Glendale Heights, where she stayed until her recent retirement in 2019.



Today, Meghan is a teacher at St. Joseph School in Downers Grove, IL, and Alex is the Senior Director of Team Operations for the Chicago Fire Soccer Team. They are both married and have children. Meghan and Justin have a girl, age five and a boy, age two. Alex and Lea have a daughter, age one.

The family is true blue Chicago Bears fans. Sports is a big part of their lives with both Meghan and Alex competing in soccer and basketball in grade school and high school, then continuing on through college at Illinois State University and Indiana. Mary and Tom love to travel and took a life-changing trip to the Holy Land in October of 2021.

### HOW DID YOU COME TO FIND OUT YOU WERE ADOPTED?

Strangely, I came to know of my beginnings through a neighborhood kid. Thinking they were being smug and mean they blurted out that I was adopted, and my parents weren't my real parents. Of course, I went running home crying and my mom went running across the street to voice her opinion to the kids' parents. I really don't remember how they calmed me or told me, but I know that at the age of eight, they must have explained something to me because I never "felt" adopted, whatever that feeling may be. I always knew they loved me, and we had the same stresses parents have raising children. In fact, compared to my older brother Harry, who is quiet and calm, I feel I was more of a challenge for them than they were for me. They raised me to be the person I am today, and I think they did a great job. I actually loved to brag whenever I could about being born in Ireland, but as I matured, it became a cause for inner questions I would wonder about... Was my birth mother alive? If so, where did she live? Did she think about me? Do I have any siblings or cousins? But I never began my search until after both parents

had died, out of respect, I guess. The rest, as they say, is history born out of love and selflessness of a young girl who found herself faced with a life-altering decision at the age of seventeen.

### DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT SPECIFICALLY INSPIRED YOU TO BEGIN LOOKING FOR YOUR BIRTH MOTHER?

I don't know if I can pinpoint one particular reason I began the search. I know that I had many "what ifs" in my head. Are there any family health issues that I should know about for me or my children? Will she and her family want me in their lives? What would my family think? Is she well? Most importantly, I wanted her to know that what she did for me was the bravest and most selfless thing a person could have done. When I had my children, and the feelings I had about them, I knew it had to have been awful for my birth mom not knowing if I was ok and that she made the right decision. That is why it was important that I told her it was! I needed her to know that, and whatever followed I would handle.

### TELL US ABOUT THE FIRST TIME YOU MET YOUR FAMILY.

After my trip to Ireland in 2008, and my phone conversation with Peg and Mick, a decision was made by both families for an "in person" meeting in New Jersey for my sister Maggie's fortieth birthday! During the time between the phone call and the meeting, I would continue to talk to mom through phone and Skype. While we spoke, Mick would stick his head into the screen and say hi, and if any of my siblings were there, they'd give me a shout out. But most of the time was Peg and I getting to know each other. It was so special. Every call or email ended with an "I love you so much" ALWAYS.

The day I finally arrived, and I boarded the plane at Midway airport bound for Newark Airport, I remember sitting on the plane, and occasionally looking around at people thinking, "If only they knew where I was going and why, and how my life was about to change!" I stepped off the plane and began the walk to the area where my family would be. I had my phone out with my hand shaking. I finally approached the opening and there they were. I turned to my right, and there stood the woman who had wondered every single day for fifty-two years if her little girl was ok. I looked at her and everything was right with the world! We hugged each other and then we were both blanketed in the arms of my brothers, sister and Mick, holding a bouquet of flowers to welcome me in his perfect way.

Since that day we have become a family of miracles and have shared more love than both families could have ever imagined. They were at both of my children's weddings, and we have been to weddings in Jersey. For one of the weddings, my daughter and granddaughter were in the wedding party, and I was asked to sing. This miracle only happened because of two very important people... Mick O'Hagan and Tom Boler, both strong and committed to family and teaching by example, that was passed down through strong people who came before them. I'd say this journey has been quite unbelievable. We have shared births of the next generation in both families. Losses of loved ones where the heartbreaks touched us all; and celebrations that lit up the room with laughter and hugs (of course).

I will leave you with a statement my sister-in-law Bethann said to me the weekend I met everyone for the first time. She looked at me and said, "You were always part of our family, you were just on a long vacation."

continued next page





**DR. TOM GORMAN**

Dr. Tom Gorman, Superintendent of Ridgewood Public Schools, has worked in public education as a social studies teacher and administrator for over 20 years. He grew up in Ridgewood and graduated from Ridgewood High School. He earned a B.A. from Muhlenberg College, a M.A. from Montclair State University, and an Ed.D. from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. He has been a participant on education discussion panels and authored several professional articles. Tom is married to Maggie, who is a daughter of Peg. Together they reside in Ridgewood where they are raising their three children: Sean, Hagan, and Shea. Peg retold and recorded her story with Tom, who transcribed the notes and authored the memoir.

**TOM, WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO HELP PEG TELL HER STORY?**

After Mary joined the family, everyone was amazed at the details of this reunion. Everyone said that we need to get this on Oprah. After several years of getting to know each other and catching up on lost times, more details emerged. I asked my mother-in-law, Peg, several times if she wanted me to write her story but each time I was rejected. She did not want to betray her husband Mick's love. She also said that she lived a lifetime trying to forget the pain of the experience of giving Mary up for adoption and did not want to relive it. However, after Mick passed, she finally felt she could tell her tale.

**TELL US ABOUT THE RESPONSE THE BOOK IS GETTING.**

We are overwhelmed by the positive response we have received. We originally only wrote the book as a family legacy, but many people asked if they could get a copy. We decided to launch the book on Amazon the week before Christmas. We even have a few

international sales now too! Since our launch, we have been interviewed by Sean Moncrieff on Newstalk, an Irish radio station, Flavio Romeo on The Hawthorne Towncast podcast, Marsha Stoltz from The Record, and now Ramsey Neighbors and Ridgewood Living. The story is one that had to be shared. It resonates with people on many different levels. It is a story about immigration, family, faith, hope, and love. We have had so many friends and family help out in the process. Everyone has offered something to make this book a success and we are only beginning. We are grateful that this story has touched the hearts of so many.

**DO YOU PLAN TO WRITE MORE BOOKS?**

I have many ideas for future books and truly enjoyed writing this memoir. Right now, we are concentrating on getting this book into as many hands as possible. I have also been speaking with a friend who wants to make this story into a play. We believe this also has the foundation for a movie. We are excited at the possibilities.

**MAGGIE GORMAN**

Maggie grew up in Hawthorne, NJ with "the greatest family anyone could ask for" her parents Mick and Peg O'Hagan and brothers Mike, Jim and Pat. Maggie graduated from Kean University and received her Master's degree from William Paterson University. Maggie started working at Ramsey High School in the fall of 1992 and has been there ever since. She lives in Ridgewood with her husband Tom and their three children.

**MAGGIE, HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT YOUR MOM WENT THROUGH IN IRELAND?**

My mother shared her plight with me when I was 20 years old. I was struggling with life as most 20-year-olds do, and my mother shared her pain to ease mine...like she always did. I will always cherish that moment



because it made me realize that we all have "stuff" to deal with! We all must find a way through it no matter how difficult it may seem. There is a way out...you just have to find the light! My mom was always my light.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR SISTER MARY LIKE?**

We finally met our sister in person in January of 2009. Mary flew out for my 40th birthday. We picked her up at the airport and it was like nothing we could have imagined! Seeing Mary walking and yelling towards us and hugging her was like a dream come true! Seeing her and our mother hold each other just made sense and truly completed our family...and at the same time filled the hole in my mother's heart!

It has been nothing short of a miracle! We have shared precious memories and life moments in the past 13 years together. Marriages, parties, births, deaths...all the ups and downs of life. But now it's together...nothing better!

**WHAT HAS THE SUPPORT FROM RAMSEY BEEN LIKE DURING THIS WHOLE PROCESS?**

Teaching in Ramsey was my first job out of college - starting in the fall of 1992. It has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I get to do what I love to do, make relationships through teaching and coaching that have lasted over the past 29 years!! I have made friends for life, and I cherish them with all of my heart! Ramsey staff, administration and students (and former students) have shared their love and support during this crazy ride of the book I CALLED HER MARY. I always feel the love that surrounds me here in Ramsey, so this is just another amazing example of how great this Ramsey community truly is! It is a special place for sure.