

# Ridgewood Living



## The Glazer Family

FOLLOWING YOUR PASSIONS



# I Called Her Mary

## A Family's Story of Faith, Hope & Love

BY LAUREN DEPAUL SCHREIBER PHOTOS BY KAT YANNAFLO, PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKY

**M**argaret Mary Holland (Peg) became pregnant as a teenager in a conservative village in 1950s Ireland. She was poor, young, unwed and didn't have a lot of options, so her parents sent her to Sean Ross Abbey to deliver the baby. But after Peg returned home with her daughter who she named Mary, they were shunned, outcast and ridiculed. Faced with nothing but impossible choices, Peg made the harrowing decision to give Mary up for adoption, a mother's sacrifice to ensure her daughter could have a better life. With nothing left for her in Ireland, Peg fled to America where she worked as an indentured servant. Here, she met the love of her life, Mick O'Hagan, and together they raised four children in Hawthorne, New Jersey. But Peg never forgot Mary and she thought about her every day. Fifty years after Mary's birth, Peg received a phone call that would change her life. Mary was looking for her and wondered if she wanted to meet...

What a story right in our midst! One of Peg and Mick's American-born daughters, Margaret O'Hagan Gorman (Maggie), is a gym teacher at Ramsey High School and lives in Ridgewood with her husband, Dr. Tom Gorman. Tom grew up in Ridgewood working in public education including as Ridgewood's superintendent of schools. For years Tom implored Peg, his mother-in-law, to tell her inspirational story. Finally, on Christmas Eve, 2015, Peg knew that she was ready. Her memoir, *I Called Her Mary*, is a compilation of interviews with Peg and Mary captured by Tom who authored the book. I talked with Mary, Maggie and Tom on a windy day at Ramsey High School.

### Mary, how did you come to find out you were adopted?

Strangely, I came to know of my beginnings through neighborhood kids in the town where I was raised, GlenEllyn, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. 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 my parents calmed me down or told me, but I became aware at the age of eight. I never felt "adopted," whatever that feeling may be. I always knew they loved me. I actually came to enjoy bragging about being born in Ireland, but as I matured, it became a cause for inner questions: 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 my

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

### What inspired you to begin looking for your birth mother?

I don't know if I can pinpoint one particular reason I began the search but I had many "what ifs" in my head. Are there any family health issues that I should know about? Will she and her family want me in their lives? What would my family think? Is she well? But I also wanted to tell her that what she did for me was the bravest and most selfless thing a person could have done. When I had my own children,

Maggie O'Hagan Gorman, her half-sister Mary Boler and Maggie's husband Tom Gorman who authored the memoir.





I knew it must have been awful for my birth mom to not know if I was ok and whether she had made the right decision. That is why it was important for me to tell her that it was. I needed her to know that.

**Tell us about the first time you met your family.**

The day I boarded the plane at Chicago's Midway Airport for Newark, I remember sitting on the plane and looking at the people around me thinking, "If only they knew where I was going and why and how my life was about to change!" When we landed, I stepped off the plane and, shaking, walked to the area where my family should be. There they were including 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.

This journey has been quite unbelievable. Since that day we have become a family of miracles sharing more love than both families could have ever imagined: the births of the next generation, losses of loved ones where the heartbreak touched us all and celebrations that lit up the room with laughter and hugs.

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."

**Please tell us more about your life.**

I graduated high school in 1973 and received a Bachelors in Education

from Illinois State University. In 1978, I married Tom Boler. I taught second grade for six years at St. Irene in Warrenville, Illinois, but left to raise my children, Meghan and Alexander. I then returned to teach middle school at St. Matthew School in Glendale Heights till I retired in 2019.

**Maggie, how did you find out about what your mom, Peg, went through in Ireland?**

My mother shared her plight with me when I was struggling with life as most 20-year-olds do. She shared her pain to ease mine as she always did. I will 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 from Chicago for my fortieth birthday. Seeing her walking toward us was a dream come true and seeing our mother and Mary hold each other just made sense. It truly completed our family and filled the hole in my mother's heart.

**Tom, what made you want to help Peg and Mary tell their story?**

After Mary joined the family, everyone was amazed at the details of this reunion. Everyone said that we needed to get this to Oprah. I asked my mother-in-law Peg several times if she wanted me to write her story but each

Mary Boler reading *I Called Her Mary*, a memoir about Mary and her mother Peg O'Hagan.



time I was rejected. She said that she lived a lifetime trying to forget the pain of giving Mary up for adoption and did not want to relive it.

We originally wrote the book as a private, family legacy but many people asked if they could have a copy. We launched the book on Amazon and have been overwhelmed by the positive response we have received. The story resonates with people on many different levels. It is a story about immigration, family, faith, hope and love and we are grateful that this story has touched the hearts of so many.

*This story originally appeared in the April issue of Ramsey Neighbors. Margaret Mary O'Hagan, Peg, passed away at the age of 84 on April 9, 2022.*

Ridgewood residents Maggie and Tom Gorman.



Mary and Maggie in the gym at Ramsey High School where Maggie is a physical education teacher.