

## The Garnet Brooch

The garnet brooch was probably the catalyst long before my interest in genealogy began in 1974. But not because of its appearance. To a ten-year old a two-inch pin set with blood red jewels in three circles was not very exciting. It didn't sparkle like diamonds and was nowhere as beautiful as my own birthstone, the ruby.

What was telling was my mother's excitement the day the brooch arrived at our general store/post office in Webster Indiana. Cousin Marie, an old maid from far away Florida, sent it to her. As soon as Mom opened the small black velvet jewelry box, she put it on and wore it until bedtime. She even talked Dad into promising to buy her some earrings to match. That night when she took the brooch off, back it went into its special box and then into her glove drawer where she saved things "for good."

The family tradition said it was to be passed down to the oldest daughter and to her daughter and so on. Mom didn't know how far back the tradition extended. For sure Cousin Marie got it from her mother Aunt Lizzie, whose family fame was painting flowers on bud vases. But past Aunt Lizzie Mom was vague on facts. All she knew was that side of the family came from somewhere in Ohio, which wasn't hard since Webster was only fifteen minutes at the most from the state line and the cemetery in New Paris where my great-grandfather and my 2<sup>nd</sup> great-grandmother were buried.

For me the important fact was since Marie had no children, Mom was next in line for the family heirloom, and I, as the oldest daughter, was the brooch's next heiress. Like most ten-year olds, I was not very logical. I didn't see the fallacy in Mom getting the brooch while her mother and grandmother were both alive as well as various female cousins and aunts on that side of the family. But I didn't ask any other questions. Instead I gloried over my sister that I'd receive the heirloom one day and she wouldn't. That was more important than the jewelry itself.

The "good" my mother saved the brooch for were her annual sorority holiday parties, important family events such as weddings, funerals, and graduations. When my father needed a head shot for his campaign for state rep, my parents used the appointment with the photographer to have pictures taken of them together and Mom by herself. She wore the garnet brooch in pride of place.

In 2001 my mother passed away, and I inherited not only the brooch, but also a mystery. Since my mother left written instructions that I was to get the brooch, it was part of the required estate appraisal. It turned out the brooch was set with red glass and worth ten dollars. The appraiser didn't give a date, just its value. My inheritance was a fake.

But why was the brooch so important to Cousin Marie? What I remembered about her was she was a frumpy old woman who grew her own oranges and sent birthday cards she further decorated with her floral paintings and Bible verses. My mother's sisters had very little to add except Marie was not the oldest daughter until her sister died. Furthermore they were just as surprised as my sister and me that the brooch didn't contain real garnets. I kept thinking there was something very ironic about the way the genealogist in the family who insisted so strongly on documentation had inherited a fake.

This is where I left it until I was sorting through my family files and came across pictures my aunts had given me when I started genealogy. Over the years I had forgotten their specifics. In a space of five minutes I found formal studio photos of Cousin Marie and her mother Aunt Lizzie. Both were wearing the garnet brooch. And these were

women who didn't look like they would knowingly wear fake jewelry. Every bit of their appearance was planned. What statement were they making with this brooch?

The family Bible told me Lizzie was born in 1861, and she was by no means the oldest daughter. My second great-grandmother Sarah Jane was, and the brooch had not been passed down to her oldest daughter and so on. Lizzie and Sarah Jane's mother, Eliza Jane, is one of my brick walls and I don't know if she was the oldest. If her father was who I think he may be, she was not the oldest daughter.

I tried coming up with a backstory for the brooch. My first thoughts were some young man pledged his love to Aunt Lizzie with the brooch. The pictures I had of Uncle Billy didn't show a particularly romantic looking man, but maybe in his day he was. Could the brooch have been worn in memory of Marie's sister who died so young? But I've not yet found any evidence that mourning pins looked like the brooch.

Last year another possibility came my way during a class presentation. I had asked my middle school students to bring in some family memento and share its history. One girl stood up and opened a black velvet bag. Reaching in, she brought out a red glass pin, twice the size of my garnet brooch. Her story was one of her grandmothers, way far back, received the pin for perfect attendance at her church long ago.

Now I'm researching Methodist church history and every so often cruise through Ebay to see if there are any more clues out there. So far I've not found any more evidence, but I am enjoying dreaming up "what ifs" and exploring where they lead, including writing a novel.