

# The Journey of a Lifetime

*"She dropped her glove to prove his love, then looked at him and smiled; He bowed, and in a moment leaped among the lions wild; The leap was quick, return was quick, he soon regained his place, Then threw the glove, not with love, right in the lady's face.*

*'In faith,' cried King Francis, 'Rightly done!' and he rose from where he sat; 'No love,' quoth he, 'But vanity, sets love a task like that.'*"

"No love,' quoth he, 'But vanity, sets love a task like that.'" Annie Harris whispered to herself, "Isn't that so romantic?" she asked her friend, who sat next to her in the long grass, leaning against the big gum tree in the bottom of Annie's mother's garden.

"Romantic!" Her friend, Jan Miller, gestured with a hand that held a packet of sour squirms, "You've got to be kidding me! You do know that you are a complete nut, don't you?"

Annie just smiled and shrugged.

"Yeah I know. Here can I have one?" she reached for the packet of sour squirms, but Jan held them out of reach

"Only, and I say ONLY, if you repeat after me, 'I Annie Harris, am completely weird and I won't go boring my best friend with poetry for the rest of the afternoon.'"

Annie laughingly repeated the words and was duly given two sour squirms as a reward when she put the poetry book in her back pack.

A few hours later, Annie waved good bye from the veranda, as Jan's Mum drove down the long dirt track that was their drive way.

She sighed, it was always a good time with Jan but all she was interested in was boys and gossip. Annie glanced at her watch and sighed again, 3:00; it would be at least another hour before her older brother James was back from TAFE. He was usually a good person to pour out her heart to except when he was at TAFE or at work! Her brother, she corrected herself, adoptive brother was a good listener. He had been the one who's shoulder she cried on after she had been told that she was adopted and that she had another family somewhere else, she was still at loose ends at how to deal with it all. Her adoptive parents had given her a choice she could choose to meet her birth parents or she could call off the meeting that had been arranged and continue with her life as she knew it.

She put her thoughts aside and headed inside, then taking the stairs two at a time, she headed for her room. Shutting the door behind her, she grabbed her Ipod and placing the head phones over her ears, she found some Beethoven and flopped on her bed. Annie closed her eyes and let the sweet strains of violins fill her ears. Slowly she drifted into a doze, but was woken when someone put "Turn This Life Around" on and turned the volume up to full.

She sat up with a jerk and reeled the blasting headphones off her ears "Ahh! Ouch! Okay, Adam and Jack, you are in so much trouble when I find you!" she shot a glance around the room, and narrowed her eyes as a curtain shivered with a muffled giggle.

"I'm going to tickle you two so much you will scream with laughter and beg for mercy!"

Both little boys made a dash for the door but didn't make it, at the last minute Annie grabbed them and turned them around.

"I's sorry." They said and grinned.

Annie smiled back "Then I forgive you but remember that if you really want me to keep my hearing you won't do it so loud next time, okay?"

The blond heads bobbed and said "I pwomis."

She put her hands on the tops of their heads and guided them out of her room "Let's all go down and see if Mum made those biscuits." Both boys nodded again and ran ahead.

Shaking her head and laughing she followed.

The smell of something good met her at the kitchen door.

"Something smells good in here!" she said as she gave her mother a tentative smile.

Mum smiled warmly back "Well you had better take some before the twins polish them off." Annie reached for one and took a bite

"Mmm, yum, Peanut Butter?" she asked around a mouthful of biscuit.

"Annie!" Mum slapped her hand gently "Don't talk with your mouth full, you are a terrible example to your brothers."

Annie swallowed her mouthful before asking "When should Dad and James be back?"

"Your father was picking James up at 3:30, so," she glanced at the clock which read 3:52

"They should be here anytime now."

That evening after dinner, Annie went back to her room. Sitting down at her desk she turned on her computer and signed into her emails, there were none. Facebook wasn't much better, she picked a few random online people to talk to but she was tired and after a while she just said goodbye and got ready for bed.

Once in bed Annie tried to pray, "Father in Heaven. Thank you for," yawn "a great day and please help me... to..." there she fell asleep.

The next morning Annie woke early and quickly dressed in her favorite Tee and inch-too-long jeans and adding a cap she descended the stairs.

Quietly she entered the kitchen to get an apple as an early morning snack before easing the fly screen open so it didn't creak; it always did when you were trying to be quiet. She pulled

on her work boots and stepping around the creaking boards she made it off the veranda and jogged out of the yard. She sucked in the cool summer morning air as she kept running.

There was no one around, the Harris's farm was in a valley all of its own, and all of it was truly beautiful. The farm backed up against the national park and had at least 200 acres of bushland within its boundaries. It was very quiet, except of course for the bird song that was almost always present and the regular thuds on the gravel her boots made when she took a running step.

Annie's thoughts wandered from the present, there were places all along the road she was jogging along and the whole farm that were filled with memories and dreams. The small stream 100 meters away had been the silent witness to many childhood adventures she had taken by herself but the best ones were with James and their friends. Adventures where they would build small dams with rocks only to come back a week later to find that the gentle and steady tug of the current had pulled most of the rocks out of position and away. They would almost always get back in the water and repair all the holes in each wall, it didn't matter what season it was there was just no good reason to let a good dam be ruined by sheer neglect. Mud was another favorite toy; there were no game-boys or Nintendo-Wii's, so when they found a small dam that almost always dried up in early summer there was no time wasted in getting permission to go and play. To their utter delight they found an abundance of tadpoles and warm mud. This was a favorite playground much to the displeasure of the mothers who would have to spread blankets over the car seats to prevent their dirty children from leaching dark smelly mud into them.

After a while they grew out of mud pies and dam building, there were more important things at hand such as books, friends who weren't interested in playing with 'the little sibling' and most dreaded of all: school work. Being homeschooled had its advantages even if they didn't get to see their friends regularly, Mum would give them ½ an hour to go play and there was no staying in the back yard for them when Dad had only the day before baled hay bales two paddocks over from the house.

Annie brought her thoughts back to the present and slowed to a walk as she reached 'The Creek' more like a small river there had been many memories scattered with the ashes of a hundred campfires and bon fires that had taken place at this very place. The first time she had come here with her family when they had first bought the property, 10 long years ago.

She had been slightly excited at the prospect of moving to a farm, but at six Annie didn't really know what was happening. The camping trip was to be their first night on 'their' new farm. It was also an adventure because it was the first time James and she had been camping.

The tent was the stock trailer with a cattle crate on it. Dad had pulled a tarp over it to make a waterproof but rather rustic tent. Mum and Annie decked it out with mattresses, blankets, pillows and the odd torch.

The rest of the trip had become slightly fuzzy over time. But she did remember lying on her mattress that night listening to the creek running swiftly past, to her over active imagination it sounded like it was a raging river.

"Mum?" she asked quietly, scared "Do creeks have tides?" her six year old mind bringing pictures of a huge sea coming out of the creek and carrying them away.

"Yes but not big ones." The sound of her mother's voice calmed her a bit but she wasn't convinced. It wasn't long before Annie had fallen asleep. Much to her relief they were all still alive and in the same place the next morning.

James had celebrated his 16<sup>th</sup> by asking a few family friends out for the weekend, they had had the formal party at the house with presents and cake but then after all the kids had gotten tired of sitting around playing board games they had relocated the party down to the creek to 'burn down that big old gum'. Everyone had helped gathering paper and matches before about 10 kids piled onto a 4-wheeler and went down to the creek.

There were a lot of small branches and sticks around the tree so they piled them up around the base of the tree and James instructing everyone to stand back doused the small flame with petrol, it took half a second before the pile was engulfed in fire, the bright orange flames licking up and around the thick trunk of the tree.

That wasn't their first bon fire and it wasn't the last. Annie sat on a fallen log, one which had only not been burnt yet because of its usefulness as a seat.

There were recent memories and thoughts that clamoured for attention but a big milestone in the recent past made her smile with relief and excitement.

She had felt numb as she handed the test to the woman over the counter. The woman handed her back the documents of identity, her birth certificate, a bank statement and a signed statutory declaration.

She crouched down and with a snap of elastic cords opened her folder and making sure they wouldn't crease she placed the documents inside then closed the folder with another quiet snap of the cords that held it shut.

Zippering up her school bag she heard the words "Congratulations, sweetie, you passed."

She could only feel relief as she stood knowing she was grinning like an idiot. She had passed, Annie Harris had passed her learner drivers permit test!

Barely hearing a word, she conversed with the woman about the three questions she had answered incorrectly. She didn't really mind that she got three wrong, she had passed and it was over.

She had driven a little around paddocks and up and down laneways and the driveway but it had been a whole other world on the real road. The art of perfect driving she had been told only came with practice and it still eluded her.

Annie thought about the future and wondered what it would bring, 16 was very nearly an adult and that scared her slightly especially now she was uncertain to who she was. Somehow she had always known she had been slightly different to the average 16 year old.

She shook her head mentally to clear her thoughts and glanced at her watch, her birth parents and family would be arriving in two hours. She had to get home and get ready. She also wanted to spend some time with her adoptive family that had loved her all these years as their own. The sun shone warmly around her as she turned and headed home.