

# Little Green a little blue

**REUNITED** / *A year after meeting her birth parents, Joni Mitchell's daughter talks about the cost of finally finding her roots.*

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**I**T was an adopted child's fantasy fulfilled: After searching for five years, Toronto's Kilauren Gibb was last year reunited with her birth parents, Canadian folk-rock icon **Joni Mitchell** and Toronto photographer Brad MacMath.

For Gibb, 33, the experience seemed like a fairy tale. Overnight, she acquired an extended and loving family. Overnight, nagging questions about her origins were resolved. She spent long weeks in Los Angeles, leisurely getting to know Mitchell, sitting by the pool, hanging out with rock stars and celebrities.

"I was the fresh princess of Bel Air," she says, alluding to Mitchell's \$9-million (U.S.) spread in one of L.A.'s toniest neighbourhoods.

But as fairy tales go, Gibb now concedes, this one is slightly flawed. And it may contain some sobering lessons for other adopted children in search of their roots, or perhaps for the recently discovered half-siblings of guitarist Eric Clapton.

One year after her widely publicized reunion, Gibb is beginning to come to terms with the darker consequences. Although the emotional benefits have been enormous, they have not been without cost.

There was a two-month rupture in relations with her adoptive parents, retired schoolteachers Ida and David Gibb. Her once-close ties to brother David, a Toronto advertising executive, remain strained. A relationship with boyfriend Ted Barrington foundered, in part because of Gibb's frequent trips to L.A. Many of her friends suddenly assumed, mistakenly, that the connection to Mitchell had conferred wealth, and expected Gibb to pick up bar tabs. In fact, she says, "things aren't that great for me financially." Of course, she could easily seek assistance from Mitchell, but "I can't ask. I have too much pride."

"Kilauren's got a lot of stuff to deal with," says her new stepmother, Donna Miller, a partner with MacMath in a commercial photography studio. "I feel for her."

In exploring these personal horizons, Gibb's own career has been suspended. She finished a desk-top publishing course last year, and her one-bedroom-plus solarium, 20th-floor condominium on Lake Ontario — paid for with earnings from an earlier modelling career — now boasts a new \$3,000 computer (a birthday present in February from Mitchell).

But in recent months she has worked only at odd jobs — refinishing wooden boats, interior decorating, painting. Most of her time, she says, is spent with her four-year-old son Marlin, the result of an earlier marriage to Toronto drummer Paul Kohler; the two are separated.

For a couple of months last year, she moved to Vancouver, "trying to be closer to Joni," hoping to find work in films.

Please see Gibb / C6



Kilauren Gibb: 'I don't know what I'd have become if I'd been raised like a Bel Air brat.' (GREG STAATS/The Globe and Mail)

# Gibb discovering she was adopted caused an identity crisis

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But the work was hard to come by, and she felt guilty about cutting Marlin's ties to his father. "It just didn't feel right," she says.

In short, says Gibb, "it's been a very tough year." And although she speaks to "Joni — I'm not ready to call her mom yet" — three or four times a week, and sees her birth father MacMath frequently as well, she has the sense of being pulled emotionally, and simultaneously, in several directions. At one point, she found herself in a hospital emergency ward. The diagnosis: stress.

JONI Mitchell, born Roberta Joan Anderson, was just 20 years old, an art-school student in Calgary, when she became pregnant in 1961. Afraid to tell her parents, she fled to Toronto. Her relationship with MacMath ended shortly after. Their daughter, Kelly Dale, was born the following February in a charity hospital.

There was an impromptu marriage of convenience to folk singer Chuck Mitchell, but Kelly Dale was soon given up for adoption. As Mitchell explained last year, "I was dirt poor. An unhappy mother does not raise a happy child. It was difficult parting with the child, but I had to let her go."

The situation was put more poignantly in *Little Green*, a song from her 1971 album *Blue*: "Child, with the child, pretending/ Weary of

lies you are sending home/ So you sign all the papers in the family name/ You're sad and you're sorry, but you're not ashamed/ Little Green, have a happy ending."

And *Little Green* did. Renamed Kilauren Andrea Christy Gibb, she grew up in the gaze of loving parents, attended private schools, enjoyed annual vacations in the tropics. Yet for all that, Gibb always felt different from her family, both in looks and in attitudes. From an early age, she felt the urge to travel. At 11, she started to smoke (Mitchell had started at 9). Encouraged to excel academically and athletically (she almost made Canada's Olympic swimming team), she was instinctively drawn more to the arts. At 16, she became a professional model and for 13 years plied catwalks on three continents, partying with the likes of Mick Jagger, Ursula Andress, Rick James and Cornelia Guest among others. It's entirely possible, she says, that she and Mitchell attended the same parties in New York; both lived there in the early eighties.

"Our lives paralleled in so many ways. Like Joni, I was really headstrong. My parents didn't like my doing modelling, but nothing could stand in my way. Now, with Marlin, I'm a little more wimpy. I can't run away."

It wasn't until Gibb was 27, however — and pregnant with Marlin — that she learned what she had long suspected: she had been

adopted. The revelation precipitated a full-blown identity crisis. "I longed to know who I was. I wanted so bad to find my mother." Five years later, comparing information from Ontario adoption records with a fan's **Joni Mitchell** Web site, Gibb made a match.

She found her father a few weeks later, as well as a new eight-year-old half-brother, MacMath's son Morgan. "Kilauren and Brad are very much alike," says Miller. "They have the same gait, the same light-hearted attitude to life, the same artistic sensibility. They still giggle when they see each other." Meanwhile, Marlin and his uncle Morgan have become "like cousins." (There's also another still-unlocated half-sister, Sita in California, from MacMath's previous marriage.)

THE past year has been a whirlwind. In the media madness that followed the news, Gibb felt a little muzzled. "We went on [the Vikki] Gabereau show and no questions were directed toward me. I really wasn't allowed to say anything. Joni had no makeup on, so she wore sunglasses, so then we all had to wear sunglasses."

The California experience was in many ways wonderful, she says; Mitchell flew her out with Marlin, first class, on several occasions. She met Graham Nash, an old Mitchell flame, actor Harry Dean Stanton, music legends Herbie

Hancock and B. B. King, ZZ Top guitarist Billy Gibbons, singer Etta James and, only a week before his alleged suicide, INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence in a VIP room at Vipers, a celebrity nightclub in L.A. "He was so insecure that he was completely unattractive," Gibb says. "His pupils were huge. 'Stay away,' I thought. 'This guy's trouble.'"

"Generally, I fit in quite well in Joni's life," she adds. There were excursions to the beach, dinners at Dan Tana's, a fancy West Hollywood Italian restaurant, days spent painting together with Mitchell. Compared to Los Angeles, Toronto inevitably seemed "a little dead."

But in other ways, she says, California "kind of gives me the creeps. The earthquakes. The natural disasters. And I'm not really the star-struck kind. I'm an East Coast girl."

I asked Gibb whether she had reconciled herself to Mitchell's original decision to put her up for adoption. "That's an issue," she allowed, "a tough issue. It's hard to tread there. I think she [Mitchell] really has a guilty feeling about that."

On the other hand, Gibb is grateful for the upbringing she had. "I keep trying to reassure them [Ida and David] that I love them, that they did a great job, that they're not going to lose me. I don't know what I'd have become if I'd been raised like a Bel Air brat."

At one point last year, Gibb engineered two other emotionally charged meetings. The first,

at Toronto's Donalda Club, introduced her adoptive parents to Mitchell. "Everyone was a little nervous," she says, "but it had to be done."

The second, in a Yorkville bistro, reunited Mitchell and MacMath for the first time in 32 years. "They were blushing," says Gibb. "Radiant. It was like they were back in school. I took pictures."

According to Donna Miller, "Brad was worried about meeting Joni. He thought he might hate her or something. But it went really well. He felt really protective about her."

Now, back in Toronto, Kilauren Gibb is contemplating her options, "striving to find a little regularity." She wants to do more acting. She'd like to write a book about her story. A few familial fences still need mending, including one with her brother David, forced to keep the secret of her adoption for many years. And she'd like to organize a trip to Saskatoon, to see Mitchell's parents, Bill and Myrtle Anderson, now in their 80s.

"I have some bad days," Gibb admits. "I feel like I don't get enough time with Joni. She's very busy." (Mitchell is about to embark on a West Coast tour with Bob Dylan, and a new album, *Taming the Tiger*, is expected out this summer.)

"But everything's fine, really," she says, packing for a weekend trip to the country with Marlin and her old boyfriend. "It just needs a little readjustment."