

# The gift of sisters three

*Velvet Martin's year of reuniting with one long-lost sister led to the discovery and reunion with another*

BY SCOTT HAYES  
Staff Writer

Velvet Martin has added one more Christmas card to the list, and she can't fully express her joy at doing so.

A year of reconnecting with one long lost sister, another has come along to join in the growing family tree. It was a blessing this first time around, she said, but a pure miracle that it happened twice.

Last June, Bonnie Williamson-Powell traveled to St. Albert for her first-ever visit with her newfound sister, and a story was published in the *Gazette* to mark such a heart-warming occasion even though there was still a sibling who wasn't part of the picture.

But Martin never lost hope. She took that *Gazette* story to further her search. She knew that her mom had other children but complications and other circumstances led to them all being separated. All she had was a name to use for her own genealogical quest.

"Honestly, we wouldn't have found Helen. We were at a standstill and her last name is Murphy. Trying to find a Helen Murphy was a needle in a haystack," she said.

Life, as we all know, has a funny way of working out. Word spread and spread, and the article was shared more than 1,500 times until one fateful day in October when it landed home.

"I kept sharing it and sharing it and she saw it in Toronto. I think it was Twitter that I was on one morning and trying to look back through messages. It led me to one that said, 'Can you please look at this picture?' I opened it up and there was a picture I've never seen of mom before," Martin said, recalling the first time she ever heard from her new, new sister, Helen.

"She said to me, 'I wasn't sure how to approach you, I wanted you to know I was legitimate. The only thing I could think was just to show you a picture of our mom.' It was the only one that she's ever had."

There are now three photos sitting on a shelf together, each one taken of their mom Marguerite Hennessey and different daughters in each one. There are actually two other girls in the pictures as well, though sadly one has since passed and another is not in communication for her own reasons. The world is indeed a funny place that doesn't always work out the way you expect or want.

Because Helen and Bonnie live in Toronto and Mississauga respectively, they've already had the chance to see each other in person. Their paths might have even crossed before that.

"It's been an incredible year for me. It was pretty remarkable finding out that she's lived in the same place in Toronto for 40 years," Williamson-Powell said, adding that she works in Toronto and frequently used to go to movies with an elderly friend of hers at the centre where Murphy works. "I'm sure I probably walked past her and never had a clue."

Meeting Helen was tender and touching and more than a bit emotional.

"Apparently, according to Velvet, she's the same size as our mother. It was pretty incredible because, as I gave her a hug, I was thinking this is what it would have been like hugging my mother. That was pretty unreal."

"She said, 'She's so tiny,'" Martin added, quoting



DAN RIEDLHUBER/St. Albert Gazette

Velvet Martin of St. Albert, right, gazes into her long lost sister Bonnie Williamson-Powell's eyes for the first time at the Edmonton International Airport.

**"Trying to find a Helen Murphy was a needle in a haystack."**

VELVET MARTIN  
Sister

Bonnie. "And I was like, 'Oh my gosh ... just like mom.' Our mom was under five feet and under 100 pounds. It's like she's mom."

Murphy offered her own expression of gratitude for the "amazing" turn of fate that she and her new sisters have experienced.

"It's hard to take in. Just like them, I always thought I just had one sister. It's still overwhelming but they are just so nice," she said, noting that she had a lot of fun meeting Bonnie.

"I think some days I'm still in shock."

Now, it's Velvet's turn to travel.

She hopes to take a trip out east in the spring to finally be with both of her sisters together. She can't wait to meet Helen, she said.

"All these years – decades – I never imagined the joy that comes in finding family. It is the best gift ever. I truly wish that our story will bring hope to others that they, too, may find their missing loved ones."

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COURTESY OF BONNIE WILLIAMSON-POWELL AND HELEN MURPHY/Photo  
Three sisters separated by circumstance have now been reunited thanks in part to a Gazette article published in June 2019. Last year, Velvet Martin discovered her long lost sister Bonnie Williamson-Powell and reunited with her here. After the story of that touching reunion came out, word spread and another sister – Helen Murphy – reached out to connect as well.

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## Welcome Christmas Home

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