

Painting
the
Rainbow

AMY
GORDON

Holiday House / New York

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Summary: During Holly and Ivy's annual month-long visit at the family's New Hampshire lake house in 1965, the distance that seems to be growing between the thirteen-year-old cousins fades when they accidentally uncover hints of a family secret dating back to World War II.

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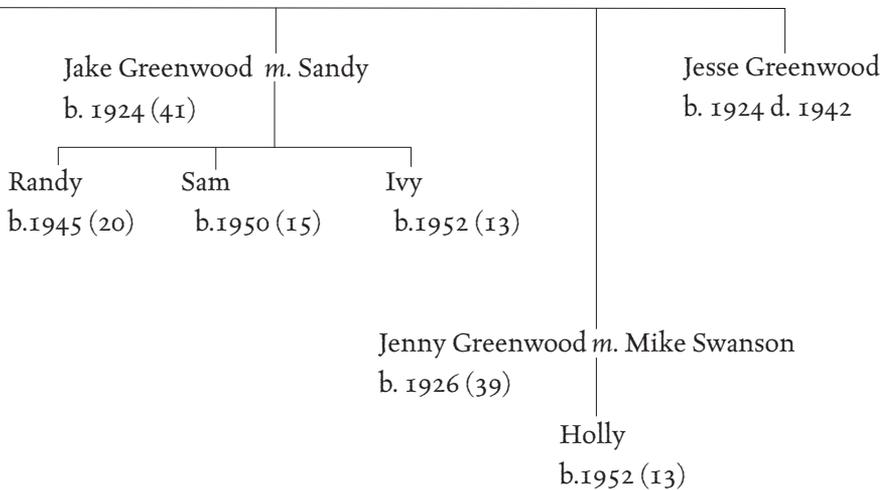
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For the path
between the houses

The Greenwood Family Tree



Georgia (Gigi)
b.1897 (68)



Kiyoshi Mori
b. 1923–d.1965
(age 19 at the
time he met
the Greenwoods)

Ivy's diary

Wednesday, July 21, 1965

Randy acted so crazy tonight. At supper he said, "Dad, I want to know things you've never told us. Like where Uncle Jesse was when he died in the war, and was he in the army or the navy, or what?"

When he said Uncle Jesse's name, I thought my heart was going to stop. Mom sort of gasped and said, "Randy, you know better," and Sam muttered, "He's got to be joking."

Dad's face turned bright red, and he said, "There's nothing to know about him."

Randy said, "I don't think that's true, and I don't understand why we're not supposed to talk about him. He was your *brother*—your *twin* brother."

Dad exploded then, banging his fist down on the table, making Mom and Sam and me jump. He roared, "That's enough," and he got up and left the room.

Mom said, "Randy—why would you ask such a thing?" and Sam said, "You never know when to keep your mouth shut," and Randy said, "It's not a crime to want to know what happened to my uncle," and Sam said, "Don't you think if Dad wanted you to know he'd tell you?"

Randy stared at him. "You think something *did* happen to him—out of the ordinary, I mean."

Sam turned bright red then, too, and started picking the wax drips off one of the candles on the table. "I didn't say that."

"Stop making a mess," said Mom, and I got up and left the table and came up here to my room. The last thing I want to hear right now is everyone fighting with each other. Thanksgiving was bad enough. Dad was in such a terrible mood, picking on me and Sam and Mom, and he got so mad at Randy that dinner got ruined. I don't know why Randy always has to bring up dangerous topics when we're all sitting down together.

Ivy's diary

Thursday, July 22, 1965

For the first time in my life I am wondering how it was for Dad to lose a twin brother. It just never occurred to me before. I feel bad that I never thought about it before, but when you are little you don't think about things like that. Ever since I turned thirteen in April, I notice things more. I don't like it. I wish I could turn off my brain.

I guess I don't blame Randy for being curious about Uncle Jesse. He is such a mystery.

I never even knew Dad had a twin brother until I was eight years old, and I was at Otter Lake house as usual for our family vacation. Holly and I found an old photograph of Uncle Jesse under one of the beds in the Tower Room. It was stuck in a board between the wall and the floor. We brought it down to the living room where all the aunts and uncles and Grandpa and Gigi were sitting around after supper. We ran over to Gigi and showed her the picture because we thought she could tell us who it was.

I'll never forget how she put a hand up to her heart, and Grandpa, who was sitting next to her, said, "I don't want to see that," and Gigi scooped the photograph out of our hands and tucked it away somewhere.

And Holly, who has always been braver than me, said, "Why?"

Grandpa barked, "It's enough that I said so!" Grandpa never, ever yells. It was so unexpected, and Holly and I thought we had done something really wrong, and we both started crying. I don't remember Mom being there, but Holly's mom, Aunt Jenny, took us out of the room. She told us about Uncle Jesse. He had been Dad's twin, and her brother, too, of course. He died in World War II. The whole family was really sad when it happened, and Gigi took it very hard, but Grandpa totally broke down. Aunt Jenny said it was because terrible things had happened to Grandpa in World War I, and Jesse's dying brought them all back.

So then Holly asked what the terrible things were. So Aunt Jenny told us Grandpa was a captain of a company of men in France

during the war, and they spent hours and hours holding the Germans back from crossing an important bridge. When the war was over, Grandpa was awarded a medal for his bravery. But ever after, poor Grandpa suffered from his wounds, not just ones you could see, like the trembling in his hands, but there were wounds in his mind, too. Aunt Jenny told us that Gigi worked really hard to protect Grandpa and that we needed to be careful, too.

We asked Aunt Jenny what Uncle Jesse was like. Lovable, she said. Like Randy and Cousin Peter rolled into one. And that was the last time I remember having a conversation about Uncle Jesse, so to tell the truth, most of the time I forget he even existed. It was shocking when Randy brought him up last night.

Ivy's diary

Friday, July 23, 1965

I am kind of wishing that instead of going up to Otter Lake tomorrow, Mom and Dad could have let me stay at music camp. I miss camp so much. The master classes with Tōru Kameda were totally amazing. In about five minutes, I learned more from him than I've learned in five years from my teachers at home.

I loved learning to sail at camp so much, too. Once I was good enough, they even let me go out by myself. They knew I didn't want to compete, so they never made me race. Sometimes it just feels good to do things because I like doing them, and not because I have to prove anything to anyone else.

But tomorrow we go up to Otter Lake, and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm looking forward to seeing Gigi and Grandpa, of course, and I love Tucker and the twins, but I'm dreading seeing Tina. She just gets more obnoxious by the minute. I could hardly stand her at Thanksgiving, not that *anything* was good about that Thanksgiving.

And normally I'd be so excited to see Holly, but all Holly talks about in her letters now is boys. We always swore we'd never act stupid as we got older, but I think Holly's going to be hopeless.

It'll be strange, too, because Holly will be there without her parents. Aunt Jenny and Uncle Mike are going to be in California for almost the whole time. They told Holly she could go with them but that she'd probably be bored because they'll be teaching art history courses all day at the summer school at Berkeley. So I guess Holly thought about it, but she finally decided she couldn't possibly *not* be at Otter Lake. She said she'd spent a part of every summer of her life at the lake with Grandpa and Gigi and all the aunts and uncles and cousins—and most especially *me!* But what if she's given up this great trip to California and we don't get along?

Our cousins Peter and Miranda won't be at Otter Lake for most of the time. That's bad, because Tina is easier to take when she's with Miranda, and Peter is nice and he's funny.

Randy has gotten soooo serious, and I'm worried that he will be fighting with Dad the whole time, or that Mom will be nagging Sam to study math, or she'll make me go to the church dances, and also that she and Dad will be fighting in front of the rest of the family, which will be horrible.

Ever since Thanksgiving, Mom and Dad's fighting has gotten worse, and it scares me.

Oh, Otter Lake. It used to be the place where there were no troubles, and I could be happy. I want to be there and have everything be the way it used to be.

Holly

1

So I rode from Boston up to New Hampshire in Uncle Jimmy's new van, sitting in the way-back between the six-year-old twins, Tigs and Tally. I played Twenty Questions with the girls for an hour, and listened to Tucker and Tina bicker in the middle seat for another hour. Aunt Kate turned around every five minutes to tell them to be quiet until Uncle Jimmy pulled over and said he wouldn't drive anymore until they stopped.

I was so relieved when we rolled into the driveway at Otter Lake. As soon as I piled out of the van behind the twins and Tucker and Tina, I was caught up in a big hug from Gigi, and Grandpa took my suitcase, and Ivy's mom, Aunt Sandy, gave me a peck on the cheek, and then there was Ivy's brother, Sam, with a new buzz cut. He came up and punched me lightly on the arm. He'd grown like a weed, and then Ivy's oldest brother, Randy, came up and said hi. I was shocked to see him. His hair was so long, tied back in a ponytail, and he had a huge, bushy beard. Then Ivy's dad, Uncle Jake, came out of nowhere and gave me a bear hug, which surprised me, because mostly I didn't think Uncle Jake noticed me much.

"Going to miss your mother," he said.

Uncle Jake had a soft spot for Mom, maybe because she was the youngest and the only girl, but without Mom around, I planned to keep out of his way, because he had a bad temper and he scared me.

I looked around for Ivy, but she was standing back from all the commotion as if she were on this little island of shyness all by herself.

"We're going to miss your parents, but thank goodness you're here, Holly," Gigi said. She looked so safe and familiar, with her curly gray hair and her blue jeans with the cuffs rolled up at the bottom.

"It just wouldn't be the same without you," said Grandpa. "And we'll take good care of you, I promise." His face shone with excitement beneath his boating cap. Gigi often jokingly said that Grandpa loved his students when he was a history professor, but when he retired, he transferred all his love to his grandchildren.

It's going to be okay without Mom and Dad, I thought, relief welling up, and I knew I had made the right decision.

I ran over to Ivy, and we stood facing each other in the driveway. I hadn't seen her since Thanksgiving, when there was this really terrible scene at the table right after Grandpa served the turkey. Uncle Jake yelled so much at Randy that Aunt Sandy left the table in tears.

"When'd you get here?" I asked Ivy, feeling shy myself suddenly. She had grown like a weed, too, and her hair was so long I couldn't even see her pointy elf ears anymore.

"This morning." Ivy's voice was soft, and I had to lean in to hear her.

"Did you like music camp?" I asked.

"I liked sailing," said Ivy, nodding slightly. "And they had this great Japanese guy teaching a master class for the pianists—he was amazing."

I grabbed Ivy's hand. "*Uma cotcha walla*," I said, giggling a bit. I was worried Ivy would think our secret Walla Walla language was babyish, but she said "*Uma cotcha walla*" back, and we shook hands, palms flat, then fingers curled, and then palms flat again.

Tina caught us at it. She came over, grinning, twisting one of her new pearl stud earrings around and around in her ear. "You guys are thirteen and you're still doing that?"

"So what if we are?" Ivy said, her face turning red.

"Come on, Ivy," I said. "Let's go to the Sunbird."

Ivy took off at a run, and I followed.

Too bad for Tina she wouldn't have Miranda around for most of the time we were up here this summer, but that was her problem. Ivy and I had more than a month ahead of us, even if things had been kind of awkward between us for a few seconds.

I breathed in the smell of pine needles warmed by the sun, and Otter Lake happiness expanded all through me. Halfway down the hill from the house to the lake was the Sunbird Tree. We stood in front of it, and then put out our hands to touch the Sunbird itself. No one in the family seemed to know who had carved it into the trunk of the big pine, but there it was—a circle with rays pointing out of it like a little kid's drawing of a sun, and inside the circle was a bird with outstretched wings.

We touched the Sunbird first for good luck and then chanted the Sunbird charm. “*Grant us our wish, O Sunbird Tree, and we will be grateful for eternity.*”

As I closed my eyes to make a wish, I guess I felt a little embarrassed. Maybe all this chanting and wishing was like putting on a sweater you really loved, even though you knew it was too small and it didn’t really fit anymore. I tried to concentrate.

Please let this time at Otter Lake with Ivy be fun.

I opened my eyes first. Ivy looked a little pinched, and she seemed to take forever over her wish. When she finally opened her eyes, I felt shy again.

“Come on, let’s go down to the lake,” she said.

As she took off, I ran after her. She ran like a deer, graceful and easy, and here I was, bopping along like a bunny rabbit.

Grandpa was standing on the dock next to an old wooden boat resting on sawhorses. As we joined him, he pointed to it, and I thought the trembling in his hands seemed worse.

“How would you two girls like to have your own boat to kick about in while you’re here? I’ve been cleaning out the barn, something I’ve been meaning to do for years, and what do you know, this old rowboat was hiding in the back behind a stack of old boards. I sanded her down and caulked the holes, but I’ve left the fun of painting to the two of you. So, what do you think?”

“I’d love that!” I said, but Ivy didn’t say anything. She’d written from camp saying how much she was loving learning to sail. Probably an old rowboat would be boring to her. Looking closely at the hull, I said, “It used to have stripes or something—what color was it before?”

“All the colors of the rainbow,” said Grandpa. He paused, clearing his throat. “They even called her *Rainbow*. Had her out all hours of the day, exploring, fishing.”

“Who did?” Ivy asked.

“Well, your father, for one, Ivy,” said Grandpa quietly.

“Oh!” said Ivy, interested suddenly.

“And—well.” Grandpa stopped short and then quickly looked away at something out on the lake. He had almost mentioned some other person,

I was sure of it. A shadowy image floated into my mind. I saw two boys sitting side by side in the rowboat. Uncle Jake and—it dawned on me that Uncle Jake's twin brother, Jesse, was the other boy, our uncle who had died in the war. I was amazed. Grandpa had been about to say his name out loud. Grandpa never talked about Uncle Jesse. No one ever talked about Uncle Jesse. We weren't *allowed* to.

I felt a tingling on the back of my neck. It seemed *important*, suddenly, to bring the rowboat back to life. I couldn't stop myself. I said, "Can we paint her like a rainbow again?"

"We don't have to," said Ivy quickly, frowning at me. I knew she didn't want me upsetting Grandpa.

Grandpa brought his gaze back to the boat and seemed to consider for a long minute. Then he said quietly, "You could paint her like a rainbow again. I wouldn't—" He struggled for a moment. "It will be a big project. You'll need two coats, at least."

I saw the two boys in the boat again, as clear as day. I clapped my hands. "Come on, Ivy, let's do it!" I circled the boat, excited.

"I guess," said Ivy, looking at Grandpa in a worried way.

"I'll go out and get you the marine paint and brushes," said Grandpa. "And you'll find masking tape in the boathouse if you want to start marking out the stripes."

"He almost mentioned Uncle Jesse," I said to Ivy as soon as he left.

"He didn't mean to," said Ivy. "He caught himself. I don't know if this rainbow thing is a good idea."

"It was *his* idea," I said.

"It was *your* idea."

"No, it really was his idea."

Gigi came down onto the dock. "Thought you girls might want to swim, so I—" She broke off when she saw the rowboat. "Ted did say he was going to let you use the old rowboat. I didn't realize he'd already brought it down."

"Grandpa says we can paint her like she used to be painted, like a rainbow," I said.

"He *kind* of said so," said Ivy.

"He just left to go and buy us the paint," I said.

Gigi opened her mouth to say something and then closed it. She put out a hand and gently ran her fingers along the old gray wood. “She was a lovely little boat in her day. Perhaps he—well—if he’s going along with it, it can’t hurt. But go on, girls, put on your suits. I’m sure you’ll need new ones, but last summer’s will do for now.”

We raced into the boathouse. Same as always, Uncle Jake’s sailboat was suspended from the ceiling. He’d soon be racing it in the August Series.

“The *Ginny G* isn’t here,” I said, staring at the empty stall where Grandpa’s old wooden motorboat, named for his mother, was usually tied up.

“Grandpa’s fixing her up. She’s in the barn,” said Ivy.

Everything else in the boathouse seemed just the same. It even smelled the same, a sweet-sour smell of damp towels and gasoline and bat droppings—but then I felt a shiver go all through me. I’d read somewhere that ghosts could have a certain scent. *Uncle Jesse*, I thought, looking at the dust motes dancing in the shafts of sun that came in through the dusty windows. *Uncle Jesse, you’re here with us.*

“I have this feeling,” I said, turning to Ivy. “About Uncle Jesse. Like he’s connected to the rowboat somehow. Not stored away in the barn anymore.”

Ivy shook her head. “Stop it. You’re giving me the creeps.”

We found last summer’s bathing suits in the changing lockers. Ivy squealed as she put hers on, and mine barely fit at all. It was funny, but also humiliating. We kept our T-shirts on over the bathing suits.

And then we ran out onto the dock and leaped into the lake at the same moment. When I came up to the surface, I floated on my back, soaking up the lake and the sky and the dark black-green pines. Gigi was on the dock watching over us, and then I felt the tingling on the back of my neck again. *Uncle Jesse is watching over us, too.*

The lake was so blue, and the boathouse was freshly painted bright red. The white sandy beach curled away from the dock in a big smile around the sheltered cove. I couldn’t wait to be sitting on the dock again with a sketchbook, drawing and painting everything around me.

Glancing up the hill, I could just make out Otter Lake House perched up on the pine-needley knoll. Big and brown, with all its windows wide open, it was if the house were grinning and saying, *I'm sooo, sooo happy you're here again!*

And I answered back, *I'm sooo, soo happy to be here, too.*