

## Sparrow

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*Jessica Warfield*

**Red.** The color of my sister's carpet, in the bedroom where my grandmother told us that Gloria, my mother's mother, had died. News she had received by a collect call from a prison somewhere in the desert of California. We never referred to Gloria as our grandmother—we barely knew her.

We sat on the edge of the bed, unsure of how to react. We cried silent, small tears. We did not speak; we only looked down, at our toes—wrestling them into the red carpet.

**One.** The number of memories I have of Gloria. This memory is confined to her '70s looking living room in a sepia hue. My sister and I are sitting on a dusty couch looking at a wall full of pictures of people we have never met, waiting for our mother to return from her bedroom with something that Gloria wanted to give us. In the pictures, we learn that one man with dark features is our Aunt Mona's father—not our mother Cyndi's.

We would learn later that our mother's father died when she was three. Not Mona's father.

**Smith.** Gloria's maiden name. Born to Abbie and Percy Ellsworth Stewart in October of 1936. Gloria was one of the eldest of eight children to be born to the Stewarts of Somerset County, Maine.

**6th grade.** The highest level of education Gloria completed. She was twelve years old when she left school to work at the local plastics manufacturing plant in downtown Madison. The mill, at one time, interestingly enough, was famous for making cloth for women's coats, and during World War II, they landed a contract with the United States Navy and made navy blue indigo cloth for the Navy's uniforms.

From a young age, Gloria knew the responsibility she had to help support her family. There were needs that had to be held above her own, even if this meant sacrificing her ‘need’ for an education. She continued to work in the mill and live at home until she was eighteen.

**June.** The month in which Gloria met Edward John Barry: a tall, muscular, handsome, twenty-year-old who had recently joined the Marines. Edward was visiting from a nearby town with some buddies to see a show by the famous Lakewood Players theater group. Gloria was down by the shore of Lake Wesserunsett with some friends when a group of young men spotted Gloria’s group of beauties down by the shore line. The group was bold and suave and had the nerve to invite them to the play they were about to attend.

**Barry.** The first married name Gloria would take only two months after meeting Edward. It was a short courtship followed by an even shorter engagement. They were wed by late August. It was a small backyard wedding. The couple had hoped for a traditional Catholic wedding—mass and all—but with a tight budget of less than a hundred dollars, they had to make do. Gloria wore her mother’s long-sleeved, time-faded wedding dress, which was intended for an early winter wedding. Gloria roasted in the dress; August in Maine could get well up to 100 degrees or more.

After they had cut their modest cake made by Edward’s aunt, they spent their first night together at a local bed and breakfast. Within the week, the new couple was headed west. Gloria never looked back; she had her ticket out of small-town life and wasn’t going to miss her chance.

They moved from Maine to San Diego, California, so Edward could attend basic training at Camp Pendleton. They would spend the next eight years on the West Coast together, until one tragic night when a drunk driver hit Edward’s red, 1963 Ford Falcon, killing him and his passenger instantly.

His obituary was first on the list for that day. Following him was the death notice of a Dr. Walter Henry, an 84-year-old local dentist. The *San Diego Blade-Tribune* provided the smallest logistics of his life.

**Birthplace.** Edward was born to Alexander and Alberta Barry in 1934 in Waterville, Maine, a territory in Kennebec County often referred to as a plantation territory, but in actuality has only had one plantation in its history. His parents were also from Maine, born and raised. That is as far as the family history on his side goes.

**Employment.** Edward was a carrier for a trucking company in San Luis Rey. His obituary also mentioned that his survivors included a wife, two sons and two daughters, a mother and sister in Connecticut. I gathered that he was Catholic since his services were being held at St. Francis' Holy Church. There was no mention of him being a Marine.

**Death.** The article ran only six hours after his death occurred. "Two Die In Fiery Freeway Wreck" headlined the front page of the *Blade-Tribune* on Wednesday, July 27, 1966. My grandfather's car was rammed from the rear by a Daniel Darnell, who was involved in a high speed pursuit with the California Highway Patrol. Darnell's car hit Edward's, causing his small, red, fiberglass sports car to burst into flames and disintegrate on Interstate 5. Darnell and his two passengers suffered minor injuries and were transferred to Tri-City hospital, while Edward and his single passenger were transferred to the city morgue.

**Carolene.** The passenger of Edward who was also thrown onto the interstate and killed. She was barely eighteen, a newlywed, and moved from Ohio to San Diego because of the military as well. Her husband was being shipped off to Vietnam, and Carolene wanted to see her husband for a few more hours before he left for thirteen months. She feared that they might never see one another again.

**Letter to the editor.** October 1966. We say, "Oh yes, we are very civilized. It is stylish to have our drinks; it is the thing to do." But we fail to realize that every time a person takes one drink and moves behind the



wheel, he is a potential killer. We say how terrible the war in Vietnam is killing all of our wonderful boys, and this is true. But we are killing far more people on the highways of our wonderful nation and shrugging our shoulders about it. Driving while drunk is a good part of it. All of you read the story on the front page of the *Blade-Tribune*. You must have said, "How awful," and then forgot about it. But Tom Estes, the husband of Carolene and the best friend of Edward Barry, will never forget. Edward's four children and widow will never forget. And Daniel, the drunken boy who caused the accident, now charged with felony drunk driving and manslaughter, will never forget either.

**Next of kin.** Misfortune hit hard and lasted for almost six years. My mother recalls the moment she received the news that her father was dead. A police officer came to their door, and her older brothers, who were ten and five at the time, began to cry. My mother began to cry as well, not because she was grieving, but because that is what she thought she was supposed to do.

This is a typical response for a three-year-old. At three, children are still fluctuating between the idea of fantasy and reality. In the mind of a toddler, death is not understood as a permanent thing; toddlers don't know how to react to death in the same way adults do.

My sister's and my response to the news of Gloria was processed in this same manner, only we were twelve – still fluctuating between two ideas: the fantasy of a regular relationship we wish we had with our grandmother and the grief we should have been feeling, compared to the reality of the absence of grief we really felt.

**Retreat to the northeast.** Gloria moved back to Maine for a brief year after Edward died. She went back to the paper mill, this time in order to support her own family. The winter was inevitably harsh, and Gloria would escape the chill of her small silver bullet trailer by cooking cinnamon toast on a pizza tin with the oven slightly open. She heated hot chocolate with the burners on top of the stove. Her five young children would pile around the table and move as close as they could towards

the warmth of the oven before they had to venture out into a blizzard towards the only elementary school in Madison.

**Recommendation.** A time-faded paper document, written by typewriter, by a manager of R&D Technical Services at Hughes Aircraft Company in the vacuum tube products division. Gloria worked here for a period of time, and to her co-workers, she was friendly. To her highest superiors she was “highly intelligent and a person with a real will to perform.”

Gloria had to have a real will to perform; she had to work a double shift just to take care of her four young children on what income she herself could bring in. For almost thirty years she worked for Sierracin/Magneddyne and built motors for CAT scans and worked on government contracts to build motors for Boeing 747s as well. To the outside world, and in particular to the 200 employees Gloria managed, she was collected and friendly, but at home, disorder ran rampant. Her children had to be self-sufficient if they wanted a roof over their heads, clothes on their bodies, and food in their stomachs.

**Depression.** A common side effect to the experience of death of a loved one. If your depression worsens or remains for more than a month, consult your primary physician.

Gloria consulted her primary physician, and he prescribed her cocktails to relax her and calm her nerves. Cocktails every day keeps depression away! Gloria's favorite cocktail was a White Russian, made of vodka, coffee liqueur, and cream.

**Standing room only.** The funeral parlor overflowed with people who had come to pay their respects to Gloria. People spoke about how giving Gloria was, and that she never let you leave her house without eating some meatloaf and having something to drink first. One of my mother's biggest regrets is missing her funeral on that October day because she was confined to a jail cell for being caught selling methamphetamines.

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