

Pointes of Interest

If DNA could talk ...

It did for a Maringouin native, and a new book tells her story

By Kevin Fambrough
kevin.pcbanner@gmail.com

Eddie White knew she had been adopted when she was born in 1970.

The girl who grew up in Maringouin as Edris Ann O'Neal with an adopted brother and another brother and sister in Dr. James O'Neal Jr.'s home never had an urge to learn about her biological background.

When she did reach out, she learned it involved siblings, relatives, a connection to Al Capone and a photo with a mystery.

The baby of the O'Neal family became the eldest sibling of another family, fathered by a pacifist who challenged David Duke at LSU with a bloody knife.

"The Little Girl at the Bottom of the Picture: A Journey of Selfless Discovery," made its debut two weeks ago, written by Edie's husband, Jeremy White.

"Edie's selfless agenda is the heart of this powerful story of healing and sets it apart from other works about similar searches," Jeremy White said.

"It's an insanely beautiful story that we've largely held close to the vest for five years," White said. "Now we're literally telling the world about it, so it's mind-blowing to have such an overwhelming response."

Jeremy White calls the 468-page book, published by White Lines Press, "a real-life unicorn of a story."

Life in Margouin

"My life was great. Living in Maringouin was remote," Edie White said. There were horses, cats and dogs at home, but her mom, Cletta "Ducky" O'Neal, kept her immersed in after-school activities.

She was in the Brownies, took dance classes in junior high, piano lessons and art lessons in New Roads.

She followed her three older siblings to Catholic-Pointe Coupee, beginning in kindergarten and finishing as valedictorian for the Class of 1988.

She enrolled at LSU, where she met a mechanical engineering major who at times took to the stage as a comedian and at other times was a high school/college football referee.

Edie and Jeremy married in 1992.

Edie White said she always knew she was adopted.

"My mom told me, 'If you need to talk, I am here.'"

Yet Edie said she had no urge to seek her biological parents.

Book launch

"Little Girl" kicked off its official release July 1 with Jeremy and Edie White at Cavalier House Books in the Denham Springs Antique Village.

One week later the Red Sticks Read bookstore in Baton Rouge hosted the Whites.

The appearance featured Jeremy White explaining how the book came about, answering questions and presenting a slideshow of photos taken over a five-year period during the research for "Little Girl."

While the slideshow was not planned at the start, White said, "It felt like I was doing a documentary in telling the story."

Jeremy White credited bookstore owner John Cavalier with helping him with publication after 125 queries to agents brought no offer.

"John opened my eyes to the potential of partnering with indie bookstores," White said.

The collaboration led to a publisher, a place on Amazon and becoming partners with two bookstores in Baton Rouge, two in in New Orleans and six bookstores in three other states.

Then came Christmas

On Dec. 25, 2017, Jeremy White recounts, the family gathered in Mar-



Photo by Kevin Fambrough



Photo by Jeremy White/Facebook



Photo by Jeremy White/Facebook



Photo by Jeremy White/Facebook

Photos of Jeremy and Edie White's travels blend with photos of their work on the book of her search for her biological relatives.

ingouin.

Edie's father, Dr. James O'Neal Jr., had passed away in 2010.

Her brother Patrick sent his DNA to Ancestry.com and found some ties in New Orleans.

"Doc didn't want her to look into her adoption," Jeremy White said. "That evening after everyone had left, she said would look into the DNA."

"Ducky was excited."

Edie said she worried about opening old wounds for other people.

"But it could be healing someone else's wounds," she said.

In early February 2008, Ancestry.com sent a message via its app.

"You have 700+ fourth cousins or closer."

Edie's background was one quarter east European-Russian.

"Though she was the most Irish of two adopted kids, suddenly she's from the Soviet bloc," Jeremy White told his amused audience.

The Whites pieced together Edie's family tree that took them to Texas, the West Coast and Chicago to meet a younger brother in Washington state and a younger sister in Austin.

And it led to her meeting her biological father, John Hart, a graduate student at LSU after serving as a "pacifist" MP in the Army in Vietnam.

Asked about Edie's mom by an audience member, Jeremy White replied, "You need to ready the story." Asked further about Edie's father, he replied, "You need to read the story."

And the little girl at the bottom of the photo?

That question plagued an enthusiastic horde of gangster-adjacent Ukrainian Americans in Chicago for more than 65 years, according to Jeremy White.

"Well, that photo was taken in 1952, so it can't be Edie. The story is in the book," he said, although he added that branch of the family did some "small things" for Al Capone.

An ironic tidbit, Edie's cousin is the chief financial officer of the lab that does the DNA tests for Ancestry.com.

The David Duke story

Jeremy White says Chapter 11 "sounds easy to dismiss," but the incident is in two books and the Daily Reveille reported it on Nov. 13, 1969.

After the Free Speech Alley at LSU, where avowed racist David Duke spoke, a black student, Carl Tickle,

Above left: Author Jeremy White discusses "The Little Girl at the Bottom of the Picture: A Journey of Selfless Discovery," during its launch July 1 at Cavalier House Books in Denham Springs. Above right: Edie White listens to her husband, Jeremy, talk about their book. Left: Edie White grew up in Maringouin.

How to order

"The Little Girl at the Bottom of the Picture: A Journey of Selfless Discovery," can be ordered at LittleGirlBook.com or at Amazon.com.

The book is available at Cavalier House of Books, 114 N. Range Ave., Denham Springs, (225) 664-2255, web site: cavalierhousebooks.com, email info@cavalierhousebooks.com.

It also is available at Red Stick Reads, 541 S. Eugene St. Baton Rouge, (225) 333-8312, web site: redstickreads.com, email: redstickreads@gmail.com.

took a knife, challenging Duke to cut his hand to show there was no difference in their blood. Duke refused. Another student accepted the challenge.

A Reveille photo shows Tickle's bloody hand holding a white bloody hand -- The hand of John Hart.

No regrets

Edie White now works at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in media relations. Family trips have taken on a new meaning.

"People tell me I'm brave. I was never thinking about what could happen," Edie White said.

"I went in thinking in case someone needed to answer a question, that I could let them know it came out good," she said.

"I hit the jackpot growing up and I hit the jackpot again."

