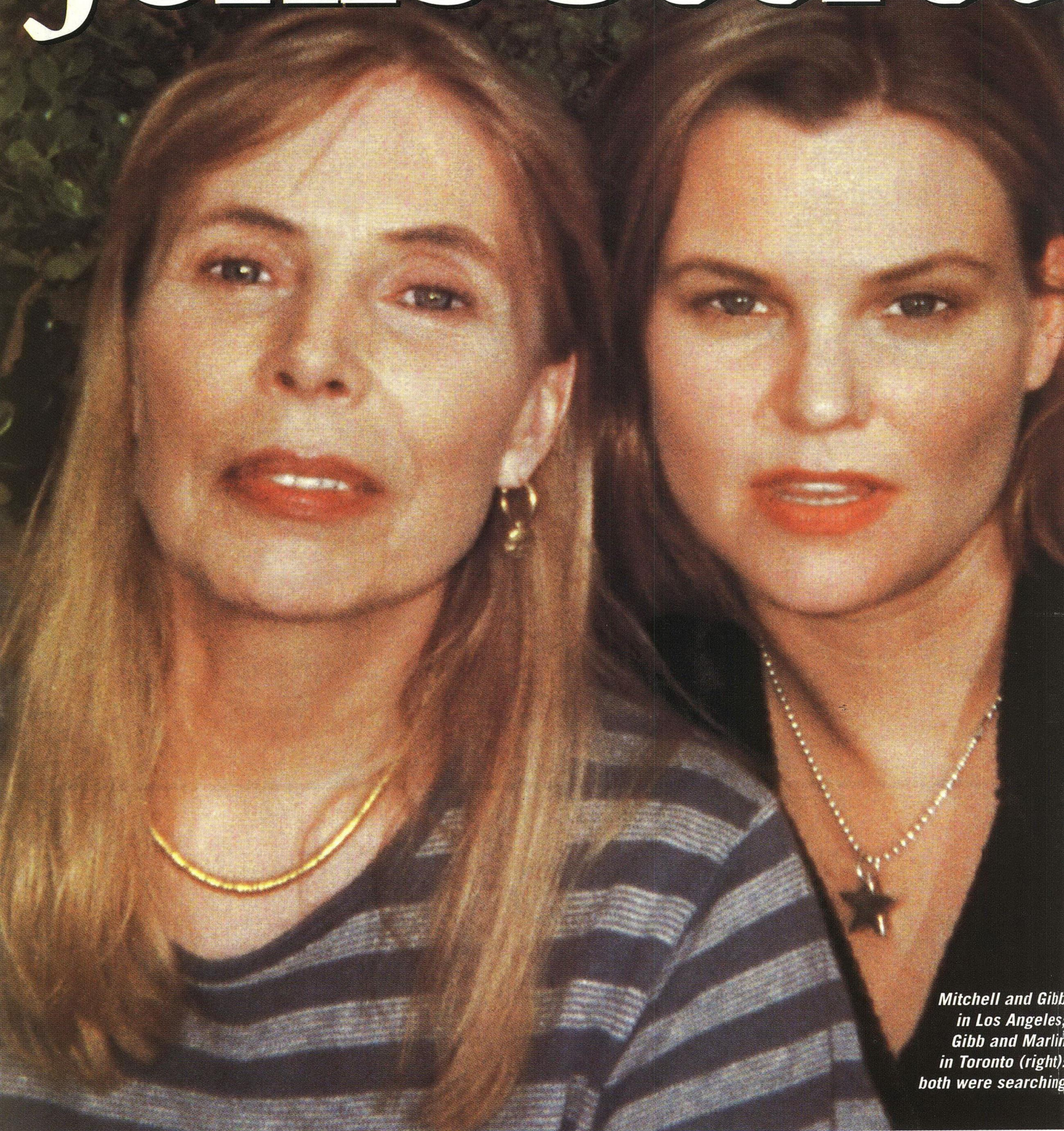


# Joni's Secret



*Mitchell and Gibb  
in Los Angeles,  
Gibb and Marlin  
in Toronto (right),  
both were searching*



# When a pop legend found her long-lost daughter, a musical prophecy came true

BY BRIAN D. JOHNSON

*Born with the moon in Cancer  
Choose her a name she will  
answer to . . .*

*Call her green for the children  
that have made her . . .*

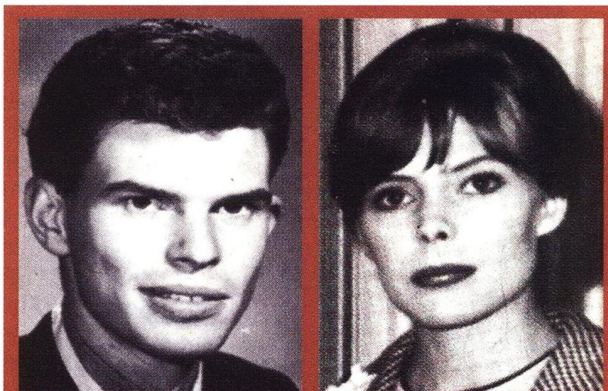
*Child with a child pretending  
Weary of lies you are sending  
home*

*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*

—Joni Mitchell's *Little Green*,  
from her 1971 album, *Blue*



MacMath; Mitchell in Calgary: young and destitute

**I**t is all there, encoded in the song. A true story of secrets and lies. The child “born with the moon in Cancer” is the baby that Joni Mitchell gave up for adoption. She felt she had no choice. At 21, she was Joan Anderson, dirt poor and pregnant, an unknown folksinger in a Toronto rooming house. The girl was born on Feb. 19, 1965. The child’s father, a Calgary artist named Brad MacMath, had, as the song says, disappeared “to California/hearing everything was warmer there.” Joni balked at the prospect of being a single, destitute mother, and was not prepared to ask her parents back in Saskatchewan for help—they did not even know she was pregnant. She tried a desperate marriage of convenience, to a fellow folksinger named Chuck Mitchell, but it would soon collapse, leaving her nothing but a new surname. “Weary of lies,” as Joni sings in *Little Green*, she “signed all the papers in the family name,” and sent her baby, Kelly Dale Anderson, into the unknown. Kelly, as in kelly green.

ED BARRINGTON/SGMA

## COVER

Penned two decades before Mitchell’s secret was finally exposed in a tabloid newspaper four years ago, *Little Green* was part private confession, part wishful prophecy. And the “happy ending” hoped for in the song had already begun to unfold. At the age of six months, Kelly—renamed Kilauren Gibb—found a home as the adopted daughter of two teachers, David and Ida Gibb, in the cozy Toronto suburb of Don Mills. Kilauren grew up in a world of private schools and country clubs and tropical

vacations. She landed a career as a fashion model.

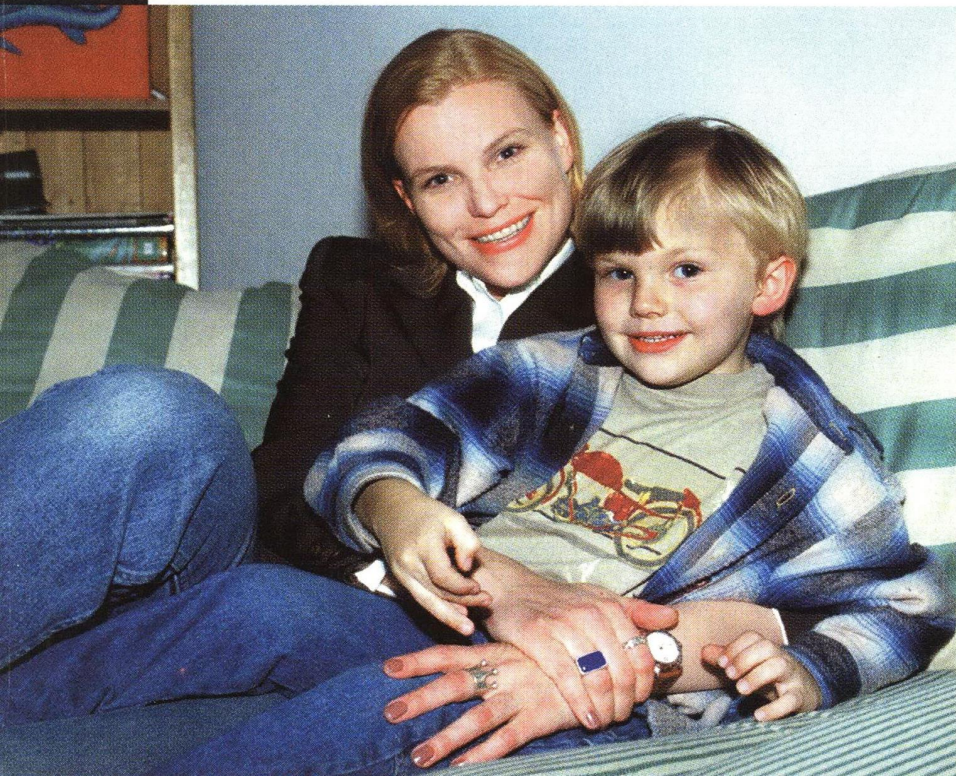
But, as the song predicted, there was also sorrow. The mystery of Kilauren’s adoption cast a lengthening shadow over her life. She says that her parents did not tell her she was adopted until she was 27 and pregnant with her own child. Kilauren then embarked on a frustrating five-year

quest to track down her birth mother. Now 32, she is separated from the father of her son, Marlin, who is almost 4. And a “happy ending” quite different from the one envisioned in *Little Green* has come to pass. In the past few weeks, amid a blaze of media attention, mother and daughter have reunited, their high cheekbones, blue eyes and long blond hair framed side by side. “I’ve had pain and joy in my life, but nothing like this,” Mitchell told a reporter in Los Angeles, where she has lived since 1968. “It’s an unparalleled emotional feeling.”

The story reads like a fairy tale. But the tale is beginning to show some tarnish. Mitchell, who is twice divorced, has not just gained a daughter, she has inherited an entire family, innocents who have found themselves in the spotlight at a time of tremendous emotional upheaval. Losing Kilauren to her birth mother “was our greatest fear,” adoptive mother Ida Gibb told *Maclean’s* last week. “It was a nightmare that this would happen to us when she was little and when she was a teenager. Now, it is easier to take. But it’s still hard.”

Kilauren, meanwhile, has had to cope with the excitement of finding her birth mother and becoming famous all at once. Hounded by reporters, she disconnected her phone last week and abandoned her apartment. Soon, she had handlers marketing her, selling interviews and juggling requests from the likes of Barbara Walters, Oprah Winfrey and Larry King. “You can’t imagine the onslaught of press from all over the world,” says Mitchell’s Vancouver-based manager, Sam Feldman. “It’s so bizarre. It’s something out of a movie.”

The Joni-Kilauren saga is a story that has become too good for its own good. Its appeal obviously goes beyond Mitchell’s mellowing stardom. It is about seeing the destinies of the famous and the unknown thrown together in a lottery-like twist





of fate. It is also a fable for the baby boom generation, one that suggests miracles can still be salvaged from the emotional losses of the Sixties. But above all it has played out as a very public adoption drama—and shed light on the dilemma faced by families whose adopted children seek out their biological parents (page 54).

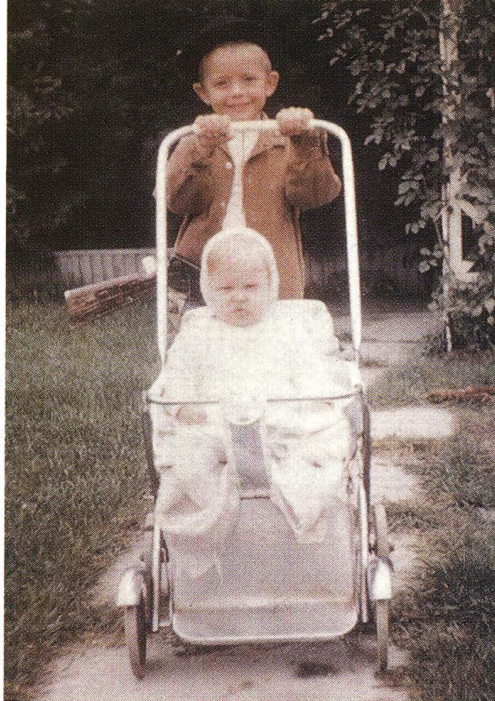
What really complicates an already sensitive issue, however, is the fact that Kilauren Gibb's story has become a property. Swamped by interview requests, Gibb put Mitchell's manager in charge of her publicity. And she also had her boyfriend, an orthopedic parts salesman named Ted Barrington, act as a go-between. After several days of trying to set up an interview with Gibb last week, *Maclean's* finally received a call from Barrington, who said it could be arranged for \$10,000. When told that *Maclean's* does not pay for interviews, he became impatient. "It's all business to me," he declared. "The money's for Kilauren. She doesn't have a pot to piss in. She's a student right now [living on student loans while studying desktop publishing at George Brown College in Toronto] and she should really be able to profit from this, at least monetarily."

But what about her newfound birth mother? "Joni's asset-rich but not cash-rich," replied Barrington. Kilauren is getting "quite anxiety-ridden. If you were in her position, and you were being hounded all day long, you'd say what the f... am I getting out of this, except a real bad headache."

Then he added, before hanging up, "If you've got an offer, let us know. You have my pager number." Later, after talking to Feldman, Barrington phoned back to apologize. "I was out of line," he said, adding: "All the good stuff is at the back end with book deals and all that. I'm just worried about Kilauren being exploited. I'm just worried about my girlfriend."

Even Mitchell's octogenarian parents, Bill and Myrtle Anderson, have been swept up by the media blitz. "It's sort of a fairy-tale thing," Bill told *Maclean's* from his home in Saskatoon, "but some of the publicity isn't so entertaining as far as we're concerned. It's been hectic, especially for Myrt. The phone's been ringing off the wall." Myrtle and Bill both say they are happy to discover their granddaughter, and a great-grandson. "But I feel sorry for the adoptive parents," says Myrtle. "They do all the work and then suddenly they have a rival." Her husband concurs: "The parents who brought the child up deserve a lot of credit, and sometimes we feel they're being overlooked," he says. "I hope they don't lose her."

Kilauren's parents live on a quiet crescent in Don Mills, in the same grey-brick bungalow where they raised their children. They invite a visitor down to the basement, into a classic Fifties rec room with wood panelling and a red shag rug. Framed photographs of Kilauren and her older broth-



**Kilauren and David on her first day with the Gibbs: the 'happy ending'**

er, David (now a 36-year-old Toronto advertising executive), cover the walls. Although David is not adopted, the siblings look remarkably matched, both blond and long-limbed. There are glamor shots from Kilauren's fashion portfolio. David, who dabbled in modelling himself, strikes a muscled pose in white underwear. There is also a picture of a beaming David, as captain of the football team at Upper Canada College, being introduced to Prince Philip. Kilauren was educated just down the road from U.C.C., at equally exclusive Bishop Strachan School.

More photographs, hundreds of them, in albums stacked on the rec room table, showing the children frolicking on beaches from Maine to Florida. A number of the pictures are inscribed with loving captions such as "my two chickadees," and they are all meticulously dated. "I would say we had a happier family life than average," says Ida. "We were very fortunate." Before retiring, she taught teenagers with learning disabilities and her husband taught at a teachers college and worked at the ministry of transportation. "When David was 3½, we were doing very well, and we wanted to share it with someone," explains Ida. "Taking a child into your home seemed like a good way of doing it. We just phoned the agency, and what surprised us is how quickly it came through," recalls

**Kilauren, David in 1977; with Ida early on (left): suburban comforts, private schools, tropical vacations**



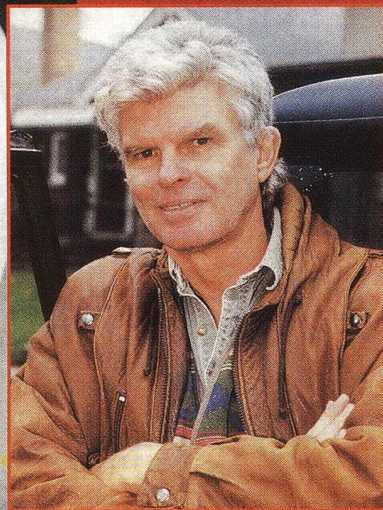




MARCEL THOMAS/SIPA



CANAPRESS



RICHARD POHLE/SIPA

**MacMath; Mitchell last year (left); and in 1970: from the stigma of an illegitimate child to a tangled thread of coincidence that led mother and daughter to find each other again**

door at seven in the morning wanting to take their picture. It's a lot to deal with. But it's all turned out better than you could have hoped for."

Ida is getting over her shock. "The thing is, Joni phoned me and we had a good chat," she says. "I found her to be quite a nice person, and that made all the difference in the world to me. She assured me that there weren't going to be any big changes, that nobody's going to lose anything."

Mitchell also put in a call to Kilauren's biological father. She had her first conversation with Brad MacMath in 32 years. "It was very weird," says MacMath, 56, who runs a Toronto photo studio with his wife. "But there was no animosity."

Last week, MacMath also met his daughter for the first time. "I was elated," he says. "But it was very strange. We had fun noticing the mannerisms we have in common. We walk the same, have the same dimples, the same little knobs on our shoulders—surfer knobs."

In the excitement surrounding Kilauren's reunion with her birth mother, meeting her birth father almost seemed an afterthought. Trying to contact MacMath, Ted Barrington phoned Linda Miller, an old acquaintance from Don Mills—without realizing that she was MacMath's wife. "I'd photographed Ted's wedding five years ago," Miller laughed. "The marriage only lasted six months. So yesterday he phoned me up out of the blue, because I'm the only photographer he knew, and he said, 'Have you heard of this Brad MacMath guy?'"

That, as it turns out, is just one in a trail of bizarre coincidences linking Kilauren to her past—slim degrees of separation between Sixties abandon and the Nineties commitment.

Kilauren's biological parents were both art students in Calgary when she was conceived. They moved to Toronto during the pregnancy and discussed settling down. "Oh yeah," sighs MacMath, "we had to go through all that. But we were not communicating." He went back to Saskatchewan, then on to California. "I was trying to be an artist," he says, "and when she got married to some other guy, I just divorced myself from the whole situation. That was the last straw."

Mitchell, in a recent interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, says that her main concern at the time was to conceal her pregnancy from her parents. "The scandal was so intense," she recalls. "A daughter could do nothing more disgraceful. You have no idea what the stigma

was. It was like you murdered somebody." Mitchell's mother, however, now says, "If we had known she was expecting a baby, we would have helped. I'm sure we would have encouraged her to keep the baby, but we didn't know anything about it until several years later when she and Chuck separated and she was home and told us about it."

Mitchell remembers giving birth in a Toronto hospital, where "one of the barbaric things they did was they bound the breasts of unwed mothers to keep the milk from coming," she says. Complications, she adds, kept her in the hospital for 10 days with her child. During the early years after the adoption, Mitchell told the *Times*, she "worried constantly" about the child's health because her pregnancy diet had been "atrocious." In an interview on CBC Newsworld's *Pamela Wallin Live*—broadcast, by coincidence, on Feb. 19, 1996, Kilauren's 31st birthday—the singer explained that she had no recourse but adoption. "I didn't have a penny," she

## The story illustrates the dilemma of reunions for adoptive families

Ida, who had to drop out of a postgraduate course in education to take care of their new charge.

Ida seems puzzled by Kilauren's claim that she did not find out she was adopted until she was 27. "She knew when she was a teenager," she says. "Her friends told her. But maybe the full significance didn't sink in." Kilauren's father, meanwhile, says: "The mistake we made was in trying to say she's not adopted, that she's one of us and let's forget the whole thing and put it away somewhere, because we wanted her to be part of the family." Then he adds: "People are born. They are a life. They belong to nobody."

Kilauren's brother, David, expresses empathy for his parents. "There's a lot of fear there," he told *Maclean's*. "They're thinking, 'My gosh, are we going to lose her? Are we being replaced?'" On top of that, you add the fame component. They're very modest, very quiet people, and all of a sudden there are people knocking on their



said. "I had no money for diapers, or a room to take her to. There was no career on the horizon. Three years later, I had a recording contract and a house and a car, but how could I see that in the future?"

In 1968, Mitchell's career began to take off. She won a Grammy for her album *Clouds*, and singer Judy Collins turned one of its songs, *Both Sides Now*, into a hit. Another cut, *Chelsea Morning*, would later inspire Bill and Hillary Clinton in naming their daughter. In 1970, Mitchell released *Ladies of the Canyon*, which featured such classic songs as *Big Yellow Taxi*, *Woodstock* and *The Circle Game*. The same year, she recorded *Blue*, an intimate excursion into loneliness and loss, which many consider her masterpiece.

Although Mitchell kept her secret from her parents for several years, and from the media for almost three decades, those close to her knew. "It was very much part of her life," singer Murray McLaughlan told *Maclean's*. "I think she was always looking for the child." Another friend, Toronto music manager Bernie Fiedler, remembers being with her at the Mariposa Folk Festival about four years after Kilauren's birth. "There was a couple with a little girl wanting to speak to Joni. We went over and talked to the girl, who must have been 4 or 5, and afterwards Joni turned to me and said: 'That could be my daughter.' I will never forget that. She was obviously suffering tremendously."

Over the years, Mitchell made some quiet attempts to track down her daughter, without success. But while promoting her album *Turbulent Indigo* (1994), she fielded questions about a tabloid report of a "love child," and took her search public for the first time.

Kilauren, meanwhile, was already looking for her mother. She says it took nearly five years for the Children's Aid Society to produce the adoption documents that she requested. Even then, the papers offered non-identifying information, just dates and some telling biographical details. A Joni Mitchell fan could have matched the profile to the singer without much trouble. But what finally led Kilauren to identify her birth mother was a tangled thread of coincidence winding all the way back to the birth of the Sixties counterculture.

The maze of events begins with Duke Redbird. Now a Toronto CITY TV entertainment reporter, in 1964 he was writing and reading poetry at folk festivals. Redbird moved into a Victorian rooming house on Huron Street, and Mitchell, already pregnant, moved in across the hall. Most of the boarders were broke. "It was a very sad and lonely time for her," Redbird says. "I remember Joni being a very private person. I would hear her singing in that beautiful voice of hers, strumming her guitar behind the closed door of her room."

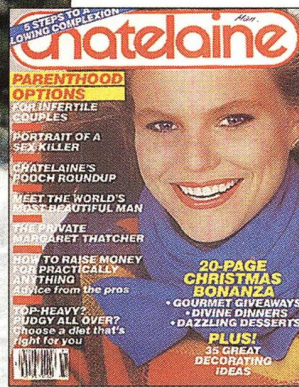
One day, Redbird's brother, John (now deceased), came by and gave Mitchell a couple of apples, a gesture that she never forgot. Years later, she met Redbird at a concert and asked him to convey her thanks to his brother.

Cut to 1988. Redbird meets Annie Mandlsohn while both are studying at York University. "Never tell this to anybody," he told her, "but I lived in the same house as Joni Mitchell; she had a baby and nobody

**Kilauren as a model: now that she is famous, handlers are marketing her**



COVER



*The mystery of her adoption cast a growing shadow over her life*

knows." Late last year, Mandlsohn's current boyfriend, Tim Campbell, introduced her to Kilauren Gibb—Campbell, Gibb and Barrington had all grown up together in Don Mills. Gibb showed Mandlsohn the Children's Aid information describing her mother as a Saskatchewan folksinger who had moved to the United States. "That was the key," says Mandlsohn. "I said, 'Kilauren! Your mother is Joni Mitchell!'"

Gibb was stunned. Mandlsohn sent Gibb to Redbird. "I said, 'Kilauren, you've got to go down and see Duke Redbird and ask him one question: what was the season that she was pregnant?' If it was winter, it's bingo." Gibb met Redbird in early March. "When I talked to Kilauren, she was hesitant," Redbird says. "She had suspicions, but I mean it's like you and I having suspicions that Donald Trump was our father." Gibb also looked up a Joni Mitchell Home page on the Internet and was struck by details matching her Children's Aid information. Finally, she phoned the singer's manager, whose office had been flooded with calls from would-be Joni offspring. She could not get through, but she sent off

a package of information, including her birth date—and the fact that she had been named Kelly Dale. Before long, Gibb and her son were on a plane to Los Angeles, where they spent 19 days getting acquainted with the singer in her \$9-million mansion.

In the Coloured Stone, a club that Redbird co-owns, he found a note pinned to the bulletin board. "Hi Duke, it's Kilauren," the note read. "I wanted to see you today because I'm on my way to L.A. on March 13 to visit Joni. She remembers you and your brother and your kindness during her time of need. She couldn't believe that I had met you. She is my mother and she has sent me and my son tickets to visit her. Sorry I missed you and I will try again soon. Thanks for being so kind. Love Kilauren Gibb."

Born of coffeehouse romance and California dreaming, raised in the suburban conformity of a model family, Kilauren has come full circle. Adopted by show business, she is now entering a new circle game, a world where there are few secrets and too many lies.

With DANYLO HAWALESZKA in Toronto and DALE EISLER in Calgary



# Joni's Secret

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