

New Brunswick

At 72, woman started second life – as a New Brunswick Acadian

Given up for adoption in the 1920s, Lillian Vetter travelled to New Brunswick at 70, in search of clues

[Gabrielle Fahmy](#) · CBC News · Posted: Aug 12, 2019 5:39 PM AT | Last Updated: August 12



Lillian Vetter moved back to New Brunswick after seven decades south of the border, to be with her biological family. (Rene Godin/Radio-Canada)

Lillian Vetter's life can be split into two chapters: the first 72 years of her life, and the past 25 years.

Vetter was born in New Brunswick in 1922 and given up by her biological parents as a child. She was raised in Fitchburg, Mass., by her adoptive family.

She married but never had children. Widowed at 70 and without any family south of the border, she set out to find out more about her Acadian origins.

On a trip to Louisiana with a friend, she met many francophones and asked around about her birth name — Petitpas.

Someone told her she should go to New Brunswick. The year was 1994. It was the first World Acadian Congress.

Certificat de Baptême
Certificate of Baptism

Je certifie que (I Certify that) Marie Lilliane Petitpas

~~Fille~~ Son Dominique Petitpas et de Priscille Balineau
de of
Fille Daughter) and of

a été baptisé le March 12 1922, was born March 10, 1922
was baptised on

Parrain Edmond F. Balineau Marraine Melina J. Balineau
Godfather Godmother

Copie exacte prise des registres de la paroisse St-Antoine de Padoue, RICHIBOUCTOU VILLAGE, Kent Co., N.B.
Exact copy taken from the Registers of St. Anthony of Padoua Parish.

Signé (Signed) A.P. Gaudet Prêtre
Priest
Joel Landry Curé actuel
Actual Pastor
July 24 19 41

The only clues Vetter had about her New Brunswick family were on her birth certificate. (Submitted)

"I said 'huh?'" Vetter recalled, laughing.

Vetter had never heard of the event.

This was before the age of the internet. She called the Better Business Bureau in Fredericton, and next thing she knew, she was on a train to New Brunswick, armed with her birth certificate.

Vetter visited cemeteries, churches and nursing homes in search of clues.

She went to Barachois, Shediac and Richibucto Village. People told her many anecdotes but nothing concrete.

Then one day, a woman left a note at her hotel.

"I was overwhelmed," Vetter remembered.

The note was from her sister.

Unbeknownst to her, she had two sisters and a brother.

They all met for the first time the next day.

Suddenly, a large family

"It was hard for me to believe," said Vetter. "In some ways sometimes I think maybe I'm still in a dream."

She went back to the U.S., sold her house, packed her bags, and at 72 years of age, moved back to the country where she was born.

Overnight, she had what was a very large family.



Vetter's brothers and sisters, from left to right: Marie, Henri, Evelyne and Lillian. (Submitted)

Not only siblings, but nephews and nieces, one of them, Canada's minister of health, Ginette Petitpas Taylor.

"What it's done to my life," she said. "It's made it whole again. It's fulfilled more expectations than I would have ever had if I had stayed in the States."

Since 1994, the World Acadian Congress has been held every five years.

Part of the mission is to reunite families.

Best years of her life

For Vetter, that reunion has been a daily thing. Now 97, she lives in a seniors home in Moncton, just down the hall from her sister.

She's grateful for getting back her "famille."

"The last 25 years have been the happiest of my life," she said.

"And I think they deserve a big 'merci beaucoup.'"