

# Private investigators help woman reconnect with long-ago benefactor

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By ALICIA ROBINSON  
The Press-Enterprise

In their day jobs, Diane and Mike "Shadow" Jones are private investigators. But in the Canyon Lake couple's free time, they do a different kind of investigation.

The volunteer "search angels" have helped adoptees find their birth parents and siblings they didn't know they had. The searches are done pro bono.

But a request they got last month from Kevin Watson, a soldier serving in Iraq, was somewhat unusual: help find his wife Shari's high school boyfriend.

Story continues below



Paula Sato / Special to The Press-Enterprise

Rick Lancaster, of Riverside, and long-ago friend Shari Watson, of Bend, Ore., recently reconnected with the help of Canyon Lake private investigators Diane and Mike "Shadow" Jones.

The search led the Joneses to Riverside resident Rick Lancaster. But they weren't sure how to handle the case until they heard more of the story behind Lancaster and Shari Watson, who now lives in Bend, Ore.

Shari and Rick, both now 45, met as teenagers at Foothill High School in Santa Ana. After seeing Rick for several years, Shari graduated and was ready to move on.

"I started dating somebody else and got pregnant," she said in a recent interview. "My son's father decided that he wasn't ready to have a baby after all."

Shari, who was then 18, wanted the baby. Her dad, however, wasn't happy about it and she no longer felt comfortable at home, she said, but she didn't know where to go.

That's when Rick stepped up, letting her sleep in the back of his car and then putting her up with his relatives.

"His cousins bought me maternity clothes, and he got a job and just took care of us," Watson said.

Lancaster's answer as to why he looked after the pregnant Watson was simple: "Because I adored her."

But then Rick's family found out he had been providing for a baby that wasn't his, and his mother was angry, Lancaster said. She sent him away to family in Iowa.

### **Happy to help**

The pair saw each other a few years later, when Lancaster returned from a stint in the Marines in 1986. Then they lost touch.

Watson had tried without success to find Lancaster because she appreciated everything he had done to help her, and she wanted to reconnect "to make sure he was OK," she said.

Kevin Watson e-mailed the Joneses from Iraq saying he thought Lancaster might be in Riverside and asked for their help.

When the Joneses heard the story, they were happy to help especially because they support the military such as sending care packages through their motorcycle club.

"It touched our hearts because there's a guy in Iraq defending our country," Diane Jones said. "All he's thinking about is making his wife's life complete."

Shari Watson and Lancaster met last week for the first time in 25 years.

"It was like I just saw him a week ago," said Watson, who came to California from Oregon to visit her son, who is stationed at Twentynine Palms.

They also met the Joneses. Watson was introduced to some of Lancaster's four children.

## Search angel

The Joneses don't keep a log of the "search angel" cases they do free of charge, but they say they have handled hundreds. Some of the stories are posted on their Web site, [www.searchangelsbiker.com](http://www.searchangelsbiker.com)

They became involved in 1995 because Mike Jones, who was adopted by an American couple in Germany, had long wondered about his birth mother.

"We have an opportunity to introduce families that have never met their mom and dad, and that's really cool to do," he said.

Typical searches can cost between \$800 and \$2,000. Diane Jones said they have funded the search angel cases themselves. They are seeking nonprofit status as a way to keep the work going.

They have developed friendships with many of the people they have reunited. One adoptee whose family they traced recently created their Web site. A Florida family they brought together invited the Joneses to their reunion next month.

"Once we decide to take on a case, we look at it as it's not just a job. To these people," Mike Jones said, gesturing toward Rick and Shari, "it's going to be a long-term relationship, and that's how we look at it."

Jones said he was impressed by Lancaster's selflessness in helping his ex-girlfriend when she was in trouble.

For Lancaster's part, he is most amazed that Kevin Watson went to such lengths to find his wife's former flame.

"He has to be a big man," Lancaster said.

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## Share Your Thoughts

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Comments (3)

[GV Dave](#) 1 month ago wrote:



Thanks to Shadow and Diane I found my birth family too. What a wonderful mission this is. Keep up the good work.

[PUNTO83](#) 1 month ago wrote:



Finally, a nice story! Search Angels...kepp up the great work you do! :)

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[SearchAngels](#) 1 month ago wrote:



We were so honored to be part of the this journey for American soldier, SPC, Kevin Watson and his wife Shari. They are truly amazing people. They and their family are dedicated to serving this country and for that we grateful. Thank you to all those who serve the US in our armed forces, your sacrifice is appreciated.