

MOTHER, DAUGHTER HOLD WORLD RECORD FOR ADOPTION

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By Megan Trotter



COOKEVILLE – Six years ago, on April 5, 2002, Frances Ensor Benedict of Cookeville formally adopted her foster daughter, Jo Anne Benedict Walker Demag of Clinton.

Benedict was 84 at the time. Demag was 65.

In 2002, they were being considered by the Guinness Book of World Records for the title of the oldest adoptive mother and

daughter in recorded history.

Now, Guinness World Records has confirmed it.

In a recent e-mail to the Herald-Citizen, Jamie Panas, press and marketing assistant of Guinness World Records wrote, “The oldest adoptive parent is Frances Ensor Benedict (USA, b. 11 May 1918), who was aged 83 years 329 days when she officially adopted Jo Anne Benedict Walker (USA) on 5 April, 2002, in Putnam County, Tennessee, USA. Jo Anne holds the record for the oldest person to be adopted at 65 years 224 days.”

The mother and daughter pair has been together for 50 years, but were unable to afford the costs of a formal adoption when they first became family.

“It was something I always wanted,” said Demag. But she didn’t want to push the matter. “I didn’t want her to think that she hadn’t done enough for me all ready.”

Demag is the half-sister of Mrs. Benedict’s late husband, Ed Benedict. Their father started a second family when Mr. Benedict was a grown man, having six children, including Jo Anne. However, when their father died, the children’s step-mother abandoned them.

“One day she told them not to come home after school because the house would be locked and she would be gone. And it was – and she was.” Said Mrs. Benedict in a previous interview by the Herald-Citizen.

The children resided at temporary homes until they finally arrived at an aunt's home. Too overwhelmed to take in so many children at once, the aunt called Mr. and Mrs. Benedict.

The Benedicts had three children of their own and had just lost one to leukemia. They had also all ready taken in one of Mr. Benedict's cousins. The couple explained that they did not think they could provide for another child at the time.

"But she said to me, 'Jo Anne will be on the bus tomorrow. What you do with her after that is up to you,'" Mrs. Benedict said.

Demag was 12 at the time.

True to her word, the aunt sent Demag away, and Mrs. Benedict and her family went to the bus depot to greet her.

"Poor little Jo," said Benedict. "She looked like a drowned mouse. She knew when she started that bus ride that we didn't want her. But when she saw us all dressed up, she knew she was wrong. We did want her."

The Benedicts welcomed her with open arms. It wasn't until 2002 that mother and daughter got the opportunity to make their relationship official. Cookeville lawyer John Acuff handled the adoption. "(Judge Maddox and I) were both just charmed," said Acuff.

According to Acuff, it is not extremely unusual for an older parent and child to want to pursue adoption, and so he did not at first realize that Benedict and Demag would be taking a world record.

"Judge Maddox and I had joked about it at the time a little bit, but no, I didn't know...It's an incredible gift to adopt somebody and to be adopted by somebody. And I was just happy to facilitate."

Now that their mother-daughter relationship is official, things have changed a little between the women.

"It gives me a greater sense of belonging," said Benedict. "I had always called her 'Fran-ma.'" One day she said, 'When are you going to quit calling me that?' And I said, 'Right now, mom!'"

Even though the mother and daughter seemed to have little choice in Demag's arrival at the Benedict's household all those years ago, both women are glad that it happened.

"If I could choose any mother, I would choose her," said Demag. "She so fulfills that role. It's because of what she did in (her children's) lives that we are who we are today....I'm so glad she's my mother."

FRANCES (ENSOR) BENEDICT

b. 16 May 1918, Double Springs, Putnam Co., TN

Husbands: 1st George Benedict; 2nd Edward Lindle Benedict, 4 August 1935

Father: James Leslie Ensor

Mother: Mamie Demaris Chambers

Marker at Cookeville City Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

EDWARD LINDLE BENEDICT

b. 16 February 1940

d. 31 March 1943

Father: Edward Lindle Benedict

Mother: Frances Ensor

Buried: Cookeville City Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

***JAMES LESLIE ENSOR**

b. 5 August 1889

d. 18 June 1958

Wife: Mamie Demaris Chambers

Buried: Cookeville City Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

***MAMIE DEMARIS (CHAMBERS) ENSOR**

b. 18 December 1889

d. 18 August 1975

Buried: Cookeville City Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



The Benedicts celebrate their family reunion. In front, from left, are Miki Benedict, Aloha Allen holding Nanea Allen, Jo Anne Benedict Walker Demag holding April, Mikie Benedict and Frances Ensor Benedict. In back, from left, are Haidee and Les Benedict, Elsie Russell, Nonda Trimis and Ann and Livin Benedict.