



*Lawrence J. McEvoy's class ring from 1954 was lost in Malta 60 years ago, but that's not the end of the story.*

# WITH THIS RING

**The kindness of strangers  
spans six decades**

By Laura Lief

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENT BINGHAM

## **HUMAN INTEREST STORIES DISCUSS**

people's experiences, emotions, challenges and triumphs. They are designed to remind people that human beings can do remarkable things and that truth can be more invigorating than fiction. This is that type of story.

In April 2022, longtime Eagle County local Marguerite McEvoy Shipman received a message via Instagram from a stranger named Mat Thompson. He claimed to have found her deceased father's college ring on a secluded beach in Malta — an island located south of Sicily. Understandably, Shipman's initial thought was that this person was trying to con her because, at that point, her father had been dead for 16 years.

“My first response was that the message was a scam but I was definitely curious because of the Malta part, as I knew my dad spent time there,” Shipman explains. “That being said, I figured this guy could have easily Googled me and found information about my dad. I also thought he wanted money.” Before responding to Thompson, Shipman asked her mother about the ring and whether the timeframe made sense. She was told that after law school, her dad served in the United States Navy for seven years as a photographic intelligence officer in Malta and Sicily. Therefore, the timing did line up, but it also meant that the ring had been buried on that beach in Malta for close to 60 years.

While talking to her mother, Shipman also learned that her father was responsible for obtaining liquor for the Navy base and “borrowed” the captain’s car at night on several occasions to cruise around the island. “Anyone who knew my dad is going to love hearing that he was in charge of procuring liquor for the base,” she explains. “He was the master of entertaining and making fancy cocktails so it’s very fitting.” Shipman believes her dad was on the secret beach, swimming in the ocean at night, and that the ring must have fallen off and had been there ever since.

Assuming that Shipman would be skeptical of the message, Thompson sent a photograph of the ring which showed her father’s

name, Lawrence J. McEvoy, inscribed inside along with the correct school and year — Emory University, 1954. Once Shipman saw the photo, she believed Thompson was telling the truth, even though it was incredibly shocking that the ring — which she didn’t know existed — was found on a beach six decades after her father spent time in Malta and 16 years after his death.

### DETECTIVE WORK

Being a curious journalist, I asked Shipman to contact Thompson so I could interview him and hear his side of the story. She obliged and so did he. Thompson has lived on the island of Malta for five years and was happy to tell me the story of finding this singular family heirloom. Thompson and his two friends, Louis Keefe and Will Clifford, decided to hike to Ghajn Tuffieha (Apple’s Eye,) a beautiful beach in Mgarr, which consists of climbing steep cliffs and clay slopes before reaching Qarraba Bay. Thompson explained that because the beach is secluded and difficult to access, most people don’t bother. But he and his buddies were up for an adventure that sunny day and had the beach to themselves.

“Louis put on his swimming shorts to have a quick dip in the sea,” recalls Thompson. “Whilst changing clothes, he stepped on something shiny that was wedged in the clay cliffs. He called us over to inspect. We pulled it out and, lo and behold, it was a gold

ring. We had a closer look at it and noticed that it had some Greek symbols on it. Around the symbols it said, ‘Emory University Business Administration,’ so we immediately realized it was some sort of university graduation ring.”

Standing on the beach, the three friends used Google to find out if having a university ring was customary in the U.S., since having a ring for graduating was unheard of in the U.K. “We found these rings to be worth up to \$1,000 and were pretty amazed by it, but went back to sunbathing and didn’t think too much else of it,” he says. “However, a few moments later, I spotted that it had a name on the inside of the ring — Lawrence J. McEvoy.”

Thompson then Googled Lawrence’s name and Emory University and found his obituary from 2006. They knew it was the same person because it said he was part of the Class of 1954 which was engraved on the ring. The obituary also mentioned that he was a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity which explained the Greek symbols. What really shocked Thompson and his friends was the line that said: “Following his education, he served for seven years on active duty as a United States Navy photography intelligence officer in Malta.” He read further and saw that Lawrence was survived by Shipman and her siblings.

“I put on my detective hat and managed to find Marguerite on Instagram. It was a stab in the dark really, because I didn’t know if I was contacting the right person,” says Thompson. “I messaged her and, quite rightly, she thought this was a scam. However, I provided further details and photos of the ring and she was in shock. She confirmed that her dad had been in Malta 60-odd years ago and that the ring must have been there the entire time!”

### FAITH IN HUMANITY

After that conversation, Shipman realized that, as unbelievable as all of this sounded, it was real. A complete stranger — who could have sold the ring and never spoken of it again — went above and beyond to track her down to return an irreplaceable family heirloom. And he didn’t want any money. In fact, he even refused to let her pay for the shipping.

In May 2022, the ring arrived in Eagle County. “When I received the ring I thought about my dad wearing it and wondered how he lost it. I tried it on and I felt like my dad was with me. I wish he knew that it was returned to us,” Shipman says reflectively.

“I still have the packaging Mat sent the ring in; it was so special. I still can’t believe he spent time finding us. It was encouraging to see the goodness in our generation halfway across the world. I also love that they have a meaningful story to tell and so do we — 5,000 miles apart.”

Thompson echoes her sentiment: “It’s a crazy story. Whenever I run out of stuff to talk about, I always have the ring story!”

Shipman was close to her father. Coincidentally, he died while she was in college studying abroad in Florence, Italy. “The last time I talked to my dad was on my birthday. A few days later, while visiting Paris, my mom called to tell me my dad had passed.” Shipman’s dad loved to travel and, in fact, he was the one who sent her to Italy.

“My biggest takeaway from this experience is having a restored faith in humanity,” Shipman says. “We hear so many horrible stories all the time but this one is amazing and positive. It gives me faith in people my age because he took the time to find me and didn’t want anything in return.”

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*Marguerite McEvoy Shipman,  
longtime Eagle County resident  
and a local wedding planner,  
wears her father's lost-and-found  
class ring from Emory University,  
Class of 1954.*



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## MORE TO THE STORY

Thompson and his friends found and rescued a piece of Shipman’s family that she didn’t know existed but the story doesn’t end there. Eighteen months later, Clifford, part of the trio present the day the ring was found, was diagnosed with stage four bowel cancer. Thompson, Keefe (who was also there), and another friend, Jack Cox, ran the Malta Marathon in March 2024 to raise funds for a cancer charity in Manchester called Maggie’s. The following month, Clifford passed away.

A few months later, in February 2025, Keefe visited Thompson in Malta and, with the permission of Clifford’s parents, they spread his ashes in the same spot they found the ring. “It was a really cool day for us, so we thought it was fitting to spread Will’s ashes there,” Thompson explains. After doing so, Thompson contacted Shipman to let her know. “I messaged Marguerite because finding that ring meant a lot to us and we tell everyone the story wherever we go.” He continues, “It’s pretty rare

these days that you get to tell a story that is just completely human. It’s a nice reminder to remain grounded and remember what is important in life.”

Above and beyond the spectacular nature of the discovery, the story is infused with gentle echoes that cross continents: Shipman was studying in Italy when she learned of her father’s passing, and was only there because her dad encouraged her to be. Also, Clifford’s full name was William Lawrence Clifford.

“It seems appropriate,” adds Thompson, “that there are two stories related to the exact same place that will hopefully be passed on for generations that involve the same name: Lawrence Joseph McEvoy and William Lawrence Clifford.”

While the overall experience and twists of fate still astound Shipman, she says having the ring means the world to her and that she thinks of her dad often.

“The memories of my dad make me happy and this ring makes me happy,” she muses. “I hope to travel to that beach someday.” **VVM**

*Lawrence J. McEvoy, pictured in his U.S. Navy uniform with his parents in Italy, below, served as a photography intelligence officer while stationed in Malta in the '60s. His long-lost class ring was returned to his daughter, who even kept the envelope in which it was mailed.*

