

# **PINE ISLAND HOME by Polly Horvath**

## **Excerpt**

THE McCready sisters, Fiona, fourteen, Marlin, twelve, Natasha, ten, and Charlie, eight, were raised in a missionary family. They had been happily and safely moving from pillar to post all over the world when their parents, taking their first vacation ever, having come into a small sum of money from an aging uncle who “felt it strongly” that they had never had a honeymoon, invited them to Thailand, where he ran a small hotel. The three of them and the hotel were swept away in a tsunami. The four girls were, at the time, living in Borneo, in a small cottage far back in the jungle without benefit of internet or phone service, being seen after by a visiting church volunteer who couldn’t continue to take care of them as she had other plans. So the church had a Mrs. Weatherspoon from Australia come to stay with them until someone in their family could step forward. That took a year.

Mrs. Weatherspoon sent out appeals to all the relatives she and the girls could find except for a great- aunt, Martha McCready, who lived off the coast of British Columbia. The girls’ mother, when opening Martha’s annual Christmas card, called her “that peculiar woman hiding in the woods.” Mrs. Weatherspoon said they would save her as a last resort. But surely someone more suitable would respond first. There were aunts and uncles in Tampa, Florida; Lansing, Michigan; Shreveport, Louisiana; and Kingsport, Tennessee. That was the lot. It took a while for the responses to Mrs. Weatherspoon’s appeal to trickle in. The mail pickup and delivery in the jungle was unreliable and slow. After receiving the appeal, the relatives then had to think about it. These were their sister’s or brother’s children, it was true. But there were four of them. Fitting four children into an already- established household was no small matter. Some of them wrote to ask Mrs. Weatherspoon to write them if no one else had come forward. When Mrs. Weatherspoon did, they had to think about it all over again. This took time. And none of them had met the McCready children. Mr. and Mrs. McCready had become estranged from their brothers and sisters many years before when they had made what the siblings considered a “very weird choice,” joining a church that none of them had heard of and of which, for some reason never explained to the girls, they all disapproved.