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Woman travels around the world to find out the truth about her brother after his death in a fire at 27

'We were best friends'

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A woman's quest to discover the truth about her 'twin' brother took her through Lincoln and across the globe – before culminating with her building a school in Africa to honour him.

Throughout her life, Michaela Foster Marsh longed to know more about Frankie, who had been adopted into her family as a baby.

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Frankie was black, Michaela was white, and they were born to different mothers, four weeks apart.

But when Michaela's white parents adopted Frankie, the two babies formed an unbreakable bond which would last beyond the grave.



LECHO Michaela and Frankie

Frankie Marsh tragically died in a house fire aged 27, having never known the truth about his biological family, his ethnic heritage, or why he had been abandoned at birth.

It led Michaela to set out on an astonishing journey to discover who Frankie really was.

Her quest took her across the world to Uganda, where she would eventually meet Frankie's three biological brothers.

Michaela was so touched by the poverty she encountered that she decided to found a charity named Starchild and build a school in Uganda in Frankie's memory.

Michaela, 53, from Glasgow, says: "Frankie and I were twins in every sense of the word. We were best friends and we could fight like cat and dog too. We even dressed the same sometimes.

"On the night he died, I felt a presence and I know that was a sign that I had lost him.

"I owed to him, and to me, to find out where he had come from. The charity is my way of ensuring that his legacy lives on."

LECHO The day they got Frankie

Frankie was adopted aged 13 months by Michaela's parents, Bill and Morag Marsh, in 1967.

They raised him in Glasgow alongside Michaela, who was also 13 months, and her older brother, Stephen.

The two babies grew up calling themselves 'twins'.

The family's only information about Frankie's background was inside a manila folder, to be opened only when he chose to do so.

LECHO Michaela's parents

black.

"The police would just mix him up with another young black man and think nothing of it. He didn't have it easy but incredibly had a sense of humour throughout."

The two were very close but, in 1994, Frankie died in a house fire.

📍 LECHO Michaela and Frankie

Michaela, a singer-songwriter, says: "The night Frankie died, I was working in Canada, and I woke up, acutely aware of a presence in my bedroom.

"It was so real, it terrified me. The following morning, I learned that Frankie was dead.

"The bond between us was so strong, and I truly feel there was an intuition between us that night."

📍 LECHO Frankie's mum Janet

In 2005, after their mother's death, Michaela inherited the family paperwork, and decided to open Frankie's manila folder, which revealed that his mother was called Janet Wivugira – a rare surname in Uganda.

It was enough for Michaela to begin a search.

Her journey took her to Belfast, [Lincoln](#) and eventually Uganda.

📍 LECHO Outside Gayaza High School

Michaela knew a family friend who was being ordained and he told her about a missionary in Lincoln.

In 2009, Michaela visited Lincoln to interview the English missionary.

By a remarkable coincidence, the woman introduced Michaela to a second missionary, a visiting Ugandan lady who was the headteacher of Gayaza High School for girls during Uganda's most harrowing years.

The Ugandan missionary asked to see Frankie's adoption papers – and she recognised the unusual surname, Wivugira, on the certificate.

📍 LECHO Michaela and Grandma Miriam

Michaela was introduced instead to Frankie's blood brother, who not only looked just like him but had the same name, Frank. Within days she met another brother, David, and a third new brother, Paul, over the telephone.

She says: "Emotionally, it was overwhelming. In a matter of moments, I had inherited a family in Uganda. I couldn't just return to Scotland and abandon them. I felt I wanted to get to know them.

"There were children in heart-breaking poverty, children just like Frankie, and I wanted to help.

"After Frankie had died, I'd written a fictional account of what I believed his family might have been like and it was uncanny how true it actually was."

LECHO Michaela and Frankie's brothers at the Equator

Michaela and her partner, Rony Bridges, decided to set up a charity and on Valentine's Day 2013, Starchild was officially launched - named after one of Frankie's favourite songs by the group Level 42, which was played at his funeral.

Three years on, she and Rony returned to Uganda to officially open the Starchild School for Creative Arts in the village of Vvumba, where Frankie's grandmother, Miriam Wivugira, lived.

LECHO Starchild

The book: Starchild: A Memoir of Adoption, Race and Family, is out now and will be released in hardback on May 19.