

"It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story."

~ Native American Proverb .

Adoption Healing and What It's Like to Be Found

I'm excited to hit the road soon and meet fellow secret sons and daughters at two upcoming weekend retreats. The first is [Inside Out: The Expressive Arts Adoption Healing Seminar](#), September 27-28 in Westfield, Massachusetts. Created and led by adoptee Craig Hyman, this workshop uses creative expression to foster healing and growth for birth and adoptive parents as well as adoptees.

I'll be guest-facilitating this year's Westfield workshop at a place very near to my heart, Genesis Spiritual Life and Conference Center. Before Genesis was [founded in 1976](#), it was Holy Child Guild, a home for unwed mothers and the place my birthmother roamed her last trimester before I was born. Two sisters from the Sisters of Providence transformed the property from a place that was once a source of hidden identities and shame to a spiritual retreat that offers innovative programs for persons of all faiths, cultures, and lifestyles.



Genesis Spiritual
Life Center

I visited for the first time three years ago and slept in a room that was like the one my birthmother would have slept in, ate where the girls would have eaten, saw pictures of them (none with a visible face) at a Halloween

party, and met Sister Elizabeth, one of the people responsible for Holy Child's transformation. Meeting her, and learning how that transformation came to be, was a great source of inspiration and healing.

There is a quote on Genesis's website that embodies the spirit of the workshops held on their 19 wooded acres: *"Oh, great Father, never let me judge another man until I have walked in his moccasins for two weeks."* – A Prayer for Understanding

One good way to walk in someone's moccasins is to listen to his or her story, which is why Heather and Mary and I love helping fellow adoptees share them. There's value in sharing your story, but before that, and perhaps even more importantly, there's value in knowing it for yourself.

What is the story you tell yourself about adoption, reunion, and secrets? And how has that impacted your life? In our Sunday morning workshop, we'll explore those questions through writing prompts and exercises (sharing of stories is completely optional).

On October 17-19, I'll be traveling to [Concerned United Birthparents' annual retreat](#) at Safety Harbor Resort near Tampa. CUB President Patty Collings sent an email introducing the three adoptees (myself included) who will speak on the panel "Being Found-Blessings and Challenges."



Safety Harbor Resort, Florida

Michael Turcotte, the birthson of Lee Campbell (CUB founder), is one of the other panelists. Lee found Michael when he was 15. I've heard a lot about Lee's story and the more I've read, and watched, and wrote (our story about CUB [here](#)), the more I wondered what it was like for Michael. What was it like having his reunion talked about on Phil Donahue? What was it like to be found at 15, in the 1970s when no one talked about this stuff? And what was it like for him with his adoptive parents in the years that followed?

Today's books and articles on adoption didn't exist then, nor was there any advice given to adoptive parents on how, when, or why to talk to their children, answer their questions, or, God forbid, have a birthparent in his or her life.

I lived that challenge, too. At 13, I learned I was adopted. My birthmother

found me when I was 19. I wished I'd known someone, anyone, back then who had gone through that experience. Someone else who'd made a choice to know his birthmother or father, like Michael. I'm so curious to hear him speak to those experiences at the retreat.

And I'm also excited to hear the second panelist, Christine Murphy, author of *Taking Down the Wall*, share why being found was traumatic and caused her to initially resist a relationship with her biological relatives, as well as what later changed and fostered a relationship that led to healing. After Patty's email went out, I kept thinking, Christine Murphy, where do I know that name from? Turns out we had corresponded six years ago over an essay I'd written that appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal* that they'd titled "Torn Between Two Mothers."

We realized we'd both grown up in New York's Albany-Saratoga region and met for coffee this summer in Saratoga. As Christine shared her story I was so struck, and impressed, by how she owned the angry parts that come about after a reunion. I also realized that for all the stories we've shared on [Secret Sons & Daughters](#), only two of them are by people who had been found, all the rest are from adoptees who had to search. If you were found, I'd love to hear what that was like, either in the comments section below, or please send me a note: ck@secretsonsanddaughters.org.

In addition to our panel on what it was like to be found, the retreat will feature a panel on the impact of open adoptions that close, a talk with Mari Steed of [The Philomena Project](#), and more.

Hope to see you there! – Christine

For more information visit: [Inside Out: The Expressive Arts Adoption Healing Seminar](#), and [Concerned United Birthparents Annual Retreat](#). Note: Safety Harbor Resort's group rate is available through September 22, 2014, then based on availability after that date.

[Concerned United Birthparents Offers Insight and Support](#)

In 1975, a Massachusetts birthmother named Lee Campbell attended an adoptee support group with a few other birthmothers. As she listened to adoptees swap stories, she wondered if mothers who had surrendered children for adoption might benefit from separate discussions about their experiences. The other mothers she'd met agreed. In the year that followed, Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) held their first meeting at (ironically) The Church of the Immaculate Conception on Cape Cod, and incorporated a few months later. During CUB's first eight years of operation, they answered 45,000 letters,

half of which were from adoptees, many of whom were testing the waters on meeting a birthparent. Keep in mind, this was the late 70s/early 80s when most adoptees didn't think reunions were possible, let alone a socially acceptable option.

Today, CUB is a national organization, a recognized voice for birthparents, and a valuable support resource. In addition, they're a major resource for adoption reform history and have supplied Harvard's Schlesinger Library with over 10,000 pages of CUB history.

This old Phil Donahue clip—which includes an interview with Lee Campbell—is a first hand look at that history and the heated early conversations on reunions, searches, pressure to relinquish, and whether an adopted person should have a right to his or her history. I'll warn you, from about minute 21 on, it's disconcerting to see that for as much as things have changed, we still have a ways to go.

I had an opportunity to talk with Patty Collings, CUB's current President (and a birthmother herself), about CUB's evolution over almost four decades and what they offer today, especially for adult adoptees.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: When did CUB decide to open meetings to others impacted by adoption and what prompted that change?

PATTY: Early on, when meetings were limited to the greater Boston area, CUB's mission was to create a safe place for birthmothers to discuss their surrenders. Early members developed a birthparent manual of sorts, exploring issues such as searching or not searching; following their children's lives from a distance or making contact; and how to make a comfortable niche for themselves after reunion, however that turned out. Initially, there was also an active adoptee group in the Boston area with whom we shared a few meetings.

That all changed as CUB grew to better understand birthparenthood and began to open branches across the country, especially in places where there were no active adoptee groups. Today, attendance at a typical meeting is split almost evenly between adoptees and birthparents.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: Why might someone attend a CUB meeting?

PATTY: I'll never forget one of the first meetings I attended. There was an adoptee in her reunion's early stages. I'll call her Carol. She told the group that her birthmother, Susan, had said something that upset her very much and continued to bother her whenever she thought about it. Susan had said: "When I first held you, I just thought you were too perfect for me to keep, so I had to give you up." Carol felt those words as cold and uncaring, and she felt very hurt by them.

Another birthmom at the meeting told Carol that what Susan said resonated with her. She said she *knew* that feeling of shame and unworthiness, and that she too had felt unfit to raise a child as an unwed mother. This other birthmom explained that Susan might have thought that her daughter was so

precious, so much better than her that she deserved a better mother, a better person to be her parent.

In the months that followed, Carol told us that what she heard in that meeting helped her to feel better whenever her mother's words popped in her mind, and she didn't dwell on them as much anymore. I still get choked up each time I remember that meeting and how Carol's face softened.

That experience is something we see again and again—adoptees have an opportunity to get a better understanding of their own birthparents by listening to other birthparents talk, and it goes the other way too. Birthparents gain an understanding of what their children might be experiencing when they can hear from other adoptees. And it seems easier to take in such points of view when it comes from someone unrelated yet very familiar with the experience.

We believe this is our most important service, providing emotional support and meeting people wherever they are in their journey. Sometimes it is an adoptee struggling post-reunion, sometimes it's a birthmother grappling with an open adoption that closed, and other times it might be a birthparent or adoptee wondering if they have a right to search.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: Can you describe a realization, or break-through of sorts, that might happen at a meeting?

PATTY: We often hear adoptees who are searching say they believe their birthparents don't think about them, aren't looking for them, and don't want to find them, let alone be found. They'll assume this because the birthparent has not registered with any of the mutual consent registries. They are often surprised to hear birthparents in the group explain that they were unaware of the registries, and/or that they were told by the adoption agencies that they must never interfere, never intrude on their child and the family who adopted them. So many of us were told this would be very disruptive, and that, for all we knew, our child didn't know about his or her adoption.

It's one thing to read this in a book or online, but when birthparents are face to face with adoptees and talk about how they have thought about their child every day, wondered if they were safe and happy, and how they think about that child every birthday – boy do we ever think about them on their birthdays—it has a different kind of impact.

I feel confident saying that the vast majority of birthparents want to be found. There's an interesting statistic in Jean Strauss' film about Illinois' recent open records law, *A Simple Piece of Paper*: since the records opened, more than 8,000 requests for original birth certificates have been filed. Of that 8,000, only 47 birthparents asked to have their name withheld.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: What advice do you offer someone who has experienced rejection from his or her biological relatives?

PATTY: A birthparent who refuses contact with his or her child is the most distressing situation. My personal belief is that we owe it to our children

to be open to a relationship and to give them whatever information they ask for. This may include the identity of the birthfather (and his contact information if we have it). They have the right to know who they are and where they came from, their birth story, the first chapter of their lives.

Adoptees typically search for their mothers first. Birthmothers who initially refuse, but later agree to contact, often describe feeling shock after being found. This is often because being an “unwed mother” might be a long-held secret, and the shameful memories so painful that they have coped by keeping feelings deeply buried. They also anticipate that they’ll be shamed and rejected by their friends and family when the truth comes out. For some mothers who have gone through this, it took years to process these feelings before they were ready for a relationship.

So when a birthparent says “no,” it might not mean never, it might just mean not now. If an adoptee has contact information, I encourage him or her to reach out again after some time has passed, and at some point, also consider searching for siblings and other relatives.

If an agency is involved and will not release information because the birthparent withholds consent, an adoptee might consider contacting a search angel or private investigator, or sign up for registries and DNA matching services. These avenues can help someone discover a sibling, aunt, uncle, or even a grandparent who is open to a relationship.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: I’ve noticed that terminology can be a real hot button. For example, whether to refer to a mother as “birthmother,” “first mother,” or some other term, and I know there are language challenges for mothers as well. How is that handled in meetings?

PATTY: There are no rules other than people can use whatever terminology works best, whether that is “I placed my child for adoption,” “I relinquished my child,” “birthmother,” “first mother”—whatever works for the person trying to share his or her experience. The goal is to support someone wherever they are in the process.

Our founder, Lee Campbell, considered several names when she was establishing CUB—the first organization to support and advocate for mothers who had lost their children to adoption. This video details the word “birthparents” inspiration and Lee’s thought process as she considered commonly used terms at the time – first, natural, biological, genetic—and then decided on “birthparent, birthmother,” as one word, like grandparent. It was a label she hoped would unite mothers of adoption loss. The rest of the title for what Lee called her “unique band of sisters” came easy after that. Lee adds: “I envisioned us birthmothers ‘united’ in our ‘concern’ about our children, and that’s how “Concerned United Birthparents” fell into place.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: Tell me a little bit about fathers—did birthfathers attend in those early years, and has their participation changed over the years?

PATTY: Fathers matter, and we have long invited their participation. Our birthfather membership is lower than birthmothers, but we know that many men may not even be aware they have a child, or that the child was given up for adoption. Also, we have heard from fathers who, years after walking away from their partner's unplanned pregnancy, realize that they feel shame too.

On a separate note, the recent focus on illegal adoption lawsuits filed by Utah attorney Wes Hutchins on behalf of birthfathers whose children were adopted without their knowledge or consent, or under fraudulent circumstances, may encourage even more fathers to come forward. We encourage them to join us.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: Do meetings also focus on helping adoptees and birthparents search for one another?

PATTY: I joined another group, ALMA (Adoptees Liberty Movement Association) in 1997. I joined CUB in 2001. ALMA is more focused on advising people how to search, and on forwarding open records legislation. In addition, they also maintain a mutual consent registry for birthparents and adult adoptees. While CUB supports these registries and legislative efforts and shares search resources, our primary focus is support and awareness.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: What geographic areas can someone find a CUB support group and roughly how many people attend a typical meeting?

PATTY: We've found that the in person connection is invaluable. It can be very comforting to sit and talk with others who really "get you." And we have all benefited from hearing how others cope with ongoing searches, rough reunions, rejection, finding a grave, and learning to deal with some family members who suggest we just "get over it" and "move on with our lives."

Several California cities have active members, including groups in Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego north and south groups. In addition to California, there are groups in Boston, Minneapolis, Portland, Washington, D.C. and Lakeland, Fl. The meeting size varies anywhere from 7-20 participants (usually in California). Our meetings in Lakeland, Florida typically have 3-10 people. We also have a younger cohort of birthmoms that meet online via *Google Hangouts*.

In addition, members who are not close to a local group have found support through our newsletters as well as emails and phone calls with CUB members.

SECRET SONS & DAUGHTERS: Any other in person opportunities, especially for those that don't live near a CUB group?



CUB Retreat Banquet

PATTY: We host an annual retreat, usually at a hotel near a beach, bay, or a lake so that the environment is ideal for reflection between sessions. The schedule is not packed with multiple sessions that run simultaneously. Instead, we focus on a core program. This year's conference will be near Tampa, in [Safety Harbor, Florida, Oct. 17-19](#), and feature a panel on Found Adoptees, several experts on an Open Adoption panel geared to younger birthmoms who are contending with open adoptions that closed, and a panel of three (two birthmothers and an adoptee) involved in family preservation work, finding resources and support to enable expectant mothers and fathers to parent their children. We also plan to have a representative from the Philomena Project.

For more information on CUB and upcoming conference details, visit [Concerned United Birthparents](#).

Thanks for visiting our online community. You can find other [organizations making a difference](#), read [adoptee stories](#), [discover your rights](#) to your original birth certificate, and join the discussion by adding your thoughts (below) or on our [Facebook](#) page.

Please [subscribe](#) to our [blog](#) to receive the latest stories and resources, and consider [adding your voice](#) to the Secret Sons & Daughters collection.

[An Ode to Father's Day](#)

Several adoptees share their thoughts on what the word "Dad" means to them in snapshots of fatherhood and odes that show just how much dads matter.

"I always assumed he was one of 'those guys,' the stereotypical birthfather who skipped town when he found out Baby Girl was on the way. I couldn't have been more wrong.

My dad hadn't wanted to give me up, and his grief over the relinquishment had been so significant that it was noted in the court file. My dad had saved everything for the day he would meet me again—from the court papers right down to the bows off the flowers he brought my mother in the hospital. He had looked for me before I contacted him.

My dad was with my mom when she was killed at age 22. He cried the day he took me to "meet" her at the cemetery. Today, he's a loving husband of 30 years and a dad to two other amazing kids. He never forgot me, and he loved me all those years I assumed he didn't care."

– *Baby Girl Stephens*

This Father's Day, for the first time, I celebrate both the father who raised me and the father I thought I would never know. My father who raised me loved me, comforted me and taught me right from wrong. He taught me to ride a bike and counseled me with wise advice. And he taught me the meaning of unconditional love through my rebellious teenage years.

I met the father I thought I'd never know the day after I turned 51. From him I learned where I came from, who I look like and where pieces of my personality come from. He has given me a heritage and roots. And he has given me his love and the gift of acceptance.

This Father's Day I honor two fathers who love me and helped make me who I am.

– Becky Drinnen

Becky is from Ohio, a state where the ability to access information on your origins changed dramatically for 400,000 adoptees this year, thanks in large part to another Ohio adoptee and her father.

Prominent Cleveland lawyer William B. "Brad" Norris, played a role in closing adoption records in the early 1960's. He wanted to seal his adopted children's birth certificates from the public, but he never intended for the law to close the records to adoptees as well. One of his children was Betsie Norris, who grew up and founded Adoption Network Cleveland.

Unaware of her father's actions, Betsie began a battle in 1989 to reverse the law that closed the records to post-1964 adoptees. After her father confessed his involvement to her in the 1990's, the two forged an alliance to push for a law that would restore access for all Ohio adoptees.

"When my Dad came to me, several years into my effort and confessed his role in closing the records, it was like a Greek tragedy where the child is, unknowingly, trying to rectify the 'sin' of the parent. From that point on, my dad partnered with us in our fight to change the law. My Dad passed away in 2006, and I know this piece of unfinished business weighed heavily on him. He didn't live to see Ohio Governor John Kasich sign the legislation into law in December 2013. But thanks to my father's help, Ohio adoptees will be able to access their original birth certificates beginning in March 2015. I

carried his picture in my pocket to the bill signing.”

–Betsie Norris ([More on Ohio's story: New Era for Ohio Adoptees Began Today](#))

My father, Willis, was a quiet man who loved his two children (both adopted) very much and we loved him the same. My father would have done anything for us. I lost him 30 years ago and still miss him dearly. Unfortunately, I was never able to meet my birth father. He passed away when I was 19 years old.

I would like to say Happy Fathers Day to my newly found uncle in Michigan–Happy Fathers Day uncle Jim! I consider myself one of the luckiest fathers this year. I've been getting to know members of my birth families and I've been blessed with a wonderful new family.”

–Daniel Koerselman ([Daniel's story: An Iowa Adoptee's Thoughts the Night Before He Meets His Birth Mother](#))

At eleven days of age, fate led me into the arms of my adoptive dad. Although all four of my parents made me who I am, I feel infinitely blessed to know my dad's unconditional and eternal love. Today, my dad is one of my best friends in the world.

–Heather Katz (my cofounder Heather's story: [Sometimes a Reunion Gives an Adoptee New Secrets](#))

I'll end this ode by saying the image above is from the card I sent my own father this year. I met him when I was 19. A few months later, he sent a card that said: “I think there is such a gap between reality and the dream in this situation. Do you know what I mean? I guess I'm trying to say that I want to be everything you want me to be, but, realistically, I'm not sure I have the foggiest idea what that is–do you?”

I didn't have any idea either, but those words and a mailbag's worth of letters over the years fostered a kinship and a second chance to have a father. From 19 to now he has become all the things mentioned in the card above. . . except maybe “fixer of things,” unless that “fixing” comes in the form of being there, through emails and phone calls, at concerts and shared beers at a pub (especially shared beers at a pub), and recently, for his wise and funny stories that give me insight on ways I can parent one of my sons who shares many of his traits.

As so many of us adoptees know, it's hard to put into words what it means to know someone who looks like you, or is like you, in small and large ways. All I can say is meeting the people responsible for my life on this planet has helped me to feel more tethered to it. And I'm more appreciative still to have this window on the invisible threads that link generations. After many Father's Days filled with longing, this year I'm counting the many blessings.

Happy Father's Day–to my own and to all you fathers out there!– Christine ([Portrait in Nature and Nurture](#))

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[An Ode to Dads—Calling for Odes and Anecdotes that Will Make us Smile, Laugh, and Cry](#)

Often times adoptee stories are about mothers, but it's important to acknowledge the paternal side of things too, especially given some of the stereotypes that don't do fatherhood justice. Dads matter.

In that spirit, we're compiling a special Secret Sons & Daughter's Ode to Father's Day to run on Sunday and would love to include you.

Do you have a dad—either biological or by adoption—who has made a difference in your life? Or, like Secret Sons & Daughters' recent story "[Never Will I Know](#)," is there a Dad out there you never got to meet? Or, is yours an ode to the father you wished you had but didn't?

Or, maybe you have a dad like Jay on *Modern Family* or *Family Guy*'s Peter, then hey, at least you had laughs. Whatever your experience, send two-three sentences that recount an incident and show us your dad in action, or tell us what that word "father" means to you.

Send your ode or anecdote via this [FORM](#) and put "Father's Day" in the subject line. Submission deadline: **midnight EST, Friday, June, 13**. Lastly, no matter how you celebrate the day, all best wishes for a good one.

NOTE: Accepted contributions will be credited so please include your name. In addition, your submission grants Secret Sons & Daughters the right to publish your piece on the website and corresponding social media. Submissions may be edited for clarity and length.

Image credit: FOX

[Secrets in Review 4](#)

Erma Bombeck once said: *“There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt.”* One recent Secret Sons & Daughters’ adoptee tale did a brilliant job of showing just that.

Writer Mary Sisco’s sense of humor (and love for all things retro TV) had us laughing out loud about things we know are tragic, and a little in awe of the ways she used satire to endure not only secrets and lies, but truth too. Her story, [An Adoptee Turns to Humor to Endure Secrets and Lies](#), wasn’t the only new take on the adoption experience.

New Hampshire writer [Larry Clow](#)’s piece left us pondering the blessings and challenges of Facebook. When it comes to adoption, social media’s big dog is a source of support, a place to connect ([like our page!](#)), a stealthy search resource for familial info and photos, and a potential source of pain. And yet, for all of the stories we’ve read thus far, even the most painful ones, there hasn’t been one person who said that the truth was not worth knowing.

In case you missed them, three new stories elicited several comments on the website: [Taylor Perry](#)’s reflection on shattered fantasies post reunion, Australian late-discovery adoptee, [Di Dunning](#)’s story, which showed that the pain of secrets long kept have no geographic boundaries, and [Karen Goldner](#)’s tale of struggling to find a sense of belonging in either of her families.

And speaking of comments, a fascinating discussion and debate is taking place in the comments section of [10 Questions to Ask When Searching for an Adoption Competent Therapist](#). Leslie Pate Mackinnon (whom I originally spoke with for the piece) recently responded to a question about her “bias,” and in doing so eloquently addressed the recommended standard of care in adoption today, why it’s important to stay a step ahead of pre-teens finding birth relatives on Facebook, and also included her thoughts on connection to one’s personal story vs. amputation from it. If the stories from our generation of adoptees have shown anything, it’s the high price many have paid for that amputation.

With that said, we let connection be our Mother’s Day inspiration this year and ran two stories in May that include what we like to think of as love letters—those initial correspondences that are often filled with hope and longing for connection.

Jason Clawson, in [California Adoptee Finds his First Mother](#), shares the letter he wrote after he found his birth mother, and I shared a letter that came from the opposite direction, the letter my birth mother sent after she found me, in this [post to ALL mothers](#).

While our “Adoptee Tales” are exclusively written by adult adoptees, between now and July 4th, we’d love to share more letters, especially those that

speak to relationships with fathers of all stripes. If you'd like to submit a letter, click our [Submit Tale](#) form and put "Letter" in the title box.

Even if you don't have a letter to share, please subscribe (here on our sidebar) to receive the latest stories, and updates. And "Like" us on good 'ol [Facebook](#) and share your thoughts. Last week's question: "Instead of searching, were you found by a birth parent? And if so, what was that like?" generated a variety of interesting responses. Also on Facebook, you'll find a photo of Heather's BIG news. She gave birth to a not-so-secret daughter, Kyra, on May 21st. Kyra will be our assistant story reader in no time.

One Adoptee Tale writer recently described Secret Sons & Daughters as a "beautiful island of thoughtfulness, respect, and camaraderie." We aspire to live up to those words, and thank *you* for reading, commenting, and sharing these stories—we hope to hear your story soon.

Best wishes,

Christine & Heather

P.S. It's not all about Facebook, you can **follow us on Twitter too** [@adoptetales](#)

[To All Adoptive Mothers, Birth Mothers, Foster Mothers and Mothers of the Heart - Happy Mother's Day!](#)

Mother's Day is a day both blessed and fraught for many people, and for many reasons—moms we've lost too soon, strained relationships, and for adoptees a particular kind of challenge that is as varied among us as it is the same.

Adoption has touched my family two times. My adoptive mom's family lost one daughter (they had named Justine) through adoption, then gained one year later when my parents adopted me. As I celebrate the day with my mom over morning coffee, I think about Justine. Her family of origin is my family of memories. They belong to us both in different ways, and I think of Ann, my own birth mother, too.

It was on this day 27 years ago that I received the first letter from her. It was the letter that started it all. Hard as it was to navigate a post reunion landscape without a map (especially back then), one of my life's greatest blessings was to have had Ann in it for 22 years, and for the ways my mom respected my need to know her. Today is my fifth Mother's Day since Ann passed and I miss her still.

Beneath all that Mother's Day is, one hopes, is love, however damn hard that might be to articulate carefully in cards and letters exchanged.

In honor of Ann's memory, I'd like to share how she first communicated that love in her voice, with the letter that started it all, and her art. The image above is a painting she created a few years before she died and titled "Childlike Spirit."

May 10, 1987

Dear Christine,

The time has finally arrived. I have just found you. It is difficult to know just what the right way is to contact you. I am writing this letter today, on Mother's Day, as it turns out, not knowing how I will get it to you. I have a friend, Jay, who lives very near you, he may have handed you this letter. Perhaps I will see you today and hand it to you myself.

However you received this letter, I hope that you are not upset in any way. I don't know if you have looked for me yet. I don't even know if you were told that you were adopted. But I feel fairly certain that by now you must know.

If you've read this far, you've probably guessed that I'm your birthmother. My maiden name was Ann Mary Roberts. When you were born I named you Ann Marie Roberts.

I am going to tell you a few things now. In early February 1967, I became pregnant. I was 16 yrs. old and "in love." I gave birth to you at Providence Hospital in Holyoke, Mass.

I had been living in a home for unwed mothers. A woman from the home rode with me in a cab to the hospital when my labor pains began. (Halloween night - around midnight we arrived) You were born at 5:10 pm the following day.

In the days that followed, you were brought into my room. I remember holding you on my lap and looking at you. Your eyes seemed to look right into my soul. What a miracle you were to me. I was overwhelmed with awe, and joy and love and sadness. I knew I couldn't keep you and my heart was broken and still is.

I was 17 when you were born. There was no option open to me to keep you. Times were very different in the sixties. My father would not even discuss the situation. My mother's hands were tied. I got a lot of pressure from the agency and my local doctor to put you up for adoption.

I did not want to surrender you. I didn't have any choice, though—and no support from any direction. They convinced me that adoption would be the best thing for you.

Words cannot express my sense of loss. Words cannot express how I have felt for 19½ years, not knowing anything about you. And not having you with me.

I have not seen you since you were 4 weeks old. I visited you once at St. Catherine's Infant Home on Main Ave. I couldn't hold you or kiss you because you were behind a glass window.

On Friday, May 8th, I set eyes on your picture in your high school yearbook – your sophomore picture. I am filled with joy – you are sweet and beautiful.

You have my dark hair and brown eyes. You looked like myself when I looked at you as a baby. Forgive me for writing down my feelings and memories.

You are a 5-10 minute drive from my house. I live in Woodscape, a two-three yr. old development off Western Ave., right past Coco's Restaurant.

Naturally, I am anxious to see you and share so many things with you. I have many family members – brothers & sisters. My mom is alive and well – my Dad died when I was 21.

We are good people, nothing to be afraid of.

As I say, I don't know how you will react to this. I will give you my number at work. Please call me anytime. I love you!

Ann

P.S. Your father is in the area. He is married. You can meet him too. He has blue eyes and is Irish and German. I am ¼ German, ¼ Irish, and ½ English. See you soon, I HOPE!

The story of what happened from there can be found here: [Portrait in Nature and Nurture](#). If you have a "love letter" you'd like to share, please send it to me at ck@secretsonsanddaughters.org. We'll be sharing them here between Mother's and Father's Day.

Best wishes for a Happy Mother's Day to all you moms out there!

Thanks for visiting our online community. In addition to stories like this one, you can find valuable [resources](#), [discover your rights](#) to your original birth certificate, meet other adoptees, and join the discussion by commenting (below) or on our [Facebook](#) page.

[Subscribe](#) to our [blog](#) to receive more [adoptee tales](#), and consider [adding your voice](#) to our Secret Sons & Daughters collection.

[Spence-Chapin's New Modern Family Center Offers Support for Adult Adoptees](#)

Today we are introducing what will be the first in a series of Q&As that highlight organizations making a difference in the lives of adoptees. First up is Spence-Chapin's new support resource, the Modern Family Center, which opened at the end of 2013. I had an opportunity to connect with Misha Conaway, Outreach Manager, who is an adoptee herself, and Dana Stallard, the center's Adoptee Services Coordinator. Dana recently gave a moving testimony in support of New York open access legislation that eloquently captured the issues at hand for adult adoptees (video included below). Here Misha and Dana fill us in on their new center's services:

Secret Sons & Daughters: What prompted Spence-Chapin to create the Modern Family Center and when did it open?

Misha: We understand the changing landscape of adoption. There is no typical make up of a modern family but there are common threads that run through all of the unique families we support. Spence-Chapin has provided services to families for over 100 years. Within the last year, the Modern Family Center was created to provide more comprehensive services to all types of families, including families formed through adoption.

Secret Sons & Daughters: What type of services does the new center offer adoptees?

Misha: We tailor many of our services to meet the needs of adoptees, including providing personal adoption histories, search and reunion guidance and counseling, mentorship programs for tween and teen adoptees, discussion panels, groups, and more.

Secret Sons & Daughters: What geographic areas does the [Modern Family Center @ Spence Chapin](#) serve and where are your offices located?

Misha: We provide services to individuals and families who live in the five boroughs of New York City, Long Island, Westchester County, southern Connecticut, and northern New Jersey. We are currently in the process of expanding our services to reach those living in southern New Jersey as well. We have two offices, one located in the upper east side of Manhattan and one in Park Slope in Brooklyn. We also offer consultations over the phone or via Skype when in-person meetings are not possible.

Secret Sons & Daughters: What have adult adoptees typically contacted Spence-Chapin for initially?

Dana: Many are hoping to be connected to an adoption community and to meet others that share their experiences or identities. Others are hoping to reconnect with their birth families and are hoping to learn more information about their birth histories and where they come from. All adoptees want to be supported throughout their adoption journey and we are able to provide guidance, empathy, and understanding to this community.

Secret Sons & Daughters: What type of details does a personal adoption history include?

Dana: A [Personal Adoption History](#) provides adult adoptees, birth parents, and the appropriate relatives with non-identifying information provided in the adoption record at the time of finalization. New York State law prevents Spence-Chapin from providing original birth certificates, the adoptee's original name, identifying information for the birth parents or adoptive family members, including first or last names, birth years, or specific locations. Spence-Chapin is able to provide personal adoption history information for adoptions facilitated by Spence-Chapin, Louise Wise (non-foster care), and Talbot Perkins prior to 1959.

For an adopted person: a written narrative called the Biological Background Narrative is prepared. This contains non-identifying information about birth parents at the time that they were making an adoption plan. This may include medical or health information about the biological family, ethnicity, nationality, religion, education, hobbies and interests and why the decision for adoption was made.

For a birth parent: a written narrative called the Adoptive Family Profile is prepared. This contains information about the child's birth and early development as well as non-identifying information about the adoptive parents until the time the adoption was finalized.

At this time, there is a bill in the New York State legislature that would allow adult adoptees to have access to their original birth certificates. I recently spoke on behalf of Spence Chapin at City Hall and advocated for this bill because we believe that it is a fundamental right of adoptees to know their original identities as well as the identities of their birth parents.

DANA'S TESTIMONY HERE:

Secret Sons & Daughters: Can you tell us more about the type of support you offer adult adoptees?

Dana: One of our social workers provides individualized support to each client seeking personal adoption history, from the initial clinical intake to sharing the information prepared, either by phone or in-person consultation. Additional counseling services are also available to further discuss related adoption issues, search and reunion, as well as to process the information received. We also offer therapeutic support groups for adult adoptees where they can share their experiences and work through any issues they may be struggling with.

Secret Sons & Daughters: Those sound like excellent resources, I wish more states had them. What types of training have your counselors received?

Misha: One of the most frequent complaints we hear from adoptees that come to us is that many mental health professionals simply do not understand the experience of growing up adopted, resulting in either minimizing their experiences or pathologizing them. Our clinicians are all trained and licensed social workers or are in a related mental health field, with an expertise in adoption and family systems. MFC's Training Department provides regular professional group and individual education throughout the year, and we frequently attend relevant conferences, trainings, and presentations.

Secret Sons & Daughters: What has the initial response from adult adoptees been thus far?

Dana: Adoptees find great comfort in connecting with others through mentorship, peer [support groups](#), or workshops. They are able to strengthen their own identities through meeting others and forming an adoption community.

Adoptees often do not know that they're able to receive a personal adoption history. It can be very helpful to find out more about birth parents and family of origin. Many adoptees are pleasantly surprised that they are able to talk to someone who provides individualized, caring support and they feel they are able to move forward in a different way after receiving that information.

One adult adoptee who received personal adoption history had this to say about the experience: ". . .it was a very illuminating day for me. What you were able to convey to me has answered so many questions about who I am. I want to thank you for your time. This is a normal practice for you, but it was a very special day for me."

In general, the initial response has been wonderful and we are encouraged to try new things and develop new programs for the adoptee community. If any of your readers have ideas for us, [we would love to hear from them!](#)

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*Thank you for visiting [Secret Sons & Daughters](#). In addition to stories, you can find valuable [resources](#), [discover your rights](#) to your original birth certificate, meet other adoptees, and join the discussion by commenting (below) or on our [Facebook](#) page. Comments are **always** welcome. And we'd love to [hear your story](#). Please subscribe and join our growing community.*

[New Era for Ohio Adoptees Began Today](#)

[Becky Drinnen](#)'s adoption was finalized in mid-December, 1963, just weeks

before Ohio began sealing birth records on January 1, 1964. She has had her original birth certificate since 1981, what she calls "important proof of my identity." What if her adoption had been delayed just a few weeks? "My birth mother would have signed the same documents, my adoptive parents would have signed the same documents, yet I would not have had access to my original birth certificate," she said. "Which strikes me as completely ridiculous, and illustrates the ridiculousness of the tiered access laws."

The first step in eliminating those tiers, and creating equal access for Ohio adoptees, began today. On December 19, 2013, Ohio Governor John Kasich signed Substitute Senate Bill 23 into law, granting 400,000 adoptees born January 1, 1964 through September 18, 1996 access to their original birth certificates. The law has two key dates.

Between today, March 20, 2014, and March 19, 2015, birth parents may file a "Contact Preference" form or a "Birth Parent Name Redaction" form. The redaction form allows a birth parent to have his or her name removed from the original birth certificate prior to its requested release. If a birth parent chooses to submit the form, a complete social/medical history form must also be submitted. All forms are voluntary, and if the handful of states that have enacted similar legislation are an indicator, a very small percentage of birth parents choose to redact.

Once this waiting period is complete, adoptees can apply for their original birth certificates beginning **March 20, 2015**.

This bill is 25 years in the making and the result of several dedicated people, many of whom worked with Adoption Equity Ohio and it's prime sponsor [Adoption Network Cleveland](#). One of those dedicated people is Betsie Norris, Executive Director of Adoption Network Cleveland, and an adoptee whose father was partially responsible not only for Ohio's sealed records practice, but also for its reversal many years later when he testified in support of the practice's demise.

Ms. Norris searched and was reunited with her birthparents in 1986. Much to her surprise she found that her birth mother and birth father had married and had three sons. They welcomed her in to their family. In 1988, she founded Adoption Network Cleveland to provide support and assistance to others and decrease secrecy in adoption. "Secrecy had been so powerful," she said. "I was steadfast in wanting to create a discourse between all three sides." Over the years, Adoption Network Cleveland has assisted in more than 1,850 adoptee-birthparent reunions.

Ms. Norris has also worked on open access legislation since 1989, and was thrilled that the bill passed virtually unanimously with bipartisan support. In addition, she said, "Ohio is the only state thus far to have a Right to Life group support the legislation."

Adoption Network Cleveland's excellent [resource page](#) provides birth parents and adoptees with information on what to do and when in terms of the new law.

Ohio adoptees can celebrate the new law at the 38th Cleveland International

Film Festival (CIFF) next Tuesday and Wednesday, March 25 and 26, when two documentary films by Jean Strauss will be shown together:

[An Adoptee ROARed in Ohio](#) is a short documentary that reveals the interesting story behind Ohio's sealed records, and how Betsie Norris worked tirelessly to change a system her own father had inadvertently created; and [A Simple Piece of Paper](#), a moving documentary that follows more than a dozen individuals as they apply to the State of Illinois to discover the truth about their origins. The latter offers a preview of what could be in store for Ohio adoptees. Tickets are available [here](#) or by calling: 877-304-3456. Use discount code "ADOPT" to save \$2.00 off the \$14.00 admission price.

Nine states have passed similar legislation. Details are available on our [Restored Access States](#) page. In addition, [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), [Connecticut](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Colorado](#) currently have similar legislation pending. To help support access legislation in any of those states click on the state name to be linked to each state's version of Adoption Equity Ohio.

Kendra Crookston, whose reunion story [Making Sense of Fantasy and Reality](#) is featured on Secret Sons & Daughters, was born during Ohio's 32 year period of sealed records. Even though she knows her birth parents' names, she says that when the time comes, she'll be in line for her record. "To many, I can imagine, the point must seem moot. I can assure you, it is not," she said. "My existing birth certificate reflects little truth about my birth, and my original one is another piece to a life long puzzle."

[Secrets in Review, Issue 2](#)

Secret Sons & Daughters launched one month ago, and we've been deeply moved to see so many people connecting through stories.

Over the past few weeks, friends, family, and even a few reporters, have asked us: "Why? Why create something like Secret Sons & Daughters?" Usually we answer that (as we do on our ["About"](#) page) by talking about the estimated four million adoptees who have restricted access to their origins, ancestry, and in many cases, important medical histories that could help adoptees and their children; and we mention how we hope Secret Sons & Daughters' stories can help shine a light on that fact, and put a human face on those numbers.

But it's more than that, the reason why is something comments like these show best:

"You put into words what I have experienced my entire life. I was always

afraid to tell people that I was adopted. I am going to write something to add here...but I wanted to thank you for creating a site where adult adoptees can go to see that we're not alone!" -Molly

"I did learn one thing in life though, family does not have to be blood because my mom and dad loved my sister and I enough to take us in and raise us as their own with unconditional love. I feel if they told us [about our adoptions] from the start they may have thought we would not love them the same. Oh how wrong they were." -David

". . . a website where adopted people can share their stories of searching – or not searching – for their first families. Honest, untidy, raw, moving, the pieces I've read so far give me – a parent by adoption – more insight into the complex feelings of birth parents and of adoptees." -Amy, an adoptive mom who shared our link on Facebook.

Several stories are responsible for that feedback. [The Adoption Domino Effect](#), by Joanne Currao, was our second [Late Discovery](#) Tale, and it poignantly shows the impact secrecy in adoption can have on an adoptee and her children.

More than a thousand people read Joanne's story within its first 24 hours on our site. It stirred quite a response in the comments section that follows it. Many people wrote to say how much they related to her story and shared details of their own tales, whether they learned they were adopted at age 2, 17, 36, or older.

Joanne responded to each person and one response in particular beautifully captures what it was like for her to share her story: *"The more we speak up about it, the better it will be for all who come after us. I am glad that this story validated you. It is good for me to see that and to feel validated by all of you who read this as well. We are a soothing salve to each other."*

[Singing to Christine, An Adoptee's Song](#), written by Amy Christine Lukas, an adoptee/singer-songwriter, shows how her curiosity about whether her birth parents are "Somewhere out There," grew after the births of her children.

[Thanksgiving Day Reunion '95](#), was inspired by Daryn Watson's reunion with his birth mother.

[An Adult Adoptee's Dilemma: To Search or Not to Search](#), is my co-founder, Heather Katz's reflection on a question many adoptees face.

In addition, a few therapists weighed in on [10 Questions to Ask When Searching for an Adoption Competent Therapist](#) with opinions regarding open adoption. The questions were provided by adoption therapist, Leslie Pate Mackinnon, who recently appeared on Katie Couric's show as the "American Philomena." Leslie weighed in in the comments section as well, saying in part:

A child needs their story, in as much living color as possible, the good, the bad, and the ugly. In the best cases, the child actually

feels love emanating, is not merely told 'she loved you so much she gave you up.' The statement that adult adoptees often loathe. In the worst cases, the child can see for themselves why adoption was necessary and may be lucky enough to recognize at least a few good attributes of the person whose DNA they carry.

I encourage you to read her full comment at the end of that post. I wholeheartedly agree that adoptees should be entitled to their stories, especially as adults, and in whatever detail is possible.

Many thanks to four organizations for helping us spread the word about *Secret Sons & Daughters*. Each of them make a big difference in the lives of adoptees: [Donaldson Adoption Institute](#), [Adoption Network Cleveland](#), [C.A.S.E.](#)—the Center for Adoption Support and Education, and [St. Catherine's Center for Children](#) in Albany, New York.

I spent my first Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's in St. Catherine's care and I'm very touched and grateful for their [wonderful mention](#) of SS&D and our support and advocacy for open records, as well as for the work they do to help sustain families. Any other St. Catherine's adoptees out there?

We look forward to sharing three new Secret Son stories in the coming weeks and an Irish adoptee tale too. If you haven't done so already, be sure to subscribe (here on the sidebar) to receive the latest Tales and News, and please ["Like" us on Facebook](#). Many thanks for reading our tales. We hope to hear yours too!

All my best,

Christine

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