

"For Just a Day"—An Adoptee's Wish for a Deeper Awareness of Adoption Pain

Adoptee, Daryn Watson was compelled to pen this poem after learning the news that a fellow adoptee had recently ended her own life. He movingly reveals some of the realities of many adoption reunions after the initial tears of joy have been swept away.

For Just A Day

For just a day

I wish my pain would go away

For just a day

I wish I could say

I knew what it felt like

To fit into a family

Without feeling like I had to earn my approval

For just a day

I wish I didn't fear second rejections

From the woman who gave me away

And who gives me her rationalizations

For just a day

I wish I could say

The words "birth" or "bio" mother

Without them being such a bother

For just a day
My hopes of my siblings to say
"How are you doing?"
Let's plan a visit in May

For just a day
I want to convey
The angst I feel in my life
That causes me much strife
Without being judged or condemned
Day after day, all over again

For just a day
I hope for the news
That we won't hear of a blindside
Of another adoptee committing suicide

For just a day
I want to segway
Into our own truth
That was formed in our early youth

For just a day
I wish the adoption industry
Would stop trying to betray
Adoptees from finding their history

For just a day

We hope lawmakers would join the fray
By stop making us feel ignored
And give us our identity records

For just a day
I wish couples wouldn't pay
Tons of money to fulfill their heart
While ripping other families forever apart

For just a day
I wish I truly fit in
With the people around me
Without losing connections again

For just a day
I desire inner peace to stay
Without the rumblings of emotional famine
Or feeling overwhelming grief at random

For just a day
I wish I wasn't cast away
To live my life in a twister
Without my natural brother or sister

For just a day
We wouldn't have to pray
That our feelings aren't swept under the rug
Or that we don't abuse alcohol or an antidepressant drug

For just a day

I want my birth mother to acknowledge and say

“I’m sorry I abandoned you” with her voice

“And I didn’t give YOU a choice.”

For just a day

I wish my pain would go away

October 8, 2014

I wrote this poem soon after I heard the troubling news of a fellow adoptee taking her own life. Although I did not know this person, I knew that she had been reunited with her birth family. Upon learning about her tragic decision to end her pain, the phrase— **for just a day**—kept running through my mind. I finally succumbed to that inner mantra and put my feelings and words to paper.

In the 19 years since I reunited with my own birth family, my emotions have run the entire gamut from feeling elated, to feeling completely rejected and abandoned again. Reunions and the adoption pain that follows them can be hard, complex, and confusing to say the least.

Society usually sees the happy reunion story during its initial honeymoon stage. Those moments are almost always filled with tears of joy, leaving the impression that the reunion and new relationship will lead to a “happily ever after” fairytale scenario. However, throughout the reunion process, the emotional undercurrents of grief, rage, shame, guilt, rejection and abandonment often lurk beneath the surface for both the birth family and the adoptee.

Thankfully today, adoptee rights organizations and social media outlets are creating a deeper awareness of the adoption pain the adult adoptee may face throughout the course of his or her life. Still, in light of the recent string of adoption-related suicides, adoptees are in need of far more resources, guidance and emotional supportive measures as they navigate the search and reunion roller coaster ride.

It is my hope that by sharing this poem, others will see another realistic side of adoption reunion and how that experience may really feel for many grown-up adoptees across the world.

Editor's Notes: Enjoy another of Daryn Watson's poems here on Secret Sons & Daughters: [Thanksgiving Reunion '95](#)

Pictured above is author, Daryn Watson and his paternal natural brother.

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[Native Awakenings](#)

An Indiana Adoptee Finds Her Alaskan tribe—

I have lived my whole life with skin that doesn't burn in the sun, dark eyes and jet black hair. I've dreamt vivid, lucid, colorful dreams shaded with images of animals and earth's elements. My night quests were often filled with salmon and streams, and I was carried away in a current. The water above and below me flowed in one direction, but my body was pulled along an opposite middle path.

For as long as I can remember, I felt as if I'd been severed from something. The forbidden questions I dared to ask about my adoption as a child were met with unsympathetic responses and nervous tapping fingers. The answers given: "We were told your birth father was one-quarter Aleutian Indian. You don't want to open doors you cannot close. Your adoption records are sealed and that is the law."

I was never introduced to Native American culture. My adoptee journey started in 1965, when I was born and adopted in the state of Indiana, one of more than thirty states that still have sealed adoption records. Non-identifying information is available in Indiana, but identifying information is only available if the first mother registers and signs a waiver of consent.

Those avenues were closed to me. Thankfully, today's internet offered an alternate path to zip past prehistoric laws and unravel my ethnic mystery.

In the fall of 2013, I searched for DNA tests that determine ethnicity and found three companies: 23andMe, FTDNA and AncestryDNA. I had waited 47 years too long, dreamt too many dreams of being tugged away from something. I wanted real answers—to know if I was just a tan looking white-chick, or if I really had Native American ancestry.

While there were DNA tests that look solely for ancestral heritage, I began my search with 23andMe because at the time they provided genetic health

information, such as whether I carried certain DNA mutations that lead to specific cancers or other diseases.

For an adoptee who has never had access to accurate family medical history, this was crucial information. (Unfortunately, the FDA has since stopped the company from offering this service.) I submitted my saliva sample and waited six weeks for the results.

When they arrived, I was shocked to find out I was in fact half Native American, my father full blooded. I mourned all the years I was denied my Native culture and never given the opportunity to know or celebrate my ethnicity with pride. My dreams, the strong spiritual connection I'd always felt to animals and the earth, the disinterest in the material world, all finally made sense to me in a way that made me feel rooted.

Thankfully, my medical history came out clean. Next thing I knew, I was accepting waivers stating that I'd read all they had to say about finding close relatives. I clicked away until I landed on a page that said there was a man with whom I shared 25% DNA. 23andMe suggested he was a nephew, but I knew in my heart he was my half brother.

We share the same birth date, one year apart. I messaged him right away and he responded promptly. He (Kevin) is 99.9% European. Since Kevin is nearly all European and I am half, it was clear we have the same mother. Kevin was born in Illinois, where adoption laws allowed him to access to our mother's name. He agreed to share it. After that, I searched for her for months on end.

The excitement of finding him prompted me to submit samples to two more DNA testing companies. My ethnicity results returned the same. All three connected me to Native American distant cousins located along Alaska's Yukon River.

I messaged everyone. Some replied, including Gail, a cousin who took me under her wing and offered to help me search for my Native birthfather.

In the meantime, I searched the internet daily for my mother. I drew family trees working them backward to forward. I searched every woman with the same name until "ruling out" was the only task left. Finally, in February 2014, I found her. She was on a public family tree. Also on that tree was a cousin from my European side, a photo of my mother, and her married last name.

I went on to find her on Facebook too and sent two messages that explained who I was (a nurse and mother) and what I longed to know, simple things like where I was born and the name of my father. I also told her that I was doing well and didn't need to know the whys.

After those messages were met with silence, I sent a message to one of her siblings and received a note saying my birthmother would be willing to look at a letter again. The letter ended by wishing me peace and God's love.

In my third letter to her, I confessed that I was petrified of hurting her and being rejected without answers. I promised to honor her private life,

shared that Kevin and I were getting to know one another, and explained my DNA test result conundrum. And I asked again for my birth father's name. I closed the letter by saying "I hope that you know you are loved."

She responded a day later, asked for my address, and promised a letter. Six weeks later, it arrived. She confirmed that Kevin was my half brother, and gave me my father's name.

Days earlier, my cousin Gail had posted my photo on her Facebook page, along with a brief note about my search for my father. I added his name in the comments and it flew like wildfire in the wind on a hot day. Within 90 minutes I had a gazillion relatives.

I was accepted without question, honored with phone calls, and welcomed with tears of joy. These new cousins shared stories about my father, how he'd been offered training with Chicago's Job Corps in 1965 and spent 12 years in the lower 48 picking cotton in Georgia and oranges in Florida before returning home. They say I am much like him: tall, dark, and thin with a gentle and goofy nature. I wish I could have met him.



Artist (and Mary's cousin) Rose Albert's "Vision" reflects Alaska's various cultures

My father, a full-blood Athabascan, walked on in 1992. My family assures me he would have loved me and done anything for me, had he known about my birth. I gaze at his photos and I see me, see white light reflected within dark brown eyes. I know his thoughts through these eyes. A history of memories carried through genetic markers that can never be washed away. My longing for connection to that history is so strong.

As for my mother's family, Kevin and I are still secrets. However, I appreciate that she honored my request and signed the waiver to release my original birth certificate—the certificate that confirmed my father's name, my Native American ethnicity, and had a checkbox marking me as "illegitimate." My half brother and I grow closer as time progresses. We talk on the phone and email photos. I hope to meet him soon.



Mary and her cousin LaVem

I recently met my first cousin LaVem. Our fathers are brothers. She flew to Las Vegas from Fairbanks, Alaska to celebrate her 50th birthday and I met her there. LaVern is the first biological relative I have ever met.

Meeting her was a special love at first sight. We laughed and joked and got along like we've known each other forever. We shared photos of ourselves on Facebook for our friends and Alaskan family to see.

Next summer my tribe will hold a memorial potlatch in Alaska. "Potlatch" is a native term for a tribal gathering that is celebrated with gift giving, traditional song and dance, and ceremonial practices for blessing. I hope to attend.

I'm immensely thankful to settle in to my heritage and share it with my children. And I'm thankful for programs now open to us that include healthcare benefits and college scholarship opportunities. If I had never known of my lineage, my children and I would have no access to these opportunities or our familial heritage.

It's extremely healing for me as an Alaskan Native American to know where I came from. Knowing one's history not only has the power to root someone in their past, it also opens doorways to the future, and our children's future, too.

Image credit: "Iditarod" and "Vision" by artist [Rose Albert](#).

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Genetic Testing: Miracles and Science

An adoptee twice rejected by her first mother turns to genetic testing for information and discovers a whole new family.

It has been 25 years since I found my birth mother. She has rejected me two times since. My search began in California in 1986 when I was in my early twenties. I hired a private investigator and made use of the “non-identifying information” a compassionate social worker had provided. The investigator made the initial contact. It was a disaster; my birth mother did *not* want to be found.

Apparently my birth had been a frightening chapter in her life and one she wanted to keep closed. Imagine a pregnant eighteen-year-old girl in prison during the dawn of the free love movement, giving birth while incarcerated, not to mention in an era that stigmatized out-of-wedlock pregnancy. She had no desire to revisit her troubled youth through meeting me, and, the hardest part, no curiosity or desire to know who I was.

I cried. I felt awful, guilty even.

It took months to work through my emotions over this second rejection, but I finally wrote to her. She responded with a letter that expressed her firm wish to draw a line that separated her from her past. Our only other communication was through two more letters over the years that followed. They met with the same result. Time seemed to have no effect on her wounds. To this day I’ve never met her, nor spoken to her on the phone.

I know I can’t control how she feels. I can only control my own reaction. I admit it hurts, but I’m not the type to kick something around forever. Thankfully, my life is full of other moments. Great moments, especially those surrounding the births of my two sons and the years spent raising them.

As the years have ticked by though, I increasingly wondered about my birth father. My birth mother was the only person who knew his identity and she was unwilling to divulge that information.

I made a rogue attempt to use social media to locate him. My Facebook page plea included the date and place of my birth, along with several photos of me throughout the years. I waited. Several weeks went by and there was no shortage of shares. Like a cheesy 80’s shampoo commercial, I told two friends and they told two friends, and so on, and so on.

The result: nothing. In the end, I surmised that my birth mother never told him that she was pregnant. How do you find someone who has no idea that you exist?

After that failed social media experiment, I took a break from finding him, until gnawing questions about my health history prompted me to try genetic testing.

Thank you, science and technology. I spit in a test tube, waited a few weeks, and 23andMe (a genetic testing company named for the 23 pairs of chromosomes in a normal human cell) gave me a genetically “clean” bill of health. The report explained that they detected no mutations or gene variants that would indicate serious inherited conditions, only a couple of genes indicating an elevated risk for non-life threatening conditions such as psoriasis and restless leg syndrome.

This was before 23andMe suspended their health-related genetic testing to comply with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s directive.

After I received the health results, I played around with the “Ancestry Composition” section of the site. I was fascinated to find out that I was mostly British and Irish, which was at least partially similar to my adoptive parents’ British and German ancestry. Given my propensity for arguing, raising my voice in exciting situations, and talking with my hands, I figured there would be a bit of Italian in me. Nope. I was enchanted anyway with the idea of being British and Irish, and fantasized I was related to Bono.

Initially, I never thought to look at the “DNA Relatives” section of the site. I already knew who my biological mother was, and I knew she hadn’t had other children. As for my birth father, I figured he wouldn’t be looking for me, and given his age (early 70’s), he probably wasn’t spitting in a test tube to get in touch with his genes.

A few weeks after analyzing the health data, I received an email from 23andMe. It was a conduit email from a “potential relative.”

Hi – Through our shared DNA, 23andMe has identified us as relatives. Our predicted relationship is 4th Cousin, with a likely range of 3rd to 6th Cousin. Would you like to explore our relationship?

Fourth, maybe even a 6th cousin? Whoop de doo. With no blood relatives that I actually *knew*, except for my own boys, a 4th cousin was too distant to rouse my curiosity. Even if he were related to me on my paternal side, how would I know? These potential matches typically request lineage information—a list of surnames to help piece together a family tree. I had no surnames to offer, so I ignored that first message.

I received a few more requests, but they were all the same—distant cousins. The flurry of them, though, finally prompted me to check 23andMe’s “DNA Relatives” section. I could have shut off these notifications, but now I was a curious to see if there were other matches who hadn’t reached out yet.

On that page, 23andMe reported that I had 762 potential relatives. 762! What does one *do* with this kind of information? Okay, maybe a lot of people care

about distant cousins—it's a way to find common ancestors and build your family tree—but I didn't have a family tree. I barely had a shrub.

Then I saw it: "One Close Family." What? Who? I clicked on it, but before 23andMe would reveal any details, a warning popped up. I had to confirm that I *really* wanted the information.

23andMe asked for two layers of consent before it revealed a close family relationship. First, I was given the chance to turn off the "relative finder" function, which shows relations as close as second cousins. Once you've opted in, if 23andMe finds a close relative (closer than a second cousin), a pop-up warning explains how this "new" evidence of a close family relationship can be unexpected and even upsetting in some cases. Upsetting? Been there. Of course I wanted to know! I clicked, then:

You may learn information about yourself that you do not anticipate. Such information may provoke strong emotion.

Thanks 23andMe. Now I was scared. But I clicked "proceed" anyway. Then I saw it: **Male, Father, 50% shared, 23 segments**

Father? My *biological* father?! 23andMe had found my biological father! Boy, this was not some online game, yet I felt like I'd just won the lottery—*50.0% shared, 23 segments*.

I had to contact this guy. 23andMe required that initial contact be made through them. I could hardly think straight as I typed out a message to *my father*:

Hi,

I am contacting you because 23andMe has identified you as a relative of mine because of our shared DNA. 23andMe has predicted, through our DNA "match," that you are my biological father. You won't recognize my name, because I was adopted and bear the name of my adoptive parents. However, my birth mother's name is Margaret Michaels. I hope that the name Margaret Michaels is familiar to you, although it was 50 years ago and I understand that it was a difficult time for both of you. I hope that you will respond to my message and that you are interested in exploring our relationship. I look forward to hearing from you! Lauren Pittman

(Original birth certificate reads: "Baby Girl Michaels")

It hasn't been an easy journey. At first, he thought our match was a mistake. My birth father—a self-proclaimed "old hippie" and artist who had fully immersed himself in the early 1960's beatnik culture—had no recollection of his encounter with my birth mother. He doesn't even remember her name, but since the geographic details and genetic facts all added up, our match could not be denied.

He lives in another state and I have yet to make the journey to meet him. We're taking things slow and communicating through email. I'm grateful and amazed at his openness. He is telling me his truth, his story, and I am telling him mine. It's really something to hear and be heard by a biological relative, and hard to explain how powerful that is to people who grew up with the ability to take that for granted. It feels like a miracle, like a whole new world opened up, with a little help from science.

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[Hey Ole' Man—A Father Known and Unknown](#)

Hey Ole' Man

Who are you? What are you thinking?

On the front porch
In your wife-beater shirt and jeans
Sipping coffee from a snowflake print mug
In July
Watching the road
In silence

Who are you?

My dad and not my dad
A husband for 50 years
A grandfather of eight
A U.S. Navy vet
A loyal football fan
A retired autoworker
A cancer survivor
A simple man with secrets
A complete stranger

Are you happy?
Angry?
Fed up?

Curious?
Relieved?
Scared?
Wanting more or just tired out?

What's on your mind today?
The War?
The elections?
The ball game?
Your truck in the shop?
Your bills?

I think about you:
When I see an ad for Chevy
When Mellencamp sings
When I watch football
When something happens on the news

You have an opinion on everything.

But what do you think of me?

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[Never Will I Know](#)

A woman born and raised in England discovers her Northern Irish roots and longs to know the father she was too late to find.

Father – “unknown,” his name is John.
He has blue eyes, just like me, I am told.
To my 5-year-old-self, the mystery of my origins began.

The earliest search started within my heart,
In my imagination,
Searching the faces of strangers,
In the street, in pictures, on television,

Anywhere that I might find the connection,
A deep sense of loss, a yearning, emptiness,
A marrow-deep need to know, and to belong.
There were no words to describe the longing,
Only an intangible feeling, etched in my soul.

His name is John...

And here I stand, not alone, for my brother holds me strong,
Your firstborn son, sharing my grief, bringing me to you,
I am too late, my journey's end, no more searching, no more hope, just the
cold, hard truth.
As frigid as the tombstone before me, you are gone, the dream is over.

Never will I know –
The warmth of your hugs,
Hold my hand in yours,
Hear the sound of your voice, your laughter,
Feel your kisses planted on my head,
The tousle of my hair beneath your fingers,
Your acceptance of me,
Your love for me.

His name is John...

Your headstone majestic, yet humble, in death, as you were in life,
The grief threatens to overwhelm me—my knees buckle beneath me,
You will never be there to catch me when I fall.
Silent tears for all that is lost overwhelm me.

I light four candles at your graveside— beacons of light, of hope,
For the grandchildren you never knew,
Who bear your ancestry, and who live because you did.
My existence denied in death, as in life.
No acknowledgement of me, the relinquished one.
Silently I scream, I am here, I am yours.
No acknowledgement of the loss I feel,
I was your firstborn, the first wain you held in your arms.

His name is John...

I still grieve for you every day.
I live a life full of love and gratitude in deference to you.
Your grandchildren will always be proud of the man you were—
They will respect all that you achieved and acknowledge their heritage,
Even though we are denied and eradicated from your life.

I often wonder...
Did you ever think of me? Did you ever question what became of me?
Did you ever grieve the loss of me?
Would you have protected me from the hurt and shame?
Would you have loved me and accepted me for all that I am?

Will you forgive me for not finding you in time?
Would I have been enough?

His name is John. He is my father. And he is gone...

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[An Adoptee Turns to Humor to Endure Secrets and Lies](#)

I was born in February of 1968, a byproduct of the previous year's notorious "Summer of Love." There were so many relinquished babies in the late '60s, we were like a Pet-Smart hamster cage overrun with new litters. Any 'God-fearing' family with a traditional home setup and decent donation check could score one of us pinkies.

The idea of adoption first popped into my adoptive dad's head as he strolled through the 1967 Minnesota State Fairgrounds with his four bio-kids and clinically depressed wife. There in the livestock section was a Catholic Charities adoption marketing booth decorated as – no lie – a red barn adorned with big photos of adorable, pink, healthy baby faces. BINGO, thought Dad. This will keep my emotionally crippled wife busy and add some pep to the house like a cute new puppy.

"No, I do not want to adopt a baby," insisted adoptive mom. But Dad demanded it would be a nice Catholic thing to do, and it was a patriarchal time, so despite protests from Mom and the youngest bio-kid, they did it.



Again, in those days there were gobs of babies available. Have you seen that

old 1967 *Star Trek* episode, "The Trouble With Tribbles"? It may have been inspired by all of us little homeless waifs. So a family that already had several natural-born children and an unstable mother was still able to pass the brief home visit with flying colors. Those issues might not be approved on today's social service checklists.

As I grew...and grew...and grew (eventually reaching 5'11" in a very petite family – women 5'1", men around 5'6"), adoption was never discussed except for the one time I was informed about my own adoption.

I was 6-years-old and we had recently talked about the word "adopted" in my first grade class. For some reason, I had confused the word "adopted" with "baptized" so I told my teacher that I was adopted at church. She explained the definitions in more detail and cleared up my confusion.

I relayed this story to Dad when he and I were alone together, and he stated matter-of-factly that I was in that category the teacher described, I was adopted. Another woman had me, and they were raising me, and that was about it.

Mom never wanted to talk about it. The older siblings weren't interested, either. They are strikingly similar to one another in stature and physical features, and they're all very much alike in personality and lifestyle preferences, too—staunchly conservative, Catholic, meat-and-potatoes Republicans.

And I'm an agnostic, vegetarian, tree-hugging liberal. For years I tried to adapt and conform. Most adoptees have a strong desire to fit in and deep fear of abandonment, so up through my early 20s I attempted to change my true nature. But man, it is exhausting trying to be someone you are not.



So, like bad episodes of *Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island* blaring on the TV every Saturday night, it ("it" = adoption, round peg in square hole, etc.) was plainly 'there' in the room but never discussed.

There were some nice times together. There was definitely no abuse, and my kid brain always reasoned, if not for this family I would've been left in a bag on the street or something worse! Be GRATEFUL, Tribble!

At age 18, I had to find a genetic link after a lifetime of feeling like an alien dropped from space (this *Star Trek* theme won't stop, will it? I do love Shatner).



Catholic Charities agreed to check my file, and saw that my mother, Terry,* had contacted them several years prior, inquiring about me. They sent her a form to fill out, which would allow me to access my information and her contact information. The completed form was never returned; however, it did not take long for the social worker intermediary to contact Terry and see if she was up for some communication (cue Peaches & Herb “Reunited”).



Polite, friendly letters, a few phone calls, and one face-to-face meeting ensued. The honeymoon phase felt good. I was shocked at the amount of relief I felt about the fact that I had actually been born to someone, came from a real genetic family like other human beings. Not like Mork from Ork. Not even a tribble.

Terry was 24 when she had run out of money, and options, while living in San Francisco several months pregnant with me. She had not told anyone in her family about her pregnancy, but decided to tell her brother, who was a priest temporarily assigned in St. Paul, Minnesota.

He got Terry settled in at a Catholic Charities wage home while she waited out the pregnancy and relinquishment plans. She told me she blocked out a lot of that period of her life, but more than once she defended her choice, stating, “I did what was right for me at the time.”

Okay. Thanks Mama. But WHY couldn't your brother have been stationed in Honolulu? Or anywhere else that wasn't the COLDEST FREAKING PLACE ON THE PLANET TO GROW UP? Just kidding (kind of). There are some lovely people up there in Minnesota, even if they do all sound like the cast of Fargo.

Terry and I stayed in contact off and on for about six years. It was rocky. She had never told her kept children (or most relatives) about me, and she was clearly not comfortable having an ongoing relationship with her deep, shameful secret.

So, after dozens of her denials and disappearing acts, our quasi-relationship was kaput. My letters were not answered and the rare phone call had been met with condescension and irritation. Secondary rejection is not fun or pretty.

But I decided it was a sign to look up the “other half of me,” my paternal side.



Terry had never told my father, Rick, that I existed. She had broken up with him and moved to San Francisco from Philadelphia after finding out she was prego with me. My last phone call to her, telling her about my desire to connect with him, was met with the outrage and fury of a thousand angry klingons!

With the help of a Catholic Charities intermediary again, I found my father. Although Terry had never intended to state his name anywhere in the records, apparently she let it slip during a counseling session and the note-taker at the time (bless her heart) jotted Rick’s full name in the paperwork margins. It was easy to find him because he and his family lived in the same neighborhood as Terry and her family. Some of their kids attended the same school, and the wives knew each other. Talk about a soap opera. Seriously, Aaron Spelling couldn’t make this stuff up!

No wonder she freaked out. Oh, the tangled web some weave. We have never spoken again. But I forgive her, for my own well being and for the sake of moving on.

Anyway, Rick was surprised but delighted to find out he had another child. Getting to know him and several other paternal family members has been a real treat. He is as laid-back as my mother is high-strung. He introduced me to dozens of kinfolk.

My Great Aunt Helen and I developed a close friendship for a few years, until she passed away. She used to tell me I reminded her of her mother, my great grandmother. She said our hands and gestures were identical, and Great Grandma was nearly 6 feet tall. This meant so much to me.



It’s been a ridiculous ride, but fascinating to say the least. Now I have my own wonderful tribbles, I mean CHILDREN!, and have learned some valuable lessons to pass on about nature, nurture, honesty, openness, forgiveness, and love.

One of the biggest messages I've taken from all of this is that sometimes the universe hands you some major, in-your-face contrast so you can more clearly see what you do want in your life. Honesty, integrity, and being a loving, attentive mom are high on my list of goals, and maybe some of that has to do with seeing their opposites.

So, now with a bit of closure achieved, life goes on.

As Mr. Spock keenly advises: "Live Long and Prosper" – and of course laugh whenever you can.

*Names not changed to protect privacy. Screw that. Enough with the secrets and lies.

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[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!

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Shattered Fantasies and a New Journey: A Young Woman Meets Her Birth Parents

My incredible parents adopted me in East Tennessee, when I was just two days old. They named me Taylor Rebekka Perry— though they told my birth parents my name was Rebekka in order to protect my identity until I might wish to find them on my own. That wish became a strong desire shortly before my 18th birthday.

My parents gave me their full support, and they understood my reasons for wanting to search. I had always been curious about my family history, where I had come from, and most importantly, why my birth parents had put me up for adoption—which I believe most adoptees can easily relate to.

My uncle (my mom's brother) had been the attorney who handled my adoption, so I was able to obtain my birth parent's contact information quickly.

A fresh blanket of snow laid across the ground on the December morning of my long anticipated reunion day.

My boyfriend at the time, accompanied me in an attempt to calm my nerves, but that did little good. My heart raced a mile a minute. I worried if I looked okay, if my hair was okay, and was my breath fresh enough? So many silly thoughts sped through my mind.

We arrived on time to the arranged meeting place: A Cracker Barrel that marked the halfway point between my hometown and my birth parent's home. I called my uncle. He was already inside the restaurant with my birth parents, letting them know that I was in the parking lot. My uncle came out to greet my boyfriend and me, and he gave me a few moments to catch my breath.

This was it. My boyfriend handed me a Kleenex so that I could wipe the sweat off my hands. I felt out of control, my legs shook, and my voice was small and hoarse.

My uncle took me by the arm and escorted me inside. We slowly walked to a table in the back of the restaurant where my birth parents were already seated.

As we approached them, they immediately stood with their arms stretched out, ready to embrace me. My birth mother hugged me first. I could not believe I was finally in the arms of the woman who had given birth to me.

She was nothing like I pictured her—her hair was much darker than mine, and her body was larger as well. My birth father hugged me next. He towered over me, and with the exception of our matching dark brown eyes, we shared little

resemblance.

My uncle quietly slipped away.

My birth parents talked most of the time, filling me in on the past twenty-plus years. I learned that I had a full-blooded sister. *A little sister—a full sister*—I was shocked!

When they showed me her picture, it was as though I was looking at a younger version of myself. We look almost identical.

Sadly, I also discovered that my younger sister was never told of my existence—I was the “secret daughter”.

After I was born, my parents had stopped seeing each other, and my birth mother believed she had no means to care for me. Eventually, they got back together and married several years later. I was thrilled they had had another child. Even though my boyfriend and my parents did not understand, I was neither angered nor hurt that I was the secret daughter. I felt for my birth parents and I understood their situation at the time.

Still, building a relationship with my birth parents and little sister was a rocky one from the very start, especially with my birth mother. She attempted to control me—always wanting to know where I was, whom I was with, and why it was that I would not answer her calls and texts immediately.

She talked to me about things no mother would ever talk to their daughter about, things like her love life and her dramatic one-night stands. It was disturbing to hear these kinds of things, and unsettling that so many of our conversations had become one-sided.

At one point, I had become so overwhelmed, that my mother stepped in and took over. She told my birth mother that she needed to give me more breathing room.

Two-and-half-years into our relationship, and on the eve of my 21st birthday, my birth mother called to tell me that she and my birth father had separated and would eventually divorce.

After they finalized their divorce, I experienced even more of my birth mother’s deceit and lies. She had falsely claimed both cancer and pregnancy, and she had stolen money from my sister. She told my sister that she regretted knowing me and tried to turn her against me. My birth mother proved to burn me time and time again.

Naturally, I started to distance myself from her, and in January of this year, I finally sent her an email that outlined my true feelings. I never heard back from her.

For almost four years, I allowed myself to be sucked into an unhealthy relationship with her. It took much soul-searching, but I finally realized that having this woman in my life was bringing me down and keeping me from growing in an emotionally positive way. My birth mother has hurt others so

much more than she has ever helped anyone.

I never imagined my reunion would end up like this. It brings on tears of deep pain.

Maybe I was too immature when I made the decision to reunite with my birth family, or maybe I set my expectations too high. Either way, I fell for the fantasy—a fantasy that I had come from a wonderful woman who had given me life, was perfect, beautiful, smart, strong and independent. The tarnished reality and finding out that she was not who I had hoped her to be, has broken my heart.

My birth parents have been divorced for over a year now. My birth father is grappling with many of the same things I am, and he and I are working on building a strong and healthy relationship.

My younger sister and I have fallen on patchy times. It's hard to know what lies she was told, and she is too young for me to sort that out for her. She will have to make her own decisions in time about me and about our mother.

My birth father tries to point my sister's thoughts in the right direction and only time will tell where all this will lead.

I am flooded with regret and sorrow for no longer having the woman I had fantasized about for 18 years in my life. Sometimes I think my life would've been easier if I had made the choice to leave well enough alone, but when I dig deeper, I am glad that I searched.

I'm glad I know where I came from. I'm glad I know my history, I'm glad to have a beautiful little sister, and I'm glad to have a relationship with my birth father.

I've also learned that I'm a much stronger person than I ever thought I could be. I hope and pray that down the road my relationship with my birth mother will mend, but I have come to terms with the knowledge that it may not, and I am okay with that. My sister is still young, and I feel that with time and work, our bond as sisters will grow stronger.

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A California Secret Son Finds his Birth Mother

Jason Clawson recounts his early years with his adoptive parents and how he met his birth/first mother.

In 1972 my first grade teacher threatened to call my mother if I continued to tell her and my classmates that I was adopted. She thought that I couldn't be adopted because I couldn't explain what "adopted" meant. When I insisted that my mom had told me I was adopted, my teacher called her during class playtime. After several minutes, my teacher hung up, walked over, gave me a hug, and apologized for not believing me.

I don't remember the day I grasped the full meaning of adoption. I knew I was loved, and how I arrived to my family didn't really matter to me. I was where I was supposed to be.

My parents lived in Downey, California and had tried unsuccessfully to have children for five years. They had discussed adoption but originally neither was in favor of it. Then one evening, a friend from my parents' church called and said there was a newborn boy in San Diego available for adoption. "Are you interested?" he asked. Perhaps if my father had taken the call I would have ended up elsewhere, but fortunately my mother answered the phone that night, and immediately replied: "We'll take him!" A few days later, my parents met my birth mother, Sandy, and me.

Sandy lived in Phoenix, Arizona. At age 18, she unexpectedly found herself in a family-way. Her parents couldn't believe their daughter had shamed their family by getting pregnant. Her father threw a chair at her. Sandy's parents sent her to San Diego to live with her older brother and his wife. The plan was that she'd deliver me, then give me up for adoption. She didn't hear from her parents once during her time in San Diego. She had signed an agreement with an adoption agency and the agency had selected a family.

After I was born, however, Sandy rescinded the agreement and decided to do the one motherly act remaining to her—find the right family and give me to them herself. I've since learned, Sandy's decision did not ingratiate her to the hospital staff or adoption agency. They became quite hostile and tried to coerce her to sign the adoption agreement.

Nevertheless, about two weeks after my birth, my soon-to-be parents Jim and Jeannette, drove from Downey to San Diego only days after receiving their friend's call. They had no crib, no diapers, no clothes, no formula—nothing. Now that I have children of my own, it's difficult to imagine two people less prepared to receive a baby.

As Sandy spoke with my parents, they learned that my birth father, "Milt," had denied fathering me and wanted nothing to do with me. After a time, and

apparently pre-assured by her attorney's vetting of my parents, Sandy handed me to my mother and told her, "I believe you're the couple that should have my baby." On that day, Jim and Jeannette became my parents. They drove back to Downey, me in my new mother's arms.

With news spreading that a third passenger was on the return trip, my grandmothers sprang into action, buying bottles, diapers, blankets and clothes. Still, not *everything* was in place for my arrival. I spent the first weeks sleeping in a dresser drawer.

Three baby showers later, and my parents were well stocked and learning about their new son. My mother's pregnancy cut that time short though. My sister Courtney joined the family ten months after my birth. Since Courtney and I were similar in size, and both had blonde hair and blue eyes, many thought we were twins. I like to think that my arrival opened the way for Courtney, and for my sister Brooke, and brother Brett. Had Courtney's journey into the family started two weeks earlier, I would be living somewhere else with a different life and a different name. Thank you for waiting, Court.

Sometimes I look at my ten-year-old son and know exactly what he's thinking because in many ways he's like me. My parents weren't afforded that and now that I'm a parent myself I wonder if they had an easier time connecting with my sisters and brother. Similarities or not though, I always knew that I was loved.

I had a normal childhood. I made friends, got along with my sisters and brother, and tended to be protective of them. Occasionally, I pointed out to my sisters that they shared Mom's genes and were destined to turn out just like her. It's remarkable what an insult that can be to sisters.

Not knowing anything about my own genes and heritage allowed me to be the descendent of whatever my imagination could conjure. Before I met Sandy, I thought it would be nice if she knew that I'd turned out okay and that she'd made the right decision. Not surprisingly, I never had any interest in knowing Milt.

As I grew into adulthood, I was reminded that I was adopted each time someone remarked how much I looked like my father. Indeed, most people thought I looked more like my parents than my siblings. I've often thought that it's amazing that an entire family can find ways to resemble the adopted child. Even my personality was often compared to my personable Grandpa Delwin, a US Congressman.

I married in my mid 30's and my wife and I had a son 14-months later. It was when, to my complete surprise, our marriage abruptly ended that I began to think about Sandy. When you go through a divorce that you didn't see coming, there are a few ways you can react. I'd witnessed several unproductive reactions through the divorces of close friends. I decided I needed a positive outlet and distraction, so I began researching my adoptive family's genealogy. It turned out that much of it had been completed. The only way I was going to distract myself with a genealogy project was if worked on my biological family's tree. I was ready for the journey. First step: find

Sandy.

My parents were supportive. My mother gave me the name of the hospital where I was born. I knew the name I'd been given at birth, my birth date, and I knew Sandy's maiden name. I hired Colleen, who specializes in California adoption searches. I sent her the information. Ten days later, Colleen had located Sandy. Sandy was married and living in Bellingham, Washington.

On March 16, 2006, I sent Sandy a letter via FedEx, which required signature confirmation.

Dear Sandra,

I hope you're sitting. Perhaps for some time you've wondered if you'd ever hear from me. On September 2, 1967, I was born in a San Diego hospital and named Steven Grant Meyer. I have reason to believe that you are my birth mother. I hope that you are, because I have so much that I'd like to share with you.

Most importantly, know that I love you and that you made the right decision in giving me to my mother and father. They have showered me with love and if my mom's story is correct, that you felt that they were the couple that was meant to receive your son, know that you were absolutely right. If this is the only communication we have, let this letter comfort you in that knowledge.

Because part of me comes from you, I'm certain that this letter is bringing back a flood of memories. My parents never hid from me the circumstances of your situation and I have never, ever questioned your choice. To the contrary, I have been forever thankful...

The letter ended with my contact information. Perhaps most adopted children are forced to face the many different ways sending a letter to a biological parent may play out. I wanted to be careful not to upset whatever life Sandy had. I knew she was married, but didn't know if her husband knew of me. I had no fear of rejection because I viewed finding Sandy as a possible bonus to my life and perhaps comfort to hers. I've found that adopted girls seem to have a greater desire to understand the "whys" of having been placed for adoption than do boys.

A day later, the online FedEx confirmation read "Delivered." Two weeks went by with no reply. I figured the letter might have gone to the wrong Sandy, or it made it to the correct Sandy and she either didn't want contact, or she didn't know how to reply. It turned out to be none of those reasons.

Sandy had been on vacation when the delivery person left the envelope on her porch. Sandy and her husband, David, had gone through the mail and left it on the table thinking it was from a salesperson. I'd addressed it to "Sandra," not knowing that she went by "Sandy." She finally read it. She told me that she gasped when she read the letter, and David asked if she was okay. Rather

than answer him, she re-read the letter and then silently handed it to David. The next day, Sandy sent me an e-mail reply: "Dear Jason, yes I am your birth mother..."

Image credit: photo provided by author.

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[A Michigan Adoptee Reflects on the Concept of Choice](#)

Ten years ago this month, the phone rang at 7 a.m. That was my first indication that it was bad news—nobody ever calls that early with good news.

"Are you sitting down? You better sit down," said Jenifer, my sister-in-law. "There's been an accident. Cristi is dead."

My predominant reaction to the news was confusion. Cristi was my 36-year-old full biological sister, 14 months younger than me, and a sister I'd only known for 15 years.

I was adopted in 1966 as an infant, in a closed adoption. I met Cristi when I reunited with my birth family in 1988. A year-and-a-half after we had met, we were *both* surprised to learn that we were full sisters.

Apparently, my birth mother met my birth father secretly six months after my birth, and as a result of that encounter, Cristi was born. Our birth mother went on to marry another man, one her family approved of, and he raised Cristi as his own. She grew up believing he was her father, that is, until I came into the picture.

I should be really sad about losing Cristi, I thought when the news of her passing settled in. I pretended that I was. Don't get me wrong, on one level I was sad. Christi was young, she had two small children, and this was a tragedy. I had had little history in common with her—no shared memories of growing up together—only our genes. We were not close.

Like many adoptees, I spent my life denying, repressing, and stuffing my feelings, and even medicating them when all else failed. Expressing my

feelings, I thought, might destroy me.

I had received society's message to be grateful because I was special and chosen. I was supposed to feel lucky that my parents had adopted me. Other children, in an attempt to be sympathetic, would remark that their parents were "stuck" with them. Being adopted made me special and chosen? Who wouldn't be grateful for that?

But in my heart and in my gut, I knew that something terrible had happened to me, even though no one spoke of it. No one ever said: "I am sorry you couldn't stay with your mother."

If I had allowed myself to grieve that loss, it would have overwhelmed me. I believed that had I protested or expressed my feelings openly, then my adoptive parents might've rejected me and left too. *That* would have destroyed me.

In time, however, my denial mechanism became a hindrance. From the beginning, the setup was for me to fit what others needed, not for me to discover what fit me.

Therefore, I had developed no internal radar, and very little clarity on who I was or how I truly felt. When I was younger, I accepted jobs that I didn't care for only because they were offered, and I ended up in too many relationships with men that were not right for me, simply because they had expressed an interest in me.

So there I was with a dead biological sister and great uncertainty about how to grieve.

I went to the funeral home, along with my birth family and pretended to be devastated. I cried. I hugged my family as they grieved my sister's death. I tried to be one of them just like I had since my reunion.

I sat around a table at the funeral home with my birth mother, my brother, and Cristi's husband, and helped with the obituary wording.

What the hell am I doing here? Why did they include me? I don't belong—I hardly even knew her.

I kept those thoughts inside, ignored my feelings and tried, as always, to fit in. And part of me felt grateful to be included. I felt privileged to finally be in this family that I had been banished from decades earlier.

Three days later, after I had returned home from Cristi's funeral, my then-husband met me at the door. "You better sit down. Your brother just called. Your father died."

My adoptive father, whom I had been to Arizona to visit two weeks prior, had dropped dead from a stroke at the age of 79.

The feelings came fast and hard. I felt clear—no ambiguity this time, and it tore right through me. I dropped to the floor and sobbed.

The truth is though; I was not close to my adoptive father, either. He was a good person, well liked, but not a very good father. He was aloof, distant, unengaged, and often, he didn't seem to care much about me, yet the pain I felt was real and genuine.

Ironically, one of the things I remember most about his funeral was when my adoptive mother told me not to cry.

I was about to board a plane back to Michigan and I was worried about leaving her alone, without my father. My tears would not stop. She patted me on the shoulder and said, "Oh now, don't cry."

I thought *Jesus Christ, if I'm not even allowed to cry now, when my father has died, will there ever be a time when it is okay for me to cry?* But, good little adoptee that I was—I denied my feelings and I stopped crying.

That was a pivotal time in my life, and a very complicated one. Many things were changing, most of all me. I had two young daughters, my marriage was falling apart, and I was transitioning from an agency job to begin a private practice as a clinical social worker. It was a time I learned about choices.

A year later, I ended contact with my birth family. I was tired of pretending. I had already spent a lifetime doing that with my adoptive family, and that added stress had become too much to bear. The realization that I could never be privy to the memories that they shared was excruciating.

I had always felt sad after being with them for holidays and birthdays. After one visit in particular, my husband asked, "If you were not biologically related to these people, would you have anything to do with them?"

"Absolutely not," I replied with certainty.

"Then don't," he said.

"That's really an option?" I asked.

"Of course it is."

In my mind, choosing my family relationships was never an option. Being adopted had meant that others decide whom I call family.

I had an epiphany last year when I read someone's post in an online adoptee support group that I participate in. It said: "I did not ask to be adopted, nor did I want to be adopted. The whole thing did not work out very well for me at all. I do not owe anybody anything."

Wow.

It was as though my blinders had been removed. I realized that I no longer had to try to navigate my very complicated relationship with my adoptive mother. I have always felt like I owed her something because she had taken me in and raised me.

All of my life, I had desperately struggled to fit with her, despite her callousness and emotional abuse, and I beat the hell out of myself when I did not. I would've never chosen to have a casual friendship with a person like my adoptive mother—much less have chosen her as a parent. Given the choice, I would have remained with my birth family—my clan.

I once read a quote by the Reverend Keith C. Griffith, MBE that said:
“Adoption is the only trauma in the world where the victim is expected by the whole of society to be grateful.”

Today, after years of grappling with that trauma, I carefully choose who is part of my family—they are a select and exclusive few. The requirements for membership are simple: you must truly love, appreciate and unconditionally accept me for exactly who I am— and not who you need me to be; authenticity and genuineness are required; and trust is a must.

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