

"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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[The Dreaded Question: What Is Your Family Medical History?](#)

My interest in finding my roots started early. In fact, I have been trying to find information about my biological parents since I was in middle school.

I had adopted friends who'd found their birth parents and I was happy for them, but I was upset about my own missing information at the same time. When I turned 18, I called the adoption agency that I had been adopted from to ask for information on my birth parents, but I was told that they could only send me the non-identifying facts. It took 11 long years of my persistent emails and calls to receive it.

To finally know something as simple as what time of day I was born was amazing! The information also included my parent's height and weight measurements, and the fact that my bio-mom was 16 years old when she had had me. That helped me understand why she did not keep me. Both of my parents were from religious families, but different denominations. My mom's biological father was unknown to her, which makes me wonder if she ever felt or feels the way that I do.

Agency workers claimed they had no accompanying family medical history for me, but that they would let me know when my biological mom contacted them with any updates. I let *them* know that I was not going to give up.

When I asked if there was anything else that I could do to uncover my family medical history—they told me they would notify me when my biological mother died. *What a cold response.* I hung up the phone and cried. This felt like a personal attack and reminded me of the awful remarks people used to make to

me while I was growing up. Some called me "adopted trash." It sucks knowing that some people just don't care. I had reached another dead end—back to square one. Still, I took in a deep breath and decided to keep trying.

I wondered why someone from the agency couldn't just ask my mother if she wanted to meet me, or say, "Hey, the child you gave up is going through a lot of health issues right now. Any information you could give us would greatly help her. It could also potentially help her children." After adoptions were made final, did the agency really no longer care about those babies and moms who were in their care?

I made the decision to contact some people who had stayed at the same maternity home as my mother. They described it as a horrible place—the agency had lost many records and the state of Texas had even closed it for awhile. It later reopened, but it was said to have never really improved. I hope the agency and home is better now.

The family that raised me since I was a baby had always told me I was adopted. As soon as I wanted to find out about my biological family, though — like who I might look and act like, and where I had come from — it was game over. I was told that they were probably dead. And now the only parents I'd ever known didn't want me around; they were very hurt and mad at me.

It meant nothing to them when I explained that they were the only family I had ever considered to be my family. Eventually, they started to push me away, only to officially kick me out of the house when I was 17.

I have had some hard times since then, including two abusive marriages, being sexually assaulted, and abducted by a trucker for months. I was young, vulnerable, and had no idea who to trust in the world—I found myself in terrible situations.

I do not talk to my adoptive family anymore, though I have tried to get back in touch to offer an apology. It seems I am not good enough for them, so I have moved on. Today, God has blessed me with an amazing and extremely patient husband, and I have beautiful kids.

I now wish to give my children as much information as I can about our side of the family and me, including our medical history.

I have ongoing health issues. I see doctor after doctor trying to sort them out, and each time, I am asked the same thing: "What is your family medical history?" I answer, "I was adopted and I don't know anything." They look at me as though they don't know where to start with the medical testing. Sometimes they even ask: "Is there is any way you can find your family history?" And I always reply, "I desperately want to know and hope to some day."

Now, as I wait to have dangerous medical procedures performed, I wonder why my petition did not make it through the court system to open my adoption records and provide me with the medical answers I need. Isn't my life and the health of my kids important and valued? Many of my conditions are genetic. I

believe that the mystery illness I am struggling with now, which doctors are stumped over, is genetic as well.

Every year, I write to the congressmen and governor of Texas asking them to help the adoptees with sealed records get the answers they need. Knowing if your biological family has a history of cancer or other medical issues can save your life. Also, knowing who you are and where you come from, I believe, is everyone's right.

Even if a biological parent never wants to meet his or her relinquished child, I think agencies should have mediators who work with families and adopted people to provide more answers for them. For those parents who do want to meet, let them. There are ways to help everyone and heal the hurt. Many agencies and states provide this basic human right – why not Texas? Why not every state?

For some of us, our lives depend on it.

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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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[Blocked: An Adoptee's Facebook Search Yields Much Information, But Little Comfort](#)

There's little excitement in sitting at a computer, but on one warm weekday afternoon in June 2013 it was nail-bitingly dramatic. I was at my home office desk, out of work early from a crappy temp job, and a little scared. There she was on the screen, on Facebook—my birth mother, Diane. And there I was, staring stupidly at a blank "New Message" box trying to figure out what I wanted to say.

That wasn't the first time I tried to contact her. It was more like the fourth. Since 2007, I'd written a letter, called her house, and even asked the case worker who had handled my adoption in 1982, to write a letter. I had hoped that communicating via a third-party might somehow do the trick.

But each time, my efforts were met with silence. In my first letter to her, I dumped out decades of emotional baggage. "*Dear Diane, I think I might be your son,*" I had written.

Years later, a therapist suggested, for a variety of reasons, that I be slightly more circumspect in my attempts; “hint at a family connection,” she had told me. “Be light, be casual, be vague—in case of inquisitive spouses.”

That’s what went wrong with the letter; I must have scared her off. And the phone call—had she received the message or had her husband heard it? But reaching out directly to her on Facebook? Maybe this could work.

Play it cool. That was my mantra—just say that you think you might be related and that you want to talk with her, nothing too heavy, nothing too emotional.

If you could’ve seen me that day, you’d think I had dressed for playing it cool. Khaki shorts, a white button-down shirt, sandals, and the beginning of a summer tan—I looked ready for a backyard barbecue. But trust me when I say that, in that moment, no one had ever worked harder at casually dashing off a Facebook message.

“Dear Diane, I am doing some genealogy research and I think we might have a family connection...” I listed my birth date and the name of the hospital where I was born. *“I’d really love to talk. Please contact me.”* I clicked “Send” before I could have second thoughts, then left to meet my girlfriend for coffee.

...

I’d hoped it was the last message like that I’d have to send—that this time, she’d reply, and acknowledge me in some way.

I started searching for her in 2005, the same year that Facebook opened up its network to the non-collegiate public and the same year my home state, New Hampshire, became one of the first states to reopen access to original birth certificates, which is how I learned her name.

The digital landscape of the early 2000s is almost unimaginable now. There were no smartphones and maybe only a half-dozen social networks. Our lives were still largely analog, and that’s how my search started, with snail mail and phone calls and copy machines.

Up until then, all I knew, thanks to my adoptive parents Vic and Sue, was that I had been adopted through New Hampshire Catholic Charities when I was three months old, that my birth mother had been in college somewhere in the state when I was born, and that her sister may have been allergic to bees.

I remember childhood summers, the sun bright and hot, and my mother dutifully shooing me away from any spot that might attract bees. At ice cream stands, you could hear my mother through the din of customers: “Larry, get away from that garbage can. There are bees all around it! You don’t want to get stung! What if you have an allergic reaction?!” We weren’t what you’d call a very outdoorsy family.

Her warnings worked. I avoided being stung until I was 21, when I ran afoul of a bee while repainting an old barn. As a spot on the back of my right hand swelled, I sat down and calmly waited for certain death. Nothing happened,

though, and after 20 minutes, satisfied that I wasn't going into the throes of anaphylactic shock, I cracked open a can of soda and resumed painting.

My search has been a lot like that bee sting, a string of accidental revelations. I caught a break in 2007 when I found Diane in a state university alumni directory.

On a humid Saturday morning in July of that year, I sat in the university library with Diane's college yearbook open in front of me, looking at her picture for the first time. It was the first time I'd ever seen anyone who looked like me. Her smile tipped me off. It's my smile, too—one that unfolds from our lips to reach a crescendo in our cheeks—a smile that lingers in the eyes.

Another lucky break and a little detective work yielded her married name and address. I learned that she still lived in New Hampshire, a two-hour drive from my home on the seacoast.

That was when I wrote my first letter. Two carefully printed and handwritten pages on a yellow legal pad, telling Diane about my life and how I would like to get to know her. She never responded.

In 2011, in a fit of daring, I called and left a message on her home phone. She never replied.

While the analog portion of my search for information proved fruitless, the digital side was greatly successful.

Thanks to the internet, I cobbled together a sketch of my birth mother's life, and my biological family, through a series of late-night Google searches.

I learned about Diane's three kids, her husband, and the church they attended. I read letters she had written to the local newspaper and found articles about her kids, their victories with local sports teams and spelling bee wins. An obituary for my great-grandmother yielded the names of cousins, aunts, uncles, and a legion of relatives I'd never even considered.

The clincher was a photo from Diane's local newspaper of her and her children posing with a representative of a local charity. For their latest birthday, her twins donated their gifts to a children's charity. Diane and the kids looked as though they'd just returned from soccer practice, or maybe from a family hike—glowing, beaming, full of life.

By the summer of 2013, I'd found my biological aunt—the one with the apocryphal bee allergy—on Facebook. And through my aunt, I had also found Diane. Her profile indicated that she'd joined a few months earlier.

Diane's profile added more to my sketch: she had a dog and ran in 5Ks along with the rest of the family. There were no pictures of her, just her kids, my half-siblings. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be part of that family, running together with them—unconcerned of errant bees.

...

After sending that Facebook message to Diane, thoughts of a potential reply in my inbox consumed me during the coffee date with my girlfriend. I rushed to my computer as soon as I returned home and logged in to Facebook. My wall was empty. I scanned through my messages and saw it: **Blocked**. Diane had blocked me.

After eight years and many attempts to contact her, Diane had finally acknowledged me. It was that first bee sting all over again. A moment of pain, followed by nothing at all.

Today, I've got a folder full of digital artifacts, articles, photos, and familial facts, though I still feel little comfort.

Is it better to know something about Diane and her family—my family—than nothing at all? Is any acknowledgement, even if it's a passive rejection over Facebook, preferable to those unanswered letters and phone calls?

It's been a year since I sent that Facebook message. I'm still not sure which I prefer. I think, now and then, of writing another letter, of calling her one more time. I wonder if I can face a fifth or sixth rejection, and I wonder if that's a reasonable price to pay for potentially knowing my mother.

Each time I log on to Facebook, I hope Diane will have returned my message. When I get my mail, I hope that mixed in with all the bills and catalogs, I will find a letter from her. Mostly, I hope that one day soon, she'll make the next move.

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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. Cristi 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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[The Last to Know—An Australian Late Discovery Adoptee's Story](#)

I was born on Valentine's Day, 1955, in Paddington, Sydney and grew up in country New South Wales, Australia, believing I was the third of four children, and the only daughter of Dutch immigrants. Despite being only five months younger than my older brother, I never suspected something was amiss.

I had considered myself a medical marvel to survive, but it was a lie, not only about me, but about my "almost" twin brother, too. My mother even managed to keep this secret from her family in Holland.

Decades later, when I was 43-years-old, I approached my mother to find out more information about my estranged late father. I needed to know more about our family's medical history after my third child died from a congenital heart defect, and our next child was born with a disability.

My mother adamantly told me that the only thing I needed to know was that my father was bad (in phrases I won't repeat). She refused to speak any further about him, so I arranged to meet with a beneficiary named in my father's will to try to get more information.

Towards the end of the conversation with this woman, she mentioned my family's secret adopted child, but she did not know which of the four of us it was. I knew the only way to find out if it had been me, was to write to the Department of Welfare.

In October 1998, I received a letter in response to my "Request for Confirmation of Adoption." That moment is forever etched in my memory. I sat alone in my car and read a letter that challenged everything I had ever known or believed to be true about myself:

Our records indicate that you were adopted. Many people find it

distressing to have their adoption confirmed, even when they have suspected it for many years. If you would like to discuss this with a counsellor, please do not hesitate to phone and ask to speak with a counsellor on duty.

I didn't phone a counselor—I phoned the person whom I had known for forty-three years as my 'mother.' The fact that I'd discovered my adoption shocked her. She felt betrayed. Whereas our phone conversations had always ended with "I love you Diana," after that day, she never assured me of her love again.

I cannot describe the physical and emotional pain I endured from her rejection. I found some consolation in finally understanding why it was that I had never felt a bond or deep love for her. Our relationship had always seemed to be based on what she needed from me— and I could never provide enough.

Despite this, I agonized over what to do with my newly found information. Should I let it go, or search for my true identity? I struggled with feeling responsible for her pain, though in time, I learned that this was a by-product of adoption.

Worse yet was learning my three brothers, and their wives, knew I was adopted 20 years before me. I was the last to know.

The next decade was dominated by my search. I learned that my birth mother had also moved to South Australia and lived only 40 kilometres away from me. Our relationship was respectfully distant, and I am thankful to her for that. She provided my family history, circumstances of my birth, and information about my father in the years before she passed away.

I learned that they'd decided to relinquish their parental rights prior to my birth and that my mother went home on the fourth day of her confinement. I, however, remained in the hospital for a month, then moved to another location for two more months before joining my adoptive family.

There were some gems to savor in her family history—she was the granddaughter of a knight of the realm in England— although her father, shell-shocked and dishonorably discharged from the army after serving in Gallipoli, was considered a disgrace to the family name, and eventually disowned.

As for my father, my mother told me that he was Greek. After they'd each heard their parents arguing about my impending birth, they decided it would not work to keep me. I went from being double Dutch to half Greek, which explains my dark hair, eyes, and propensity to break plates.

My birth father went on to become an orthopedic surgeon. After googling his name one night, I read his obituary in an orthopedic magazine. Apparently, he had been a wonderful doctor, husband, and father. I had written to him twice, shortly after I found out I was adopted, and again five years later. Now I knew why my letters were met with silence.

Since I discovered my adoption, the most difficult parts of my journey have

been extricating the effects of adoption on my mind, body, and soul. I lacked the resilience to cope with what life had thrown at me, and my default position became one of despair, detachment, or avoidance.

As time unfolded, my preoccupation with looking after other people to the neglect of what I wanted and needed, led me to study social sciences and counseling. My post-graduate counseling theory studies gave me a scaffolding in which to understand the effects of my adoption experience, the profound effects of loss, grief, and the trauma of attachment disruption.

I am trying to reclaim my soul—my identity—and something equating to agency to live as an adult rather than reacting as an insecure child. There was no loving adult to comfort me after my birth. There was no secure adult to parent me, or teach me social skills, or how to cope well.

And I finally understand how the various forms of family abuse, separation trauma, on-going complex trauma, and neglect have caused me to react defensively to others. Often, I arm myself for a fight as if in a life or death situation, which is often out of proportion to the actual situation. It's exhausting.

Seven years ago, when I was overwhelmed by the concurrent illnesses of my daughter and my two mothers, I began therapy. My therapist recognized my lack of essence, or presence, as I sat in his room reading my notes, unable to describe what I was feeling.

He has provided a safe space to cry years worth of pain, to speak and feel heard, and to be accepted despite my mistakes and weaknesses. It has been a place to learn the skills I need to live. Through this inner work of psychotherapy and hypnosis, I have met my demons and knit together some of the pieces of identity that were fragmented after my birth.

I continue to reclaim whom I am, but am left with the disquieting evidence that perhaps there is no way back from the life-long effects of my adoption. Every day I learn to settle my physiology and be gentle with others and myself.

—

Editor's note: March 21, 2013 was a significant day in Australia's adoption history. On that day, former Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave a moving apology on behalf of the Australian Government to people affected by forced adoption or removal policies and practices (video below). The Australian government's "[Find & Connect](#)" website provides links and information for Australian adoptees to search for records and connect with support services.

<http://youtu.be/5hVbokTpYeg>

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