

**ASK** ADOPTION  
SUPPORT  
KINSHIP  
*...about reunion*

June 15, 2011

Dear Friends in the Adoption Community in Ontario:

We are pleased to provide you with a copy of the Search Manual for Adoptees and Birth Relatives, Adoption Community Outreach Project (ACOP), published in 1997.

The Search Manual, as we usually call it, was painstakingly put together by members of the adoption community at the time and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Although it was developed before the Internet had come to be used as a searching aid, the Search Manual still contains invaluable advice and strategies for searchers—pearls of wisdom from the collective minds of many who experienced their own searches, made mistakes, learned from them, and then went on to help many others.

Although it was developed before the Internet had come to be used as a searching aid and before the Ontario adoption laws changed in 2009, the Search Manual is a very useful complement to your search using the Internet or any other means. For your Internet searching, please check out the links on the [ASK website](#). [Steve please hyperlink]

We hope that you will benefit from these authors, some of whom aren't around anymore. The Search Manual, we believe, will also come to be viewed as an historical document, born in the age of adoption secrecy before Ontario unsealed adoption records in June 2009.

Warm wishes for productive searching!

*Wendy Rowney*

Wendy Rowney  
President of ASK

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*ASK ...about reunion (Adoption Support Kinship) is a search and support group that meets on the first Wednesday of every month in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Please see our website at [askaboutreunion.org](http://askaboutreunion.org) for details and directions.*

# SEARCH MANUAL FOR

**ADOPTEEES AND**

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**BIRTH RELATIVES**

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*"And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."  
[T.S. Eliot]*

ADOPTION COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT

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# **Introduction & Welcome**



# Introduction

***There is courage and dignity in your decision to undertake this search. It is never simply a matter of idle curiosity as others may think. It is not an act of disloyalty to adoptive parents -- it is your right to know the truth about yourself and your roots—about how the adoptee fared.***

***You have made the decision to step into unknown territory which holds many personal truths for you. The many, many successful reunions to date confirm the value of pursuing these truths.***

The aim of this guide is to provide an ***easy-to-follow map*** of methods and resources for people preparing to search, searching and experiencing reunion and its aftermath.

The manual is set out in chapter format...There are special sections for adoptees, fostered adults, birth relatives, adoptive parents and First Nations Persons. The techniques for preparing to search, searching, initiating contact and dealing with the reunion process have been refined over many years and been ***proven to work*** in hundreds of instances. They will help you to conduct your search discreetly and in a straightforward way, and to avoid the most common mistakes and pitfalls in this work.

Search is not necessarily difficult and mysterious. It is a process of building on the information you are entitled to receive from government and placement agencies. This and further information gathered from public sources, along with a certain degree of imagination and perseverance, will allow you to assemble a family picture of those you seek.

There is a rule of thumb in searching that you should keep in mind as you use this manual. It is ***“homework first -- questions later”***. This means you must do the research before attempting direct contact or making a “fishing call”. Homework must be thorough and questions discreet. The most common difficulties in search arise either because a key piece of information has been overlooked, or because inquiries are made carelessly or without respect for confidentiality.

Remember that the person you are looking for will likely be pleased to be found, provided that you ***tread carefully***. Volunteer self-help groups estimate that over 90% of completed searches lead to ***positive reunions*** for both parties. It is rare to find a birth relative, particularly a birth mother, who refuses contact, once they have recovered from the initial shock. So, be optimistic and don't let yourself be held back by fear of an unpleasant outcome.

Search is a continuum. The adoptee who looks in the mirror and wonders, “who do I look like...?” and the birth mother who looks at the calendar and thinks, “...he would be sixteen” are both searching, every bit as much as those who undertake more active search.

We all search, to some extent or another, in our own time, at our own pace,  
when we are ready....

***“Do unto others...” and BEST OF LUCK!***

# ***THE ADOPTION COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT***

## **SEARCH GUIDE**

### **FOR MEMBERS OF VOLUNTEER PEER SELF-HELP GROUPS IN ONTARIO**

## ***WELCOME!***

***Please read through this manual thoroughly before beginning an active search.***

**Use a notebook to keep track of EVERY aspect of your search  
and keep your notes in good ORDER.**

There are several steps to follow when conducting your search. The process is detailed within this manual.

1. Read through this guide in its entirety; check out recommended reading.
2. Obtain the information required to begin your search.
3. Register with disclosure registries; find and join (or start!) a self-help group.
4. Make a search plan and begin your research.
5. Document findings; focus, eliminate and re-focus.
6. Double check everything! Consult with your peers.
7. Make a plan for initiating contact.
8. Be sure you are ready; rethink “expectations”.
9. Re-read chapters 5 and 6 and take a deep breath....
10. **Come back to your group and help one more person.....**

# Chapter 1

## Preparing to Search



## Preparing to Search

*"Where there had only been fearful emptiness...  
there is now unfolding a wealth of vitality.  
This is not a homecoming since this is a home never before existed.  
It is the discovery of home."  
[Alice Miller]*

Welcome to the search stage of your adoption experience! The road you are about to embark upon is intense, exciting and emotion-packed. The key to minimizing the potholes and detours is **PREPARATION!** Those of us who have traveled before you have seen how many reunions have been eased by some ***emotional groundwork and pacing.***

How do you know if you are ready to search? Wanting to know about the other person and wanting to search are two different things. Searching begins when the wanting turns into need, and you reach a point where there is no longer a choice -- it is something you must do to move beyond not knowing. It begins when you are ready to take the time and make the effort and commitment to search, meet strangers who are relatives, and deal with the aftermath. That seems like a lot, but if you take it one step at a time, you can do it!

"Sure, I was scared. But I knew it was something I couldn't put off any longer. The need to know had become greater than the fear of anything I would find. I knew deep down that I could handle whatever was ahead."  
(An Adoptee)

## SUPPORT

The most important tool in search is **SUPPORT** .. found in self-help groups, family, friends, resource materials, counselling and within yourself. Surrounding yourself with knowledgeable, positive, encouraging people provides the safety net to help you through the process.

***Self-help groups*** offer a chance to talk (for the first time for many), get encouragement, ideas, and assistance in networking. They allow you to hear the experiences of others .. which is crucial to understanding .. and help prepare you for what your missing relative(s) may have experienced. Members truly understand and are going, or have been, where you are now. Try to hook up with someone in the group who can be your ***search buddy.***

***Family*** can be a tremendous support, although family dynamics can be complicated. Many adoptees are concerned about loyalty issues with their adoptive families, but most are surprised to find support when they talk to their adoptive parents. Some adoptive parents have not dealt with their own issues, and must face these when confronted with the adoptee's need to search. Give them time to accept your decision and adjust. ***Remember, this is an act of loyalty to you and what is right for you.*** We encourage you to reach out to your family as much as possible, they may have valuable information and be willing to offer support, but regardless, this is your decision about what's right for you. You should probably consider how you might feel if someone you care for was doing something this important, and didn't share it with you. Do not ignore your family even if they discourage you - they are still your family - but

move ahead and do what is best for *you*.

Birth relatives should be aware that complications may arise if current family members are unaware that a child was relinquished. If you are considering search, your family will have to be told sometime. Many people are surprised to find understanding, support and an opportunity to search together. Disclosure can also allow time for others to come to terms with this information before you find your son/ daughter/sibling....

If you are searching for a birth sibling, are your parents behind you? You need to carefully balance your needs with their needs.

**Friends** can be a lifesaver, especially if you do not have support from your family. They can distract you when you need a break. They know you well and can help you stay grounded. Be careful of overwhelming them, though -- you need them for the long haul! This is one reason why belonging to a support group and/or having a search buddy is also recommended.

**Resource materials:** READ, READ, READ! There are many books and articles on adoption that can provide you with knowledge and prepare you for the road ahead. See the **Suggested Reading List** in the appendix. Many participants in post-reunion groups wish they had read more before reunion. They report that this would have better prepared them and eased the process. The internet also provides access to an abundance of adoption and reunion related material, as well as opportunities to exchange ideas and information with other members of the triad, worldwide!

**Counselling:** You may discover at some point that issues are too deep or complicated to deal with on your own. Through individual or group counselling, many have found help and guidance to work through the pain and intense emotions that arise. See Chapter 6 for more information.

Finally, **do not forget yourself**. This is a time when looking after yourself - physically and emotionally - is mandatory. Eat well, exercise, get adequate rest, and pamper yourself. Take time to reflect and relax. Search is not a race. Keeping a journal often helps sort out feelings, and is great to look back on later. Be your own cheerleader!

## THE EMOTIONS

The importance of getting "in touch" with your feelings cannot be stressed strongly enough - not just impressions, but specific feelings on what searching will require of you, your family, friends, and those with whom you hope to be reunited.

*"The real work of search is inside. Underlying every search is a need for the resolution of something connected to your adoption experience."*  
(Mary Jo Rillera, *The Adoption Experience*)

It is critical that you consider **honestly** what expectations you have. Are they realistic? What will you do if things go beyond, or fall short of your dreams? A wise person once said of his search,

**"I kept my feet on the ground, and my head in the clouds."** Dreaming and hoping are great motivators in search -- but keep yourself grounded and open to accepting reality.

If you are not clear on how you feel about adoption, search and reunion, following are some questions you should consider thoughtfully and seriously. Come back to them regularly, as your

answers will most likely change as you learn more through the search and reunion process. This questionnaire will help you be clear about what you are feeling and experiencing as you go through the process.

**Family:**

- ◆ Who is supportive of you in this quest? Why?
- ◆ How can you best manage the intensity of search?
- ◆ How can you ensure that you'll still have time and energy for your spouse/partner, children, other family?
- ◆ What/how much will you tell your children, minor or adult? Other family members?
- ◆ What will your search/potential reunion mean for them?
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal:**

- ◆ How much time and money can you dedicate to searching?
- ◆ Can you schedule your search around your life?
- ◆ Can you explain your rationale for searching in 100 words or less to someone who has no concept of the adoption experience?
- ◆ How can you handle it if searching becomes obsessive?
- ◆ What can't you sacrifice to search?
- ◆ What are your feelings about adoption in general? Your case in particular? Your life experience?
- ◆ Are you angry? Why? At whom? Can you do anything about it? Why or why not?
- ◆ Are you resigned? To what? Why? Who said so? Why?
- ◆ Do you blame anyone for your circumstances? Who? Why? Is it realistic? Can you change it or let it go?
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

**The Search:**

- ◆ Are you prepared for possible negative responses from authority figures when you approach them for information?
- ◆ Do you have enough self-esteem and confidence in yourself to know that what you are doing is right for you?
- ◆ Are you ready to do the work needed to search?
- ◆ Are you prepared to be elusive while doing research?
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

**Reunion:**

- ◆ Are you ready for the possibility of:
  - ⇒ Waiting for the other person to make a decision?

- ⇒ Partial acceptance? What will you feel or do? What might your options be?
- ⇒ Rejection? What will you feel or do? What might your options be?
- ⇒ Total acceptance? What will you feel or do? What might your options be?

- ◆ Will you be prepared to meet the needs of those you find?
- ◆ Can you give them - and yourself - room to change and grow and balance their needs with yours?
- ◆ Can you be open to their needs without ignoring your own?
- ◆ What if you don't like who/what you find? What if they don't like you?
- ◆ What do you expect of the found person? Have you thought about re-evaluating your expectations? Are your expectations realistic? Will their's be? What do you think they might expect of you?
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

## THE SEVEN CORE ISSUES OF ADOPTION

All triad members have deep-seated, often buried, emotions surrounding adoption and the impact it has had on their lives. These will emerge, or be re-opened, throughout the search and reunion process. **Reunion does not solve or take away these feelings. It is a tool to confront and resolve them.** Although we come from different perspectives, all triad members have to deal with the seven core issues of adoption as developed by Sharon Kaplan (please see appendix).

*"Adoption is created through loss.  
Without loss there is no  
adoption."  
(Deborah Silverstein)*

These seven issues are:

1. Loss
2. Abandonment/rejection
3. Guilt and shame
4. Grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance)
5. Identity
6. Intimacy
7. Control

Recognizing your own emotions and those of your adoptive/birth families leads to acceptance and healing. It is extremely important to consider the time when the birth, relinquishment, and adoption took place. What was it like to be an unwed mother at that time? A childless couple? What were the laws regarding adoption then? What about society's religious views? What was the accepted definition of a "good" family? We are looking back with today's perspective, and many things have changed since then.

In dealing with your issues, remember help is there if you need it. The following are a few tips:

1. Write a letter to the person you are searching for. This can help organize your thoughts and feelings about what you want to say to your mother/son/sister. A letter may be your first form of contact and this way it will not be written in a

panic. You have time to edit it.

2. Talk to members of your group. Ask the questions you are unable to ask your adoptive mother, relinquished or adopted child, etc. Others may be able to give you more objective answers, and help you deal with your own issues. You and your peers are the life experts here!
3. Try to find balance in your life. What positive things came out of your experience? How did your experience make you a better or stronger person?
4. If finding answers is difficult, pretend someone else has come to you and told your story as theirs. What would you tell them? You often have the answers inside yourself, and by stepping away can see what you already know.
5. Remember that life is not absolute. Recognize that you are human, acknowledge your mistakes, and then forgive yourself and others. We may not have had choices in the past, but we do today. Acknowledge that you have grown and changed.

## **COPING WITH OTHERS' REACTIONS**

You may find people try to block you along the way -- social workers, other triad members in denial, or family members, friends, even strangers! Discussion can teach and help others understand, but your focus should remain on your search. Try not to react-- pull back and evaluate what is being said. It most likely reflects other's issues rather than your situation, but there may be some validity to some people's questions or comments. By keeping discussion open, others may also provide solutions you had not considered. However, give yourself permission to be self-centered -- this is different from being selfish.

It is helpful to have some straight-forward, prepared responses to others' questions and reactions to your search. Be compassionate, and try to consider how you want others to react to you. For example, to answer questions about why you are doing this, you could say:

"I have the same right to know my background as you do yours."

"You take your heritage for granted -- I want to know mine."

"I need to know my medical history."

"I need to know whether he/she is alive and well."

"This is something I must do for me."

## **TAKING A BREAK**

It can be hard to avoid becoming obsessed with your search. It is normal to go at full tilt, but there are rarely deadlines for completion. It is important to balance your life and not put everything else on hold. This includes your health, your

relationships and your job. **Schedule time out for fun, too!** Sometimes when you shut off the conscious, the subconscious comes up with the answers you need. Often friends and family may start complaining that you are too involved. Listen to them. They know you well, and you need their ongoing support.

## DEALING WITH ANGER/FRUSTRATION OF SEARCH PROCESS

Frustration is normal. Very few searches are accomplished without encountering at least a few stumbling blocks. What you think is a dead end is often just a detour. Talk to other group members and ask their advice. Go over your search journal to see if there are avenues you have overlooked. Take a break; sometimes you just have to wait and see what the results of all the "feelers" you've put out will be.

If you find yourself feeling angry and not just frustrated, this may be a sign that you need to step back a bit. Try to discover what is motivating your anger -- the system? .. lack of control? .. lack of understanding? .. lack of validation from others? Do not turn your anger inwards or take it out on others. Do not personalize it with bureaucrats. Use your anger constructively to write and let government officials know how the current system is affecting you.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCRETION

There is a difference between discretion during search and secrecy with your family, friends and community. During search, it is imperative to protect those who will search after you, as well as the person you are searching for. Barging into a library and announcing the purpose of your research is as inappropriate as barging into someone's life. You may decide not to tell certain people about your search, for your own reasons, but you should definitely be as circumspect about the reason for your inquiries as you will be when you're ready to initiate contact with the person you seek (more on this later).

The most acceptable thing to say if someone asks is that you are doing genealogy. Better yet, this is actually the truth! You are entitled to the information you are gathering from government and placement agencies, but if you have to speak directly with a librarian or someone who may not believe you have the right to search, you may be closing doors for yourself and others behind you if you elaborate. If this does not seem fair, it isn't. Use your emotions about injustice to facilitate change, rather than to hinder the search process.

It may seem tempting, but it is not advisable once you have a name to start calling everyone in the phone book. It is imperative to **do your research and homework first** before talking with possible candidates. It comes back to preparation. The person you are searching for will have had no chance to prepare for contact, and you can have no idea whether they are ready. You cannot know if the people in their lives even know about you; you must try to be as prepared as possible~ for your own sake and in order to be able to offer time and support while others adjust to being found.

## FINAL THOUGHTS ON BEING PREPARED

Your adoption journey is a life-long one. Search and reunion are great opportunities for change,

and you are in the driver's seat. Handle this responsibility with care, forethought and compassion for others on the road with you. Take the time to do this one step at a time. Get advice from others who have been there and can help you find the shortest, but safest route. Look after yourself.

There is nothing that can compare with the

**emotional rollercoaster of search and reunion.**

Get ready for the ride of your life.... and **GOOD LUCK!!**

## Chapter 2

### Searching: The Process



## 2

### Searching: The Process

#### Gathering the Information You Need to Begin...

*"There are two births; the one when light  
First strikes the new awaken'd sense...".*  
[William Cartwright]

#### ADOPTees

Adults who were adopted in Ontario can receive a certified copy of their Adoption Order (see sample, appendix). Most adoptive parents keep the original document in a safe place (e.g., safety deposit box) and are willing to share it if you ask.

The Order shows one's pre-adoptive or "birth" name. Until the 1970's this included both your given name and surname at birth (i.e., your birth surname was your birth mother's legal name at the time of relinquishment). Many people adopted after about 1970 will find only their given name(s) on their Adoption Order, followed by the initial of their birth surname and the birth registration number.

*To obtain a copy of your Order call (416) 327-4730. Ask for an affidavit in support of application for an Adoption Order. Follow the instructions which come with this application to the letter (don't worry if you cannot fill it out completely) and you shall have a copy of your Order through the mail in about a month (see sample application, appendix). You may have this directed to your home address, your business address, or in care of a trusted friend.*

The Court file, which the Order of Adoption rests on, is SEALED. Names of judges, file numbers, birth registration numbers, etc., which may appear on the Order are therefore useless to you. Do not waste time and energy trying to decipher this information, or trying to get in touch with the judge who signed the order, or the social worker who placed you in your adoptive home. (S)he likely doesn't remember anything about your case, and can't legally tell you anything even if (s)he does.

If your Order shows only the initial of your surname, the number immediately following corresponds to your birth registrations, original and amended (see below). Vital Statistics (i.e., Registrar General) files are also sealed at present, so the number will lead you only to a well-guarded dead end. Put that aside, and get on with your search.

When a person is adopted in Ontario, his/her original birth registration, also known as the "**Statement of Live Birth**" is amended (some say "falsified") to show that the adoptee was in fact "born to" the adoptive parent(s). There is, therefore, little sense in applying for your long-form birth registration, as you are bound to be disappointed to find it only shows information that you already know.

## FOSTERED ADULTS

Adults who grew up in foster care (i.e., those who were never legally adopted) are entitled to receive a copy of their long form birth registration (a.k.a. "Statement of Live Birth"). Too often agencies treat you just as if you had been adopted when the reality is that your status is the same as any other (i.e. non-adopted) person.

You can obtain an application form to get a copy of this document from your local library, the Provincial Archives, Queen's Park or your local M.P.P.'s office. Fill it out to the best of your knowledge. Take it to the MacDonald Block, (Bay & Wellesley in Toronto), to the Vital Statistics office, or mail it to the Registrar General's office in Thunder Bay with the appropriate payment. The current (1997) fee is \$25.00.

This document will tell you where you were born (hospital or home address), birth time, weight, etc., the number of children your mother bore before you, and, among other things, her full name and address at the time of your birth.

Make this application YOURSELF; do NOT ask the agency to do it for you, or to help you with it, as they may seek to obliterate identifying details from the document.

You are also entitled to receive information from the agency which supervised your foster care (known as your "**child file**"). Write a letter (see sample below) requesting "all available information" rather than non-identifying history.

The 'rule' is, ask the agency (nicely) once. If they don't or won't comply, apply for your file under the "Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act" (FIPPA). It is your file, and you're entitled to see it! It is NOT exempt from FIPPA, because you aren't adopted. (Adoption information *is* exempt from this Act). Consult with your local MPP's office, your search group leader or a lawyer for assistance in applying under FIPPA.

As far as accessing information, you have some advantage over those who were legally adopted. Searching and contact methods, however, are much the same as those outlined for adoptees in this manual. Remember, many birth mothers relinquished their children for adoption, and may have no idea that that you were never actually adopted.

## PERSONS IDENTIFIED BY NUMBER

Those whose Adoption Orders show only the initial of their birth surname should ask their adoptive parents to try to recall *any detail* (e.g., baptismal record, prescription medication, passport, etc.) issued prior to the finalization of the adoption which could provide the actual surname.

Searching without a full surname is still possible, if more difficult than pre-1970's searches. The information you want is out there somewhere .. you just have to be diligent and more creative than your older counterparts. At least you have an initial .. birth relatives would love to know even that much!

Your non-identifying information may be more comprehensive than most as you have no surname to work with. Keep after the worker who compiled your history for every minute detail! (See below: How To Request More Information.)

## PRIVATE ADOPTIONS

A private adoption is one that was handled by a doctor, lawyer, minister, family friend or anybody else not in the employ of a public agency (i.e. including some maternity homes). Private adoption was not *regulated* in Ontario until 1979. Don't mistake "private" for "illegal" here. After 1979, individuals who place children for adoption have had to be licensed through the Ministry of Community & Social Services and are called "licensees."

If the adoptive family was Jewish, make sure you apply to the Jewish Child & Family Services for background history, and do this BEFORE you approach the Ministry or local CAS. Even though it may have been a "private" adoption, Jewish Family & Child Services may still have information on record.

If an adoption was handled privately, there is likely little or no information available through a Children's Aid Society, but it's still worth checking .. limited information may be available from the Ministry.

If you know the name of the doctor or lawyer, etc. who handled the adoption and can locate this person, or perhaps the professional who took over his/her practice, write a letter such as the one following, requesting non-identifying background.

## BIRTH PARENTS

Birth parents and siblings are entitled to receive "non-identifying" background information about the adoptive family.

When writing to request this, birth mothers should also ask for a copy of the consent to adopt, along with any other documents they may have signed.

Write to the hospital where you gave birth; send along a copy of your identification (e.g., health card) and ask for copies of your medical records and the 'nursery chart.'

Try to call ahead and find out the name of the medical records supervisor...a personal letter to an individual is most effective.

"My life closed twice before its close;  
It yet remains to see  
If Immortality unveil  
A third event to me ..."  
(Emily Dickinson)

**SAMPLE LETTER to PROFESSIONALS re: PRIVATE ADOPTIONS**

Dear Doctor/Lawyer,

I am writing to you about a very private matter which is of urgent personal concern to me. I trust that you will keep the following inquiry in strictest confidence, and that you may be able to help me.

I am an adopted adult/birth relative. I/my daughter (son/sibling/grandchild) was born on \*May 26th 1972 at the Toronto General Hospital and my birth mother/I named me/her \*Karen Ann Smith.

*[Adoptees]* I was subsequently adopted by \*John Peter and \*Linda Marie Jones (nee Clark) and my name was legally changed to \*Susan Marie Jones. The date on my adoption order is \*January 12, 1973 (see copy enclosed).

*[Birth mothers]* I was born on \*June 17th 1955 and my maiden name was \*Ann Smith (see copy of my birth certificate enclosed).

I have recently decided that I would like to know more about my background/how my daughter has fared, and have registered with the provincial disclosure registry. My family is fully supportive of me in this. Please be assured that I have no desire to disrupt anyone's lives.

As you may know, under current Ontario law governing the disclosure of adoption information (the Child & Family Services Act), I am entitled to certain non-identifying background information about my birth/the adoptive family. Usually, this is provided by a Children's Aid Society. However, in this case, since the adoption was handled privately, the agency does not have any information to share with me. The only person who may have a file or any recollection of my birth family/the adoptive family is the professional who facilitated the adoption.

Following is a list of the things I am interested in knowing [see policy & implementation guidelines below and fill in appropriately].

I understand that some of the above facts may not be a matter of record. Nonetheless, I would appreciate it if you would give this some thought and share with me as much non-identifying information as you are able to. I would be happy to make an appointment to meet with you.

The Ministry of Community & Social Services, Adoption Disclosure Unit can provide you with assistance in compiling this information for me, should you think this necessary. You may contact the Registrar at (416)327-4730.

\*\*for MD's: I am certain that as a health care professional you will understand the basic necessity of family medical history.

\*\*for LLB's: Legislation concerning disclosure is in flux all over this country right now. British Columbia has recently codified changes that reflect the spirit and intent of the Canadian Charter, and conform to U.N. conventions to which Canada is signatory. Other provinces are following suit.

I look forward to hearing from you promptly, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*cc. file*

## SAMPLE LETTER TO HOSPITAL

**Attn. "Medical Records Supervisor"**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to request copies of my medical records respecting the birth of my son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_ (birth name) whom I delivered at your facility on \_\_\_\_\_ (birth date).

At that time, my full name was \_\_\_\_\_ and I lived at \_\_\_\_\_.

My date of birth is \_\_\_\_\_.

My doctor's name was \_\_\_\_\_.

I would also like to have a copy of the nursery chart concerning \_\_\_\_\_'s care while (s)he was in hospital

Enclosed is a copy of my identification.

If you have any questions about this request, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me. I can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_ during business hours.

Should there be a fee for providing this information, kindly let me know and I will forward a cheque to cover copying expenses, etc.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

cc. file

### **REGISTER WITH DISCLOSURE REGISTRIES!**

Someone may be looking for you!

Adult adoptees (i.e., over 18 years old) and birth relatives of an adopted adult may enter their names on the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services' disclosure registry. There is no fee for registration.

*"Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand...  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you'd plann'd..."*  
[Rossetti]

Call (416) 327-4730. Identify yourself as adoptee or birth relative, and ask for an application form (see sample, appendix). This will be accompanied by an explanatory brochure outlining services available through the provincial authority.

All other Canadian provinces have similar registries. YOU MUST REGISTER IN THE PROVINCE WHERE THE ADOPTION WAS FINALIZED.

1. See the internet page at: [http://nebula.on.ca/canadopt/Ongov .htm](http://nebula.on.ca/canadopt/Ongov.htm)
2. Check with local support group leaders
3. Contact Adoption Council of Ontario @ 416-482-0021
4. Contact Adoption Council of Canada @ 613-235-1566

for listings of the various provincial disclosure registries check with your search group leader for the address of the registry in the province where the adoption took place.

## **OBTAINING NON-IDENTIFYING (BACKGROUND) HISTORY**

Contact the agency that handled the adoption and ask for your non-identifying information. Adult adoptees, birth relatives and adoptive parents/legal guardians of minor adoptees are **entitled** to this information, under Ontario's CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES ACT [a copy of the Act is available in most libraries if you are interested in reading the legislation].

Look over the sample letter requesting non-identifying history below and use this as your guide. Do not call the agency; you MUST request this information in writing, and waiting lists can be lengthy, so **do this as soon as possible**. Make certain you include as many pertinent details about the adoption as you can, to help workers locate the proper file(s).

If you do not know which agency dealt with an adoption:

- a) Ask your adoptive parents;
- b) Write to Ministry of Community & Social Services, 2 Bloor Street West, 24th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1E9 and ask which agency you should apply to.

**Note:** Do not call; all requests must be made in writing and this applies to ALL ONTARIO adoptions, regardless of which county they were finalized in.

If the adoption was handled privately, write to the Ministry as above requesting any non-identifying information available. Ask for the name of the doctor/lawyer/licensee who facilitated the placement. If you can locate this person, call and make an appointment with them. Stress that you are **legally entitled** to this information if they have maintained records (see sample letter above).

It should be noted that information shared verbally with birth/adoptive parents at the time of relinquishment/adoption was not always accurate or even true. People were often told what the worker perceived they wanted to hear. For example:

*"Your baby will go to a professional couple who value education."*

OR

*"The child's birth mother is very young, single, and comes from a prestigious family."*

This can set up some fantasies that shatter when non-identifying history is received years later and the truth begins to emerge. Adoptees -- do not fault your folks. They only repeated the story they were told.

“Although our four adult adoptees found their roots they still consider themselves a branch on our family tree...”  
*[Brian & Fay, adoptive parents]*

Information obtained orally from adoptive parents and other family members can be very valuable; just make sure that *your* history is not confused with one of your adopted siblings' background.

Beginning in the 1970's, many adoptive parents received written information that was generally accurate (if scant) when the adoptee was placed with them. Any background history prepared/received prior to July 1987 may contain less information than what you are entitled to (see below, "Policy & Implementation Guidelines").

For a listing of the various Children's Aid Societies/Family & Children's Services in Ontario check with OACAS (416-366-8115).  
or  
ask your search group leader.

## THE ONTARIO “POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR THE DISCLOSURE OF ADOPTION INFORMATION” (AS PER THE CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES ACT)

**Definition:** “Non-Identifying information means information whose disclosure, alone or in combination with other information will not, in the circumstances lead to a name, address or telephone number of the person ”to whom the information pertains”.

Non-identifying background information for adoptees/adoptive parents should contain the following, to the extent it is available.

- ◆ birth parent's ages at the time of adoptee's birth
- ◆ birth parent's nationality, ethnic origin or Indian language
- ◆ description of their personalities, appearance and temperaments
- ◆ their talents, skills, interests
- ◆ levels of education and fields of employment
- ◆ description of interpersonal relationships within their families
- ◆ all medical information
- ◆ information about siblings\*
- ◆ circumstances of pregnancy and nature of relationship between birth parents
- ◆ reasons for adoption
  
- ◆ all information concerning the birth (pre and post natal)

*“What is your substance,  
whereof are you  
made...”?*  
[Shakespeare]

- ◆ given names of the adoptee
- ◆ religious denomination of birth parents and date of pre-adoption baptism if applicable
- ◆ developmental history of adoptee
- ◆ description of significant relationships prior to adoption (e.g., with birth family, foster family, etc.)
- ◆ any updated information the birth family has forwarded for sharing with the adoptee
  - \*Existence is generally disclosed, except under exceptional circumstances, or where agency is unaware of their existence.

Non-identifying information for birth relatives should contain the following:

- ◆ circumstances leading to adoption
- ◆ birth details that relate to the adoptee
- ◆ care of the adoptee prior to placement
- ◆ the developmental progress of the adoptee up until finalization
- ◆ information about foster care situation and approximate date of placement
- ◆ date (approximate) of the Adoption Order
- ◆ name of the society/licensee responsible for the placement/supervision of the probationary period
- ◆ description of the adopting family: approximate ages, religion, levels of education; fields of employment, physical characteristics, ethnic origin, talents and hobbies; age/sex and status of other children in family and reasons for choosing to adopt.

All registrants with the Ontario Adoption Disclosure Registry and adoptive parents of minors should note that special provisions under the Act are made in cases where the “health, safety or welfare” of a person may be jeopardized. This means that those seeking a birth parent, child or sibling may request that their case be given priority **if they can document serious and compelling need** for information to be passed to the other party.

**SAMPLE LETTER  
REQUESTING NON-IDENTIFYING BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Children's Aid Society  
City/County where Adoption Finalized

RE: Birth Name and Date and Place  
(Adopted name if birth name unknown)

I am writing to request non-identifying background information about myself and my birth family/a child I relinquished for adoption/my birth sibling.

Enclosed is a copy of my: a) driver's license; b) birth certificate; or c) baptismal certificate.

I/the child was born on \_\_\_\_\_ (full date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (hospital if known), in the town/city of \_\_\_\_\_.

**For adoptees only:**

\*I was adopted by \_\_\_\_\_.

My adoptive father's full name: \_\_\_\_\_.

My adoptive mother's full name: \_\_\_\_\_.

When I went to live with them, they lived at: \_\_\_\_\_ (full address if known)

**For birth parents who consented to the adoption:**

I also require a copy of the document(s) which I signed when I relinquished my birth child.

I understand that, under the Child & Family Services Act, I am entitled to the information I have requested. I respectfully request that this information be forwarded to me, in a timely fashion, to the above address.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

c.c.:Ontario Minister of Community & Social Services  
Your local M.P.P.  
File

**SAMPLE LETTER TO PROVINCIAL AUTHORITY (ADR) TO DETERMINE  
WHICH AGENCY HANDLED AN ADOPTION**

your name/address/ph.#  
date

Ministry of Community & Social Services,  
Adoption Disclosure Unit,  
2 Bloor Street, W., 24th floor,  
Toronto, Ont.,

**RE: \_\_\_\_\_  
full birth and/or adopted name, date and place of birth**

I am an adoptee/birth parent and am writing to ask which agency I should apply to in order to receive my non-identifying background information respecting the above noted adoption. If this adoption was handled privately, I also hereby request any and all such information from your department. I am enclosing a photocopy of my identification, and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

cc. file

## **HOW TO REQUEST MORE INFORMATION**

Once you have received your non-identifying information, check it over carefully to ensure you have been told everything you are entitled to know. Bring it to a meeting and let your peers look at it. Even if it seems complete, you may wish to ask for additional details. Just remember that not all files are as complete as we would like them to be. Data was not collected for the purpose of sharing it with you years later, and the agency cannot tell you anything for which they do not have a record. You can still ask questions though -- they are free, and the worst thing that can happen is you won't get the answer you want.

### **Adoptees Ask..... ?**

- ◆ What language(s) did my birth mother/her family speak?
- ◆ What were her goals/ambitions for the future?
- ◆ When was the last time the agency heard of/from my birth family?
- ◆ Has anyone ever made an inquiry of the agency about me? If so, may I have a copy of the non-identifying information provided to my birth relative about me?
- ◆ What was my grandparents' marital and immigration status?
- ◆ Was I named for someone/do my given names have any significance?
- ◆ Who was supportive of my mother during her pregnancy and after she relinquished me?
- ◆ What were my birth mother's living arrangements when you knew her?

...and anything else you would like to know that is not covered in the prepared history.

**If you have just received your background history, call the worker who prepared it and ask for an appointment to come in and discuss this information.**

If you have had your history for a while, write to the agency that prepared it requesting more information. BE SURE TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF SUFFICIENTLY (see sample letter above.)

**Note:** Adoptees, remind the worker to check the “keepsake” file to see whether anyone left you a letter, card or other token.

*“With all my will, but much against my heart,  
We two now part, My Very Dear,  
Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear...With faint, averted feet  
And many a tear....We will not say there’s any hope, it is so far away  
But, O, my Best....Perchance we may, where now this night is day...  
Making full circle of our banishment, amazed meet...  
With tears of recognition never dry.”*

[Coventry Patmore]

### **Birth Relatives Ask.....?**

- ◆ What language(s) did the adoptive parents/grandparents speak?
- ◆ If deceased, when did the adoptive grandparents die?
- ◆ What was the marital and immigration status of the adoptive grandparents?
- ◆ Who were the adoptive parents’ references (e.g., doctor, minister, etc.)?
- ◆ Were the adoptive parents close to their parents/siblings?
- ◆ What was the family’s degree of affiliation with their church?
- ◆ How was the adoptive home described (i.e. rented/owned, urban/rural, etc.)?
- ◆ What about other children? Biological/adopted? Sex/age?
- ◆ Has my birth son/daughter or the adopting parent(s) ever asked for non-identifying background information? If so, may I have a copy of what they were provided with about me?
- ◆ Please send me a copy of the relinquishment papers I signed.

And anything else you would like to know that is not clear from your non-identifying profile.

***Note: Adoptees/Birth Relatives: make it clear to the agency that you have registered with the Adoption Disclosure Registry (A.D.R.). Find out how to go about updating your non-identifying information and file this with the agency for the purpose of sharing with the other party should (s)he inquire.***

## **MATERNITY HOMES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS**

Hint... Until the late 1950's, many maternity homes placed babies for adoption directly (i.e., "privately"). These institutions kept records. If the home is still in existence, sometimes staff can be persuaded to give you a bit of information. Sometimes they will copy records for the Ministry or Children's Aid Society so staff can include information from the home's records in non-identifying profiles. (NB: Placements facilitated by homes were usually "supervised" by a Children's Aid Society, so in many cases, there are two files, and you'll want to get as much information from both as possible)

If the home no longer exists but was affiliated with a church, its records are generally archived along with other church material (see section: Church Archives).

### **Bethel Home (Sponsored by Pentecostal Benevolent Assn. Of Ont.)**

115 Bonis Avenue  
Agincourt, Ontario M1T 3S4 Telephone: (905) 293-2074  
Director: Laura MacDonald

### **Humewood House (Anglican Church in Canada)**

40 Humewood Drive  
Toronto, Ontario M6C 2W4 Telephone: (416) 651-5657  
Executive Director: Lynda MacInnes

### **Jewels for Jesus Mission Inc.**

2110 Argentia Road, Suite 306  
Mississauga, Ontario L5N 2K7 Telephone: (905) 821-7494  
Executive Director: Iris Wood

### **Rosalie Hall (Sisters of Misericorde, Roman Catholic Church)**

3020 Lawrence Avenue East  
Scarborough, Ontario M1P 2T7 Telephone: (416) 438-6880  
*(\* until the late 1950's, this was St. Mary's Home, Hospital and Chapel, downtown TO)*

### **Salvation Army Bethany Home**

450 Pape Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M4K 3P7 Telephone: (416) 461-0217  
Executive Director: Captain Sheila Buck

### **Massey Centre (formerly Victor Home) (United Church of Canada)**

1102 Broadview Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M4K 2S5 Telephone: (416) 425-6348  
Executive Director: Nancy Peters

## Other Homes and Private Hospitals

**The Strathcona** (was at 32 Gothic Av. at High Park/Bloor St. W. Toronto; this mansion has now been converted into apartments; none of the hospital's records have survived)

**The Burnside Hospital** and **The Mayfair Hospital**: Many mothers who delivered at these hospitals were residents of "Victor Home" (see above) ... these hospitals' records have not survived

**Armaugh Home** (was run by the Pentecostals- see above)  
Port Credit (Mississauga area)

**Hamilton:** Grace Haven (Salvation Army) was directly across the street from St. Joseph's Hospital from the 1940's to the 1960's; Catholic Home for Girls (was on Mohawk Rd. W)

**Chatham & Kitchener:** both had homes run by the Catholic Church

**Salvation Army Homes:** *Bethesda Home* (London), *Faith Haven* (Windsor)  
*Bethany* (Ottawa)

**Ottawa:** also had a Catholic Home (St. Mary's) and "Rideau Terrace" (in Rockcliffe, a section of Ottawa where many well-to-do families sent their daughters).

## FIRST NATIONS PERSONS

If you believe (or even suspect) that your birth family were native, you should apply immediately for your status as a First Nations Person. ***This can take many months, so do not delay.***

Because of adoption laws and limited disclosure policies it is **not** necessary for you to prove your entitlement to status. The Department of Indian & Northern Affairs will contact the agency that handled your adoption and the Ministry. They will then set about determining if you are in fact entitled to Status based upon the information they gather from C.A.S. and/or the Ministry of Community & Social Services. Apply directly to the Federal department *first* (i.e., before applying to a C.A.S. or Ministry) for information.

*"And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more." [Erica Jong]*

If you are entitled to status, you may be advised of your BAND NUMBER, which will lead directly back to the community (reserve) that your birth family belongs to.

In the meantime, follow the steps outlined in this manual. Your search is actually no different from most others, although more specific data may be more readily available to you. The Archives of Ontario is a good place to begin your research; ask the genealogist for help.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Search Methods & Techniques**



# 3

## Search Methods & Techniques

### Interpretation Is The Key....

*“How happy is he born and taught  
That serveth not another’s will;  
Whose armour is his honest thought,  
And simple truth his utmost skill...”*

[Sir Henry Wotton]

Although the following section is written in part specifically from the adoptees’ perspective and partly from that of birth parents/relatives in search, the method of learning to interpret your background history is much the same for both.

Searching for an adopted person or without your full birth name is generally more difficult than searching for birth relatives where the birth surname is available. The same search resources are available but working without a name can be a major impediment.

***Do not be discouraged! Search IS possible!***

Ask yourself why you have decided to search now. Have you/your birth child recently reached majority? If so, you/(s)he may well still live with the adopting parents, or may be away at school. Have you recently experienced a “major life event” (e.g., divorce, remarriage, “empty nest”). Timing is critical to search...all the research in the world can send you in circles if you do not approach your search in a positive frame of mind (see also Chapter 1).

*“Words cannot explain the feeling within me after my reunion with my birth mother. The hole in my heart has been filled....”*

[Pat, adoptee]

If possible, make sure you’re listed in the telephone book under the birth surname, preferably in the same area where you lived (were born) at the time. Ask your telephone company about cross-referencing an existing listing--yours or a friend’s/relative’s. The cost is minimal, and the first place most people will look is in a current phone book.

Birth mothers should request copies of hospital records (see sample letter or ask your family doctor, specialist or therapist to do this on your behalf). This will confirm many things you already know as well as correct any mistaken memories and refresh others you may have blocked. It is perfectly normal to have repressed some memories about this traumatic time in your life.

**REGISTER on every disclosure registry you can find, and keep your address and telephone number(s) up to date!**

Have a stamp made up with the adoptee’s birth name, date and place. Stamp the front and back of every envelope you mail. Remember to make sure all mail you send bears your return address, too!

Seek out older people and people who are the same age as those you are looking for would be,

in the community where your search centres. It's best if you can go to the area in person and ask questions discreetly. Attend local churches/church events you think the family may have belonged to, and chat up the oldest parishioners. Say you are doing genealogy (you are!) for a friend. This way, if you run into questions you can't answer .. you can say you will have to get in touch with your "friend" and ask.

Many times, adoptees follow their "genetically programmed" interests. If birth relatives were athletes, the adoptee likely will be, too. Check into sports teams that were around at the time. Go into arenas, schools and the like and look at team photos and trophies.

*"I saw a sign on the road one day that said 'obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off your goal'. I thought, 'this is something that people who are searching should think about....'"*  
[Jean, birth mother]

Would you expect the other person to be musically inclined? (Are you?). Find out what you can about local bands, music lessons/teachers in the area. Is there a flair for acting in the birth background? Check out amateur theatre groups. If everyone in your family was an animal lover, what about equestrian clubs and other organizations pet people frequent? If the background history hints that the adoptive parents/birth family were community service oriented, find out about service clubs (Rotary, Lions, Scouting and Guiding, etc.) in the area.

All searches begin with what you **do** know. Your background history provides some clues:

- ◆ adoption was finalized in the county where the adoptive parents lived at that time.
- ◆ what people did for a living (e.g., a professor's family probably resided in a university town) can help narrow it down, both before and after you compile a "short list" of possible names.
- ◆ The family's ethnic origin -- many surnames are immediately identifiable as German, Scottish, Italian, etc.
- ◆ If the family had a cottage, you can check with cottagers' association yearbooks (e.g., Muskoka Lakes Association).
- ◆ Often church archive material, high school and university yearbooks have been instrumental in finding.
- ◆ What about hobbies and interests -- many collectors, amateur athletes, etc. belong to organized groups.
- ◆ Look for specifics and oddities in the profile (e.g., is there a doctor, lawyer, clergyman, or politician in the family?).

And .. bring your background history to a self-help group meeting and let others help...often a little objectivity is the key....

**Remember: Agencies tried to "match" children with their adoptive families in terms of physical characteristics, educational/socio-economic level of the birth parents.**

If a birth mother left her home community solely for the purpose of concealing the pregnancy, the adoptee most often was "repatriated" back to the county of her permanent residence. However, this generally does not apply to older children, wards with health problems, children of mixed race or adoptions handled privately or through one of the three Catholic agencies in Ontario (Hamilton, Toronto, Windsor).

Below you will find an explanation of one of the most useful search tools available to birth parents:

adoption announcements. Remember that not all adoptions were announced in newspapers. However, the list you have access to through your group, or via the Internet (<http://www.bconnex.net/~rickm>), is extensive and is a good place to begin. Once you have the non-identifying information, you are ready to start! Use your imagination and consider every possibility until you can eliminate it for good cause.

*"Imagination is the highest kite one can fly"*  
[Lauren Bacall]

*"Often rebuked, yet always back returning, To those first feelings that were born with me,  
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning For idle dreams of things which cannot be;  
Today I will seek not the shadowy region; Its unsustaining vastness waxes dear;  
And visions rising, legion after legion, Bring the unreal world too strangely near.  
I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces, And not in paths of high morality,  
And not among the half-distinguish'd faces, The clouded forms of long-past history.  
I'll walk when my own nature would be leading: It vexes me to choose another guide..."*  
[Emily Bronte]

## **ADOPTees, TOO: START WITH WHAT YOU DO KNOW!**

- ◆ Where were you born? Your birth mother *must* have been right there, at least for a short time!
- ◆ Is there any indication that she left home to conceal her pregnancy? For example:
  - ◆ Any mention of a stay with relatives or in a maternity home?
  - ◆ Were you placed with a family outside of town/city where you were born? (E.g., if you were born in Toronto, but placed in Barrie, it is likely that your birth mother was from Simcoe County. However, if you were not an infant, or were of a mixed race, if your health was in question or you were placed via a Catholic agency, this may not be true).
  - ◆ Most maternity homes are church related...what was your birth mother's religion?
  - ◆ What is the origin of the surname (e.g., Irish, etc.)? This may provide a clue as to where the family was from (see below)..
  - ◆ Occupations -- these are imperative for doing city directory work. They can also give an idea of where a family lived (e.g., steelworker -- Hamilton; government employee -- Ottawa; etc.).

The birth mother's marital status is an essential clue. If single, you are undoubtedly working with her maiden name. Concentrate on her male relatives (father, paternal uncles, brothers, etc.). At this juncture, information about the birth father is not usually much good unless he had a very unusual occupation, family situation, etc. Look for specifics and oddities (e.g., clergyman, doctor, politician, a divorce in the mother's family).

If she was married, or even separated/divorced, her legal name was her (ex) husband's, whether or not he is the birth father. Remember: married women did not retain their maiden names, or take them back after divorce until the '80's. Any indication of divorce in the family you seek could be the best clue you will get (read on!).

Hobbies/interests listed in the non-identifying information may help narrow down the area. For example, if members of the family you're seeking favored water related sports and the adoptee was born in Toronto, check Peterborough/Haliburton area. Or maybe they had a cottage... (see "association yearbooks" below).

*Remember that the ONLY place in Canada where Grade 13 (also known as "senior matriculation") has ever been offered is here in Ontario. In the western provinces, high school is completed at Grade 12; while in Quebec and the Maritimes, secondary school only goes to Grade 11. This can reflect on the age or year a person graduated.*

Did any member of the family attend University? This too can give direction to a search (e.g., if the history indicates eastern Ontario as the birth mother's birth place, and her brother studied medicine, check Queen's University first; see Universities below). Look in city directories for Kingston, Cornwall, etc. and check out the section on professional associations and directories. Remember too that certain universities specialize in certain fields of study; law, medicine, veterinary science and even engineering aren't offered just anywhere.

Keep the time-frame in mind when analyzing your history. For example, it may be that a birth mother did not travel very far from home the older the adoptee. The birth mother and her family's socio-economic status are also important here. The daughter of a doctor will have dealt with unwed pregnancy differently than a plumber's daughter. Consider the birth mother's age too, and whether her family was supportive, whether they even knew about her situation, or shunned her.

*"Look twice before you leap."*  
[Charlotte Bronte]

New immigrants to Canada tended to stick together, both in terms of where they settled within the province/country, and what part of a city they chose to live in. Knowing a family's ethnic origin can help you pinpoint a place to start.

**Germans** tended to settle in: Lunenburg, NS, the Niagara region of Ontario, Kitchener, Waterloo, Pembroke-Renfrew County, Ottawa, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

**Ukrainians** favored: Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and the Kirkland Lake area.

**The Scots** preferred: Glengarry, Dundas, Perth, Ontario and Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

**Irish** settlers initially came to the Peterborough area of Ontario.

A trip to the history department at your local library may reveal other trends. While you are at the library, **GET A MAP** of the area where you are searching...the more detailed the better. See if you can obtain a city/town street map circa the year of birth and compare it to a current one. Make yourself familiar with the locale, then and now.

*"You must do the thing you think you cannot do .."*  
[Eleanor Roosevelt]

## **IF THE ADOPTEE WAS IN FOSTER CARE ....**

If you know that you/your birth child was in foster care, even for a short time, ask the agency worker who prepared your background to try to forward a short letter to the foster parents on your behalf. If they are still around and you can get in touch with them, they may know something about the birth mother/adoptive placement. Simply write and introduce yourself and ask if they will call you, collect if necessary.

Some birth mothers visited the adoptee while (s)he was in care. Birth mothers: try to recall where the foster family lived. Even if you don't know or can't remember their name, if you can single out a house or even a block, you can use city directories, etc. and during researching, a memory may come back to you.

## **SEARCHING FOR BIRTH FATHERS**

Searching for your birth father can be either much easier, or much more difficult than finding your birth mother/other maternal relatives. If your birth mother is able to tell you his name, and if it isn't "John Smith", then your search should be relatively simple. Men don't change their names every time they marry! On the other hand, if she can't tell you his name, or if you're seeking your birth father in the absence of contact with the birth mother (i.e., you still haven't found her, she passed away....) this can be much like a birth relative's search for an adoptee.

There are a few things you can try, in addition to usual techniques as outlined in this guide:

- ◆ Ask the birth mother's friends/relatives what they know (or knew back when)
- ◆ Check out the yearbooks of the school the birth mother attended
- ◆ Double check the street guide in any city directory your birth mother appeared in around the time you were born to see if she lived with anyone else then
- ◆ Try to contact former neighbours, school chums, other employees of a place she/they worked
- ◆ Does someone from the Church she attended recall whom she was dating?

*In smaller centres, you may be able to identify the right family from your non-identifying profile.... What does it say about how, when and where the birth parents met? Searches have been completed using clues like "...he liked to bowl...."*

## COMPOSITE CASE STUDIES

### Sample Background History (Adoptee)

Dear John,

John, you were born October 3rd, 1966 at the Toronto General Hospital after a 5 hour labor. Your condition at birth was good, and on October 10th you came into the care of the Metro Children's Aid Society and were placed in a foster home.

Your foster mother described you as "easy to care for" and said that you slept through the night at 2 weeks of age. You took Similac formula willingly, 4 oz. every 3 to 4 hours. You weighed 13 lbs. 4 oz. on December 28th when you were seen at our clinic, and the doctor reported that you were gaining well. You went to live with your adoptive parents on January 3, 1967. The whole family was delighted with you.

Your **birth mother was 18 years old** at the time of your birth. She was **unmarried and in grade 13**, and planned to finish high school and go on to **university**. She **hoped to become a teacher**, as she was very fond of children. Your birth mother was 5'4" tall, weighed about 125 lbs. and had blond hair and blue eyes. She enjoyed playing **piano** and had taken **lessons for over 10 years**. She was not very athletic, but liked to play football with her brothers, and loved to swim at her **family's cottage**. She also enjoyed reading and writing short stories.

Her father, **your maternal grandfather, was 46 years old** when you were born. He was born in Southern Ontario of **Irish and Scottish** parents. He completed **Grade 13** and was a **foreman for a lumber company**. He was 6' tall, 180 lb. with red hair and blue eyes. He enjoyed boating, fishing, hunting and **raised purebred dogs** which he showed and sold.

Your **maternal grandmother passed away at age 40** of cancer. She too, had been born in Southern Ontario and was of **British descent**. She was very healthy until one year before she died, and had devoted herself to raising your birth mother and her 4 older brothers. She had been 5'2" tall with light hair and hazel eyes, and was slightly overweight before she became ill.

Your birth mother's **brothers were born in 1938, 1939 and 1944**. The eldest was married with 2 children and was an **engineer**. He was 6'1" tall with red hair and blue eyes, and his children both looked like him. The next brother was also married and worked in a **marina**. He was 6' tall with blonde hair and hazel eyes. The brother closest to your birth mother in age was attending **university studying medicine**. Since he did not live in the same city, your birth mother did not know if he was aware of her pregnancy.

In late August, just before you were born, your birth mom came to **Toronto to stay in a home for unwed mothers**. She had been referred through her pastor. Although your birth mother's family did not consider themselves religious, they did attend a Protestant church in their community from time to time.

Your birth mother stated that she and your birth father **had known each other since grade school**, and began dating before Christmas 1965. She did not inform him of her pregnancy, as he was **going away to university** and she did not want this to disturb his **plans to go into teaching**. He was 19 in 1966 and, like your birth mother, a straight A student. His father and older brother worked the family's **small farm**; an older sister was married and had 3 children and his own mom was a homemaker.

Apart from your maternal birth grandmother, all members of these two families were in excellent health. Your birth mother told her worker that she was glad to know that you would be going to a family who really wanted a child, could care for you, and give you all the things you needed. She realized that she was too young to parent on her own, and hoped that you would be happy and well loved. It was hard for her to say good-bye to you, but she felt sure that adoption was the best plan for both of you.

## Preliminary Check/Research List for “John’s” Search

**Birth Name (per adoption order):**JAMES COLIN MCNABB

**Birth Date/Place** October 3, 1966

**(per amended birth certificate/background history):**Toronto, Ontario

**Non-identifying History (Received from Kawarthas C.A.S.):**

<b>FACT</b>	<b>ASSUMPTION</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
Birth Mother born circa 1948		Check newspapers for birth announcements
Birth uncles born 1938/39, 1944		Check birth/death/marriage indices if available
Birth grandfather born circa 1920	Birth grandparents wed circa 1937	Check back issues of newspapers: Wedding announcements
Birth uncles wed by 1966	Uncles wed 1958-1965	Ibid. wedding announcements
Birth grandmother deceased at age 40	Wed young and died circa 1958; birth grandfather may be re-married	Ibid. death notices/marriage announcements. Check cemeteries/funeral homes
John born in Toronto, placed in Lindsay with adoptive parents	Search centres in Kawarthas	
Irish/Scottish background	Fits with Kawarthas area	
Grandfather worked lumber yard		Check city directories
Uncle worked in marina		Check city directories
Uncle was/is engineer		Check P. Eng. Association
Uncle studied medicine		Check Medical Association Directory
Birth parents became teachers (?)		Check “Blue Books”
Dog breeders		Check C.K.C. membership
Family cottage		Check association yearbooks
Lumber mill/marina/farm		Town/rural area

## “John’s” Search

“Courage is the price that Life exacts for granting peace.” [Amelia Earhart]

John registered with a local volunteer search & support group, the Internet registry and the provincial disclosure registry. He applied for, and received, his non-identifying background information.

Although he was born in Toronto, his placement was in the Haliburton-Kawarthas region, so he suspected his birth family came from that area.

John asked his adoptive mother to help him, and she gave him his *Adoption Order* which showed that his *birth name* was James Colin McNabb.

John read through the search manual thoroughly until he thought he had a good idea of how to begin his search. Then he did his preliminary check list based upon what his background history told him about his birth family.

John concentrated on his birth mother’s side of the family, because he had her maiden name (the non-identifying history said that she was single at the time of his birth).

John began by searching through *city directories* in the Haliburton-Kawarthas and Peterborough areas, where he had grown up. He started with directories from 1960, *six years prior to his birth*, and made notes on all the McNabb’s he found, where they had lived, and worked.

**Then he went back over his non-identifying information and looked for a family within his research notes who fit the profile. He found four possibilities and noted these.**

John called the cemeteries in Lindsay, Huntsville, and Peterborough and on his third try he discovered a record for a Mrs. Betty McNabb who died in 1957 at age 40. He was advised by the cemetery staff that she was indeed interred at the Peterborough cemetery. John noted the lot, plot and grave number, as well as her exact date of death. The man at the cemetery also told John that Betty’s husband’s name was Colin McNabb (the deceased’s next of kin are usually a matter of record).

John obtained a copy of Betty’s death notice from the Peterborough newspaper; it listed her survivors as her husband, Colin, daughter Jane, sons Matthew, Mark, and James, and brother Bill, all of Peterborough.

John discovered that Betty’s maiden name was Hall (i.e., her brother was listed as Bill Hall).

John went back to the notes he had made from city directories. In the 1966 Peterborough directory he found:

McNabb, Colin T., wks Acme Lumber,  
h, 123 Lock St.  
McNabb, Mark R., attd., Delta Marine,  
r. 123 Lock St.

In 1967 he found:

McNabb, Colin T., foreman, Acme Lumber  
h. 123 Lock St.  
McNabb, Jane E., stud., r. 123 Lock St.  
McNabb, Mark R. (Julie P.), mgr. Delta Marine, h. 77 Water St.

It looked as if Jane's brother had gotten married and had moved between 1966 and '67. John knew that directories are not always 100% accurate, and that data collected one year is often not published until the next. His birth uncle was supposed to be married at the time of his birth in 1966, but didn't show up in the directory with a wife until 1967. John was not deterred. (City directory listings are usually gathered one year and published the next.)

Between 1960 and 1970 John found no listing for either Matthew or James McNabb, who he believed to be his other two maternal uncles. From 1960 to present, year after year, John did find:

Hall, William C., carp., ABC Bldg.  
h. 89 Main St.

John believed that this man was his birth mother's maternal uncle.

Colin, John's grandfather, and Jane continued to be listed at 123 Lock Street together until 1969; then both disappeared. John checked the street guide in the 1970 directory, and found that 123 Lock was listed to Paul F. Johnson.

He looked up Mr. Johnson's name and found:

Johnson, Paul F. (Jane E.), tchr., Bd. of Ed.  
h. 123 Lock St.

(In most directories, the wife's name is listed in brackets beside her husband who is generally considered the "head" of the household.)

It looked like Jane had married Paul between 1969 and early 1970, and they had taken over Colin's house.

John checked the current Peterborough phone book, but there was no listing for either Paul F. or Jane E. Johnson. Bill Hall, however, was still listed at the same address. John figured the Johnsons might have a non-published number, but he was not ready to try a fishing call to his great uncle Bill just yet. **He wanted to avoid calling his mother's family if at all possible.**

John called the property tax department in Peterborough and asked for the name of the current owner of 123 Lock Street. He learned that the house now belonged to Fred and Daisy Kerr; he checked and found that their telephone number was also listed.

John knew his birth mom's first name and middle initial (which he guessed -- correctly as it turned out -- stood for Elizabeth, after her mother), as well as her married name and husband's first name. He just didn't know where she'd moved to.

John went back to the city directories and found that the last listing for the Johnsons at 123 Lock was in 1978. He assumed that after a few years of marriage they'd started a family and moved to a bigger house (he didn't know it but he was right again). John also discovered that the Kerrs had taken over the house directly from the Johnsons.

John called the Peterborough Board Of Education and asked which school Paul F. Johnson taught at. He found out that Paul was now vice-principal of River Street Public School. John knew the board wouldn't tell him the Johnsons home address, but at least now he knew they still lived in the area.

John called directory assistance and asked for any listing for Paul or Jane in smaller towns outside Peterborough, such as Apsley. (He could have checked this using "Canada 411" on the Internet, but he didn't have access to the 'net). The operator told him there was a listing for P.F. Johnson at R.R.#1, Lakefield, and that there was also a "children's line" listed to the same address. John took both numbers. John looked up Lakefield on the map and in the postal code book and found out it was a very small place indeed.

**He decided to just think about all of this information for a day or so.**

John was now 99% sure that he had his birth mother's full name, address and phone number, along with the research to prove it to himself.

He called his friend, Mike, from the search group. Together they went over the information John had gathered. John explained how he had gotten from non-identifying information and Jane's maiden surname to Jane's married name and current address and phone number. He asked Mike to look out for any flaws in his reasoning and research. Neither spotted any.

John figured he had been named after his grandfather and uncle.

Betty (Elizabeth) McNabb had died in 1957 at age 40, and it seemed likely that this was his grandmother, since this fit with his non-identifying profile.

Jane's father and one of her brother's (James and Colin) occupations in the city directories also matched the descriptions in his background history.

Jane had married a teacher. He wondered if Paul could be his birth father, since he knew that subsequent marriage of birth parents was more common than many would think.

**John decided he would call Jane. He studied the script in his manual and made some notes of his own. Then he and Mike ran through what he planned to say a couple of times.**

John waited until 10:00 a.m. the next morning, a Thursday, hoping Jane might be home alone so she would have some privacy to talk with him. He still did not know whether Jane's family knew of his existence.

At 10:00 a.m., John, script in hand, dialed Jane's number. There was no answer. He felt deflated and called Mike to let him know he did not get through.

At 1:30 p.m., John felt ready to try again. This time the line was busy. He felt utterly frustrated and more apprehensive than ever. John decided to take his dog for a walk; he didn't want to sound angry or too stressed when he finally managed to talk with Jane.

At 3:00 p.m. John placed a third call to Jane's number. This time, she answered the phone, and John could hear a radio in the background:

Jane: *Hello?*

John: May I please speak with Jane Johnson?

Jane: *This is she.*

John: Mrs. Johnson, my name is John Morgan, and I am calling long distance about a very confidential matter. Are you free right now so that we can talk for a few minutes?

Jane: *Well, what is it about?*

John: Mrs. Johnson, this is a very urgent and personal call, and I need to know that you have some privacy before I can go on. This call is very important to me, and I'm a little nervous.

Jane: *Well, the kids will be home from school in a little while, but sure, go ahead and tell me what this is concerning.*

John: Mrs. Johnson, I was adopted when I was a baby. I have been discreetly searching for some information about my birth family. I was born October 3, 1966, in Toronto, and my birth mother named me James Colin McNabb.

Jane: *Oh.*

John: Until now, I've told no one the reason for my inquiries. I don't want to upset anyone, but I'm hoping that you may have some information which could help me complete my search.

Jane: *Well...*

John: Mrs. Johnson, are you sure that this is a good time for you to talk?

Jane: *Yes, yes it's fine. I'm just not sure what to tell you. I was very young, and, you see, it just wasn't acceptable in my family. Oh dear. I'm sorry, I'm just a little shocked.* (Jane has "admitted" she is John's birth mother)

John: I'm sorry if I've upset you, it's just that I feel a very real need to know more about myself and my history. My family and friends are very supportive of my searching. I realize how difficult this may have been for you at the time, and you should know that I was happy in my adoptive home.

Jane: *Paul -- we're married now -- will be home in an hour or so. He didn't know I was pregnant back then. The kids still don't know but I suppose now I'll have to tell them.* (Jane has indicated her husband is the birth father)

John: Don't feel pressured to do anything that you don't want to right away. I'm anxious to meet you, but I think maybe we should take this slowly.

Jane: *No, no, it's okay. Its time they knew. I just never thought....Paul will be very happy. We have three girls you know, and we've always talked about you on your birthday, at Christmas...when the girls were born...well, I guess I'm trying to say that your father and I have never forgotten about you, and we've always wondered...*

John: I have a letter here that I wrote to you when I first began my search, before I knew much at all about you. I'd like to send it along to you, and, would you like a photo?

Jane: *Oh, that would be just wonderful! Our girls, Sara and Jody are in high school and Kate is just 10, will be delighted to have an older brother!*

John: I have a younger adopted brother, but I've never had a sister before.

Jane: *Do your parents know about this?*

John: Yes, they gave me my Adoption Order which told me my birth name. That was the beginning of my search.

Jane: *How did you ever manage to find me?*

John: (Tells about his background information and his research....)

Jane and John arrange to exchange letters and photos. Jane decides to tell Paul what has happened and then they can tell their daughters together.

A couple of weeks later, a couple of hundred dollars in phone bills have accumulated. Letters and pictures have flown back and forth, and Jane and Paul have told their kids about their new brother. The girls, as expected, were thrilled.

John agrees to drive to Peterborough, and he and Jane arrange to meet in town at a restaurant for lunch before he accompanies her home to meet Paul. The girls will be away at their grandfather's cottage (where he now lives full time) until late Saturday evening, so John will have several hours alone with his birth parents before meeting his sisters.

On Sunday after lunch, John will return home so that everybody will have a chance to wind down before the week begins. John has arranged to get together with Mike for dinner Sunday evening so he can talk about his reunion with someone he knows will be interested and supportive.

## IN REVIEW

John's background history actually gave him more facts to work with than he needed to complete his search. **He managed to find his mother and reunite without contacting another birth relative**, but, had it been necessary, he might have:

- Found out from the Kerrs that his grandfather had retired to his cottage, and/or where the Johnson's had moved to.
- Checked professional association directories for his other uncles.
- Followed up on the fact that his grandfather bred show dogs by checking with other area breeders, etc.
- Made a fishing call to great uncle Bill.
- **Etc., etc., etc., etc.**

***The point is, your search is never over until it's over. There is always one more clue, one more lead to follow, no matter how far-fetched it may seem at the moment.***

Never say 'never,' never give up, **"if at first you don't succeed..."**

*"... we two parted, in silence and tears  
Half broken-hearted, to sever for years...  
They name thee before me, a knell to mine ear;  
A shudder comes o'er me...after long years..."*  
[Lord Byron]



## Sample Background Histories & Composite Searches (Birth Relatives)

Dear Mary,

This letter is being written to you in answer to your request for non-identifying information about the daughter born to you on August 15, 1960 whom you named Jane Mary.

Jane entered a foster home on September 4th directly from hospital. As you will recall, she weighed 7 lbs. 13 oz. at birth. Upon release from hospital she weighed 7lbs. 10 oz. Perhaps you remember that she had a birthmark on her forehead, said to be from forceps, and it was supposed that this mark would disappear. (The report goes on to detail some medical information re: the child's development and a physical description.)

On September 26th, Jane was welcomed into her adoptive family, and her parents chose a new name for her, after the mother's mother. She was formally adopted on May 31st, 1961.

This adoptive family adhered to a Protestant religion. The young man was 6' tall and had very dark hair and blue eyes. *He was employed in a responsible position and it was noted that although he had moved a few times from one job to another, it was done on a planned basis.* He was very pleasant in appearance. He told us his father was a retired farmer and he had three brothers, one of whom also farmed. The other two brothers had positions in the business world.

This man was keenly interested in his home and had done renovation work on his various homes to improve them. He enjoyed his wife's company and also liked to read and listen to the radio.

The adoptive mother was 5'4 3/4" tall and had brown hair and blue-green eyes. She weighed 125 lbs. She had been a hairstylist before her marriage and for a year afterward. She was very quiet, reserved and attractive. She was an only child and her parents lived on a farm. Both these parents said they had been brought up with kindness tempered with discipline. They were found to have no chronic illnesses and were judged to be in good health at the time.

Your birth daughter was welcomed into the adoptive family and greeted warmly by her sister who was then just three years old. This child was also adopted and was doing very well with the family.

There has been no contact since the adoption was finalized. The forgoing information contains all the non-identifying information available according to our files, Mary. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us again.

### A written request for further information from Mary revealed the following:

- The adoptive parents were 32 (father) and 27 (mother) when they adopted their first daughter. When Jane was adopted, the father was 35 and the mother 30.
- The adoptive parents married in 1950 and had waited approximately 4 1/2 years before adopting.
- The agency's last contact with this family was in the summer of 1961 when they called to inform their worker of a change of address.
- The adoptive mother completed 3 years of high school and apprenticed for 3 years. She had gone back to work part-time.
- The adoptive father moved several times within his job field, but not within the same company.

- The family lived in the city and were purchasing their own home.

The “mystery” of who this adoptee “became” was solved in three weeks. The local newspaper was researched for all weddings and engagements during 1950. A list of all “only daughters” was made, then each name was researched for occupations using city directories. From the wedding announcements, the following information was gathered about the brides and grooms:

- a) Maternal grandparents' names and general addresses (i.e., city/town)
- b) Paternal grandparents names and general addresses
- c) Names and addresses of groom's siblings
- d) Couple's addresses after marriage.

A general genealogical search was conducted using the above gathered information. The adoptive mother's family had lived on a farm until their deaths. Their tombstones located in the town cemetery gave their years of birth and death, and noted that the grandmother's given name was 'Elizabeth.' The adoptive family had lived in the city until the summer of 1961. This information was cross-referenced and verified using city directories. The directories also showed that the adoptive father changed jobs several times.

Neighbours of the deceased maternal grandparents confirmed that the couple's two granddaughters were adopted. (No adoption notices had appeared in the local paper.) The maternal grandparents' probated wills were found in the local courthouse. The grandmother's will stated that her sole beneficiary was her only daughter, and the executor, her son-in-law. The adoptive parents' more recent address in another city was noted within the document.

Further research in that city indicated that the adoptive father had died a year earlier, that both adopted daughters were living on their own. A drivers' license check confirmed that “Jane” was now “Elizabeth” (i.e., the date of birth matched and this was her maternal grandmother's first name, too) , revealed her married name, and gave her husband's name as Paul Edwards.

Mary now had enough verified information to be confident that she had located her birth daughter. She wrote a letter to Elizabeth, but did not receive a reply right away. Several months later, she wrote again, and finally heard from Elizabeth that she was reluctant to tell her mom, and felt she needed some time to think about possible reunion.

Mary, however, was simply delighted to know that her daughter is alive and well and seemingly happy; that she is married and stable. She is certain that they will meet someday, when Elizabeth is ready.

## SAMPLE #2

Janet received non-identifying information about her son, Sean, who was born July 11th, 1968. The first two pages set out the birth and health information up to the time of placement in his adoptive home. The letter continued:

Sean was cared for by a foster family from July 27th, the date of his discharge from hospital. You signed the Consent for Adoption on August 17th. Sean was placed with his adoptive parents on December 5th. The placement developed positively and the family reported enjoying the adjustment to having a baby in the house. The adoptive father is proud of him and takes pleasure in him as a son and as a person. The adoptive parents' older child, a daughter aged 6, shared in his care and enjoyed him fully. The adoption was completed in May 1969.

The following are facts about the adoptive parents as recorded at the time:

Nationality: Caucasian      Ethnic Origin: Irish      Religion: Protestant  
Ages: 45 and 40 years      Health: Good

Adopted father: Education: B.Sc. and post-graduate work      Employment: Business administration field      Interests: wood working, gardening, sailing, skiing, reading, community work;      Personality: outgoing, articulate, warm, good-humored      Physical Description: 5'9" appropriate weight, brown hair/blue eyes.

Adopted mother: Employment: dietitian (prior to marriage) homemaker      Interests: cooking, skiing, skating, tennis, church work, needle work      Personality: warm, reserved, capable, friendly, feminine, *popular with CGIT group*      Physical Description: 5'4", slim, fair, blue eyes, quick smile.

This couple impressed as very capable, intelligent people who shared their interests and goals. They had been married 8 years. Their first child was friendly, well-behaved and likable, and very important to them both.

Both adoptive parent's parents were deceased. His father had been a lumberman; no occupation was listed for his mother. Her father had been a physician; her mother's occupation was not noted. He had two older sisters, one a secretary and the other a housewife. She had one older sister who had a university degree and was a homemaker.

Following the adoption, we did not hear from this family until 1982 when the father contacted our agency to discuss procedures for locating biological parents. He stated that he wanted to be prepared should his son be interested in doing so, and seemed quite open toward this. Non-identifying information and information about the disclosure registry was provided at that time.

**As a follow-up, Janet spoke to the social worker in person or by phone at least six more times. She asked a lot of questions. Some were answered, while others could not be, but she obtained the following important information:**

- Sean was adopted within the boundaries serviced by the agency. The adoption was finalized in the local courthouse on May 29th, 1969.
- The adopted father was five years younger than his wife (this was not clear in the original background profile).
- The couple's first child was born to them rather than adopted.
- They were an established couple, intelligent and educated who lived in a new home that they owned. They had this home built to their high standards, and it was important to them. They were planners and had taken time to furnish

the family room, while the living room was not yet furnished. (The worker further noted that there wasn't much construction in this particular town at that time).

- The paternal grandfather had been born in 1874 and was a lumberman in Nova Scotia. The paternal grandmother was born in 1895. The maternal grandfather was born in 1878 and his wife in 1879. The adoptive father was born in Nova Scotia, and the mother in Ontario.

Janet searched the local newspaper and wrote to everyone who'd adopted a boy at about this time (i.e., from adoption notices). Her letter began: "I am assisting a friend in locating his natural son..." Incredibly, she received a response rate of 85%, but not one adopted son's birth date matched with Sean's.

Janet checked Ontario Universities for Dietitian programs, and the University of Ottawa supplied a class list for several years during the 1960's. Research in the local paper provided a list of CGIT leaders in the area at the appropriate time. Calls to several of these women revealed that books of meeting minutes had been kept and were available. Lists of Ontario doctors were obtained from the professional directories at the local library. But the most valuable piece of information turned out to be what Janet had learned about the family's home.

In only one area of this city were there homes being built with family rooms in the 60's. City maps showed which streets were in the area. Cross-referencing with city directories indicated which homes were new (i.e., as these were built and occupied). The directories also showed who was a professional vs. a blue collar worker. Janet created a "short-list" of 50 possible names.

*She then visited the local school to see if any records were available to the public and was able to locate and copy three public school yearbooks in the school library. Sean would have started school in the fall of 1973, therefore there was a good chance one of the little boys in the kindergarten photo was her son! She knew he had a sister six years older who would have then been in one of the senior class pictures. Cross referencing revealed that Jennifer Brown then in grade 6 had a brother, Chris then in kindergarten.*

Checking back with the short list, Janet found that the Browns had indeed moved into a new home in 1968 to an area where new homes had family rooms. Mr. Brown was CEO at the local hospital. The newspaper archives contained clippings of when he was promoted to this position, and the information in the article matched with the background educational and employment history in Janet's non-identifying profile of the adoptive family. A chat with the archivist revealed that Mr. Brown's wife had been a dietitian and hospital volunteer who was well liked but unfortunately had passed away from cancer in the late 1970's.

The family had left the city in 1974 and relocated "down east somewhere." Another hospital employee remembered that Mr. Brown had taken his family to New Brunswick to become CEO of a brand new hospital there, and added that Jennifer and Christopher both now lived in British Columbia. This friendly helper also remembered that Mrs. Brown had grown up in Ottawa, and had returned to their city which she loved .. only to succumb to cancer in 1977. Funeral home inquiries found that indeed Lillian Brown was deceased and had been buried in her family's plot in Ottawa. A call to Ottawa confirmed her maiden name and the inscription on her headstone.

*A local newspaper article noted the family's church affiliation; Janet spoke to the church secretary and confirmed the baptisms of Bob and Lillian Brown's children, Jennifer and Christopher. The secretary offered to send Janet copies of the*

*certificates, but also read the information over the phone, and Christopher's birth date matched Sean's!*

Janet found Mr. Brown's current address and telephone number using "pro-phone," which was available at the public library, and wrote him a carefully worded letter. She suggested that she was Chris's birth mother and asked Bob Brown to contact his son and see if he was interested in hearing from her.

*Mr. Brown called Janet to confirm the information in her letter, and then talked to Chris, who chose to register with the provincial disclosure register to confirm the match.*

Finally, Janet received her first letter from her first born and only son, and, though not without its "ups and downs," they've formed a mutually rewarding and beneficial relationship which continues to grow.



# Chapter 4

## Research Tools & Resources



# 4

## Research Tools & Resources

### CITY DIRECTORIES

City directories are, more often than not, the most valuable tool available to you in researching your birth family tree. While they may seem complex at first, you'll find you are an expert at cross-referencing the data contained in a directory within your first afternoon spent at the library.

The explanation printed by the Metro Reference Library (see appendix) is quite comprehensive, but a few specifics deserve special attention:

Some directories may be referred to as "Might's" or "Vernon's", etc. This is simply the name of the company that produced them. Keep a record of every directory you consult (place, date, etc.) and of every person you find who shares your surname. Include his/her designation in the household ("h", "r", etc.) address, occupation, and place of employment.

Begin by checking the directory which was compiled at least five years prior to your birth; bring the information as far forward as possible.

Beware of occasional spelling errors, especially when working with a very uncommon or ethnic name.

Note that one or more of your given names may have been a relative's name also. First names may be contractions (e.g., Christina = Tina). Some first names are unisex (e.g., Constance/Connie, Bev/Beverly, Francis, Lesley, etc.). Generally, the best jumping off point is to look for your maternal grandfather/prospective adoptive father using the surname and his occupation as noted in your background history. Some directories list wives in brackets beside their husbands, while others list couples separately (cross reference by address).

Directories begin with business listings, followed by alphabetical name listings, followed by a street directory. Once you find a prospective address, you can look it up in the street guide and determine who a family's neighbors were that year. Most people only show up in a directory if they work outside the home, or are students over 18. Before 1940, people left school and entered the work force earlier, so may have been listed at 14 or 15 years of age.

The most complete collection of Canadian City directories can be found in the National Archives in Ottawa. The Archives of Ontario (77 Grenville Street, Toronto, College/Bay St. area) also holds an extensive collection of Ontario directories. Metro Reference Library (Yonge/Bloor Streets, Toronto) and the North York main library (North York Centre subway stop) both have all Toronto Might's directories in either book form or on microfilm. As well, the archives at Toronto city hall has a comprehensive selection of Might's Toronto Directories. Directories in other cities and towns are usually held at the main branch of the public library, or in city/town hall archives.

**N.B.** You may only photocopy microfilmed directories; copying from the books themselves is not permitted.

Current city directories for most places in Canada, and some USA and European cities are available at the Metro Toronto Reference Library and at the National Archives in Ottawa. Some Ontario directories are available at the Ontario Archives. Many university libraries (e.g., University of Toronto, Western), and local public libraries, also carry some old city directories. Call the main library in the area where you are searching and ask what they may have available.

### Some Call Numbers for City Directories

V = VERNON'S, M=MIGHT'S, H=HENDERSON'S, P=POLK'S

Brampton	917.13535M37	Niagara Falls	917.1339V25
Brantford	917.1348V26	North Bay	917.13147V26
Calgary	917.1233H25.2	Oakville	917.1353M37
Cambridge	917.1344V26	Oshawa	910.7135V261
Edmonton	917.1233H25.2	Ottawa	910.71383M37
Guelph	917.1343V26	Peterborough	917.1368V26
Halifax	910.7162H12	Sault Ste Marie	917.1313V26
Hamilton	910.7135V26	St. Catherine's	910.7135V264
Hamilton	910.7135V26	Sudbury	910.7131V26
(H222 (1853-1934) microfilm 1936-90)		Thunder Bay	917.1312H25
		Timmins	917.13142M37
Hamilton	(Sub)910.7135V265	Toronto	910.7135T59
Kingston	917.1372M37	(microfilm T68694)	
Kitchener-Waterloo	910.7134V262	Toronto	(Sub)910.7135M376
London, Ont.	910.7136V26	Vancouver	917.1133V115
Montreal	917.14281C67	Windsor	910.7133M37
microfilm (1842-1978) L9105		Winnipeg	910.7126H25
		Woodstock	917.1346V26

**Note:** If you have any City Directories or old phone books that you are willing to donate to the adoption community, please let your group facilitator know, or bring them to your meeting.

### TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

Old phone books, most on microfilm, can be found at the Archives of Ontario, Metro Toronto Reference Library, the National Archives in Ottawa, and in local libraries in other places.

Keep a record of which places you have checked, what you find, and what you do not. Use phone directories in conjunction with city directories.

Current phone directories for almost anywhere in the world are available at the Metro Reference Library on the first floor (either the books themselves, or on micro-fiche).

Most libraries also have CD ROM programs called "Pro Phone," or "Canada Phone" as well as programs for places outside the country. A data base called "Canada 411" is also available via

the 'net (<http://www.bonnex.net/~rickm>).

Remember, people move every day, but the list will give you accurate information based on publication of the last phone directory in that area.

## **CANADIAN TELEPHONE COMPANIES**

The companies listed below may be able to tell you where old directories they have published are archived, and how you can get access to these.

### **Alberta Government Telephone**

10020 - 100th Street Fort William Building,  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0N5  
Telephone: (403) 425-2110

### **Newfoundland Telephone**

PO Box 2110  
Saint John's, Newfoundland A1C 5H6  
Telephone (709) 739-2000

### **British Columbia Telephone Company**

3777 Kingsway,  
Burnaby, British Columbia V5H 3Z7  
Telephone: (250) 432-2151

### **Northern Telephone Limited**

Po Box "H"  
New Liskeard, Ontario P0J 1P0  
Telephone: (705) 647-7311

### **Edmonton Telephones**

10044 - 108th Street,  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S1  
Telephone: (403) 441-2000

### **Quebec Telephone**

6, rue Saint-Jean, C.P. 2070  
Rimouski, Quebec G5L 7E4  
Telephone: (418) 723-2271

### **The Island Telephone Company**

71 Belvedere, PO Box 820  
Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7M1  
Telephone: (902) 566-5501

### **Saskatchewan Telecommunications**

2121 Saskatchewan Drive  
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3Y2

Telephone: (306) 347-3737

**Manitoba Telephone System**

Box 6666, 1108 Saint James Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3V6  
Telephone: (204) 941-5487

**Telebec Limiteé**

1126, Ch. Saint-Louis, Floor 3  
Sillery, Quebec G1S 1E5  
Telephone: (418) 688-9992

**Bell Canada -- Telephone Historical Collection**

1050 Beaver Hall Hill, Room 820  
Montreal Quebec

In many instances, it is necessary to go to the actual site where a resource is housed to use material. In some cases, however, it is possible to borrow material via inter-library loan, or to write to an archive or library and request copies of certain information.

When you write, always send a self-addressed stamped envelope and a few dollars to cover copying costs. Make sure you include your telephone number in your letter of inquiry, as staff may have questions, and mention that it is okay to call you collect. When asking for help from a maternity home, church, county museum, library or other not-for-profit or charitable (or financially strapped!) organization, it may be useful to send along a small donation, not to be confused with a bribe! Donations are appreciated...bribes are threatening to most people.

The difference is your attitude, and it will show, in person, on the phone or in a letter. When you make telephone calls or write letters, mention that you are doing genealogy (its true!) and be polite, but not too "professional." (Save your professional demeanor for "fishing calls" where this is sometimes necessary and appropriate...).

**ADOPTION ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sometimes, adoptive parents put a notice of adoption much like a birth notice in their local newspaper when they adopted their son or daughter. Thanks to the work of a dedicated birth mom who found her own daughter this way, there is a list of adoption announcements which appeared in newspapers in various Ontario newspapers or via the Internet (see below).

If you are searching for an adoptee, ascertain both the approximate dates of the placement, and finalization, of the adoption. Sometimes a notice will have appeared when the adoptee was first placed; other times, parents submitted it when the adoption became final (sometimes both!).

**NOTE: Prior to 1954, the probation period between placement and finalization of an adoption was 2 years; after 1954 it was 6 months, with most adoptions being finalized after approximately 9 months.**

If the background history notes the adoption of (an)other child/ren into the family, look for their notices too. Not surprisingly, often there will be a notice for the first child placed with a family, but not for subsequent ones.

Adoption notices list the same kind of information as regular birth notices: the child's given and surnames, names of the parents and sometimes the mother's maiden name; names of grandparents and siblings often appear as well.

Using your background history, city directories and other resources you can set about researching families who placed appropriate notices at the right time(s), eliminating some and continuing to research families who fit the non-identifying profile.

Adoption notices may include:

- date notice appeared in the newspaper
- which paper(s) it appeared in
- adopted name(s) of the child
- name(s) of the adopting parents
- name(s) of sibling(s)
- name(s) of grandparent(s)
- maiden name of the adopting mother

*Remember: The information is gathered as at the time it was published in the newspaper; it is not therefore up to date and is only a starting point. You must research anything and everything you find which looks promising....*

***HOMEWORK FIRST...QUESTIONS LATER!***

If the adoptee was placed in an area where notices have not yet been catalogued, you can go back to old newspapers for that community and check in the appropriate time frames. If you do this, PLEASE KEEP YOUR RESEARCH NOTES -- we would like to add your findings to the list, to better serve the adoption community in future.

## **DIVORCE RECORDS**

If there is an indication in your background history that your birth parents or grandparents, or the adoptive parent[s] or grandparents divorced, you have a terrific clue. Divorce records are public; the trick is to identify the county in which a couple's decree was granted.

To do this, you have to narrow down the time frame using the ages of family members as recorded in your history, and ascertain approximately when the divorce took place. Note that many couples were separated for many years before actually divorcing, and that it became easier to obtain a divorce after 1969 when the law changed. For example:

*The birth mother was single and 18 at the time she gave up her child. According to the history, the birth mother's parents had been separated since the birth mother was 10. In this instance, we are seeking a divorce record for a couple with the birth surname (i.e., the maternal birth grandparents); who divorced after the adoptee's birth; and who had been separated since 8 years before the adoptee's birth (separation date will be noted within the divorce file).*

You may find several records that, at first glance, could be the one you really want. It is simply a matter of eliminating all but one of these, based on what you know from your history and from information you've gathered from city directories and so on.

Divorce records generally contain the following:

- Full names of parties to the action (including maiden names)
- Dates/places of birth of the principals and of their children (called "issue")
- occupations and employment histories
- matrimonial address and addresses since the separation
- copy of the marriage certificate
- copy of decrees nisi and absolute
- transcriptions of the testimony
- financial statements/child welfare reports concerning minor children

**Note:** Divorce records may contain a lot of detailed information, which is wonderful for your purposes, but they are not pleasant to sift through, as you may discover things you think you would rather not know (e.g., reports of abuse, neglect, etc.). Just remember, if you are looking at it, it is history, and does not necessarily paint a picture of what you will find today.

## ACCESSING DIVORCE RECORDS

Indices to divorce records are located in different places, depending upon the time frame and county where the divorce took place. Ontario records from before about 1960 are available via the Provincial Archives (77 Grenville St. in Toronto). Indices for the period between the late '50's and about 1970 are accessed via the court office at 393 University Avenue, 10th floor. More recent divorce file numbers are computerized and are held in Ottawa; if you're looking for a file number for a divorce granted after 1970, ask your group facilitator for help.

Indices to divorce judgments are arranged chronologically by year(s) and then by the initial of the surname. Look for the surname in the approximate years you have already determined and copy down full names and file numbers. A copy of the "decree nisi" and/or the "decree absolut" is available for a fee of about \$20. These decrees give some, but not as much information as is available if you look at the whole file. [Note: you can only look at complete files of divorce actions that were finalized before about 1970]. Take the file number(s) and go to the Archives of Ontario (77 Grenville Street, Bay/College in Toronto).

**Note:** You must register to use these Archives, so if this is your first visit, be sure to bring along your identification; when asked for the reason for your research, list "genealogy."

Ask the Archives staff to show you how to fill in request slips to retrieve the file(s) you want to see. Retrieval takes 3 to 5 business days; staff will call you when the files you need are available in the reading room.

Check each file against the indicators you have in your history and what you have pieced together from previous research. Copy down all pertinent details (e.g., names, dates of birth, etc.). While you may requisition photocopies of material, this costs \$1.00 per page and takes

*weeks*; take your own notes instead.

Go back to your history and research notes and try to fit the information gathered from the divorce file(s) to what you already know. If it fits pretty well, congratulations! If it's obviously too far off, keep trying.

**Outside of York County, check with the local courthouse to find out where and how indices to divorce judgments are recorded, and how files can be retrieved.**

## **BANKRUPTCY RECORDS**

Bankruptcy records are centralized in Ontario. If you have reason to believe that someone declared bankruptcy, go to 393 University Avenue. There is a customer terminal (public access) on the counter. Simply follow the directions and enter the name you are interested in. Continue to follow the prompts. There is no fee to search for a record, but a fee does apply if you want to print a copy of the discharge certificate.

There is a difference between filing for personal bankruptcy, and corporate or business bankruptcy. Ask the clerk at the office to help you if you want to check for the latter type.

If you find who you are looking for via the computer, you may ask the clerk to retrieve the file. The on-line screen will show you the individual's address at the time he/she filed, his/her date of birth, date of discharge and the name of the trustee who handled the case for them. This may be all you need to know. Pre-computer age records are on microfilm -- ask the clerk to help you use these.

## **PROBATE RECORDS (WILLS)**

Any will that has been probated (i.e., filed with the court) is public record. Accessing a person's will is often the easiest way to discover their date and place of death, which may lead you more directly to a newspaper death announcement or an obituary.

The will itself lists the names of those to whom property, etc. was left; you can usually determine the relationship between the deceased and his/her beneficiary.

A copy of any will is available (ask for a "plain copy") for \$1.00 per page.

In York County, go to 393 University Avenue, 10th floor, and ask the clerk to show you how to access the index wills. These are listed alphabetically, chronologically on micro-film (some older will indices are in ledger books). Actual wills are not kept on site. So again, you may have to wait several days before you can pick up a copy of the document. The date and place of death, however, are listed right in the index.

**Outside York county, check with General Court Division in the county seat for the town you are interested in.**

## **FUNERAL HOMES/CEMETERY RECORDS**

Funeral home and cemetery staff are amazingly helpful and kind to poor souls who are looking

for the final resting place of a relative or friend.

In smaller centers, call the cemetery directly (see Sample Family Tree Letter for an example of what to say). These sources can often provide an exact date of death, the name of the next of kin and his/her address, etc.

If you do not know either the approximate date of death or the location of burial, you may check with the local cemetery board for a list of possibilities, and/or with local funeral directors.

In Toronto, you can write to:

**Commemorative Services**  
65 Overlea Boulevard, 5th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M4H 1P1

which holds the records for the majority of large cemeteries in the Toronto area. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope, or a small donation, asking for information on names you have gathered from city directories, etc.

Many genealogical societies and local museums have transcribed cemetery records, and a good many cemetery indices are now also available on the 'net. Check it out.

Outside Toronto, check the Internet page as many cemetery indices are available via the 'net.

## THE INTERNET

Ah, the wonders of technology! If you're not already on the 'net -- check with friends, neighbours, colleagues or get yourself to one of the growing number of "Internet cafes" or your local public, college or university library and get going. You will be glad you did! (NB. If you're really stuck for access, ask your kids--they're probably "on line" at school!).

You can list birth information (i.e., birth name, date and place) on registries FREE, and this will then become accessible world wide.... There's also so much information about searching and reunion you'll be amazed! Log on, and follow the instructions....

**Ontario Groups:** <http://nebula.on.ca/canadopt/Ongroups.htm>

**Canadopt Registry:** <http://nebula.on.ca/CANADopt/Registry>

**Canadian Adoptees Registry & Classifieds:** <http://www.bconnex.net/~rickm/>

**Adoption Triad Outreach:** <http://www.cm-online.net/adoption>  
<http://www.absnw.com/reunions>

**Links to other resources:** <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/5653/ADOPT.HTM>  
<http://nebula.on.ca/canadopt/webpages.htm>

**Links to ALMOST EVERYTHING:** <http://pages.prodigy.com/janetb/2ado.htm#regs>

Key Words: *Adoptee, Adoption Reunion, Missing Persons, Genealogy...*

## NEWSPAPERS

Birth, death and marriage announcements that appeared in newspapers can be particularly helpful - if you can find them! Old newspapers on microfilm are available at libraries, archives

and sometimes newspaper offices.

Out of town newspapers on film can usually be borrowed via inter-library loan. Ask about this at your local library, main information desk.

To make use of newspaper announcements, you must have an idea of what it is you are looking for. Here are some examples:

***Crown Wardship Notice***

*Did an agency place an ad seeking your birth parent(s) prior to placing you in your adoptive home? Check the personal ads in the classified section for up to 3 months prior to your placement date.*

***Birth Announcement***

*Do you know when your mother/her siblings were born (approximately)? Or when the adoptive parents or a natural child was born (approximately)? Check for birth announcements which may be theirs. What about locating another person born in the same hospital on the same day? Ask him/her to ask his/her mom if she remembers yours....*

***Marriage Announcements***

*Depending upon their age at the time, if you can ascertain when a person/couple married or was likely married, you may find an engagement or wedding announcement in the paper. Check under "Social Notices" or in weekend editions especially.*

***Obituaries***

See Probate Records (Wills) and Funeral Homes/Cemetery Records above.

***Greetings/Personal/People Search***

*Check back on birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's, Christmas, etc. to see if anyone ever placed an ad looking for YOU!*

***[See also below and "Newspapers" Chapter 5]***

**Newspapers at the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library (on microfilm)**

Toronto Star:1892 - present  
Thunder Bay:1981-1986  
Toronto Telegram:1876-1971  
Sudbury:1910-1988  
Peterborough:1980-1989  
Oshawa Droit:1960-1987  
London Free Press:1849-1989  
Kitchener:1980-1989

Kingston:1834-1989  
Hamilton:1847-1988  
Brampton:1964-1987  
Ajax:1957-1975  
Windsor:1893-1989  
Toronto Sun:1971-1990  
Toronto Globe and Mail:1844-1987

Check in the newspapers, in the personal and people search columns on birthdays, and special holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's day for any announcement. Go back many years on these dates.

Place discreet ads in newspapers on these dates. If you do place an ad, use an "adsitter" or

your group's phone number as a contact. This will avoid crank calls. Hold back some small but critical piece of information that can be used to verify a person's identity (e.g., number of children in a family, occupation, etc.). Remember if you give a box number or an "answering service" number these remain in effect for only a short time. If you do use a group's number you must remember to advise the facilitator. Most papers call to "OK" the ad. All of this takes time, so avoid disappointment and book your ad well in advance.

## SAMPLE ADVERTISEMENTS

Adopted? Birth parents & siblings seek John Michael SCOTT born **May 4/69** at Windsor, ON. *Happy 28th Birthday!*  
Please call Parent Finders (519) 515-5151 in confidence.

*HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY TO MY BIRTH MOTHER!*  
Katherine Anne S. born October 15/73.  
I'd love to hear from you. Please call 403-555-1111 (collect).

**ANDERSON**, Jean Marie born Feb. 20/55 at Hamilton wishes to hear from birth mother (born 1936, UK) or brother "John" (also adopted) born December 1953. Please write Pam, PO Box 123, Stn. "G" Winnipeg MA., C1C 1C1

## BIRTH/DEATH/MARRIAGE INDICES

Outside major cities, many communities maintain an index to births, deaths, and marriages with respect to local families (e.g., Sarnia, Port Colborne, etc.). Check with the main community library in the town where you are searching to see if these are available.

Information can be obtained by checking under the surname in appropriate years for an announcement. Often the index listing will refer to an announcement in the local newspaper.

## DIRECTORIES/LISTS

### High School/University Yearbooks (Student Directories)

Many of these directories are available at the individual schools; check with the school librarian first. Check too with the local board of education and public libraries in smaller places. If no one seems to know where what you need is, call the publisher!

If you have done your homework, you may have a good idea of what part of the town/city your family lived in, and this can help you figure out which schools to check with first.

Universities specialize. Go back to your history and look for clues as to people's areas of interest. Remember, there is a limit to the number of places a person could have studied to become a doctor, teacher, lawyer, etc., at any given time. For example:

#### **Medicine is offered at:**

*University of Toronto, Queen's (Kingston), McMaster (Hamilton), but NOT at the Universities of Guelph, Waterloo, Windsor, etc.*

#### **Law is offered at:**

*University of Toronto (Osgoode), York (Toronto), Western University (London),*

but NOT at McMaster, U. Waterloo, or Laurier, etc.

**Pharmacology** is ONLY offered at the University of Toronto

**Optometry** is offered at Wilfred Laurier (formerly "Waterloo Lutheran U.")

**Agricultural Studies and Veterinary Science** are a specialty at U. Guelph

**Journalism** is a specialty at Carleton (Ottawa) and Ryerson (Toronto)

While you are looking for relatives in yearbooks, make note of potential classmates, especially those who had unusual surnames (they will be the easiest to trace if you have to).

## Professional Directories

Ask at the library for directories of members of professional associations. For example:

*The Canadian Medical Index is published annually. It lists every physician in the country, his/her date/place of graduation (which can help pinpoint age), field of specialty, address, and the name of the hospital with which the doctor is affiliated.*

Old directories are also available at the Metro Toronto Reference Library and at some public and university libraries.

Similar directories exist for lawyers, professional engineers, etc.

In addition, one can call a professional association (e.g., The College of Physicians & Surgeons, The Law Society of Upper Canada, etc.) and ask for the membership office. Tell staff the name of the person you seek, and they will tell you if (s)he is registered and their business address. They may be able to tell you how and where to access their old directories, too.

## Teachers

Yearbooks naming Ontario teachers beginning in the 1950's are available at the library of the *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* (Bedford Road/Bloor Street in Toronto) and at the National Archives in Ottawa. Commonly referred to as "Blue Books", these list all Ontario teachers by board of education annually, until the early 1970's.

Until the 1970's, many teachers in Ontario earned their "senior matriculation" (i.e., grade 13/OAC's) and then went to "normal schools" (later called "teacher's colleges") rather than to universities to earn a teaching certificate. Research which "normal school" or "teacher's college" (the Ministry of Education or a local library can help narrow it down, since there weren't many of these institutions) a person may have attended at a given time. This can help give geographical direction to your search.

## Nurses

Until the 1970's most nurses in Ontario graduated from a hospital. Some hospitals have yearbooks and even class photos. Nursing programs were offered at few universities: Western (London), U of Toronto and Queen's (Kingston), or community colleges until recently.

The College of Nurses *may* forward a letter on your behalf to a registered member, once you have a full name. They may even be able to cross-reference from a maiden name, but they won't give out updated information such as a married name.

If you're certain you are looking for a nurse, once you have a full name write a brief covering

letter to the College Registrar. Ask them to forward an enclosed, sealed, personal, and confidential communication to this person whom you believe is a member. Include an extra stamp, and ask that the sealed envelope be returned to you intact if it cannot be forwarded.

Then write a brief letter (see “contact letters”) and seal it, marking it “**PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL**” and enclose it with your covering letter.

## **Employment/Union Records**

A carefully worded letter to the head of Human Resources at a company where you **know** a birth relative once worked can be helpful (see “City Directories”). Call and get the person’s name and title, and address a personal letter to the individual. State your objective plainly (i.e., “I’m trying to get in touch with a distant relative”), but without going into the real reason you want to find this person.

Give any specific information you do know (e.g., “I know Jane lived at 123 Sesame Street in 1973 when she worked for your firm”). Ask if it would be possible to put a small notice in the company newsletter, or if the company still has a record of the person’s whereabouts (e.g., from pension records, etc.) to forward a letter on your behalf.

Many places of employment are union affiliated and it is worth pursuing this avenue. Unions will often give out information on their members more readily than employers will. If the company still exists, simply call and ask which union and which local represents their workers. Then, call the union office and ask for the name of the secretary. Send him/ her a letter as indicated above.

**Note:** *When asking employers or unions for help, the less you ask for and the easier you are willing to make it for them to cooperate, the better off you are. Remember, they are doing you a favor. Send self-addressed stamped envelopes. Invite them to call you collect if necessary. Do not be surprised that rather than opening a file and typing a letter, you just get a quick call from somebody telling you what you really want to know.*

## **Voters’ Lists**

Municipal voters' lists are archived at city/town halls [in Toronto, you can access these at the Municipal Library, 55 John Street (Metro Hall)]. The older the lists, the more information they will contain. Current lists are not useful unless you have a street address to work with.

Federal electoral lists are organized province by province, riding by riding, and poll by poll (i.e., polling station). Federal elections were held in 1935, '40, '45, '53, '57, '58, '62, '63, '65, '68, '72, '74, '84, '88 and '93. The only place where you can access these is The National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa.

Rural listings are alphabetical, while in towns and cities the list is compiled street by street.

## **School Support Lists**

Every household, regardless of whether occupants rent or own, must designate whether their property taxes (paid by themselves or their landlord) will go to support the public or the separate (i.e., Catholic) school board in the city/town where they reside. School support

directories are available at city/town halls.

## **Property Tax Records And The Ontario Land Registry Office**

If you want to know anything about the ownership history of a specific address, including a good deal of personal information about the owner(s) him/her self, you're in luck. All of this is public information and can be accessed at the Land Registry Office, 20 Dundas St. W. (near Bay, "The Atrium" in Toronto).

Be prepared to spend a day there, but it is sure to be "time well spent." N.B. Some land registry records are also available at the Archives of Ontario (77 Grenville St. near College & Bay in Toronto)

## **Family Histories**

You are not the only one interested in genealogy. Almost every family has a "great aunt Betsy" who has compiled the family tree at one time or another.

Check at the main branch of the local library in the area where your search seems to centre and ask about holdings of family histories within their system. More often than not, such histories are self-published, and especially in small places, a copy was donated to the local library.

Some places have local museums. Do not be deterred just because they are called that, as these often hold genealogies on families who are/were prominent in that area.

The Ontario genealogical societies and Ontario archives also have many such histories. You will not know unless you ask (see below).

## **The Ontario Genealogical Society**

If you have a surname (or surnames) to work with, it may be worthwhile to join the local branch of the OGS in the area where your search centres. The society holds a fantastic amount of genealogical research material for use by members. Call the main branch in Toronto at (416) 489-0734 for a list of existing branches and an application form.

Note: All other provinces also have such societies; the OGS can help you get in touch with similar organizations outside Ontario, too. **REMEMBER: Genealogy is *EXACTLY* what you are doing!**

## **Church Archives**

If you know what religion a family was/is, you might be able to get some information from churches and church archives. Getting in to see the marriage and baptism records will be helpful, but whether this is allowed depends on the policies of the individual church, and the co-operation of the personnel involved. It is recommended that you telephone ahead to find out when staff will be available to help you.

Most churches keep their weekly services calendars, which may contain such information. Some publish congregational yearbooks. Minutes of meetings and newsletters may also be available. It may be worth looking into if you are stuck in your search, and you know that a family were religious (especially if you get such clues as "mother sang in the choir" from the

background information)..

Several religious denominations have collected various church records (birth, baptism, dedication, confirmation, marriage and death records) in one central archive. Some archives also offer information on clergypersons. Church publications often held in these archives include informative obituaries.

Some of the libraries also have some records for parishes in their area. Keep in mind that most churches have national newsletters and a discreetly worded advertisement might be allowed.

**Note:** *Remember, too, religion and ethnicity are often closely related. "Protestant" can mean several different things, but German families are often Lutheran while Scottish people are generally Presbyterian and the English usually Anglican.....*

## **DENOMINATIONS:**

### **ANGLICAN:Anglican Church of Canada**

General Synod Archives  
600 Jarvis Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2J6  
Telephone: (416) 924-9192

### **BAPTIST:Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec**

Canadian Baptist Archives  
McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4K1  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140

### **CHURCH OF LATTER DAY SAINTS (L.D.S.):**

See Mormon

### **JEWISH:Toronto Jewish Congress/Canadian Jewish Congress**

4600 Bathurst Street, Willowdale, Ontario M2R 3V2  
Telephone: (416) 635-2883

### **LUTHERAN:Lutheran Church in America**

Eastern Canada Synod Archives  
The Library, Sir Wilfred Laurier University  
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3C5  
Telephone: (519) 884-1970

### **MENNONITE:Mennonite Archives of Ontario**

Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6  
Telephone: (519) 885-0220

### **METHODIST: See UNITED CHURCH**

### **MORMON:Family History Library**

Box 247, Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 4V3  
Telephone: (416) 621-4607

The Mormons have long collected and catalogued details about families all over the world (i.e., not only Mormons, but people of all faiths). Before you look at LDS records, you should know that most of the collection relates to families before 1900, and much the material concerns families in the US and abroad. Sometimes in search you have to go backwards before you can move forward.

Metro Reference Library (Yonge & Bloor, Toronto) and the North York main public library (North York Centre Station on the Yonge subway line) have the most comprehensive L.D.S. census available on CD-ROM. Call ahead since you may need an appointment to use this resource. Ask the librarian to show you how to use these incredible records.

The L.D.S. has many other branch libraries throughout Canada and the United States. They are genealogy experts and have gathered an amazing collection of information. Telephone first, because their library hours are unusual.

**PRESBYTERIAN:** (See also UNITED CHURCH)  
**Presbyterian Church in Canada, Archives**  
59 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2E6  
Telephone: (416) 595-1277

**QUAKER:Religious Society of Friends**  
Friends House Library  
60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1C7  
Telephone: (416) 921-0368

**ROMAN CATHOLIC:Archdiocese of Toronto Archives**  
355 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1Z8  
Telephone: (416) 977-1500  
**Roman Catholic Information Center**  
830 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario M5R EG1  
Telephone: (416) 534-2326

**UNITED CHURCH:**(made up of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches)  
**Central Archives**  
Victoria University  
73 Queen's Park Crescent East, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K7  
Telephone: (416) 585-4563

## **SENIOR CITIZENS**

Senior citizens can be a big help during search. Keep in mind that many hold old fashioned values and may not agree with your objectives. Remember that it is always considered honorable to be researching one's family tree, and this is precisely what you are doing! Just do not mention the word "adoption."

Many seniors will be glad to have some company and will be able to tell you a good deal about former neighbors. Using the street guide in the City Directories try to trace someone who used to live near the family you are researching.

If you think an older person lives in a nursing home or seniors building, consult the "Blue Book: A Guide to Community Resources" (available at most libraries, community centers, and information centers in malls) for a list of local retirement homes and services.

## **LEGION HALLS**

Many people who served with the Armed Forces, or whose parents did, belong to a local legion. Most communities have at least one legion hall; some chapters of the legion are ethnically specific (i.e., the Ukranian Legion, etc.).

Anybody can join a legion as an "associate member" (i.e. even if your dad wasn't in the army!) and if you belong to one, you have "privileges" at any other chapter. You can visit the local legion hall in the area where you are searching, have a pint, and find *lots* of older people, most of whom are *very willing* to talk (read: "gossip") about old times...

If you think the family you are researching may have been affiliated with the legion, by all means, try this!

## **THE “FRIENDLY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE”**

Especially in smaller areas, staff at the Chamber of Commerce can be very helpful. Often, they know just about everybody around, especially if you are looking for somebody who had a business. Even without a name, it is often possible to get information about who local merchants were back when, or who is still in town who would be about the same age as the person you seek and likely went to high school with him/her. Searches *have* been completed using “clues” like “...he was a butcher,” so look at your background history and see what’s really there!

## **ASSOCIATION YEARBOOKS**

Many ratepayers' associations, such as “Muskoka Lakes”, produce yearbooks that list all members and associate members, the latter being the children and sometimes grandchildren of the property owners. If you are searching for clues in “cottage country,” call the local Chamber of Commerce (see above) and ask where such yearbooks might be accessible.

## **THE NORTH YORK LIBRARY GENEALOGY ROOM**

It would be impossible to list here the resources available at the North York Library (Yonge St. north of Sheppard, or the “City Centre” subway station on the Yonge line) which are useful to those in search. Visit this genealogy centre...you’ll be glad you did!



# **Chapter 5**

## **Initiating Contact**



# 5

## INITIATING CONTACT

*“Does the road wind uphill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.  
Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?  
From morning to night, my friend...  
Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?  
Of labour you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?  
Yea, beds for all who come.”*

[Rossetti]

### “FISHING FOR INFORMATION” – THE ‘GOLDEN RULES’ OF SEARCH

#### FISHING CALLS:

A “fishing call” is a direct inquiry to try to ascertain or verify personal information you have gathered from research sources. It is a “one shot” deal, so be extremely careful and ensure that you are as well prepared as possible.

#### HOMework FIRST, QUESTIONS LATER!

Remember that although the “fishing call” can be a very useful tool to gather information you need to further your search, many people guard their privacy and can be suspicious of unknown callers.

Construct your story carefully. The more detailed information you have about the school, company, neighborhood, etc., you are going to use when you make your fishing call, the more credible your story will sound. And the more likely you’ll be to gain information.

There are basically two types of fishing calls:

- Calling a former neighbor, roommate, employer/coworker (i.e., someone who once knew the birth mother/family, but likely doesn’t have contact with her/them any more);
- Calling someone whom you have determined to be a birth/adoptive relative, former spouse or close friend.

Obviously, the closer you are the more careful you have to be. Be prepared for surprises. Type one can quickly turn out to be in fact type two, since you never know who may have kept in touch with who over the years. An old college roommate can easily still be a close friend. Remember, your paramount objective is to find and contact your birth mother while maintaining her confidentiality.

Using the factual information you have gathered, make up a plausible story and WRITE IT DOWN. Practice with a friend.

Timing is critical—do not call at dinner time, late at night or too early in the morning and try not to call elderly people between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m., as they may nap. Be sure to take time zone differences into account.

Never leave detailed messages on answering machines, but don't call repeatedly and hang up on the machine either. ("I was calling to speak with Mr. Jones, but I'll try again later").

*"You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try."*

[Beverly Sills]

A source of concern to birth relatives is that the adoptee may be unaware that (s)he is adopted. Once you are certain you have located him or her, it is possible to have someone conduct a "survey" call.

*"We can do no great things, only small things with great love."*

[Mother Theresa]

Such a call is best made by somebody who isn't emotionally involved. A few simple questions, based upon "proposed changes to adoption disclosure law" will usually determine whether someone seems to have any "personal" opinion on the rights of members of the adoption community.

## SAMPLE SURVEY CALL

Q. "My name is 'Mary' and I'm calling from 'National Social Policy Survey Services.' May I ask you a few questions about your thoughts on whether the government should allow adopted people to see their records? E.G.: Why do you think they should/should not have access to this information? What, if any, restrictions should be placed on access to adoption information?"

THE RESPONDENT WILL *PROBABLY* DISCLOSE that (s)he is an adoptee somewhere in the conversation, but if you really have to "fish"... "Do you know anyone who is adopted or gave up a child or adopted a child?" Does this influence your answers....?"

Throw in a couple of "statistical purposes" questions such as age group, marital status, occupation, etc. to give credence to the survey.

## SAMPLE "FISHING CALL" (to a former neighbour)

"May I please speak with Mr. or Mrs. Jones?"

"Mrs. Jones, my name is Carol Smith, and I'm wondering if you might be able to help me. My mother and father-in-law (distance yourself) are celebrating their \_\_\_\_th (DO THE MATH!) anniversary in a couple of months, and my sister-in-law and I are trying to locate people who were at their wedding."

"I've done a little research and it seems that the Brown family used to be neighbors of yours at 125 Sesame Street. Do you remember Jane? Do you have any idea where the Browns moved to? Do you know of anyone else in the neighborhood who might remember?"

Have "names" ready for your "parents-in-law" (including her maiden name), and "names" of attendants and some guests at the wedding (make 'em up!).

Pick a local church you can throw into the conversation if necessary. Mention that the anniversary party is a surprise, so you're reluctant to ask your mother-in-law too many questions.

If you know where "Jane" actually worked, you can mention that you *think* your mother-in-law worked with her at the "ABC Company", etc.

Mrs. Jones may not recall much, but may give you the name and phone number of the oldest neighbor on the block, or, she may have a daughter just Jane's age who can help.

Be extra polite, and try to leave your name and number, "in case Mrs. Jones remembers something later."

Take notes while you're talking, and write down as much of the conversation as you can recreate as soon as you get off the phone! Sometimes pauses and nuances speak louder than words, but don't get yourself all caught up in analyzing the way a person responds to such a phone call. If someone is rude, it probably means you disturbed them, *not* that they know exactly who you are and what you're up to and don't want to cooperate.

Fishing calls to relatives/close friends are more delicate. The premise is the same. Try to get information without revealing the real reason you want to contact "Jane" -- but you have to be much better prepared in terms of your background story. Think about what *your* brother might "buy" if he got such a call looking for you. Be ready to:

- ask the person you're calling to have "Jane" call you (if they are reluctant to give out information);
- or*
- Ask them if they will consider forwarding a confidential letter (or an "invitation to the anniversary party") for you (see Sample Contact Letter). This should then be sent in a sealed envelope, along with a covering letter thanking the person for sending it along. Include extra postage so they can mail it if necessary.

**If you are in doubt about making a fishing call, consult with your group leader or search buddy before going ahead.**

**Note:** Fishing calls to a known birth relative are to be considered the **LAST ITEM ON YOUR SEARCH AGENDA BEFORE ACTUAL CONTACT.**

Fishing calls to a known birth relative should **NEVER BE MADE ON SUNDAYS OR HOLIDAYS**, or between December 15th and January 2nd ... because of holiday company, difficulty of a private talk, etc.

## FAMILY TREE INQUIRY LETTER

Another tried and true method for gathering personal information once you've done your research using public records is the family tree inquiry letter:

Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request. This will make it easier for the person you are asking to fill in your chart, and by paying for it, no expenses will come out of their pocket. They will feel more obligated to answer your questionnaire.

### SAMPLE FAMILY TREE INQUIRY LETTER

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Address  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

I am in the process of tracing my husband's/wife's family tree and hope that you can offer some assistance. I have discovered a line of his/her family tree shares your surname.

*You may wish to say that you are planning to give the completed family tree as a birthday present, which lets the people you are writing to know that you have a time limit. By saying that you are doing the family tree for someone else, you can then plead ignorance if you are asked questions that you do not know the answer to.*

I would greatly appreciate if you could supply me with the information outlined on the attached page regarding your family.

Should you have any comments or notes to add, please use the back of the page. If my research shows that our families are related, I would be happy to supply you with a copy of my completed project.

I assure you that this information will be held in strict confidence and used only for genealogical purposes.

If you know of anyone in the \_\_\_\_\_ family who has worked on the family tree, please ask them to get in touch with me; I am happy to accept collect calls.

Thank you in advance for your help with my project.

Sincerely,

c.c. file

## SAMPLE FAMILY TREE

Full (Maiden) Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year & Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Parents

Their Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Place of Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupations: \_\_\_\_\_

If deceased, the date(s) of death and place(s) of burial:

Mother: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Father: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings: Name 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Name, Date, and Place of Your Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse's Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Children: Name 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Your Grandparents:

Their Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Place of Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupations: \_\_\_\_\_

Children: (Your aunts and uncles)

Name 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Please check here  if you would like a copy of the final tree when it is finished.

## ADVERTISING

(See also Newspapers chapter 4)

*"One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done."*

[Marie Curie]

Advertising should be your **last resort!**

While someone *may* recognize something about you from your ad, it's also possible that you will alert people to the fact that you are searching. Friends/relatives you may wish to call later may be more circumspect if they disagree with what you're doing. They may attempt to "protect" the family by refusing to cooperate, giving incorrect information, or putting themselves between you and your objective.

### The Toronto Star

The "HAVE YOUR SAY" page in the Sunday Star is an excellent way to get free advertising. Unfortunately, they cannot publish every letter submitted. Write a brief letter about who you are searching for and include birth information.

Try to make it a human interest story -- "break the editor's heart" and keep sending your letter in until she finally chooses it. Be persistent!

Address your letters to: **Have Your Say, Sunday Star**  
1 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E6

### Have You Ever Wanted To Be On TV?

For a small donation (proceeds go to charity) you can say whatever you want to at "Speaker's Corner" (CITY-TV, Spadina & Queen in Toronto) or the similar CTV public comments' booth (Eaton Centre in Toronto).

Briefly tell whom you are seeking. Mention birth dates but not full names, (they're unlikely to use the piece if you do) and leave your telephone number with the station manager.

Ask that anyone with information that could help you call your group's number. Maybe your notice will air; matches have happened using this method.

(Some people, while they are there, give the government a good blast for trying to keep us from finding one another and making us languish on never ending waiting lists!)

### Blanket Classified Ads

Write to the appropriate company (see below) and they will place your ad in the rural newspapers they cover. Costs vary. Keep your ad brief and be discreet.

E.g. "Born John Henry Smith, Oct. 2/65 at Ottawa Civic and adopted? Birth mom, Ann -- still thinking of you.  
Call Parent Finders 515-555-1515."

## **Rural Community Newspapers**

### **Association of Quebec Regional English Media**

MacDonald College, 21-111 Lakeshore Rd.  
PO Box 195, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec H9X 2V9  
Telephone: (514) 398-7706

### **Ontario Community Newspapers Association**

1184 Speers Road  
PO Box 451, Oakville, Ontario L6J 5A8  
Telephone: (905) 894-0184

### **Manitoba Community Newspaper Association**

Suite 310, 275 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B3  
Telephone: (204) 947-1691 Facsimile: (204) 947-1919

### **Saskatchewan Weekly Newspaper Association**

4 - 2155 Airport Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S0K 2A0  
Telephone: (306) 682-3408 Facsimile: (306) 683-2012

### **Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association**

360-4445 Calgary Trail South  
Edmonton, Alberta T6H 5R7  
Telephone: (403) 434-8746 Facsimile: (403) 438-8356

### **British Columbia and Yukon Community Newspapers Association**

Suite 230, 1380 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia V6Z 2B7  
Telephone: (604) 669-9222 Facsimile: (604) 684-4713

#### **IN MEMORIAM**

*The following section is dedicated to the memory of Joan Marilyn Hall Schuhmacher, born Kathleen Ann Burton-Stevens, February 18, 1933 at Toronto.*

*Joan became a member of Parent Finders Incorporated in 1977 and was reunited in 1978.*

*She was a search buddy to many, many people, and originated the following contact scripts, which have been widely and successfully used to facilitate many reunions.*

*Joan passed away on March 5, 1997. She will be missed.*

## CONTACT METHODS

Birth relatives -- especially birth parents -- and adult adoptees should be contacted directly wherever possible. That is, refrain from explaining the real reason for your search to neighbours, business colleagues, friends, adoptive parents or *anybody* besides the person you're seeking.

*"Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity."*  
[Oprah Winfrey]

Discretion and respect for others' personal privacy are paramount. If the situation were reversed, you would want to be approached rather than have the other party calling your parents, spouse, friend or co-worker....

There are only a couple of exceptions to this rule. A third party should only be taken into your confidence to complete your search if a) you have determined that the party you wish to contact is deceased, or b) if after *extensive efforts* you have no other alternative.

Some people advocate using an intermediary, particularly where the contact is to be made to the adoptee, while others maintain that contact should come from the person who is searching. Circumstances can bear on how you decide to proceed (i.e., the person's age, apparent living arrangements, etc.) but in the final analysis, an informed decision is best made by *you*. Think it through; consider the options and what seems as if it will work best *for you*.

Remember, you know you've been searching; you've had time to consider all the "what if's" carefully during the process. The person you have found may be quite overwhelmed, and may need time to consider the opportunity you're presenting.

*And that is exactly what you are doing when you initiate contact: creating an opportunity to know one another which has, until now, been denied you both!*

It has been demonstrated that the best intermediary is a member of the adoption community who has him/her self been reunited and has had experience in facilitating contact.

Even today, there are adoptees who are unaware of their status. Some of the most successful contacts to adoptees are facilitated through another, reunited adoptee, or by a birth sibling. Somehow, this is less threatening to adopted people than direct contact from a birth parent can be perceived.

Please remember to proceed cautiously when first approaching a birth parent, especially a birth mother. The instant she catches on to the real reason for the letter or call she is likely to feel catapulted in a heartbeat back to the frightened young woman she was "once upon a time".

None of this means that contact will not be welcomed. Most often, people are delighted once they recover from the initial shock. Tread carefully, respectfully and with sensitivity...listen to that "small, still voice," put yourself in the other person's shoes and you'll "know" in your heart and your head how best to proceed.

*"Tact is, after all, a kind of mindreading."*  
[Sarah Orne Jewett]

## SAMPLE CONTACT SCRIPTS

### By Telephone (adoptee to birth mother)

Ascertain that you are speaking with the right person:

*"May I please speak to Mrs. **Jane** Jones?"*

(\*more than one person in a family may have the same given name; a woman and her mother-in-law or sister-in-law may both be "Mrs. Somebody.")

Strive for privacy:

*"Mrs. Jones, I need to speak to you about a very confidential matter. Are you free to talk for a few minutes?...I really need to know that you have some privacy before I tell you anything about why I'm calling...."*

If you're nervous, and in all likelihood you will be, *say so*. Don't dwell on it, just tell her that this call is extremely important to you and ask her to forgive your nervousness. This can serve to both dispel some of your apprehension and to let her know that you are sincere and sensitive about what you have to say.

Have your script **prepared**, be **non-threatening** and **non-intrusive**:

*"Well, as I said, this concerns a very private matter. I am an adoptee, and I was born on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) in \_\_\_\_\_ (city). **My birth mother** named me \_\_\_\_\_ (full birth name)"*

Speak **slowly and calmly**. Refer to your birth mother in the third person (she/her) until you get the 'okay' from her (see composite case study)

*"I have been discreetly searching for some information about my origins/background. Until now, I have told nobody of the real reason for my research, and I am hoping that you will be able to help me complete my search."*

Be prepared to cite information from your non-identifying profile, as well as give details about the public records you have used to further your search. If you made a "fishing call" to a friend or relative, admit this, but reassure her that you used a ruse. Tell her the story you invented to protect her privacy. Apologize for being untruthful, but explain why you found it necessary to tell a "white lie" for this purpose.

Give time for reality to set in:

*"Mrs. Jones, I realize what a painful and difficult decision my birth mother made with my best interests in mind. I have no desire to disrupt anyone's life, but I do need to know more about myself and my background".*

If she seems reluctant, reinforce that you have gone to great lengths to maintain the confidentiality of everyone involved. Mention that you have the support of your family (this could mean your spouse/partner, children or members of your support group, even if you haven't told your folks or they aren't in fact supportive). The biggest fear of many birth mothers is that they feel they don't have any right to "infringe" on what they may consider the adoptive parents' "territory."

***A few general things to keep in mind here are:***

⇒ Do **not** tell the individual that you are calling *anything* negative about your adoptive placement/family [remember what your mom taught you: "...if you can't say anything nice..."]. Birth mothers especially have lived in fear for years that something terrible may have happened to you, and at this moment, the fact that you're calling is more than enough for her to deal with.

⇒ Do not tell her that you are glad your birth mother gave you up. You can say you understand why she had to do this, or that you can see why it was the right decision under the circumstances at that time. Don't feed her guilt, or the feelings of inadequacy as a mother, as others probably did when she was advised to give you up.

⇒ Do **not** ask about the birth father at this time. If she brings it up, remember that you've been looking for *her*. Tell her so, and that you'd rather talk about him later. Delight in the fact that you've found her!

⇒ Be prepared to explain how you came to be calling this person or how you found them.

⇒ If the conversation lags, or if you have the feeling that this was not a good time after all:

*"Mrs. Jones, I hope my call hasn't upset you. You probably need some time to think about this. Perhaps you would take my name and number and call me (collect) another time."*

If you haven't heard anything back in a week or so, write a short, pleasant, handwritten note. For example:

"Dear Mrs. Jones,

I really enjoyed talking with you for a few minutes the other evening about my family tree. I realized after I hung up that I forgot to give you my full name and address, in case you would prefer to write to me. (Include this as well as your phone numbers, in the event that she didn't actually take this information down or has lost it.) I'd be happy to hear from you, and do hope you'll get in touch soon. Yours....."

Such a letter shows that you are still committed to maintaining her confidentiality--if anyone else in her household should read it, she is "covered." It also makes clear that she didn't dream your call, and that you haven't "given up."

If you are certain your research is correct and the person you've called denies any knowledge of what you're trying to tell her:

*“Mrs. Jones, I am so disappointed. I’ve been so careful and discreet. I really have no intention of disrupting anybody’s life, but I would be grateful if you’d give this some thought and call me back if you can think of anything which could help me. I’ve really enjoyed talking to you and I appreciate your time.”*

Offer your number and let her know she can call any time, collect if necessary.

Then sit right down and write that pleasant little note, as above, and don’t forget to include your full name, address, phone number and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

**Sample Contact Letter** (from an adoptee)

You may decide to send your letter by registered mail, or by courier to ensure delivery. Remember that such a delivery draws attention to itself. Give some thought to addressing it to the individual at their place of business if you know it.

Date Your Address  
Phone Number

**Personal & Confidential**

Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

I am writing to you about a very personal matter. I trust that you will keep this strictly confidential.

I am an adoptee. I was born on \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ and my birth mother named me \_\_\_\_\_.

I have been discreetly searching for some information about myself and my origins, using public records.

I am fully aware of what a painful and difficult decision my mother made, and have no desire to disrupt anyone's life. However, I do have a need to know more about my birth family.

*Insert updated information at this point. For example:*

*"I was raised in Toronto and have one younger adopted brother. I have an undergraduate degree and work for a large insurance company. I have been married for twelve years. My husband, a teacher, and I have two young sons. My family is very supportive of me in my search."*

**Don't give too much information here, and don't send photographs -- you could just satisfy the other person's needs to know about you. Again, don't say anything negative about your adoption.**

If you have any information that could help me to complete my search, I hope that you will find it in your heart to get in touch with me. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope, or feel free to call me (collect), in confidence, at your convenience.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours truly,

cc file

**Don't forget to include your phone number(s) and the envelope. Intermediaries may use the same 'formula' for either a phone call or letter. Call/write "on behalf of a friend".**

A beautifully simple method of sending a discreet message to your birth mother was related by a member of "Jigsaw," a search group in the UK. Once he'd done all the research and was *certain* he knew who she was and where she lived, he sent his birth mother a "change of address" card (available at any postal outlet) which read:

*"Peter Allan Connaught (his birth name)  
formerly of 123 Sesame Street, London (her address at the time he was born)  
has now moved to 234 Cherry Lane, Nottingham (his current address);  
Please, do get in touch."*

Clear, non-threatening, elegant even, this didn't draw attention to itself the way a letter, especially a registered letter might have....

### **ESPECIALLY FOR BIRTH RELATIVES....**

It is generally recommended that birth relatives have an intermediary make the first contact to the adoptee. It is *highly* recommended that that intermediary be a reunited adoptee.

Like birth relatives, adoptees should always be contacted discreetly and as directly as possible. It is *never* a good idea to contact the adoptive parents of an adult adoptee. If the adoptee is not aware of adoption, the adoptive parents are the last people who you can expect to mediate a reunion.... Further, it's always possible that an adoptive family has already had some previous experience of reunion which you wouldn't want to colour this situation.

Many adoptees believe that the choice about reunion should be theirs, so contact must be initiated with great care. Please see also the preceding sample regarding making contact with a birth mother.

### **By Telephone (on behalf of a birth relative)**

**Ascertain that you are speaking with the right person:**

*"May I please speak to **Sylvia** Smith?"*

**Strive for privacy:**

*"Ms. Smith, my name is Susan Green, and I'm calling on behalf of my friend, Jane, about a very confidential matter. Are you free to talk for a few minutes?"*

Have your script **prepared**, try to be as **non-threatening** and **non-intrusive** as possible:

*"Well, as I said, this is about something very private. My friend, Jane, gave a child up for adoption many years ago. She has been discreetly searching for some information about her birth daughter, because she needs to reassure herself that she is well and happy."*

Speak **slowly and calmly** and **give time** for reality to set in.

*“Ms. Smith, Jane is really a lovely woman and she has no desire to disrupt anyone’s life. Jane’s daughter was born on \_\_\_\_\_(date) in \_\_\_\_\_(city), and she named her \_\_\_\_\_ (birth name). I hope you realize that Jane had no choice but to give her child up; she was young and single and in 19\_\_ things were very different. Jane has never forgotten her birth daughter; we are hoping that you might be able to help Jane complete her search...”*

**Don’t push:**

*Ms. Smith, I know this may have come as quite a shock to you. You probably need some time to think. Do you have anyone you can talk to about this? Please take my name and number down so you can call me back when you’ve had a chance to digest this a bit.”*

*“Ms. Smith, I’ll tell Jane we talked. Is there anything you’d like me to pass along, or anything else you want to know right now?”*

*“You can’t be brave if you’ve only had wonderful things happen to you.” [Mary Tyler Moore]*

## **Siblings**

The ‘formula’ is much the same for a sibling to sibling reunion call. However, remember that most adoptees know they have birth parents, but may be unaware that they have siblings, and may, therefore, have trouble believing this at first.

**Sample Contact Letter (from a birth sibling)**

Personal & Confidential

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_(full name) and I am writing to you about a very private matter.

For several months/years, I have been searching for some information about my (half) brother/sister who was given up for adoption before I was born.

My birth brother/sister was born on \_\_\_\_\_(date) in \_\_\_\_\_ (city), and his/her name at birth was \_\_\_\_\_(birth name).

In 19\_\_, my mom was just \_\_\_\_ years old and single. She had no choice but to give her baby up for adoption.

*Insert brief, updated information at this point, especially things which may be hereditary.. For example:*

- *"I am a student at Centennial College where I study interior design."*
- *I'm \_\_\_\_ years old, single, and live with my boyfriend. I have long, wavy brown hair, green eyes, am 5'6" tall, and weigh about 130 pounds.*
- *"I love to read, especially mysteries, play tennis, and make many of my own clothes."*
- *"I have a younger brother/sister, but have always wanted a sister/brother..."*

I don't want to disrupt anyone's life, but am anxious to have a chance to get to know my birth brother/sister. I really hope you'll be able to help me complete my search.

I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope, so that you may write to me if you wish, or you may feel free to call (collect) at any time.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours truly,

*c.c. file*



## **Chapter 6**

### **Some Good Advice**



# 6

## SOME GOOD ADVICE

*“Our genetics come to us prepackaged and our environment surrounds us without permission.  
But if this were all that made us unique, people would be like snowflakes:  
Each different but each cold and changed only by the world into which each falls.  
Choice makes us an active participant in changing what has been into what can be.....  
We are never really lost; we simply feel lost  
because we have rejected so many pieces of ourselves.”*  
[Elizabeth Baker, *Who Am I*]

For those of us whose lives have been touched by adoption, there will be periods in our lives when issues related to this lifelong process will arise. Because intimate relationships are at the core of adoption, it is not surprising that relational milestones and life crises such as marriage, separation, divorce, birth, reunion, illness and death bring our adoption-related issues to the fore.

At such times, we may feel confused, frightened, lost, alone, and overwhelmed by deep, intense feelings. To find our way in the midst of such personal turmoil, we need informed support and guidance in our struggle to make sense of the many emotions, thoughts, experiences and decisions involved. We need to know that what we are going through is shared by others affected by adoption, that we are not crazy, and that healing is possible.

Family, close friends and support groups can be wonderful resources for us, but there are times when we can benefit from the objectivity of a **trained therapist** who has no personal stake in our very complex, multifaceted journey. A good therapist will provide a safe and comfortable environment in which we can explore our feelings, thoughts and experience in complete confidentiality. With a good therapist, we will feel heard, seen, understood, accepted and validated. **It is a sign of strength to reach out for this kind of support.**

Whether you're an **adoptee** troubled by pangs of disloyalty as you anxiously contemplate undertaking a search, a **birth mother** feeling torn between your present day family and a secret daughter who is your mirror image, or an **adoptive parent** feeling betrayed and threatened by your adult child's preoccupation with an extended birth family, the task of finding an adoption-sensitive professional can seem daunting, especially if you've never before reached out for this kind of help and are unfamiliar with the territory.

An obvious place to start is with your own circle of family, friends and associates. If you are comfortable asking someone you know who has seen a therapist, you might get a lead or at least speak to their therapist for possible references.

Your group's facilitator, local Children's Aid Societies and Family Service agencies have names of therapists who deal with adoption-related issues. The Ontario Society of Psychotherapists, The College of Social Work, The Ontario Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and The College of Psychologists of Ontario have directories of therapists from which you may obtain referrals.

*Therapists in the private sector charge a fee for service and many have a sliding scale to match your financial resources. Fees can range anywhere from \$35 to \$90 an hour, with psychologists usually charging the highest fees of up to \$150 an hour. Most therapy sessions are an hour in length.*

When looking for a therapist, keep in mind that you are a consumer and that, as such, you have the right to ask questions to help you determine whether a therapist is the right one for you, just as you would check out any other professional before entering a working relationship with them.

You should ask about a therapist's professional qualifications, including their academic background, training, credentials and experience working with adoption issues. You should also ask about their professional affiliations; is (s)he a member of The College of Certified Social Workers, The Ontario Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, The Ontario Society of Psychotherapists, or The College of Psychologists of Ontario? Because virtually anyone can hang out a shingle claiming to be a "therapist," it is important to determine for yourself that an individual is indeed truly qualified to help you.

*It is critical that you find a therapist who acknowledges that adoption IS an issue, and a profound one at that. Unfortunately, there are some professionals who dismiss adoption as having little significance in our lives. Those of us who have experienced adoption can attest to its powerful impact on one's sense of self, sense of trust, connections with others, sexuality, intimacy and feelings of shame.*

We also know that at the heart of adoption is profound loss, which we all need permission, space, time and support to grieve at different levels throughout our lives. It is imperative that a therapist recognize and validate these themes. It is also crucial that a therapist be at home with the expression of deep, intense feelings such as pain, sorrow, anger, rage and fear.

Some **adoption-sensitive therapists** have a personal experience of adoption which informs their professional work. Some people choose to see a therapist whose experience parallels their own, for example a birthmother seeing a therapist who is a birthmother, or an adoptee in search seeing a therapist who is a reunited adoptee.

Others choose to see a therapist whose position is different from their own. Whatever choice you make, it is important that your therapist has done his/her own work around *their own* adoption-related issues so that these don't interfere with *your* process.

For example, a therapist who hasn't faced her own abandonment issues as an adoptee will be unable to provide solid support for you as you confront yours, but if she has worked through these issues in her life, she will be a great asset to you. A therapist who, as a reunited birthmother, has never acknowledged her sexual feelings towards her adult son, will impede your process of exploring the sexual feelings you may be experiencing in your reunion relationship.

Conversely, if she has confronted and explored her own feelings of attraction, she will be in a more solid position to help diffuse your shame about such feelings, to understand and put them in perspective. A therapist's personal experience of adoption will be an asset to you if it has been consciously worked through but it will be a serious liability if it has not.

*It is every therapist's responsibility to have in-depth knowledge of their own issues and to be actively engaged in an ongoing process of self awareness and discovery. A good therapist knows when a client has triggered personal issues and takes steps to address them on their own time. Trust your instincts if you sense a therapist's "stuff" might get in your way.*

There are, of course, adoption-sensitive therapists who have no personal experience of adoption, but are very attuned to the issues involved and have empathy for those who struggle with them. There are also therapists who want to be adoption-sensitive and are open and eager to developing a greater understanding of adoption-related issues. You could share this handbook with a therapist who wants to learn more about adoption issues as well as other literature you've found helpful in clearly articulating these.

A short but informative outline of issues for all members of the triad is provided in the article, "The Seven Core Issues of Adoption" (ask your group leader for a copy). This is good reading for anyone wanting to understand how adoption affects us, and would be useful to a therapist who wants to become more familiar with resultant difficulties.

It is a matter of personal preference what importance you place on a therapist knowing from personal experience what you're going through or being part of the triad. Some people find it easier to bond with someone who's "been there", while for others, this is not a top priority.

Sometimes finding the right fit with a therapist requires a consultation with several practitioners. While this involves time, energy and expense, it is worth your while in order to ensure that you are entrusting yourself to someone who is competent, trustworthy and compassionate. Trust your intuition about a therapist and go with your gut feeling. You'll know when you've found the right one for you.

**Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a "quick fix", that the work of therapy is painful and difficult at times and that patience and perseverance are required in any healing process. Issues other than those we are immediately focused on often emerge as well. A good therapist can help you to gradually integrate your experience of adoption into your sense of self and the context of your whole life.**

With a good therapist, movement towards healing and wholeness is possible. Once you've found such a person, be sure to let your group facilitator know who (s)he is and how to get in touch with him/her, so that others who seek a referral to an adoption sensitive therapist might benefit from additions to the network directory.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Reunion and After**



# 7

## REUNION...AND AFTER

*"You have to accept whatever comes  
and the only important thing  
is that you meet it with courage  
and with the best you have to give."*

[Eleanor Roosevelt]

Reunions differ greatly, but following are some guidelines that have been developed over the years for how best to handle this crucial meeting.

Some feel first meetings between adopted persons and their birth relative(s) should be held in a neutral place, rather than in one party's home. This allows people to meet each other on equal footing, and to have equal control over the course and duration of the meeting.

The first encounter can be emotionally draining, and those involved often express a need to step back from the situation and assess the deluge of feelings and new information.

*"I went through every emotion from fear to elation, profound sadness to joy...in fact, I think I discovered some new emotions...."*

[Kara, reunited adoptee]

On the other hand, many reunions have proceeded smoothly when an extended visit is planned at someone's home. This can be the most practical thing to do if you are separated by great distance; try it only **after** you have developed a rapport via telephone and exchange of letters, cards, tapes, photos, etc.

Treat your first meeting as a milestone in your relationship. Be sure to exercise respect for the other person as well as discretion. Resist the temptation to bring your spouse, friend, or support person, unless the person you will be meeting indicates a strong desire to bring someone with him/her. This is between you and your mother/father/sibling/etc., and others quickly become third wheels at reunions.

*"Anyone can live with the truth, no one can live with lies, and only those who live a lie can appreciate the difference."*

[Josh Sawyer]

If your reunion was arranged through a government agency, do not let yourself be talked into having a social worker present, again, unless the other party to your "match" insists. In this situation, you may feel that three is definitely a crowd.

Many people wonder what in the world they will find to talk about with a virtual stranger. This is rarely an issue, but if it causes you anxiety before the big day, spend some time putting together a photo album that chronicles your life to give to the other person. Then, if you are at a loss for words at some point, you can talk about the pictures.

Most people report that they have too much to talk about, and end up in a marathon discussion that lasts into the small hours of the morning. This is especially true of reunions between siblings.

Some topics should be handled delicately. Adoptees should allow birth mothers time and opportunity to raise the subject of the birth father herself. There may be a great deal of pain and even loss of memory around the actual circumstances associated with your birth and relinquishment.

While the adopted person certainly has a right to know all of this information, it may be politic to leave this discussion for later. Take your cue from the birth mother. Delight in her and rejoice in the fact that you've finally found her!

Birth relatives should bear in mind that, while knowledge of the adoptee's whereabouts, health and welfare have been unknown to you for years, the adoptee has, in essence, been cut off from his/her entire heritage. It's just not the same thing....

Too often, adoptees search without stopping to consider the likelihood that they have birth siblings. Usually the focus is on finding the birth mother, at least at first. It is more common than you may imagine for birth parents to have married after a child has been given for adoption, so you may even find full siblings, which can be a wonderful, unexpected bonus.

Siblings often find they have a similar world outlook and many compatible interests. Although raised in different families and environs, they often form rewarding and lasting friendships.

*"My relationship with my brothers and sisters is amazing! They are the kind of people who, even if they weren't family would be my friends."  
[Mary Anne, reunited adoptee]*

Looking ahead through the first six months or so of any reunion, there is a typical pattern of events which bears exploring here. These phases are known as:

- **The "Honeymoon"**
- **The "Letdown"**
- **The "Showdown"**
- **Resolution**

Like search, and like adoption in general, reunion is a process, not a single event, fixed in time. It is wise to give yourself plenty of time to assimilate what you're learning about yourself and the other person, to grow, and to begin to heal. We can heal from the adoption experience, but we can't be "cured."

Re-read chapter one (Preparing to Search) and any books and articles you can get your hands on about reunion and its aftermath (see the recommended reading list in the appendices), and don't stop coming out to group meetings!

Although the phases outlined above don't necessarily occur in every reunion experience, they are common enough to be noted in literature on this subject.

The "**Honeymoon**," of course, is the period right after reunion when participants are euphoric. Genetic similarities, especially for adoptees so long denied such "touchstones" may lead to a great many unrealistic expectations. People talk about having a sense of knowing one another thoroughly, as if they were old friends, even though they've just met. This period may last for months, depending upon the amount of contact between the parties, and may be prolonged by subsequent reunions with other birth relatives.

As the exhilaration of this phase wanes, everyone begins to work out the terms of their relationship(s). This can come as a “**letdown**” ~ reality setting in ~ and/or a “**showdown**” depending on the personalities involved, whether expectations have been met or re-evaluated, and so on. This is the time when many people find it even more necessary to have the support of their peers than they did during search.

The “**showdown**” occurs when one person’s expectations come into conflict with those of the other(s). If you just can’t call her “mom” and she fully expects you to, this will need to be sorted out. Explain why you feel the way you do, and chances are she’ll understand.

The opportunity for a relationship is probably the most important thing to everybody...much too important to risk over such things. If he demands to be addressed by his adopted name and you want to call him by his birth name, talk it over, reminding him that you’ve thought of him this way for years.

Some other common, yet very resolvable issues of conflict which arise in reunion relationships are:

- ◆ Where to spend birthdays and holidays
- ◆ Whether and when to tell/meet the adoptive parents
- ◆ What to do when a birth sibling feels displaced (i.e. isn’t the oldest/only etc. anymore)
- ◆ How many children to tell people you have
- ◆ How to introduce each other
- ◆ The role of birth grandparents
- ◆ Who the birth father is
- ◆ Whether the adoptee will become “part of the family”

It is helpful to remember that “ordinary” families face similar situations all the time when couples marry, have children and/or divorce. As in any other new relationship, resolution of conflict sets the tone for continuation of that relationship. Sometimes a “showdown” can actually lead to better communication and terms of mutual respect and support...like clearing the air. Those in your peer support group have been through all of this. Seek them out and ask them how they coped with conflicts. Benefit from others’ ideas and experiences.

The period of **resolution** is the maturing of the relationship(s). Everyone settles into his/her long term role, usually becoming permanent parts of one another’s lives.

One reunion issue (certainly not the most common one) which should be noted here is referred to as “**genetic sexual attraction.**” This sounds a bit scary, but once acknowledged and analyzed, it’s quite understandable. We mention it here because experience has shown that “forewarned is forearmed,” and because, as you will see, many people are still reluctant to talk about this phenomenon openly.

Ordinarily, people have a good deal of physical contact with members of their immediate families (birth or adoptive). Mothers nurse, bathe and change their babies. Siblings often bathe and sometimes sleep together when they’re small. Nothing strange about that, is there?

Often, we're attracted to those who resemble us and with whom we share interests and abilities and so on. Without getting into the whole psychology of this, suffice it to say that we look like people we're related to by blood, and sometimes have a good deal in common with them in terms of temperament and personality.

When it comes to reunion, we are meeting people for the first time whom we are in fact related to, who often look like us, who often are like us, and to whom we may feel attracted. In and of itself, this isn't problematic...in fact, it's quite **normal and natural**.

*Sometimes, though, people experience (or mistake or confuse) the desire to be close to, to touch or hold those from whom they've been separated for a lifetime, for sexual desire. That is, their need for physical intimacy is experienced as sexual desire. While it is normal to want to hug and touch, to have an overwhelming need to be physically close to your mother or son or sister (if you hadn't been separated by adoption, you'd have had plenty of opportunities for this) it can be disastrous to enter into a sexual alliance here.*

As adults ~ for better or worse, rightly or wrongly, and to varying degrees ~ we have been conditioned to equate physical intimacy with sex. Suddenly, you may have this intense feeling of wanting to be physically close to another adult ~ one who is a stranger, and yet is someone you "know," someone you're related to.

You've heard of the "incest taboo." We all know we're not supposed to have sex with our parents, or children, or siblings. Nobody had to tell us...we just know this. The idea is abhorrent to most people. We don't even like to think about it. We certainly don't want to talk about it. It's dark and "dirty" and shameful.

But in reunion, sometimes the feeling is there, and it feels like sexual desire. Your son reminds you so much of his birth father, your first love. Your birth mother is only fifteen years older than you are, and she's absolutely beautiful. It's "wrong" and you know it. You don't want to tell anybody. You're afraid there's something wrong with you for having such feelings in the first place. You may feel as if you've "fallen in love" or are having "an affair."

Take heart. You are not the first person to have faced this dilemma. Though it isn't all that common (sexual fantasies and/or relationships among adoptive relatives are far more widespread), "**genetic sexual attraction**" isn't unheard of, either. What you have to remember is that the feeling is normal, under the circumstances presented by reunion. However, experience has shown that acting on such feelings will cause untold emotional upheaval and damage, both to reunion relationships and to existing relationships between spouses and partners.

**There's nothing wrong with you; there is a need for intimacy in this new relationship, but it's NOT sexual.**

Talk about it ~ get it out into the open. Chances are that the other person is having the same feelings, both of the desire for intimacy, and of the perception of shame. Talk to others who've experienced reunion. They won't condemn you or think you're crazy. Try to remember that this feeling will pass with time, as your relationship grows and normalizes. In the meantime, read what's been written on this subject, think of and introduce the other person in terms of your relationship (i.e. my mother, my sister, my son), and think the situation through again. You might try writing yourself a letter explaining both the reasons you have these feelings, and how you can begin to establish a healthy element of intimacy with the other person, by building a shared history together.

In some instances, people who have been reunited decide not to stay in touch with each other, or to keep contact to a minimum. This doesn't mean the reunion was not "successful." Reunion will, from now on, always be a part of your life experience. You will have gained insight ~ personally and in terms of your origins or a decision you made long ago. You will know more than you did when you began, and nobody can ever take that knowledge away from you again. Your reunion is part of your cumulative experience, and belongs to you no matter what else happens.

Reunion is a drama, not just an encounter. More often than not, whatever the long term outcome, it leads to a settling and healing for all concerned ~ adoptees and their birth and adoptive families. For the vast majority, it is rewarding beyond any expectation.



# Voices



## VOICES...

Following is a sampling of reunion stories, and “quotable quotes” as related by members of the adoption community who have experienced the ups and downs of the process.....

### *From a birth father...*

My son was born November 24th 1969, when I was just twenty. It was a cold autumn day with lots of sunshine, and I can recall it vividly even now, twenty-nine years later.

From the time my girlfriend became pregnant and we broke the news to her parents, I was ostracized from her family, as if I had ceased to exist. It was heart-wrenching not to be able to see her, or speak with her. I felt isolated and kept this to myself, telling no one in my family. Later, I realized that this was a big mistake. I figured, “I got myself into this, I can get myself out.”

After our son was born, we realized we wouldn’t be able to marry and keep him, though we wanted to. I saw him but once, in the hospital nursery.

We lost touch with one another, both married and divorced and remarried. I had more children; sadly, the mother of my son never had another baby.

Years later, shortly after a high school reunion (where I couldn’t approach her) we began to correspond and talk on the phone (by then we were living on opposite sides of the country). We finally decided that we had to search for Mark. For three years, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, even with the non-identifying information we’d received. We hired a private investigator, without success.

The breakthrough came when we hooked up with the volunteer peer network. Within two months, and after many years of worrying and wondering, we had made contact with our birth son, now called Daniel (and, ironically, my middle name). He had grown up in our hometown! Though his birth mother had traveled some distance to stay in a maternity home, he’d been adopted right back into the community where we lived at the time!

Since we first met, our relationships with our birth son have grown...and I know that they will continue to grow. Sure, there’s been some turbulence, but we’ve had some wonderful conversations, and found that we have a lot in common. Gone is much of my pain and anxiety, and I feel cleansed, and blessed to be able to get to know my first born son.

“Miracles do happen! There in front of me was a photo of my daughter. I was staring at a mirror image of myself. I cherish the words her mom spoke to me: ‘she’s our daughter, Cathy...’ and I thank her for sharing Theresa with me.”  
(Cathy, reunited birth mother, 1996)

“Recently it came to me that search for a lost child is actually far more than that. For some years now I have carried on my car a bumper sticker which reads: ‘I would have searched forever.’ When the first sticker wore out, I had another one made. Probably it should say, ‘I will search forever,’ for I have realized that searching for my daughter was only part of the process. I have also been searching for parts of myself.”

(Roberta, reunited birth mother)

“I found my daughter through a search agency, but unfortunately the news wasn’t good. My darling Melody had passed away. I cried a lot of tears, mourning the loss. We will meet again one day -- this I believe....My daughter’s adopted mother allowed me to visit...she told me about my daughter and shared a lot of pictures and she gave me a wedding picture which I will treasure for the rest of my life. I now feel that the hole in my heart can heal with time, and want everyone to know -- please keep searching, don’t ever give up. Good news or bad, we need to fill that void, no matter how long it takes.”

(Marie, birth mother)

### *From an adoptee....*

I didn’t decide to search for my birth parents until I was in my early thirties because of a number of things. I didn’t want to hurt my parents, and I was sure they’d be devastated. My younger adopted brother was found by his birth family when he was nineteen and that didn’t go well to say the least. He wasn’t searching and they were kind of pushy about it. I think his birth mother thought she could treat the whole thing as if he’d been away at camp for his whole life! Anyway, my mom was probably more upset than my brother about all that. My dad never said much about it at all. My brother hasn’t mentioned it in ages.

Anyway, when my first child was born, that did it. It was like I woke up suddenly because I realized that I had to get certain information *for his sake*, if not my own. When I called the agency to try to find out anything at all about my birth family, I got really angry about the length of time they said I had to wait. It was as if they were punishing my son for being born to an adoptee. Then it occurred to me that it was really like they were punishing me for being born at the “wrong time,” to somebody who couldn’t handle a baby. And then I thought, “God, they’ve been punishing my birth mother for having a child she couldn’t take care of!” If anybody had so much as tried to take my baby, I’d have...well I don’t know what I might have done, but I wouldn’t have been responsible for my actions!

I hadn’t really decided to search, but I went to a meeting I’d heard about and there were *all* these birth mothers and adoptees, and I decided right then and there that at least I should put my name on the registry. I signed up, and less than three weeks later got a call from the group leader. I couldn’t believe it when she told me my birth mother and my birth father and three full siblings had been registered with another branch out west for ten years!

So my husband and I and our three month old son flew to Calgary. We stayed in a hotel the first night, but after I'd met with my birth mother alone for lunch, and then my husband and my birth father joined us for dinner the day after we arrived ... we realized we just had to go stay at their house. My two sisters and even my brother were just nuts about the baby and about having a nephew, and I think the baby was the only one who got much sleep during those three days! The rest of us had a talk-a-thon. We were exhausted but very very happy when we got back. I was so — 'delighted' is the only word I can think of — to have found out what really happened back then, and happy for my birth parents that they'd managed to tough it out even though their parents made them give me up. Now, my grandparents want to meet me, but I think we'll take that slowly even though they live much closer to us than my birth parents.

And my mom? Well, my husband took the baby for a walk, and I called and told her that I had the most wonderful news, and that I want her and my dad to be part of my reunion, and she just started to cry, said she'd be right over to see the pictures and did I want some of my baby pictures to send to my birth family, and when were they coming, she wanted to meet them and thank them for giving her ME!

P.S. I still don't have my background history, but I'm sure it will come someday. Also, my birth parents were registered on the provincial registry from the day I turned 18, and so I'm sure I'll be notified of that some day, too!

"I had my first chance to begin to know my biological father when I was forty and he was sixty-eight. When I arrived home from work one summer day, I met the man who was partially responsible for my existence. We share a striking similarity in appearance, and I now know where my own sharp tonal perception comes from, since we are both quite musical. I learned about this man's long ago relationship with my birth mother and her family, information which had not been forthcoming from any other source. He confessed that he had wanted to marry her, but this was not to be. When he passed away some years later, all of my family felt the loss keenly. It has been gratifying to be able to fill in so many of the haunting questions."  
(Bill, reunited adoptee, 1972)

"My birth mother won't acknowledge me to anyone, and it's been over eight years now, but even meeting her 'on the sly' once in a while has been a dream come true. I'd do it again in a moment...so many questions have been put to rest."  
(Karen, reunited adoptee, 1988)

"When I arrived and my son opened the door, it felt so right. Seeing photos was great, but I felt sad for all I'd missed. I have been blessed and to others say: 'don't give up.' My search was a test in patience, and yes, I would do it again. I believe that all good things come to those that wait."  
(Linda, reunited birth mother, 1996)

“...we had a wonderful conversation and exchanged condensed stories of our lives. She was happily married with five children, but had never shared with them her secret of almost thirty-five years. She took the time to reconcile the situation with herself and her husband, and together, at Easter, they told the rest of the family. From that moment on, I became part of their family, and they a part of mine....Mine is a very happy story and I realize how fortunate I am. It could have turned out much differently but with maturity and happiness within my own family, I was prepared for that.”  
(Denise, reunited adoptee, 1992)

“We were very young, in love and still in high school. We gave our first daughter up for adoption, graduated and married that same year. The next year, we had a son. Every day, we would think of our daughter. We wondered whether she would even want to know us. We registered with the province and with Parent Finders...and then one day, we got a registered letter -- from Jennifer! We have found the daughter we truly missed.”  
(Don and Deborah, reunited birth parents, 1996)

“Apart from the birth of my own daughter (the first “birth relative” I’d ever met!) finding my birth mother remains the single most important event in my life, even though our reunion is now some eighteen years old. Just think, in less than three years, I will be able to say that I’ve known her longer than I did not....”  
(Holly, reunited adoptee, 1979)

“I may have waited too long, it’s hard to say. I found my mother just days after she’d passed away, but in retrospect I have to believe that she may not have been able to accept me, and then I would have missed out on the wonderful relationships I’ve been able to have with my brothers and sisters who accepted me from the outset. These things, I think, happen for a reason...”  
(Marie, reunited adoptee, 1980)

### ***From an adoptive parent ...***

The desire to find out more about her background, who her birth family are, and what they are like was there from an early age. I’m happy that she always felt comfortable raising her questions. The curiosity seemed so natural, the questions so logical. We were always curious too, so a search and reunion was always something that was going to happen, sooner or later.

As adoptive parents we may feel a sense of betrayal when our children consider a search and reunion, a feeling that we are not valued. But, if we have not experienced the loss of a parent, or if we’ve always had easy access to

information about our roots, I think we take a lot for granted. We have very little idea what it is like to be denied part of who we are.

I have learned that I can never be my child's birth mother, and she, in turn, can never be the parent that I have been to my child. We have a common connection through our child but very different roles to play. Both can be very important to the adopted person.

"I was afraid of losing her. I guess that's the fear of every adoptive parent. I also didn't want her to get hurt. Now that we have met Sue, her birth mother, we are pleased. Meeting her has been good for all of us .. for our daughter it has brought her some peace and answers to many questions. For us, it has helped us to recognize how important this is. We feel so grateful to Sue and now we share a common interest in our daughter. We too can get some questions answered. For Sue, it has ended those worries about the daughter she placed for adoption."  
(an adoptive mother)

*"We always said we would help our children when they wanted to do a search. Now that one reunion is happening, I am surprised to realize that I have a lot of feelings around this too. It's hard to put into words. I'm glad that we have a good level of communication with both our children."*  
(an adoptive father)

"A lot of emotion is involved. The element of the unknown makes it stressful and adds a lot of uncertainty. But it seems to have worked out well for our daughter's situation. Her birth mother was very receptive to the idea of reunion and has been very respectful of us."  
(an adoptive father)

"When we adopted our first son, a relative said, 'isn't he lucky, and aren't you brave!' She had the wrong end of the stick... *we* were lucky, and *he* was the one who was brave."  
(John, adoptive father)



# Glossary of Terms



## Glossary of Terms

**A.C.O.:** Adoption Council of Ontario

**Aboriginal:** A person of native or “first nations” descent

**Act:** A piece of legislation (see CFSA below)

**Adopt/Adoption:** to take as one’s own legally for all intents and purposes under the law

**Adopted sibling:** brother or sister who is not biologically related but was *adopted* into the same family; a biological son/daughter of one’s adoptive parent(s)

**Adoptee:** Person who is legally adopted

\***Adoption Order:** an Order of the Court which *legally* severs one’s connection to his/her biological family and makes him/her *legally* part of the adopting family instead

\***Adoptive parent(s):** mother or father by adoption

**ADR:** Abbreviation for Adoption Disclosure Registry, the provincial authority in Ontario

\***Affidavit:** A sworn, witnessed statement

**Adult adoptee:** person who is legally adopted and has reached the age of majority

\***Agreement form:** the document signed by a birth parent to place a child in temporary custody of an agency

**Almanac:** a book of data or listings published annually

**Amended:** to have been altered or changed

**Ancestry:** one’s forbears and heritage

\***Apgar:** A medical rating concerning an infant’s condition right after birth

**Appendices:** Plural of appendix (i.e., supplementary information)

**Appendix:** See above

**Archive:** a repository of old records and documents

**Biographical/biography:** pertaining to (a) specific individual(s)

**Birth Certificate:** common reference for a smaller extract from the statement of live birth

\***Birth parent(s):** biological mother or father

**Birth registration:** see Statement of Live Birth

\***Birth sibling:** full or half brother/sister through a birth parent

**Canadian Adoption Reunion Register:** the not-for-profit national reunion registry operated by Parent Finders

**CARR:** Abbreviation for registry as above

**Canadian Adoptees Registry & Classifieds:** a not-for-profit Internet search facility

**CARC:** Abbreviation for registry as above

**CFSA:** Abbreviation for the Child & Family Services Act (see below)

**Child & Family Services Act:** the law which governs adoption/disclosure in Ontario

**Child Welfare Act:** the law which governed adoption prior to the Child & Family Services Act

**Circa:** around a particular year

**Codify:** To be written in law

\***Common-law:** A term referring to a heterosexual couple who live together but are not legally married

**Composite:** a combination of details from different sources used to illustrate or clarify

\***Confirmation:** A religious ceremony in Protestant churches usually when one is 12 or 13

\***Consent to Adopt:** legal documents signed by the birth parent(s) agreeing to the adoption of a child

**Court file:** the documentation used to finalize an adoption

**Cross-reference:** to study two different things against one another

\***Crown ward:** a minor whose biological parents rights have been relinquished or waived and who is in the care of a child welfare agency

\***Dedication:** Similar to baptism or christening ceremonies when a child is about 7 (generally indicates Salvation Army, Baptist, Pentecostal non-denominational or an "Alliance" church)

\***Denomination:** A category (usually applies to different religions or churches)

\***Descent:** See ancestry

**Disclosure:** the release of information

**Dispense with consent:** where a court orders that someone's consent is unnecessary

\***Ethnic/ethnicity:** refers to one's nationality, country of origin

**Familial:** Of a family (whether by birth or adoption)

\***Finalization:** Refers to the date an adoption order is made by a Court

**Finding aid:** a list which has been indexed to help researchers locate material

**FIPPA:** Abbreviation for Freedom of Information...Act (see below)

**First Nations:** See aboriginal

\***Foster Care:** See fostered

\***Fostered:** to have been in the care of a substitute family, but not legally adopted by that family

**Freedom of Information (and Protection of Privacy) Act:** the legislation which allows access to certain information as proscribed therein

**Genealogy:** The research of one's family history (whether by birth or adoption)

**Half-sibling:** A brother or sister biologically related through one birth parent but not the other.

**Heritage:** See ancestry

**Identifying information:** names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth and other personally identifying details

**Index:** See finding aid

**Indices:** Plural of index

**Keepsake file:** a term meaning where agencies stored momentos which may have been left with them for safekeeping

**Kin:** Another word for family or relations (whether by birth or adoption)

**Legislation:** Law

**Long form:** see Statement of Live Birth

**Maiden name:** a woman's name before marriage (usually her father's surname)

\***Maternal:** through the mother

\***Mother tongue:** the first language a person learned to speak; the language commonly spoken at home

**Native:** See aboriginal

**Natural:** often used to mean biological as opposed to adopted

**Non-identifying information:** information that does not include identifying details such as names, addresses, etc.

**Notice of Hearing:** legal papers served on a person to let them know about a court proceeding which may affect their rights

**Order:** See Adoption Order

\***Paternal:** through the father

\***Perinatal:** Right after birth

\***Placement:** Refers to the date the adoptee went to live with the adoptive family  
\***Post secondary:** further formal education after high school  
\***Postnatal:** after birth  
\***Prenatal:** Before birth  
\***Probationary period:** the time between an adoptee's placement with a family and finalization of the adoption  
**Public records:** records which are available and accessible to the general public  
**Registrar:** an administrator or manager  
**Relinquish:** to give up  
\***Rural:** In the country (as opposed to an urban area)  
**Sealed:** Refers to records and documents which are sealed by Court Order and are therefore not accessible to anyone for any reason  
**Sibling:** A brother or sister (see adopted/birth/half siblings above)  
**Statement of Live Birth:** one's long form birth certificate which includes all birth details  
**Status:** Meaning one's position (e.g., marital status could be single, separated, widowed, divorced; one's *status* as an adopted person, birth parent, aboriginal person, etc.)  
**Step:** (As in step-father/brother, etc.) a person related through the marriage of one parent, but not biologically or by adoption  
**Surname:** one's last name  
\***U.P.** Abbreviation used often by agencies to mean "unmarried parent"  
**Urban:** In a city (as opposed to a rural area)  
**Vital Statistics:** An office where records of birth, adoption, marriage and death are housed (in Canada each province has a separate department of vital statistics)  
\***Ward:** (See also crown ward) a minor who is in the care of a child welfare agency

\* = terms specifically found in non-identifying information



# Appendices



## **APPENDIX “A”**

### **THE ROLE OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS IN SEARCH & REUNION**

(edited by R. Creasy, M.S.W., R.S.W., Family Services of Greater Vancouver)

Little has been written about the impact of adoption reunion on adoptive parents~ the thoughts and feelings they experience can play a major role in the course of a reunion and can influence the quality of their future relationship with the adult adoptee. Support from adoptive parents, or their opposition to reunion certainly has an impact on the degree of comfort and openness the adoptee experiences in coping with reunion.

Often, the first step in dealing with any kind of emotional pain is to correctly identify it. Identification can often reduce or remove the power of emotional pain to overwhelm us, as it can when we struggle to minimize it or deny its existence.

**Betrayal** may be the first feeling adoptive parents experience when hearing about reunion. They may have been assured that all adoption records were sealed “forever” and that they need not ever fear the possibility of reunion.

Understanding why adoption laws have changed can be helpful. Attending a support group or even talking with other adoptive parents can sometimes ease the feeling of betrayal, “resetting” adoption in the context of changes and the present day. This can give adoptive parents a greater sense of participation and control, if they are indeed feeling betrayed by changes to legislation and practice.

**Grief** is another powerful feeling for some adoptive parents, and may arise in part because reunion triggers issues of infertility as well as perceived “loss” of the adoptee. The pain associated with the inability to have a child can reappear when that child, now an adult but whom one has worked so hard to raise seeks or is sought by his or her birth relative(s).

The power of this rekindled grief, and the difficulty in resolving it often points to the need to focus attention on the source of this pain. People may feel disappointment upon discovering that the “solutions” used to deal with such feelings in the past are no longer sufficient. Close friends, family members and counsellors are often helpful in this process of healing; they can fulfill the same roles they would under conditions of bereavement.

It is important to know that our first inclination with grief is to underestimate its magnitude and importance in our lives. The truth of the matter seems to be that we must re-experience this grief~ go through a process of “re-grieving” in order to heal.

**Devaluation** can be another feeling for some adoptive parents during search and reunion. There is a strong tendency to view search and reunion as a signal that their “stewardship” is over and their love is no longer needed. This perspective is particularly detrimental in that it is usually caused by many other discouraging thoughts, feelings and ideas, especially the lifelong fear that the adoptee will, in fact, return to his birth family (Birth Bond, p. 228).

It is also dangerous because it profoundly affects the adoptive parents' self-esteem, and may cause them to question their legitimacy as parents. Yet, research and biographical data confirm that reunion generally strengthens adoptive relationships.

**Competitive** feelings with the birth parents often arise in the post-reunion phases. Many describe thoughts such as, "...I'll show her so much love that the relationship with the birth parent will just wither and die."

This competition extends all the way from conflicts of religious conviction down to who makes the better meat loaf. It is helpful to remember that in this kind of a competition, everyone loses. Isolation, anger and depression result from engaging in an "unwinnable" war.

**Some other common fears experienced by adoptive parents are:**

- ◇ *conscious or subconscious anger at the adoptee for being interested in his/her origins and birth family at all;*
- ◇ *worry that the adoptive parent has "failed" the adoptee~ otherwise, why would she have to search?*
- ◇ *concern that the adoptee may be rejected by the birth parent(s) or hurt by what they discover*
- ◇ *worry that the birth mother will be younger and more attractive*
- ◇ *anxiety over whether the reunion will develop into a relationship*
- ◇ *concern about losing the adoptee, and grandchildren or future grandchildren*

One positive step which can be taken by the adoptee is to reassure the adoptive parents about the strength of their love and attachment to the adoptive family. This can considerably reduce the sense that the adoptive parents are risking loss of their son/daughter.

It is also helpful if the effect of reunion is viewed as adding another dimension to the adoptee's family, or that the birth family is part of the adoptee's extended family. In this sense, reunion can be seen as kind of like marriage, where the partners become part of each others' families of origin.

**Adoptive parents should seek to realize what reunion can accomplish for the adoptee:**

- ◇ a sense of having been born, of completeness
- ◇ a sense of being a real, normal adult like everyone else;
- ◇ a stronger sense of self-esteem, when they discover the real circumstances of their birth and adoption and begin to heal from feelings of rejection and abandonment;
- ◇ an end to the paralysis generated by all of the unknowns in their life
- ◇ a letting go of the adoption difference, which is replaced with an unleashed potential to move on.

Many adoptive parents nurture their own security by staying informed and involved in search and reunion, offering support and reassurance to the adoptee. Support and reassurance are appropriate and important parenting roles~ despite the “child’s” age, and can be offered without interfering in the course of the search or reunion relationship(s).

**The following suggestions for adoptive parents may help them to see that in spite of the difficulty the search and reunion processes may bring into their lives, there are also potential rewards for them, too.**

- **READ**~ this will help you to understand more about the adoption experience from your son/daughter’s perspective, and from that of the birth mother
- **TALK ABOUT IT**~ while you may want to talk with your adoptee, remember, he’s going through a great deal at the moment too. Investigate counselling, or talk with someone you trust who can be objective. Join a search and support self help group~ adoptive parents are more than welcome!
- **UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN BOUNDARIES**~ these are your personal limits. They are not walls, rather, they are clear definitive statements of your values, tolerances (both physical and emotional) and wishes. Reunion will change these.
- **QUESTION YOUR NEGATIVE JUDGEMENTS OF YOURSELF**~ the way the search and reunion process is viewed also seems to be a deciding factor in how emotionally trying it will be for adoptive parents. Those who have viewed it as challenging consistently report positive outcomes. Those who see it as a burden to bear, often bear the burden longer.

## APPENDIX “B”

### THE BIOLOGICAL CLOCK: KEY TIMES IN AN ADOPTED PERSON’S LIFE

(By Carol L. Demuth, CSW-ACP)

The non-adopted person is surrounded by genetic heritage and easy going access to family history. In biological families, answers abound and are absorbed before the need to question arises. Feelings of belonging and relatedness are taken for granted and familial history becomes a part of a person’s identity by slow and steady assimilation.

Shared ancestry, family resemblances and cultural heritage are **denied** the adopted person, who grows up **separated** from blood relations. As the adoptee matures, the need for information about his/her birth family grows. All adoptees engage in search; the person who looks in the mirror and wonders is indeed “searching,” just as much as the one who does a full-fledged active search. It is just a matter of degree.

***Both external life events and internal processes may trigger the desire for additional knowledge or bring to the surface the need to know one’s roots.***

The following will give an idea of the key times at which an adopted person may need more information about his birth heritage. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to imply that every adopted person will have the same need at each of these times. An increased awareness, however, will aid those who interact with adopted persons in being more emotionally available and better able to meet adoptees’ needs.

**Preschool Years** (ages 2-5) The adopted child becomes aware of pregnant women in his environment. This causes him to approach his parents with questions about his own birth.

**School age Years**: The adopted child must deal with adoption outside of the family for the first time, on his own. He may feel different from his peers. He may be faced with questions for which he has been ill-prepared. He begins to become aware of society’s views about adoption, which may differ from those held by his parents. He will realize that there are two people who are not his parents who made him, but chose not to keep him. He may wish he had been born to his adoptive parents.

**Birthdays**: This is a natural day to “connect” with the birth mother psychologically. As the adoptee reflects on his own birth, he will wonder if his birth mother is thinking of him, too.

**Times of Loss** (death, divorce, moving) Any loss has the potential to trigger the original loss of the birth parents. Movies, books and so on about losses may have the same effect.

**Medical Appointments/Illness:** The adoptee rarely has much medical history; his access to updated familial medical information is unlikely. He may feel disconnected, experience heightened anxiety and anger at this lack.

**Adolescence:** Abstract thinking allows for a more thorough and complex processing about the “whys” of adoption. The adoptee may wonder about what might have been and entertain fantasies~ both positive and negative about the birth parents. The absence of biological role models may lead to feelings of disconnectedness, and heightened anxiety about the physical maturity process and sexuality. Sexual awareness may cause speculation about the relationship between his birth parents, and the adoptive parents.

**Reaching Majority:** An adopted person may feel this is the first time he has a “right” to information about his birth family, and may do this directly rather than with his adoptive parents knowledge, consent or blessing.

**Engagement/Marriage:** The adoptee may harbour fantasies of unwittingly having a sexual relationship with or even marrying a relative. The idea of having children may be fraught with fear and anxiety.

**Pregnancy/Birth of a Child:** This will often cause reflection on the adoptees’ own birth and position in the chain of life. She may experience anger or feelings of loss and depression at remembering she was relinquished by her own parent(s). Adoptees often have increased expectations about their feelings toward their own children, as this baby is the first person she has seen who is related by blood.

**Mid-Life Crisis:** Sometimes this is a catalyst for search if it has been postponed before. The adoptee becomes aware of mortality. Death of the adoptive parent(s) may trigger that original loss, or may allow the adoptee the “freedom” to pursue information.

**Questions from Children:** The adoptee’s children may raise questions or need information, which may be the impetus to search.

**Old Age:** The adopted person may realize this is his last chance to seek information; he may expect that his birth parents are deceased, but hope for contact with siblings. Often, the adoptee wants to leave information to his own children and grandchildren.

## APPENDIX “C”

### ADOPTION REUNIONS~ AN EMOTIONAL TRIANGLE

(By Raymond O. Ensminger, MSW)

For many years, many people in the adoption triangle have had questions and have personally struggled with issues around reunion. The following quotes from individuals represent some of their feelings:

*“I have never forgotten my child. I hope she is well and happy. I hope she will someday want to know me. I will always long for the child I carried but never held.”*

*“I can understand that my daughter might want to search for her biological mother when she becomes an adult. But I do not believe that her biological mother has any claim on her at all. To allow her to have the right to start a relationship after all these years is morally wrong.”*

*“I look in the mirror and wonder who I look like~I wonder why I was given up. I feel I have a right to my nationality, background and heritage. All I want to know is what’s rightfully mine.”*

The issue of reunion is a very **emotional** one. Many feelings and very personal concepts begin to surface~ identity, adequacy, confidentiality, anger, frustration, disappointment, fear, elation, and the resolution of deep-seated questions, rights, relationships and attitudes.

Historically, the policies and practice regarding issues of disclosure are similar across Canada and in the USA. Ancient Greece and Rome practiced adoption, but by late 1920’s the **“as if born to”** concept had been introduced in North America. The intent was to ensure that adopted children had the same rights and privileges as others. However, a negative implication of the **“as if born to”** myth is that it obscures the fact that adoption is different. It is not less than, but it is different.

Generally, adoption has not been seen as a lifelong process, but as a single event. Birth mothers were told that they could never hope to see their child again, and were given little if any information on the adoptive parents, or opportunity to share in the decision making concerning the adoption plan. But birth mothers continued to have frequent, unresolved feelings about the “decision.” And birth fathers were hardly ever even consulted.

From the 1940s to the late ‘70’s laws and policies remained unchanged. Then self-help groups began forming, and adoptees began to question and challenge policies and practices and laws around sealed records. They began to request more information, and many adoptive parents were unprepared, because they had been assured that adoption was the same as having children by birth.

Adoptees began organizing and lobbying for change; at the same time, many began to search and were reunited. Research into this phenomenon began: Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (The Adoption Triangle) reported that birth parents continued to mourn years after relinquishment, and wanted the adoptee to know that they cared. Eighty- two percent said they would be amenable to reunion.

The basic premises and findings of such studies have not been refuted by more recent research. Even where there has been limited contact after reunion, the parties consider the search and reunion “**successful**” and “**fulfilling**.” The results of research and experience of self-help groups also demonstrate:

- The need to search is very important to adoptees and birth relatives
- *Often there is initial apprehension on the part of adoptive parents*
- Adoptees have a strong commitment to their adoptive families, are sensitive to their needs and feelings, and don't want to hurt them by searching
- *Adoptees are also careful of their birth parents' feelings and the need to be discreet in searching/initiating contact*
- Adoptees feel a sense of completeness after searching which was not present previously
- *The vast majority of birth mothers don't want the confidentiality promised (some say imposed) them years ago. They welcome reunion*
- Birth mothers feel a sense of relief and diminished guilt by being able to know the adoptee and share their story
- *Adoptees have a greater appreciation for the adoptive parents post-reunion, realizing that the psychological parents are the “real” parents, whether or not there is a post-reunion relationship with birth relatives*
- It is essential that families have a sense of openness and honesty in responding to questions and concerns about adoption, search and reunion. The evidence suggests very strongly that reunion generally has a positive role in strengthening relationships between all parties to adoption.

There are exceptions to this, of course, specifically birth parents or adoptees who do not wish to be found. They may not have told significant others in their lives about their status in the triad. Research and follow-up studies suggest birth parents (especially birth mothers) who do not wish to be contacted are in the minority .. but their feelings cannot be ignored. At the same time, the needs and wishes and feelings of a small minority should not supersede those of the majority.

## **APPENDIX “D”**

### **SOME FACTORS INFLUENCING REUNION**

Many factors influence reunion .. the smoothness, intensity and character of the experience from two or more perspectives. Following is a short list of some of the more common and important of these:

#### **Readiness & Mutuality**

If both parties are prepared and eager to meet and or get to know one another, reunion can be easier. Both need a chance to come to terms with their adoption experience and have arrived at similar positions in the emotional journey.

#### **Current Personal Circumstances**

Always ask “what else is going on in each person’s life at the moment?” If one party has just married, divorced, had a child, experienced a loss through death, lost a job, gotten a new job, or any of many other life experiences .. he or she may not be able to devote much time or energy to reunion, or may become more overwhelmed by reunion than is usual. Passage of time is calming.

#### **Age, Maturity & Gender**

Where a person is in his/her life cycle bears on how they handle intense feelings .. and how they go about getting to know someone new. Elderly people may be less comfortable with anything new. Very young people may be immersed in their own lives and families and friendships. And men and women often respond very differently to the same situation.

#### **Reactions of “Significant Others”**

The feelings and reactions of parents, siblings, spouses, partners and children can influence reunion. No one wants to jeopardize their current relationships.

#### **Intensity of Emotion**

Deep scars can be painful to reopen. Secrets can be difficult to share. And the need for connectedness, or to learn how the other has fared can cloud objectivity, at least to begin with.

In order to forge a satisfactory relationship, and for things to fall into a comfortable pattern, there are key tasks which must be accomplished. These can be complex.

- ⇒ ***Filling up the information vacuum***~ finding out the truth and catching up on one another’s lives;
- ⇒ ***Beginning to heal***~ coming to terms with what’s happened, and coming to some kind of peace with yourself and the other party about it.
- ⇒ ***Integrating new relationships***~ informing significant others and finding a mutually agreeable way of blending new relationships into existing ones
- ⇒ ***Building a shared history***~ creating a relationship from here on in, making *shared* memories.

**RECOMMENDED READING**

Many of these titles can be found in the public library or at the ACO Resource Centre or the PFI library. Some are available at book stores such as "Parent Books" (Harbord & Spadina in Toronto) or "The Women's Book Store" (Toronto & Ottawa locations). Distributors will be happy to send you a more complete list of adoption/reunion related books they carry.

Adoption: Philosophy & Experience, Randolph Severson, 1996

Adoption Reunions, Michelle McColm, 1993

Birthbond, Louise Brown, 1989

Blessings, Belva Plain, 1990 (fiction)

Dark Side of Adoption, Marsha Riben, 1988

Death by Adoption, Joss Sawyer, 1983

Journey of the Adopted Self, B.J. Lifton, 1994

Making Sense of Adoption, Lois Melina, 1989

Reunion, Madelene Allen, 1992

The Adoption Triangle, Sorosky, Pannor, Baron, 1989

The Face in the Mirror, Marion Crook, 1987

The Other Mother, Carol Schaefer, 1991

The Primal Wound, Nancy Verrier, 1989

The Search for Anna Fisher, Florence Fisher, 1986

Torn From the Heart, Louise Jurgens, 1992

Twice Born, B.J. Lifton, 1977

Where are my Birth Parents? Karen Gravelle & Susan Fischer, 1993

Yesterday They Took My Baby, Ben Wicks, 1992

## Some Distributors

- ◆ B. & M. Books, Box 65043, Merivale Postal Stn., Nepean, Ont., K2G 5Y3
- ◆ Concerned United Birth Parents, 2000 Walker St., Des Moines, Iowa, USA, 50317
- ◆ Hope Cottage, 4209 McKinney Ave., Ste. 200, Dallas, Texas, USA, 75205-4598
- ◆ Orphan Voyage, 2141 Rd. 2300, Cedaridge Colorado, USA, 81413

◆ **APPENDIX “F”**

**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR MEMBERS & LEADERS**  
**OF PEER SEARCH/SUPPORT GROUPS**  
*(New English Version)*

- I. **Practice** compassion, empathy, sensitivity, discretion, patience and respect for each other and for other’s confidentiality;
- II. **Preach** compassion, empathy, sensitivity, discretion, patience and respect for others and for other’s confidentiality;
- III. **Be** compassionate, non-judgmental, empathetic, sensitive, discreet, patient, respectful and trustworthy;
- IV. **Offer** guidance, supportive direction and kindness rather than imposing rules, demands, requirements or an itinerary;
- V. **Remember** the beginning of your own journey; share freely of your experiences, knowledge and the insight and understanding you’ve gained;
- VI. **Provide** leadership where necessary and where you are capable; follow where you are better suited to follow and where another is more suited to plotting the course;
- VII. **Do** what you can and take responsibility for this; be prepared to share responsibility for everything else;
- VIII. **Recognize**, appreciate and reward your own commitment, expertise and accomplishments, as well as the commitment, expertise and accomplishments of others;
- IX. **Expect** everything of yourself and nothing from anyone else;
- X. **Think** positively, but learn to change what you can, accept what you cannot change, and be confident enough to say ‘I don’t know...’ when you don’t.