

LIVING

Just like he was always

BY MYNDI BROGDON
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Therese Kempf was a typical 15-year old growing up in California in the early 1970s. But in 1973 something happened that would change her life forever. The victim of what today is referred to as date-rape, she found herself pregnant.

Being raised a "good Catholic" eliminated the possibility of abortion, a decision she is grateful for today. The young mother-to-be went to St. Anne's home for unwed mothers in Los Angeles, a facility run by Holy Family Catholic Services, for the duration of her pregnancy. She was there to prepare to give her first-born up for adoption.

Today, 24 long years later, Kempf and the son she gave up for adoption have been reunited. Watching mother and son, it is clear the relationship has been easily renewed.

Matthew Burke was born May 23, 1974, just six days shy of his mother's 16th birthday. He was placed in foster care until the adoption papers could be finalized. A fight over the severance of the father's rights caused a three-month delay Kempf would agonize over for the next 24 years.

"Because it was an issue of date rape, it took me three months — that he had to wait three months," she said running out of words to describe the worry it caused. Her worry turned to joy when she learned the three-month delay was a blessing to a childless couple.

"They had waited five years for a baby. They got him on their wedding anniversary," Kempf said excitedly of the gift she gave the couple more than 20 years ago.

Never forgetting that son, but still a young girl, Kempf moved on. "I went on with my life," she said. "I had a [second] son when I was 22."

That son is 18-year-old Thomas Canale, a former baseball star at Payson High School who earned a full scholarship to Cal Lutheran University, where he is a freshman.

Thomas was just 10 years old when he found out about his older half-brother, and not surprisingly, he wanted to find him.

"It was a lot of things I couldn't have handled then," Kempf said of her decision to wait to do a search. As her life has truly come full-circle, she credits Thomas with motivating her search for Matthew.

Kempf moved to Payson five years ago, and two years ago married Charles Kempf. In a twist of fate, the newlyweds made a decision that sparked the search to complete the family circle. They adopted Chelsea



Myndi Brogdon/Roundup

Thomas Canale (left) and mother Therese Kempf were united for the first time with Matthew Burke, who Kempf gave up for adoption in 1974.

Lea in October 1997. Now 4 1/2 months old, she was adopted at birth.

"When we adopted her, my older son said, 'If you are going to do this, I want you to find my older brother,'" Kempf said.

"It was her decision. She keeps acting like it was mine, but I just told her she should," Thomas said.

Visiting Thomas in California in January, Kempf made a trip to Holy Family Catholic Services, where her search was jumped to the fast track.

"She handed me the piece of paper that changed my life," Kempf said of

the International Soundex Reunion Registry application the woman gave her.

"I sent the form in and then I just heard like a weekend and a half ago. I called that night — we had made a connection."

Matthew Burke
In search of his birth mother

"I sent my application in the last week in January. The first week in March they had a match," she said. "They contacted him first. He applied in December 1997. We had applied one month apart." An amazingly quick match, the ISRR person Kempf dealt with told her it was one of the fastest she had ever done.

Matthew has known he was adopted virtually his whole life. His adoptive parents were supportive of his search for his birthmother.

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Agencies provide adoption help, both ways

For those interested in adoption — giving or receiving — information and help are just a phone call away.

Locally, New Beginnings Crisis Pregnancy and Counseling Center can be reached at 474-8255 and is located at 200 W. Frontier St. Clients can receive counseling and referrals about the adoption process.

Catholic Social Service agencies are still among the largest networks. They can be reached in Phoenix at 602-997-6105 or Flagstaff at 520-774-9125.

Other agencies are listed in the yellow pages under "adoption," but should be checked out thoroughly before any commitment, financial or otherwise, is made.

"My parents were perfect, or as perfect as you can get. It was always an open topic," Matthew said.

Searching for his birth mother was something Matthew seemed to know he would do. "We [he and his adoptive parents] talked about it for a long time," he said.

His adoptive father found information on the Internet, but Matthew too went to Holy Family to get the ISRR form. "I sent the form in and then I just heard like a week and half ago. I called that night — we had made a connection," he said.

Eager to meet face-to-face, Kempf arranged to for Matthew to travel to Payson from his home in Las Vegas, where he is a musician. He arrived March 7. "I wanted to meet him right away," she said. Mother and son expressed amazement at the visible similarities as well as the personality traits they share.

"There is no denying him now," the proud mother said.

Finding out that his new sister had red hair, the outgoing Matthew arrived in Payson sporting fluorescent red hair. It was a sure sign that her outgoing personality had been passed on to her son, Kempf said.

Raised an only child, Matthew was pleased to find he had a brother. "It was cool finding out I had a half-brother, because that's what I had been hoping for," he said.

No-fee agency proves a success at matching children, mothers

BY MYNDI BROGDON
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Therese Kempf spent a lot of money searching for the son she gave for adoption 24 years ago. But when she found him, it was not because of the money spent with fee-charging agencies.

She found him through a free service offered by the International Soundex Reunion Registry.

Having been adopted myself, I too can attest to the variety of fees and promises out there. If you are interested in searching for an adopted child or birth parent, the following places are good places to start.

ISRR

The ISRR is free. The registry exists solely on donations, and suggests a \$35 registration fee. ISRR can be reached at P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, NV, 89702. Phone: 702-882-7755.

The registry has a high success rate, but officials there say it is unusual to receive a match as quickly as Kempf and Burke experienced. Once your application is filed, they will only contact you in the event of a possible match.

Matches are made only if both parties file an application with enough information to create a match. Each time you learn more information or move it is suggested that you update your application.

I sent a self-addressed, stamped postcard

with my application, just to verify that they had received it. That was in June 1993 and to date no match has occurred.

State Intermediary

The State of Arizona oversees a Confidential Intermediary Service for people adopted in this state. A confidential intermediary may be retained for a fee by a person making a search. The CI is not an employee of the state, but is certified only after completing training and an exam. The CI has access to state records that aid in a search. Only with written permission from both parties will information be exchanged.

For more information, contact the Confidential Intermediary Program at 1501 W. Washington, Suite 128, Phoenix, AZ 85007, phone 1-800-732-8193, and on the web at www.state.az.us/sp/assist3.htm.

Internet self-search

With the dawn of the technology age upon us, loads of information is readily available on the internet. At www.reunionregistry.com you can join, for free, more than 25,000 people who have registered in hopes of a match. The site reports 512 matches to date.

At www.plumsite.com/adoption.htm there are links to ISRR, informative articles and more. Listing of state agencies that help in the adoption triangle are available at www.webreflection.com/aim/support.html.

Mother, adopted son reunited

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"None of this has come out the way I thought it would. My connection with Thomas was like we had been together forever. That was one of the neatest parts of the whole thing."

Other points of interest to Matthew were how the two families had lived in the same cities

at the same times. He grew up only five blocks from his biological grandfather's home in Santa Monica, Calif.

Kempf was at a loss to describe her emotions. "There is no way to explain it. It was an unbelievable feeling for me — all the emotions you go through," she said. Kempf was most pleased to learn that her deci-

sion to try to find Matthew had been a good one for her son. "He had the best life. He had a wonderful life and wonderful parents," she said.

Next for the newly acquainted family members are extended family introductions. Brothers Thomas and Matthew will travel to California this week to meet family members on both sides.