

by Tammy Harris
as told to Oona Short

Mother and daughter

REUNION

**Tammy and her
mother searched far
and wide for each
other—and found
they were nearer
than they imagined**

On March 6, 1990, I was finally 21. "Michael," I said to my husband, "I've got to get going on my search." I told my daughter, Maria, "I'm gonna find your grandma."

I'd always known I was adopted. Even though my wonderful second mom told me I was "extra-special" for being chosen, I felt incomplete. Who was I? Where did I come from?

All I knew was that I'd been born in Roanoke, Virginia. So right after I graduated from high school, I moved there. Sometimes I'd look at older women passing on the street. Was one of them my mother?

I applied to the courts for information, but the process dragged on for months. I searched chancery records, death and marriage certificates, phone books, hospital records.

In the meantime, I got a job at a local convenience store. A week later, another new employee started. Joyce was a quiet, middle-aged lady. We weren't often on the same shift, but when we were, we kidded around a lot.

One day, another co-worker, Tanya, asked, "Are you having any luck in your search?"

I didn't realize Joyce was standing

nearby. "Any luck in what?" she asked. I was surprised because Joyce usually didn't jump into other people's conversations.

"I'm adopted," I said. "I'm searching for my real mom."

All of a sudden, Joyce went white as an egg. "Do you have a picture of yourself as a baby?" she asked. "I think

I might know somebody who can help you."

The next day I brought in a baby picture and gave it to her. Then for three days she didn't show up for work at the store.

When Joyce came back, she went straight into the manager's office without saying a word. Ten minutes later, Ron, the manager, called me in.

My stomach was in knots. What did Joyce know? Then I noticed something. The baby picture I'd given her was lying on Ron's desk. But there was a second picture there—another baby picture of me! I looked questioningly at Joyce. She gave a little nod. "Are you . . . my mother?" I gasped.

"I sure am," she said. We fell into each other's arms. "And you're my little girl! I've been looking for you for the last twenty years."

For the next few minutes we could only cry. She told me, "I never gave you up. I never signed a paper. The state took you away. I was drinking, and after you were gone it got even worse. Then, eight years ago, I was walking in the park and saw everybody else with their kids. That's when I stopped drinking. I knew if I didn't, I'd never be able to find you. When I saw the baby picture, I knew. But I was afraid to face you. I thought you'd hate me!"

"I was afraid of that too!" I said. We hugged some more. My mom and I had worked together for six months . . . and lived two blocks away from each other for two years!

I spent my twenty-second birthday with Michael, Maria and my mom. Maria looks a lot like me, so it'll be a double blessing for her grandma to see her grow up. Sometimes you're much closer to your dream than you imagined! ♦

For more info

● International Soundex Reunion Registry, Box 2312, Carson City, NV 89702; 702-882-7755

● National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 1400 Eye St, NW, Suite 1275, Washington, DC 20005; 202-842-1919