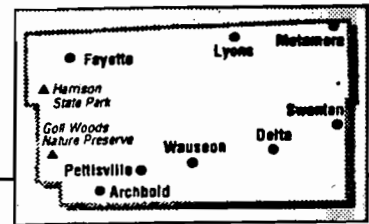


FULTON COUNTY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 1991 ■ Page S-4

THE BLADE ■ Toledo, Ohio



Couple find son they gave up for adoption

BY JANET ROMAKER

BLADE STAFF WRITER

WAUSEON — For the first time in his life, Steve Schrock celebrated his birthday with his parents, who had given him up for adoption 28 years ago.

Mr. Schrock, of Wauseon, who was placed in a foster home when he was a week old, was reunited with his birth mother and father last fall. Since then, they and other family members have been riding an emotional roller coaster.

But it has been the ride of a lifetime — the apprehensive dips downward strongly outweighed by the high peaks of happiness.

"Everyone has been saying, 'It's a miracle,' and I guess it is," said Mr. Schrock who celebrated his birthday May 20. Helping him celebrate were his adoptive parents, Wayne and Mary Schrock, of Wauseon, and his birth parents, Bob and Dona Byrum, of San Francisco.

It was 28 years ago that Mrs. Byrum, then an unwed mother, gave birth to her son in Toledo Hospital. She had moved from her home in Jackson, Mich., to a home for unwed mothers in Toledo about four months before Steve was born.

She was in high school; Mr. Byrum was attending Jackson Community College.

"We weren't ready to get married. We weren't mature enough," Mr. Byrum recalled when asked why they gave up their son for adoption.

"We didn't think we could give him the life he deserved," Mrs. Byrum added.

Mr. Byrum pointed out that at that time, they never thought there was much of a choice other than to give up the baby for adoption. Their son was placed in a foster home for four months until he was adopted by the Schrocks.

Bob and Dona married five years later, and they

never stopped thinking about their son, wondering where he was, worrying if he was alive and well, fantasizing about his looks and his life.

"Just because we did the right, responsible thing and gave him up, that didn't mean that we didn't worry a lot, that we didn't have guilt," Mr. Byrum said.

Mr. Schrock, a 1981 graduate of Pettisville High School who works at Sauder Woodworking in Archbold, decided to search for his birth parents after his wife, Kathy, encouraged him. But it took many months of her urging before Mr. Schrock agreed to seek assistance from a search group in Toledo.

He was told to expect delays and possible hurdles. To hurry the process, he filed out paperwork and registered with International Soundex Reunion Registry in Carson City, Nev.

ISRR, the largest reunion registry in the country, receives more than 1,000 individual registrations each month, cofounder Anthony Vilardi said. Established in 1975, the ISRR has made more than 2,600 matches that led to reunions, Mr. Vilardi said.

Nine years ago, the ISRR had received information from Mrs. Byrum, who registered when her son turned 18, the age when the ISRR accepts registrations from adoptees.

But for nine years, there had been no word of a match, linking her with a boy born at 5:16 a.m. in Toledo Hospital on May 20, 1963.

"I thought of him all the time," said Mrs. Byrum, gazing lovingly at her son as he sat near her on the Schrock front lawn just outside Wauseon.

"I thought of him more as time went on. I'm 47 years old. Maybe it's a function of being older — family becomes more important as you get older. My job is not as important," Mr. Byrum said.

Often, he would see a young man on the street and

BLADE PHOTO BY DON SIMMONS



Dona and Bob Byrum flank their son, Steve Schrock, at his home in Wauseon. The Byrums, who live in San Francisco, had given their son up for adoption 28 years ago.

Turn to Page S-5, Col. 1 ▶

look at him closely, hoping beyond hope to find his son.

After 9 years of waiting, the Byrums were ready to get legal assistance to track down their son in Toledo. But the ISRR made the match two weeks after Mr. Schrock registered. By the second week in November, he knew his birth parents' names.

An ISRR representative called Mr. Schrock with the news but told him to wait three or four days before reaching the Byrums, who were contacted by the ISRR by letter.

In a state of shock after reading the letter, Mrs. Byrum stalled, trying to find the perfect time to tell her husband their son was alive and well and living at Wauseon.

She told him three days later, on Thanksgiving. The next day, Mr. Byrum called and talked to his son for the first time.

"It's been a shock. It's been overwhelming. It was a strange, uncomfortable call to make, but it was a nice call," Mr. Byrum said.

"We had a hundred questions with no place to start," Mrs. Byrum said.

By early December, she was hugging her son at his home, the first of many trips to Wauseon to be with their only child.

In her fantasies, she had imagined her son married, perhaps with a baby by now. It turns out the Schrocks have three children: Ashley, 8; Michael 4; and Derek, 2.

"It's taken several months to calm down. My life has changed, but it definitely is for the better," Mr. Byrum said, glancing at his son, a look of relief etched on his face.

Mrs. Schrock, whose support has helped the family reunion be a success, said Steve's adoptive parents are happy for him.

"They said if this is what makes him happy, they are happy," she said.

"It makes me a lot happier to know where I really came from," Mr. Schrock said. He calls his adoptive parents Mom and Dad; he calls his natural parents by their first names. They all are his parents, he said.

Mr. and Mrs. Byrum have filled a void in his life that no one else could fill, Mrs. Schrock added.

The Schrocks and the Byrums encourage other adoptees and birth parents to try to reunite and find their missing link, but they caution that not every reunion is a happy one.

"I would encourage people to look, but to work with an agency. This has turned out well for us, but some people may need a support group," Mr. Byrum said. "Emotionally, it's a lot of ups and downs."