

FEATURES

One Reunion Brought Forth Story of Another

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The battle continues — the battle to open court and adoption-agency files so that people who were adopted as babies can, as adults, find their natural parents.

For their mental, emotional and physical health, a growing number of adoptees are saying that they need to know who their natural parents are. And along with them, a growing number of parents who placed their children for adoption say that they need to know what happened to their babies.

In July, a story about Debbie Price, the president of the Winston-Salem chapter of the Adoption Information Exchange — a support group for adoptees, natural parents and adoptive parents — told about her search. Her success at finding and getting to know her natural mother after 34 years brought to light another story of a successful reunion.

When Kathy Frawley of Moravian Falls read the story about Mrs. Price's reunion, she called Mrs. Price to tell how she found the daughter she had placed for adoption 25 years ago. When Mrs. Frawley, then Kathy Hutton, was just 16, she became pregnant. Like other teen-agers at the time, she felt that she had just two choices other than marriage: an illegal abortion or having her baby and giving it up for adoption.

It was a painful choice, she said in a recent telephone interview. "But I chose life."



Mrs. Frawley and her daughter, Pamela Birsinger, were matched by the Soundex Reunion Registry.

She went to live with relatives in Ohio. When the baby was born, she named her Melissa Anne and put her up for adoption.

The years passed. Mrs. Frawley, who had no other children, said that she never stopped wondering where and how her little girl was.

The year her baby would have been 18 years old, Mrs. Frawley, inspired by the growing number of reunions between natural parents and the children they had placed for adoption, decided to find her child.

But everywhere she turned, she

bumped into stone walls of silence and closed records.

Through a support group, Mrs. Frawley found out about the International Soundex Reunion Registry, a non-profit agency in Carson City, Nev., that matches adopted children searching for their parents to natural parents searching for the sons or daughters.

The registry, whose services are free, has a success rate of just 2 percent, Mrs. Frawley said. To make a match, both the adopted child and the natural parent must register. Matching is done by computer, based on dates, time of birth, places and all the information that each searcher can provide.

Mrs. Frawley registered and, expectedly, heard nothing. After her second marriage, she moved to Moravian Falls, where she now lives on a 185-acre farm.

More years passed.

One night, Mrs. Frawley was home alone watching television when her telephone rang.

On the other end of the line was Pamela Caryl Birsinger, a 24-year-old social worker at a hospital in Atlanta.

Here is the conversation as Mrs. Frawley remembers it:

"Is this Kathy Hutton? Did you file with the New National Soundex Registry? Well, they made a match. They matched me to you," Miss Birsinger said.

Mrs. Frawley asked, "Is this a joke?" She was thinking, she said, that if it were a joke, it was cruel.

"This is no joke, I am your daughter," the woman on the other end of the line said.

"We talked for an hour and a half," Mrs. Frawley said.

They talked about important and not-so-important things.

"She told me she had had good parents. I found out she has the same fine, thin, naturally curly hair that I have."

Only a few days passed before Miss Birsinger came to Moravian Falls to see the mother who had given her birth.

"She was taller than me and looked down at me, but we looked at each other with almost identical eyes," Mrs. Frawley said. "She was gorgeous."

Miss Birsinger said to Mrs. Frawley: "It's so nice to finally see myself."

Getting to know her daughter has made all the difference in the world, Mrs. Frawley said. "Now I feel complete."

In a letter to Mrs. Frawley, Miss Birsinger told about her feelings:

"I'm sorry you missed my childhood... In all those years, I have been dreaming and thinking of you. I'm glad I found you.

"I'm sure there has been pain for you. I have felt pain too, perhaps a bit differently — in the form of emptiness, disconnectedness, blank faces and so many questions.

"There is and always has been a part of me that belongs to you."