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lessons and gifts

Allyson Partridge

"Why are you special Allyson?" my parents would ask me as a young child.

"Because I'm adopted." was always my reply.

I did not understand then, but the important part was that I was told early on. As I got older, I became aware of what being adopted meant for me. My parents Bill and Sheila adopted me on December 17, 1980. I was a little over two weeks old at the time. From the time my parents brought me home, I was treated as if I was their child from birth. However, they still felt it was important that I knew I was adopted, and as I got older they told me what they knew about my birthparents.

I grew up in Nova Scotia, and adoption records there are sealed. Birthparents and adoptees are not allowed to search until the adoptee turns 19. During my childhood and adolescence, what I knew was enough for me, but when I turned 20 I decided I wanted to know more. This was a personal decision that had nothing to do with how happy my childhood was.

Mom and I discussed this life altering decision, and I was pleased she supported me. I knew not all adopted mothers supported their children deciding to search for their birth relatives. Because we had moved to Ontario, it took some time to locate the non-identifying information. I was adopted from an agency called Home of the Guardian Angel. I clearly remember sitting on the edge of my bed as I read through the information on my birthmother, birthfather, and their immediate families. This was an emotional experience for me. When I read the information about my birthmother's reason for placing me for adoption, it was the first time I truly understood the sacrifice she made for me. I knew at that moment I had to search for her. After the tears stopped, I started planning what I needed to do to search.

I quickly located the address for the Adoption Disclosure Program in Nova Scotia. I requested updated non-identifying information, and an active search. April 6, 2001 was the date on the letter that I received indicating my name was on the waiting list. I was informed there would be an extensive waiting period before they got to my name. I had no idea the fear I was going to have about how this journey would end. "Is there any mail?" I asked mom everyday for the first year. "Not today." was always her reply.

I got caught up in school, life, and all the other things a twenty something does. As a result I did not ask mom as often as when the search began. I performed my own internet searches, and came to one dead end after another. This was frustrating. With the passage of time, and the failed attempts, I admit my hope to locate my birthmother was

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fading. I was getting paranoid that my birthmother would never be found, or wouldn't want anything to do with me. My parents offered constant reassurance, reminding me that I needed to be patient. I realized that I needed to wait until the search began before I continued to make assumptions about the outcome.

I was taking a huge risk, but somehow I knew that I would have the outcome I wanted. Apparently my instinct was right. On February 23, 2004 a letter was sent to me apologizing for the delay, and asked me to prepare a letter for my birthmother before the search. I remember lying on the floor in my bedroom staring at a page wondering what I was going to say to her, this woman I had never met, but felt deeply connected to.

I had the letter prepared and sent back to Nova Scotia within two days. The social worker's name was Paula. She was very helpful. I decided to go back to life as usual, not knowing when I would hear back from her. The following week end I discovered there was a message left for me on the previous Wednesday. I was living away from my parents' home at that time. I would not be able to return her call until the following Tuesday. I was starting to see the light at the end of this long tunnel, and felt anxious.

On Tuesday I wasn't able to get Paula on the phone in the morning, so I headed off to school. I tried her there on a payphone, and that time I was successful. She told me that she had contacted my birth mom, and everything after that was blurry. I felt so many things at the same time. Relieved, happy, and even a bit scared were just some of them. I wanted to know if she lived in the country. The answer was yes, but I wasn't allowed to know anything more specific at that point. I hung up the phone and cried, and then cried some more.

A short time later, I received the first letter from my birthmother. It arrived at my mom's house and she read it to me over the phone. I was nervous and excited. I tried to get my mother to promise not to cry as she read it; of course she did which made me cry as well. My biggest dream was to be able to see her face. I was lucky enough to have the letter driven out to me the next day. When it arrived at the school I was asked how long I'd been waiting.

"My entire life!!" was all I could say.

I opened the pictures and the letter while thinking to myself that a dream I've had my whole life was coming true. I finally had a name and a face. Ironically, her name is Paula, the same name as the social worker that reunited us.

One of the things that still amazes is the length of my wait compared to how long the search took. I waited almost three years after I requested to search, and my birth mom was located after a single telephone call. However, I can understand that there are a lot of adoptees, and we must all wait our turn.

I am 24 years old, and I'm very thankful I decided to search now because we have so many years ahead of us. It was a long search, but now I believe that life teaches us the greatest lessons and gives us the best gifts. Paula, her family, and I have grown very close already. My story has been said to be one in a million, and because of faith and love, I truly believe it is.

Larry (3861) -
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