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How I Used Free & Low Cost Internet Sources To Locate My Birth Parents And how these same sources can be used by you to locate anyone!

By Kevin Witten
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Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to my wife Tabitha, for without her persistence in performing Internet searches, and tracking down leads, (while also managing our four daughters and son) I may have never located my birth parents.

January 23, 1972

I claim that date to be the beginning of my beginning. That being the date of my birth, I didn't have very many choices then, because my life was governed by the decisions of many people. What I mean by that is that I was adopted.

This isn't a sad story about how I didn't like being adopted, was abused or neglected. It's just a small glimpse into my life of being adopted. On one hand I was very lucky to have been adopted. On the other hand not so lucky; let me explain. My birth parents, both being young and unmarried at the time, were at the mercy of their parents' will and decisions.

Being young, in their late teens in 1972, unmarried, and pregnant at the time was not a good situation to be in, especially with friends and family. To give you an idea, my Birth Mother was sent to an unwed mothers' home, so that she was away from family, friends, and the public eye. I can't think of a lonelier place to be, under any circumstances, let alone being pregnant for the first time, with the feeling of being abandoned. After my birth, she was then forced to place me for adoption.

I was adopted a few months later into the loving and open arms of my new adopted family, whom I feel love me the best that they can, and still do.

Questions

I feel that it is important to describe various feelings that I had, about being adopted, at the earliest age that I can remember. If you have been adopted, you probably had or still have these same or similar feelings, thoughts, and questions that I had. Perhaps by addressing these thoughts and questions it may help you live a better, more fulfilled life. At least that's the way I feel now, after locating and meeting my birth parents. Don't take my feelings and comments the wrong way, you may agree with some of them and some you may not.

I will begin when I was about six years old, because that's when I began to understand some memories of my early life and the questions that I had while daydreaming about my life at this time.

Questions such as, "Is being adopted bad?" or "Was I supposed to be with this (adopted) family or not?" Yes, I was adopted into that family, but I wasn't told I was adopted until I was about seven years old. I had other questions too, about body features and things of that nature. After my adopted parents told me that I was adopted, it made things easier for me to understand, things such as character and physical features. These and other questions would pop into my mind while daydreaming.

I can't help but think that they told me I was adopted at that time, because these features were being recognized by the outside world. When I was old enough to date, I introduced one of my few girlfriends to my parents. My girlfriend later asked me, "Why do you look so different?" I told her nonchalantly that I was adopted. She laughed and said, "That's so funny." Needless to say she didn't last very long. Another example was a friend of mine in elementary school who ran up to my mom and asked her if I was adopted. I don't think I'll ever forget that day! We had an argument about my feet. I happen to have large feet, and did even back then, twenty years ago. I'm now 6' 4" and wear a size 16 shoe, and I tower over my adopted parents!

So I finally had to reveal my secret to “outsiders”, and admitted to my “friend” that I was adopted, and that was why I didn’t resemble my parents.

Even though I told him the truth, the jerk wouldn’t believe me, so he asked my mom. I don’t think she expected to be asked such a question. It upset me because he had stepped into a private territory that he shouldn’t have stepped in to. So from that day forth, whenever I was ever asked, “Why don’t you look like your mom and dad?” I would answer by telling them that I take after my grandparents. That seemed to satisfy everyone who asked, especially when I came to tower over my adopted parents, just shy a foot. To this day most of my friends don’t know that I was adopted. Not that it’s a big “secret”. If they asked, I would tell them my reason why and they never asked again.

The Vacation

When I was around twelve I can remember we were packing for a vacation to Connecticut, the state where I was born, and where I would learn about my background and history. That was the way I looked at it. I'm sure it brought back many old memories for my parents. I also can't help thinking they designed the vacation for me. It was really a treat to see the state I was born in. The history! "Hmm" my own history. I also think that was the first time I felt the hunger to find my birth parents. This thought became more intense the older I became. It grew even more intense into my preteen and teenage years.

After that trip I felt as though I had achieved something, but what I didn't know until now. I was building a hunger, a hunger to fill a void that I still didn't realize that I had. I also think it was the first time I got a taste of resentment, towards my birth family. How could they have done this to me? Why did they do this to me?

It was these thoughts that would sometimes bring out a rage in me that I didn't understand. For example, one time I got into an argument with my mom at age fifteen and I put my fist through the wall, right next to her head. Of course it changed the argument subject! Nevertheless, it left me asking, "Why did I do that? Where did that emotion come from? Is this how my birth parents would react. Or was it just part of being a teenager?" By the way, I'm sorry Mom.

I constantly questioned my actions and reactions in situations where my emotions came into play. When I entered high school, these negative emotions were reflected in my sporting activities. The emotions sometimes hindered me during sporting activities, but in most cases these emotions made me more aggressive. I really worked on the resentment factor for a couple of years. Eventually, I just came to a realization that things happen, whether or not we want them to. I was fortunate enough to have two parents who wanted to adopt me and give me a stable loving environment.

That reminds me of a paragraph that I had to write while in elementary school:

Life is a series of choices. The choice I have made today has brought to me the consequences of writing these sentences. Maybe next time I will make a better choice.

A Note I “had to write!”

Now that I’ve grown up and have a family of my own, I can better understand the above paragraph, and how my choices change those around me. My choice to search for my birth family was not easy. I often wondered, while doing my search, if it was the right thing to do. You may have the same thoughts. I knew that it would expose me to feelings that I wasn’t sure I wanted to expose.

For example, the feeling of betraying my adoptive family. It’s a natural feeling to have. I still felt the need to fulfill my emotional hunger, even more so after I had kids of my own, (I am a father of five, four girls and one adopted son). I also became concerned about health issues. If you were to look at your family tree on paper and cut out one name, and put it aside, how would that affect your tree? Now think of yourself as being cut out and think about when you go to the doctor and you fill out your medical history.

Now you may be thinking it’s really not a big deal, because adoption agencies understand that medical history can be an issue. They put in as much medical information as they can into your file. But, let’s face it, it’s only so good. People get older, and problems arise that they were not aware of earlier in life, or at the time of the adoption. These and many other unanswered questions were constantly on my mind, and I wanted to get the answers to them.

The Obstacle

At the age of twenty-eight I decided in earnest to pursue the search of my birth parents. Although I had decided at the age of eighteen to start searching, I was detoured either financially, or caught up in my own world of whatever was going on at the time. At the age of eighteen I moved out of my parents' house. I was still in school, played sports, had a job, and still graduated on time. That same summer, I got married, and my wife had our first child. So searching for my birth parents at that time was put off.

Around the age of twenty I picked up the spark to search again. My wife and I went to the library and looked up private investigators in the state where I was adopted. We proceeded to write letters to dozens of investigators in that state. Many responded to our letter, but few agreed to do a search. We were left with few options. We chose an investigator that seemed pretty sincere. Her price was twelve hundred dollars to find and locate a birth relative. Contacting them was up to us. Twelve hundred dollars was reasonable, considering we had read reply letters of double that price. The only guarantee was that we didn't pay until she found someone. Well, she had some leads but nothing ever came of them. So my search was put off again with the thought that there wasn't any other avenue to turn to.

A couple of years later, at age 23, and expecting our third child, I had yet another spark of interest to perform a search. This time I headed to the library and asked for their microfiche film. The idea was to look through newspapers during the time frame and place of my birth, while using the "process of elimination" and spending countless hours in front of a screen looking through birth announcements. Eliminating girls of course, birth dates, and weights of children. My "non-identifying information" gave me just enough information to possibly come up with names or some other detail at that point. Well this went on for about two months and I once again gave up, with the notion of nowhere to turn.

I had read books and other articles about “searching” for people. I know of a few people who have searched with no success, and it is very discouraging running into brick walls. This is an obstacle that is part of searching. You will more than likely run into these brick walls. But remember that most brick walls have cracks or can be climbed, usually there are ways that you can overcome these hurdles.

Another two years went by. I saw a TV commercial; perhaps you’ve seen it. It promotes a packet that states: “Find anyone anywhere with our product.” It definitely got me thinking again. So I forked out \$300.00 to get a book and some tapes. They gave me some good ideas, but I realized that this was getting expensive after numerous long distant phone calls, stamps and envelopes. I had spent nearly \$700.00 plus the cost of the packet or about \$1,000.00. I did have a nice conversation with the lady who placed me for adoption. Yes, the lady who placed me for adoption was still working for the agency, part time. I played the game of “twenty questions” with her to finally figure out that I wasn't getting anywhere. So once again, I gave up my search.

A couple of years went by, and I felt the urge to once again search for my birth family. I was getting older, and I knew that my birth parents were also. I began to fear that if I didn't find them soon and get to speak with them, just once in my life, that the void I had for so long would never be filled. I had an idea. Here I was amongst a new era of technology. The Internet, a world of information at your fingertips!

Searching for a Searcher

When beginning my search I thought of digging out and dusting off my “Locator” packet of books and tapes, and using them once again. I’m referring to the packet that I paid \$300.00 dollars for, six or so years previously. I figured I better get some use out of it. I opened it up, checked it out and put it back in the closet. When looking at it, I couldn’t see myself using it again. It’s the difference between having a fifteen-year-old 286 computer versus a 686 Pentium III computer. It’s just not practical. Instead I turned to the Internet for help. I began to do a search in the state where I was born.

At first I stumbled around the Internet, I began by searching under different categories pertaining to adoption. I have listed these search queries at the end of this book for your use. I would put certain words in for searches, mix and match them, to search websites that I would then check out. This took a while to do because being fairly new to the Internet I didn’t recognize a good or a bad website at first. Good meaning easily accessible with a lot of information. Some were reputable and some were not. You get used to recognizing the good sites versus the bad sites the more you use them. I started noticing some sites would pop up more often than others would.

In my case, I found a site that would help find my birth name and birth mother’s name. I didn’t have that sort of information about myself. What I did have was a birth date, place of birth, and weight at birth, and ages of my birth parents. Those are the forms of “*non-identifying*” information. This information is on my birth certificate and adoption papers, that my adopted parents gave me on my 18th birthday. Other forms of non-identifying information will pertain to your birth parents, i.e. age, height, hair color, eye color, nationalities, their likes, dislikes, and health related conditions. Some adoptees have more or less of this type of information. More often than not, people think they don’t have enough information to search with. Don’t be fooled by that brick wall. A professional

searcher can dig up information from something as simple as a date. Of course it's more time consuming but it has been done. All the information above is all I had to give to my searcher.

This reminds me about my searcher. She said I had less information than most, but would still be able to pin down a name. I chose this particular searcher mainly due to her site. She had a very sincere site pertaining to searching in the state I was born. On the opening page it had a mother holding her baby. I went through and registered on her "visitors page." From there I asked her if she could help. She later replied with "yes she could". Now, I had questions such as, "What do I need to do? How much do you charge? How long will this take?" She answered my questions to my liking.

She told me the cost of this service was fifty dollars. There was no guarantee that she would find a name, except for the fact that her success rate was 100%. You can imagine that I was skeptical. After all, I had been quoted at least \$1200.00 to receive a birth name from other searchers.

This brings me to the people who want your money. It shouldn't cost you more than \$150.00 to receive a birth name. Anything over that amount I would question, depending upon the information you already have to begin your search, or what the searcher has to do to come up with a name. The reason that I say this, is because I was adopted in one of the few states remaining that still has sealed records, yet I received my birth name for the small fee of fifty dollars. But understand that you might run into a lot of red tape in some states or counties.

Along with red tape you will encounter other problems regarding information that you are trying to retrieve, such as state laws. In some cases they differ from the particular county you are searching in. Sometimes, the people you are trying to retrieve your information from may not be informed of laws regarding adoption. Hence this could help or hinder your search. It's possible that you could get the "run-around".

After I received a birth name, I then proceeded to the Net to find "same last names" and hopefully phone numbers and addresses. I had a good start with six names that I received from my searcher. Remember, if you are doing an out of

state search and have found someone to help you, ask them if they can provide you with names of people in the area where you were born that pertain to your last name at birth.

I went to a great site called switchboard.com. Here you can do a people search, find mailing and street addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers among other things of the person you're looking for. From here I matched some names with phone numbers. I also used other sites to find phone numbers. All the sites I used are provided for you at the end of this book. It's a good idea to go into several of these sites to get as much information as you can. Remember to visit more than one of these sites, as they are all similar yet you might find an additional name or other important information that will help you in your search.

I happened to find six people with phone numbers in the area where I was born that were possible matches for birth relatives. This gave me a good start to do my search. Also, remember that I was looking for my birth mother. So it is possible that she had married and her last name would have changed. Not to worry, there are ways to find out. KnowX.com is one. This site allows you to perform "people" searches by name under search criteria of marriage, divorce, property and many others.

Phone Calls

When placing phone calls have a pencil and paper ready. If the phone conversation goes well you should be prepared to take notes. Be sure that you are cordial during your phone conversation; let them know that you're doing genealogical research, or some other type of search. I used genealogical research. You might want to say you're a college student and you're doing a survey. I have a buddy who used this ploy, he found out all sorts of things. He asked questions like how many births their family had in the last twenty-four years, that were his age. If he got an answer about how many births they had, his next question was, "Were any of them adopted?" That is a little more personal than what most people want to get. So I would suggest genealogical research. It seems to be more justifiable when asking personal questions.

When contacting people remember "don't give yourself up". By that I mean, don't tell them what you're really doing. You might by chance talk to somebody who will figure out what you're trying to do and in turn, want to help you. You may also find an individual that doesn't want any part of it. You might want to ask them if there is another family member that might be able to help. Just remember that you're prying into a situation that you don't know anything about. It could have been, and still may be a touchy subject for some of the people involved.

Develop a conversation by introducing yourself. Let them know what you are doing. You can start by saying that you know for example, Joan Smith (the birth mother) who used to live in (a town or area that you've chosen) and ask if she is related to you. You could also run some other names by them from your contact list to see if there is a connection. During the conversation you could say, "there was a women whose name was _____ and Bill Smith said she had a child?" Do you know anything about that? It might not seem right to disguise yourself like this, but you have to remember that generally families will protect other members whether you think it is right or wrong. If you're doing the search

you don't want to jeopardize that, especially if you're sincere about why you're doing a search. I say this because, if you don't handle the interview with "kid gloves" you will more than likely get shut down pretty quick.

This happened with the first person that I called on my list. I called, and right off the bat I said who I was and that I was looking for my birth mother. Before I called the second person on my list I figured I'd better change my plan of action because I wasn't going to get very far just asking them point blank. The next call was to a man called John. I told him that I was doing genealogy research and needed some information.

He sent me to his brother "Ron" who, by the way, had done extensive genealogy research. Wow, I thought to myself, I would find my birth parents for sure! This guy could be an uncle or something. After talking to Ron for an hour or so, I still had nothing except more leads. The funny thing was, that my whole list of people to contact were all related to each other, but I soon found out that they were not related to me! Ron informed me that there were two different families with the same last name in that area. And that a lot of the first names in both families were the same. He had the ages of the people in his family and some from another family unrelated to him. But by having the ages of people, I could eliminate some of the names, as they might be too young or too old.

You can use the process of elimination. You could have a large family, at least by last name. For example, if your birth last name is Smith, well what line of Smiths are you from? There could be a hundred or so different families of Smiths, but which one do you belong to? I happened to have found two different families of the same last name. Ron helped me out with that. With the names and ages of different people he could keep me going in a straight line, instead of bouncing around like a pinball and going nowhere. I could basically move forward. Deleting people as I went along or keeping them if I needed a little more information about them to make sure they were not related in some way.

More Efficient to Use the Net

The information you will find is as easy as opening a phone book. It's just more efficient to do it over the Internet, rather than ordering every phone book for every county, city, or state that you're searching in, or purchasing one of the expensive (\$400) CDs that are now available. However, I have included a company that sells a much less expensive CD called "Forbidden Information". It contains a great deal of information on searching, and how to make money by performing searches. You can write or fax them and request additional information about this CD in the "Sources" section.

You also might want to purchase phone cards instead of using your regular long distant phone carrier. In most cases you can find cheaper rates with phone cards than with your long distance carrier.

My Roller Coaster Ride

When I started doing a search over the Internet, unlike in the past, I found myself bombarded with information. While my searcher was searching for information, I did some reading. I read up on all sorts of subjects. For example, how birth parents react after placing a child for adoption. By the way, there happens to be more information about birth mothers than fathers. The reason why, is because more often than not birth parents are not married at the time. Therefore when they have a baby he/she will receive the mothers maiden name (if they give a name). The birth father is left by the wayside, without their name on your original birth certificate. If you are able to find a birth mother and then proceed to find a birth father, you will most likely have to do another search providing you have the necessary information, repeating the process.

In my case my birth mother had contact with my birth father about five years prior to me contacting her. This allowed for more current up to date information to find him. I also read up on other adoption stories. Some of these stories are located in the sites that I have provided for you. It added to my insight as to how other adoptees felt about the subject. I basically wanted to know what to expect walking into a situation that I was a part of, yet not knowing what to expect. For example, do birth parents have problems after putting a child up for adoption? This type of information can be very helpful for you. During this waiting period, I had gone into numerous adoption message boards and posted my personal information, just in case someone would recognize it. Most of the sites that I have provided for you have a message board to post your search message. You can also check to see if someone is looking for you.

On May 5th my searcher came back with a name. I have to admit the frustration of waiting those many years and the excitement of finally finding my birth parents was like approaching the peak of the first down-hill of a roller coaster ride, one of fear, excitement, and defeat.

Those feelings have lasted a lot longer than the five minutes of a roller coaster ride. I should explain that my first feeling was one of fear. The fear of unlocking the door to the past. Will this be a good experience, or a bad one? The fear of just the simple fact of opening a door that would slap my adopted parents in the face with betrayal. That's a hard concept to overcome. After all, they raised me to the best of their abilities.

Following a close second in the emotional arena is the excitement. The excitement of feeling that this is really happening, the excitement of reality hitting you in the face. What are they like? Do I have brothers or sisters? Those are some of the questions that I wanted to find the answers to.

After I received and dealt with my feelings, I took the second step. I went back to the Internet for more help. I went back to some of the sites I had previously visited, that I liked. Don't forget to write down, or save to your "Favorites" the sites that catch your eye. The Internet is a big place and changes every day. I have provided you with some of the best sites available to you, yet you might find others. I happen to like sites that have current message boards.

During May 8th through May 10th I registered in forty-three sites free of charge. Two stick out in my mind, Classmates.com, a good site to find old classmates. The other is Ancestry.com, another good site for researching family history. I have a cute story about classmates.com. I did a search to find every school in the state where I was born. I looked for all the high schools in the area that my birth mom may have attended. The idea was that maybe she had registered on this site and I could find her. Some of the schools have their own websites with Alumni. Well on with the story. I have a sister-in-law who wanted to be helpful, so she decided to log on to one of the high schools mentioned through classmates.com as my birth mother. My wife and I did not know that she had done this. About two hours later, (this was on May 11th,), our searcher called us to let us know that she found my birth mother. When she told us what name she was now using, we thought how ironic it was that she had the same last name as my sister-in-law. So we called my helpful sister-in-law and told her the weird news. That was when she reported to us that she thought she could help out by registering under the same name as my birth mother. I guess you could say we had a laugh over the situation.

The Payoff

Ancestry.com sticks out in my mind, because it was the very last site I registered in. They have a message board for what seems like every last name on earth. Here I went through the list of my birth surname and checked all the other messages pertaining to that name. Then I went through the last names of others to get a feel for what other people were writing about. This is a genealogical website. In a nutshell, people looking for people. Posting the message was free. All I had to do was come up with a message that was short and noticeable, without revealing too much of what I was looking for. My message read:

“Lost contact with relative’s name back in 1971, 72 in city, state name (person you’re looking for) does any body know where she is now?”

After submitting the above message, I looked at the response time to messages under that last name. The time frame was about a month for people to receive a reply. After that I searched around their site and found that I could get phone numbers and addresses too, or look up names by categories. I eventually subscribed to their site. For the following week I went back into these sites thinking, and hoping that someone would reply. The first week, nothing. The second week... nothing. By the third week I was trying to think of a new angle to search. For some reason I thought that I should have found them by now. Maybe I was hoping for too much. On June 11th four weeks and one day after posting that message, I received an e-mail reply from a soon to be known birth aunt.

She reported of knowing a lady by that name and stated that she had possibly lived in the area where I knew my birth mother once lived. I sent her a return e-mail. I left her my name, phone number and address. I said I would like to contact her if at all possible and I left it at that. We played e-tag a couple of

times until I finally couldn't stand it. I dropped the "so called dreaded ball," e-mailed the story to her and about five minutes later she called. WOW! Talk about a moment of anxiety. I finally went through the first upside down turn on my emotional roller coaster. It was like holding your breath under water for as long as possible then finally getting your head above water to take that first breath. She filled me in on different things. She let me know that the name I had given her (my birth mother) is the name of her sister. She gave me her recollection of what was going on at that time back in 1972, the year that I was born. She told me some family history, what people are doing today, etc. I didn't have a lot to say. I didn't know what to say. I filled her in on my family situation, my kids, my adopted family, job and related facts. She also told me how she came about responding to my message.

I also learned that I have birth relatives pretty close to where I live now. They would be cousins as I am told. They happen to have the same last name as my birth surname. They were searching through Ancestry.com and read my message.

So you never know who will partake in your quest to find someone. I would like to thank the cousins respectfully for without their unknowing help in my search I might still be searching and wondering today.

So now that I had made contact with my aunt, I thought about contacting my birth mother. Well on June 15th I got the phone call. The call that had been on my mind for years! My birth mother called. We were both excited. We talked for a while, a long while. I now know why I had been drawn to the "big family atmosphere." I have four younger brothers. How exciting! That day I understood my actions and reactions to different situations in my life, and about my temper, or temper tantrums for that matter.

Then at one point in our conversation she mentioned that she was sorry for what she did. I couldn't begin to tell you how I felt. I thought to myself, why was she saying that she was sorry? I felt glad that I was put up for adoption after hearing some of the chaotic things that went on at that time in her life. I soon learned that in giving me up she had sacrificed personal emotions that she never forgot about. Like my birthday, first day of school, driving for the first time, graduating, getting married, grand children and many other occasions shared by a family. In

response to her apology, I said, “There is nothing to be sorry for.” Now that we have talked perhaps we could build this into a relationship that will grow into days, weeks and even years. For it is looking into tomorrow that brings us happiness today.

The Meeting

We met in the late evening on July 1st. She was with a friend. We live in the country, where it's easy to get lost, so my wife drove out to meet them at a predetermined place, to greet them and show them the way to our house. While she was gone, the kids and I were out on our porch watching for headlights to appear. You see we have a mile long driveway so when we see headlights it takes a minute or two before the car arrives. Well about ten minutes went by...and then we finally saw headlights. Everybody ran back into the house and peered out the windows awaiting her arrival. When we finally saw the car a "what do I do?" came over everybody. "She's here, she's here," the kids were yelling. I went into another room where she couldn't see me as soon as she walked in the front door. A trembling came over me. Nerves of steel were definitely not with me that night. When she came in the front door she said, "Where is he?" I peered from the side of the wall to take a "look-see." As a child might before getting the cookie that they were told not to take.

When I came forward we locked eyes, recognized each other's features and hugged. We hugged for a couple of minutes. We settled down, wiped the tears of joy and quit staring at each other, sort of. We talked about everything. We went through pictures of my family, her family, my birth father's family, the whole nine yards. We had a great time.

My Second Search

Once again I found myself searching, this time for my birth father. It was a whole lot easier than the first time. I suppose it is because I finally broke down the first barrier, which made it seem like the rest of the hurdles were small. My birth mother had information on him as to where he lived, or at least the general vicinity. With a name that I received from my birth mother, the day I talked to her on the telephone the first time, I went to the Net again. It started out the same way. Doing searches through websites. We came upon one number with a good match. A good match meaning the initials of his name and area were a 95% match. I called the number, heard a voice message, then hung up the phone, looked at my wife and said the voice sounded like me in about twenty years. With that I called again and this time left a message. We still weren't sure if it was the right number. But you could say that we had a hunch.

On June 22nd my wife contacted my birth father. Later that evening I called him and we talked for a while. I actually couldn't tell you for how long. It was very awkward to hear what sounded like myself on the other end. Though we were men about the whole thing, I could tell there was remorse about what happened 28 years ago and satisfaction about finding him. We e-mailed each other quite a few times. We keep in contact by phone, but mostly by e-mail. After finding my birth father I became overwhelmed again with emotions.

My Six Minutes of Fame

About a week later I went into Ancestry.com again to post another message in the “found” section. You should do this in all the sites after finding your birth family. It gives other people hope in their search. I then canceled my subscription to Ancestry.com. You have to call and cancel. The reason why I’m telling you this is because the gentleman on the phone asked me why I was canceling. My reply was that I found my birth family and no longer needed their services.

A couple of days later they called and stated that they were interested in my story on how people are getting connected through their website. Another day went by and I received another call from Myfamily.com saying that they were doing a story, with a major TV network, the CBS Early Morning Show, and wanted to know if I was interested in sharing my story. I warned my birth father about what was happening. I also warned my adopted parents of what was happening.

I had suspected that they would bring my birth father on the show to surprise me, so I prepared myself. Well the day of the show, Aug 22nd came and no birth father. Six minutes before the show, I was going through the list of names of people that would be appearing on the air that day, and no birth father. We prepped for the show. We sat, our interview started and I couldn’t believe he wasn’t there. They went through the first two guests and then me. I told them a brief story about how I located my birth parents through the Internet, all the while thinking why didn’t he show up? I figured I would have seen him by now.

Our segment was just about over when I was asked by Jane Clayson, “I understand that one of the first questions you asked your birth father was whether or not if he was bald?” I replied that that was correct. She said, “Well

we thought you would like to find out for yourself.” That same trembling feeling hit me. I could feel my heart pounding with fear and excitement.

(For the record, I don’t have any feelings against bald people, it’s just a subject that concerned me, and I had to know the answer. It was not my intention to offend anyone, but to be as honest and open with you about my thoughts, feelings and concerns in this book. Far-be-it for me to offend anyone!)

My birth father appeared from a backstage wing. We said hello and shook hands on stage. My journey was over. Or was it? After the show my wife and I went to his house. While there, we talked and got to know each other. I couldn’t help but notice that we had the same walk. The same gestures. The same looks in the eye. It might not come as such a surprise to people that have been around their biological family their whole life, but when you’ve never been with them it’s all new, and extraordinary to you.

A Leap of Faith

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to observe someone without them knowing who you are? I had often thought of finding out where my birth parents had lived, and walking by with an ice cream dolly or driving an ice cream truck dingling the bell and selling ice cream to them. I would then be able to observe their characteristics, actions, and other things that I've wondered about for a very long time, all without disrupting their life, or mine for that matter.

I know a lot of adoptees that have, or have had thoughts like these. Some are unusual circumstances, but all have the same point. There are a lot of thoughts involved when thinking about doing a search. You might want to consider talking to your adopted parents, get some pointers, and find out how they feel about it. As for myself, I was fortunate enough to have adopted parents who raised me to think for myself, and to come up with my own ideas.

A lot of the reason I felt compelled to tell them of my venture was because I felt like I was betraying them and worried about their insecurities. I feel they want to protect me from the unknown. As you can imagine that's a pretty heavy subject to bring up to two people who raised you. Besides, they deserve to know your thoughts and feelings on the subject.

Different Strokes For Different Folks

I have a friend whose parents want her to look for her birth family, but she refuses. I have another friend who wants to look, but his parents forbid him to. In either case, it's a decision you alone will have to make.

My personal reason for doing a search was because I have a family of my own, a rather large family for this day and age. I was concerned with their health as well as my own. So I felt that my main reason for performing a search was to learn of any hereditary health ailments or problems. I soon realized that wasn't my only reason. I figured if anything outside of that came up than I would play it by ear, such as any relationships with my birth family. Basically, I went into the search thinking I would never find them or they were dead or they didn't want me disrupting their lives. I did this to mentally prepare myself for rejection. First of all, I didn't want to disrupt their lives. Second, I didn't want to disrupt mine. I'm not saying you have to prepare yourself, but it's a good idea.

I've talked to many people who were rejected and didn't prepare for it. In turn they became side tracked by their emotions and didn't get the answers to questions they wanted to ask, such as background and health questions, which is all they said they wanted in the first place. Remember to go in with objectives. Note: It is possible to receive medical info without any contact by requesting it through the courts for a fee. Keep in mind that it can be a long process due to the fact that they try to locate them. You can decide if you want to be contacted or not. This holds true through adoption agencies that also charge a small fee. If it works into a relationship that you feel comfortable with, then good for you. If it doesn't, then at least you have achieved your objectives. After all, I never thought I could have found and met my birth mother. And I certainly never thought that I would meet my birth father for the first time on national television, let alone writing this book.

Each and every day I have to stop and realize how lucky I am. It's not a miracle or anything. It's just that I am one man, one person with a family of my own. I look at my kids and wonder how could I have ever thought that I could miss out on something like this? I once asked my wife of ten years, "How could I have ever mentioned adopting out our first child, now ten years old?" What was I thinking? I would have missed her first basketball goal, not just the first but the first in three seasons of basketball! (It took her 3-seasons to make her first goal shot). This makes my heart break to know that I have birth parents that missed out on that excitement. Some might say "Well that's tough," and yes it is, but some people don't realize the wonderful experiences they can have in a family until it's gone.

My birth father has recently visited with me and my family. It was a visit I will never forget. I was without words. Not just because I felt like I was walking in a daydream, after finding my birth family, but I couldn't fathom the fact that I really was a part of a life. Not to say that I didn't have a life, because I did and still do, but to see where that life originated from, and how my life could have been different.

I have watched my wife's family interact with each other for about 15 years now and have always been drawn to the big family atmosphere. Her family would get together for the holidays and we would play a game called Pictionary, you might have heard of it. Anyway, I would generally sit with one of her family members. Well, half way through the game I would start complaining about the score. "This is unfair," I would say, "You make a dot and she knows the answer." It wouldn't upset me. I would just think about how similar their brains worked. Would that be me if I weren't adopted? Don't get me wrong, I'm not ashamed to be adopted. I just think that it is wonderful to be able to sit on the other side of the fence and observe. Now I feel that I have done enough observing. I can tell you that I am more at peace with myself now than I have ever felt before. In that, I mean I am more comfortable with my decisions and myself.

I've taken a lot more chances since I found my birth family. It's kind of like the Olympics. Everyone has his or her own Olympic challenge; one person's challenge may seem greater than another's, and to some, these challenges may seem great feats or overwhelming barriers. But, if you don't try to overcome

them, you may never be at peace with yourself. I can think back to when I played football and other sports. I never played to my full potential. I never knew why for sure. I think it was because I was never comfortable with my personal feelings or thoughts, which hampered my decisions.

Now I say this because it was hard to blend-in, when I stood a foot taller than my parents and nearly a foot and a half taller than my sister. No it doesn't matter what other people think, at least now it doesn't.

I've been asked if I regret growing up being adopted? My simple answer was no! Then they asked, "What about growing up with your birth parents?" I said well maybe, maybe not, who knows? I now have a chance to develop a relationship with both my birth parents and my adopted parents. Some feelings have come up that bring turmoil, but some feelings come up that have helped me excel at doing things that I would have normally just said "Oh well, forget it." I have since broken a lot of personal barriers with myself as well as with others. It's like being hurled out of a cannon, emotions and feelings that took years to overcome as a child are now brought up and dealt with a whole lot quicker and with a little more meaning. It's not about fame or being recognized. It's about accomplishing something that is hidden or a secret in people's eyes or in the law's eyes, and finding your true roots.

Whether good or bad, adoption is like a secret that everyone knows about, but not very many people want to talk about, including state and local governments. You can find a lot of information about movements to clear up adoption concealments throughout the country and the world. When I saw the reply on the message board I was astonished; it's not often that you find your birth parents or others that easily. It takes some people years to find birth family and sometimes they never do. That is one of my accomplishments.

International Searches

I have provided web sites located at the end of this book to help you begin your search. If you are inquiring about an International search I would suggest starting with ISRR site (International Search & Reunion Registry). As with most of the sites you might be able to get in touch with someone who will perform a search for free or a nominal fee.

Personal Views

I don't believe searching is everybody's cup of tea. It was a choice I made and wanted to do. Most adoptees are able to retrieve their birth records legally when they come of age (18). There are very few states left that have sealed adoption records. Yet certain laws make it difficult to obtain these records. I happened to have been born in one of them, Connecticut. Although it will probably be the last state to have sealed records, it is still possible to obtain the records for a minimal cost. It's not necessary to spend a lot of your hard earned money. So if you want to do a search, I wouldn't let money be an issue.

I do believe that a child should wait until they are of age before they attempt to search. However, I would suggest reading some general information on the subject before you start your search. There are many stories on the websites listed in the Sources section. My story is one of many; some are happy, some not so happy.

I disagree with the program where a birth mother can leave a newborn at a hospital and walk away with no questions asked. Some states call it "operation stork." I can't imagine a child becoming an adult and not being able to obtain information about their parents. I have spoken for Adoption Awareness Alliance support groups in my area to voice my personal views on this and other adoption issues.

Famous Adopted Persons

What do President Gerald Ford, Ted Danson (actor), James Dean (actor), Eric Dickerson (NFL), and Dave Thomas (Wendy's Founder) have in common? They were all adopted. I mention this because there is no limit to an adoptee's potential. I commend any adoptive parent taking on the task of making the choice to raise a child. I thank those who give the choice of life. And my heart goes out to the many young boys and girls, who have adopted parents to help them grow into the people they could be.

A Final Note

I hope that my book will help you in your search. It's been an exciting and very rewarding journey for me. And I wish you the very best of luck with your journey. And remember to . . .

Live Your Dash!

I read of a man who stood to speak

At the funeral of a friend

He referred to the dates on her tombstone

From the beginning...to the end . . .

He noted that first came her date of birth

And spoke the following date with tears,

But he said what mattered most of all

Was the dash between those years.
(1934 - 1999)

For that dash represents all the time

that she spent alive on earth...

And now only those who loved her

Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own,

The cars... the house... the cash,

What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard...

Are there things you'd like to change?

For you never know how much time is left,

That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough

To consider what's true and real,

And always try to understand

The way other people feel

And be less quick to anger,

And show appreciation more

And love the people in our lives

Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,

And more often wear a smile...

Remembering that this special dash

Might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy's being read

with your life's actions to rehash...

Would you be proud of the things they say

about how you spent your dash?

Source UNKNOWN

Internet Sources

List of references

Adoption Search Engine

- <http://www.ADOPTIONSEARCH.com> (info packed)

Help Sources & Message Boards

<http://www.peoplesearch.com/al/affiliates.cgi?403> Find Anyone at PeopleSearch.com (Minimum Fee Search Site)

- <http://www.adopt-usa.org/>
- <http://www.webreflection.com/aiml/introsearch.html>
- <http://www.adoption.about.com> (Informational)
- <http://www.isrr.net>
- <http://www.birthquest.org/>
- <http://bastards.org>

Search Helpers

- <http://www.ancestry.com>
- <http://www.myfamily.com>
- <http://www.myhistory.com>
- <http://www.infospace.com>

- <http://www.switchboard.com/>
- <http://www.yellowpages.com>
- <http://vsn.org> (volunteer searchers)
- <http://www.regday.org/> (Informational Resource)
- <http://www.vitalrec.com> (Vital Statistics search by state)
- <http://knowx.com> (records search)
- <http://www.peoplesearch.com/al/affiliates.cgi?403>>Find

Here are a few unusual but helpful products I've discovered on my journey. They are real EYE OPENERS. You may find them useful too. Contact them for free information.

Forbidden Information CD

You will discover confidential information about life's many other secrets with the **"Forbidden Information" CD**. For this free report write: Forbidden Information, PO Box 4331, New Windsor, NY 12553-0331. To receive the information immediately by fax, call their Fax-On-Demand system at: 845-568-7098, and request document 10 for a complete catalog sheet of this and many other interesting products. Note: you must call from your fax machine, and follow the prompts.

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