



Lost & Found

SEARCH-FINDERS OF CALIFORNIA, INC. MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2000



cleverly disguised as the perfect vacation...

"The Ultimate Search & Adoption Conference"

hosted by

Independent Search Consultants, Inc.
will take place at the perfect meeting place,
Hapuna Beach Hotel and Resort on the
Kohala Coast, Big Island of Hawaii.

Conference dates are
Friday, September 29th
through Sunday October 1, 2000.

Registration rates for this conference
increase after August 1, 2000.

Call Pat Sanders at 714-434-7635 or
e-mail psanders@cybersand.com

An Old-New Editor

I chose to open this newsletter with the Hawaii conference information because at this point in time we're probably all thinking about summer, sunshine and brighter times ahead. I hope all of you can attend - and bring a friend.

Hi. I'm Linda Ehle Callens, a previous Search-Finders member and Lost & Found Editor. I'm a Birth Mother who has been reunited for eight years now. Eight years!?! How swiftly that time has passed. I have changed a great deal over that time. When I first joined Search-Finders, about ten years ago, I was young and optimistic. When I found my son I was elated and blinded by the light of joy. During the first few years of our reunion-relationship I began to resent adoptive mothers and was troubled by the bad rap the universe seemed to always give Birth Mothers.

Funny how things change. I've had a lot of time to mellow, to explore other people's personal stories. Today, some of the nicest people I know are adoptive parents. We have very open and inspiring conversations. That never would have happened eight years ago! Perhaps I get along with these people because they are enlightened adoptive parents. In these newsletters I will bring their stories to you. I also want to include your story, your feelings, your advice.

In this issue you'll find an article I penned while I was the art director for *éternelle* magazine (a women's magazine, unfortunately no longer in publication) - just to give you an idea of who I am, where I've been.

You'll also find "Once Upon A Time"; an insightful article from an adoptive mother, Colleen Buckner, which appeared recently in *Pacer*.

If you have a story to share, please call me at 408-298-3037 or e-mail to: jeromec263@aol.com.

See you on the beach!

— Linda Ehle Callens, Editor

Once Upon A Time

A letter from one adoptive parent to other adoptive parents — by Colleen Buckner

I always cringe when I hear an adoptive parent describe their adopted son or daughter as a “gift” from the birthmother. A “gift” usually means something given freely and without reservation. The majority of adopted babies were “entrusted” to us— they were not a gift! We were entrusted to care for and love this child that the birthmother was not able to keep because of family and social pressure and stigma. The birthmother also loved and cherished this child that she relinquished to us, the adopting family. She was told that she was doing “the best thing” for her child.

“Search” and “reunion” are words that you probably never thought about when your adopted baby was placed in your arms for the first time. As your son or daughter grew and matured, did you ever think about the possibility of search and reunion? I know I didn’t ...until my daughter brought up the subject of looking for her birth family when she was 18 years old. I never thought about asking her if she ever considered searching for her birth family.

I was the average adoptive parent; ignorant of the research by people like Nancy Verrier (as documented in her book, “The Primal Wound”; ignorant of an adoptee’s need to claim their biological heritage; ignorant of what it felt like to be relinquished or what it felt like to relinquish a child. I only knew the joy of adoption. I knew none of the pain of relinquishment.

I always thought about my daughter’s birthmother throughout her growing-up years. At our daughter’s first birthday party, she was dressed in her lacy, pink dress with matching ruffled panties, white socks and Mary Jane shoes; and I vividly remember wishing that her birthmother could be there to share in the joy of this celebration. With each succeeding birthday, Christmas, dance recital, first day of kindergarten, first day of college, and graduation, I wished that her birthmom could be there to experience the accomplishments and celebrations of this beautiful and lovable daughter. Throughout the years, I always thought to myself, “she would be so proud of her.”

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Once upon a time, a Birthmother crossed an imaginary bridge with her child in her arms and placed the child in our waiting arms. She entrusted us to be loving parents and to honor and cherish this child that she could not keep. When our children became adults, it was our turn to walk back across that imaginary bridge with our son or daughter to the other side, where their life began. It was our turn to trust the Birthmother and birth family to be there for our adult son or daughter when they reach out to connect both of their families, adoptive and biological, through them.

As “good” adoptive parents, we told our daughter from an early age that she was adopted. We explained that while she was not born “in my tummy” like her older brother, she was born “in my heart”. Since she didn’t really question our explanation, we didn’t ask her how she felt about that difference. In our ignorance we didn’t take the conversation any further by providing a safe forum for her to discuss the “how-comes” of a tummy versus heart birth. In retrospect, I can see that we emphasized the heart experience and didn’t elaborate on the tummy experience, even though both experiences belonged to her. This was probably because we didn’t know much about her birthmother except what the social workers told us at the time: she was 19, unmarried, a college student, and felt that adoption was the best option under the circumstances.

At 18, when our daughter did question us about her birthmother and any information we might know, we offered to help her get information from the adoption agency. With a payment of \$100 and a few months’ wait, the information arrived in the mail. We all read it over and discussed it, but since there weren’t any names or addresses, it didn’t seem that we were any more knowledgeable about her biological heritage than we were 18 years earlier. The non-identifying information was put away, but went with her as she left to go to college and grad school. Eight years later, with her diplomas in hand, and a new job secured in the city of her birth, the discussion about her birth family became a priority. Within a few months, we were able to find out her Birthmother’s maiden surname.

We spent days in the library, going through old city directories and phone books and compared the names to current phone books. There was only one last name that matched the name we had. Our daughter called the number one evening and her birthmother answered. That was Once Upon A Time, almost five years ago and now my long-standing wish for her mother to be able to share in the joys and celebrations of our

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Reunion Story —

A FATHER'S WISH

When Mary Alice was born she lived with her father, Marcelo. Her parents hadn't married each other. One day, when Mary Alice was three years old, her mother - who had recently gotten married - came to visit. She told Marcelo she was just going to the store, and assured him she would bring Mary Alice back soon.

But Mary Alice never came home. Her mother spirited the little girl away - away from her father and family members who would not get to see her grow up.

Many years later, after having no contact at all, Mary Alice's mother called Marcelo; she needed help because Mary Alice, now a teenager, had gotten into some trouble. Marcelo came and helped; but when he tried to see his daughter shortly afterward, she and her mother had vanished again.

Nearly twenty years passed and Marcelo became very ill. He asked his niece, Anita, to please help him find his daughter. He knew he was not going to live much longer and couldn't bear leaving this earth without seeing Mary Alice one last time.

Anita is a woman of great faith. She asked her friends and family to pray that somehow she could find her cousin, Mary Alice. And in the midst of those prayers, Anita heard a small voice within her soul tell her to ask a woman she worked with for advice.

And that woman knew of Search-Finders. Anita called on a Wednesday and asked for help. She had little to go on; there was no paper

trail, scant work records...

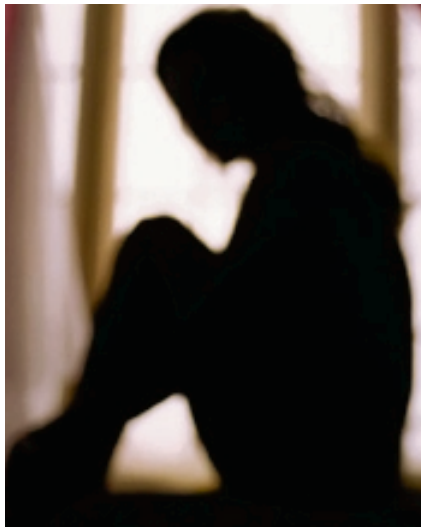
Within just a few days, Search Finders called Anita back and gave her three addresses. The first two didn't check out. On Saturday Anita, who doesn't drive, decided that the third address was her last hope. The address was fairly close to her home. She asked her husband to take her there. She bravely went to the door. Mary Alice was there.

Anita had the task of telling her cousin why she had to find her. Her father was in Texas, would she go to him? Mary Alice said she would, and Anita planned to go with her. But just before the trip, Anita had to have an unexpected surgery after which she couldn't walk.

Mary Alice didn't want to go alone. She was afraid that Marcelo's family wouldn't like her. Anita reassured her as much as she could.

Mary Alice bravely went to Texas where her estranged family showed her love and made her feel very welcome. And she saw her father - for the last time. She had fulfilled his dying wish.

Now Mary Alice is trying to sort it all out; she is filled with emotions and with questions. As her father's journey has ended, a new journey has begun for Mary Alice.



The search for Marcelo was considered a Medical Emergency; Search Finders provided their services free of charge.

— Linda Ehle Callens

Take Part In The Celebration

2nd Annual Adoption Unity Gathering

April 8, 2000 • 10a.m. • Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

A Mother Never Forgets

by Linda Ehle Callens

Feature article for éternelle magazine, Spring 1999 issue

I can't say that this will be the most tumultuous year in my life or in my experience as a mother, but it will certainly rank among the most significant.

My seventeen-year-old daughter is a senior at an all girl's Catholic high school. And right now she's buried in college applications, running to play rehearsals after school, sorting through senior picture proofs and staying up late at night studying.

I'm not the only mom who will be caught up in these activities this year. Not the only mom

to wax nostalgic too many times. Not the only one who will stand in the doorway of her daughter's room and contemplate how it will be when she is gone away next year; her room will be there, clean all the time but cold and empty, void of her exuberance and determination.

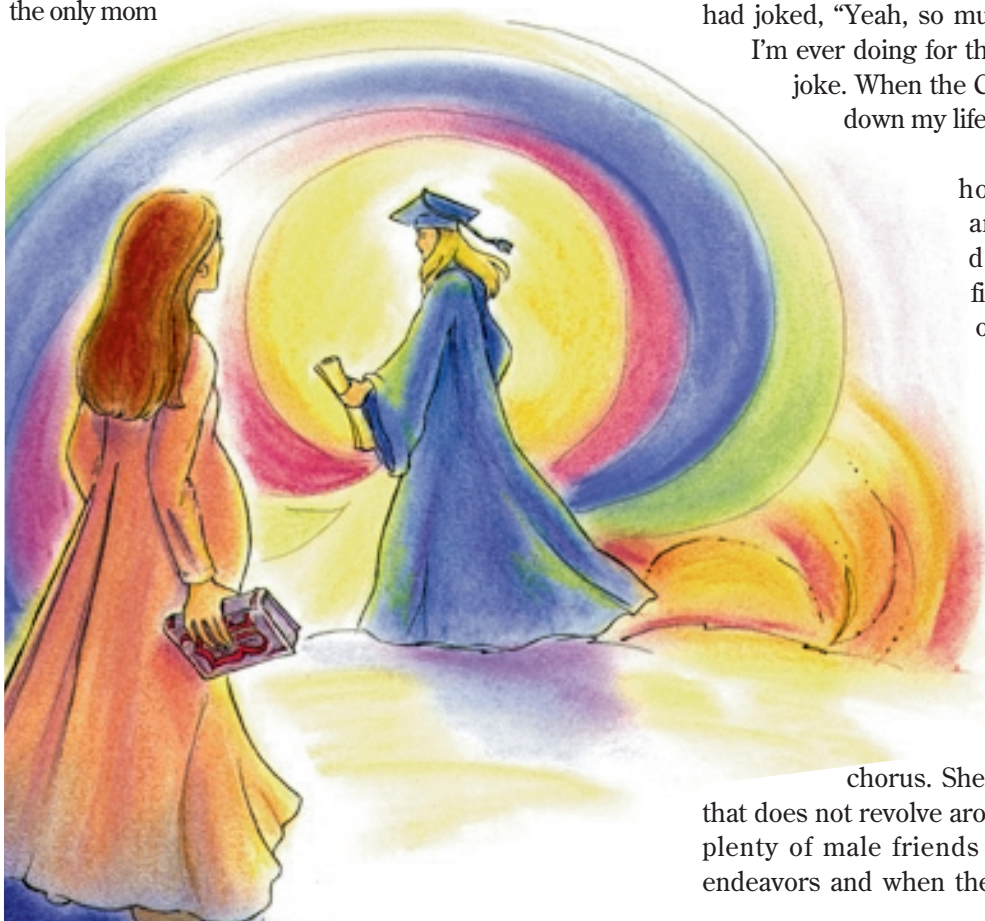
But I am one mom who has another rather unique perspective. A perspective which causes an extra set of emotions to emerge. I can't help but compare where my daughter is today to where I was when I was 17 and in my senior year of high school.

I wanted to go to college, just as she does. I had my senior portrait taken, too. I was involved in school activities as well. I was head of the decorating committee for Christmas Ball, as usual. My artistic talents had lead my art teacher to choose me as art director of the decorating committees for the school dances. And the decorations were not your run of the mill balloons – I still create props for events and I never use balloons. There was a giant papier maché snowman scene in one corner, a huge fireplace hung with giant stockings, a simulated fire “roaring within” in another corner giant glittering snowflakes hung from the ceiling ... it was very ambitious, very Disneyesque.

My team and I had been putting on the finishing touches when one of my friends said how great everything looked and what a great job I'd done, and in reply I had joked, “Yeah, so much work! This is the last thing I'm ever doing for this school.” But it really wasn't a joke. When the Christmas Ball decorations came down my life took another direction.

Everyone went home for the holidays, had a wonderful time and went back to school, but I didn't. When they took their finals I wasn't there. When everyone was rushing around buying beautiful dresses and choosing hairdos for the prom, I didn't join in. When all my classmates, clad in caps and gowns, walked to the podium to collect their diplomas, I wasn't there either.

A few days ago, my daughter put the receipt for her cap and gown into my hand as she ran out to perform with her barbershop chorus. She has a good social life, but one that does not revolve around having boyfriends. She has plenty of male friends through her many theatrical endeavors and when there is a formal dance she man-



ages quite well. She and most of her close friends are more interested in education and their own accomplishments than they are in romance. They are mature enough to know that love and sex and relationship experiences – and all the related joys and complications – will come soon enough.

I know I have had a great deal of influence on my daughter's attitude because of what happened to me in my senior year. I had fallen in love in my junior year. Before that I had dated plenty but was still a virgin with all my future plans intact. Then I met this young man, a soul-mate with whom I believed I would spend the rest of my life. And that's when my perspective went all fuzzy. He was eager to take advantage of my naivete and soon I was eager to please. There was no such thing as sex education in the schools and the subject was never mentioned at home, God forbid! Like most young people, I'd convinced myself that I knew it all. And, not to worry, I'd read all about "the rhythm method."

And by the time I was back in school for my senior year, I was pregnant. That was in 1966.

I wanted to get married and keep my baby but my boyfriend insisted I should give the baby up and we would get married later on and have other babies – when we were older and better prepared.

I was sent away, which was typical in those days. I was told that after I had my baby I would be able to forget and get on with my life. That was the typical rhetoric in those days, too. I was told that the baby would never know the difference and that someone much better suited for raising children would give him a wonderful life. That's what they told all girls like me.

But I couldn't forget. After my son was born and I had to leave the hospital without him, I went home and had a nervous breakdown. I couldn't go out in public, couldn't talk to any of my friends – I was completely dysfunctional. When I wasn't crying I was cleaning compulsively.

When I tried one last time to reason with my son's father before the final relinquishment papers had to be signed, and before he left for the army and Vietnam, he wouldn't change his mind. That is when I vowed that I would find my son someday, no matter what.

For the first ten years of my son's life I cried every day. After that it became a little easier. I simply learned how to live with a broken heart.

I went to adult education school at night and got my high school diploma. There was a graduation ceremony – caps, gowns and all – but I didn't attend. It was a struggle to hold myself together emotionally, but week by week I got better at it.

I went to the local junior college for a while. Then my parents divorced and I had to go to work full time; I couldn't find any one to help me with my education. The college counselor sat blank faced when I told him I was an artist.

I began to realize then that I was part of a sad little minority that most people don't recognize. Not only was I female, but I was an unwed mother. I felt like an outcast, like an ex-inmate, and in many ways I was. It took many years and changes but I grew into a self-educated, self-assured woman who has worked hard to hone her talents into a career. I married and had a daughter and another son. It has been a long journey.

About 19 years after my first son was born I joined an organization called Search Finders of California. With them I began my search. Through them I was counseled, studied about the effects of adoption and learned about all the things that could happen during reunions and resulting relationships. I was armed with knowledge and quite ready when I found "Kurt" – on February 14th, 1992...I thought. As it turned out, my son did not have the promised fairy-tale life. He was raised without a father. He didn't finish high school. He was into alcohol and drugs at a tender age. He's battled drug addiction since before I found him. However, he is a gifted musician and has worked hard at his craft. I wasn't surprised at that because I'm musically talented as is my father and many relatives.

We have managed to carve out a relationship which has been wonderful at times and horrible at other times. And it is an ongoing process. It is a life sentence for me. And for my son, too. He's 31 years old but he's still grappling with his abandonment-issue anger, with the significance of who he is and where he comes from. My deep and abiding love for him has not been enough to help him. There are issues with his adoptive mother. The entire thing has been a complicated, sometimes mind-boggling undertaking.

And somewhere right now there is a scared seventeen-year-old girl who is pregnant and doesn't know what to do. She may be afraid to tell her parents – the way I was. She may end up waiting too long and then be talked into giving her baby up because someone else 'much more suitable for raising children' will adopt the baby. She may never know what her options could have been. Things are much different these days, with open adoptions being more accepted, but too many people still do things like they were done in the '60's. And the saddest thing is that families are still all too ready to hide their embarrassment or shame ("Oh, God, our daughter had sex!") by giving away their baby, their grandchild, niece or nephew. They will fail to get

enough information to make an intelligent decision – especially if they go to an adoption agency first. (Adoption is a business and it usually isn't in an agency's best interest to question the motives of someone who can provide desirable merchandise.)

They won't know until it's too late that their family and the child in question will be forever affected by the separation from their own flesh and blood, from shared ancestry, from an unrequited familial love.

The same lack of knowledge can adversely affect people who are thinking of searching. Adoptees, birth mothers, birth fathers or family members - can be fooled with the come-ons of "find anyone" advertisements. Those are usually seen during certain sensational talk-shows; the ones that often engineer and exploit televised reunions. I can't imagine going into a reunion relationship - such an intense and intimate undertaking - in such a public and unprepared manner.

There are a vast number of non-profit organizations who specialize in providing information, support and guidance to anyone thinking about searching. It is not a direction any person should take without being informed first.

What I've said in these few paragraphs addresses a large subject within a small nutshell. I have so much to say to young women and their mothers, to boyfriends....to families...and that is why I've written a book, "Beyond the Bridge", about my experience. But it's a tough subject to sell. At Search Finders and other search and reunion organizations there are book tables at every meeting and that is where all of my research material has come from. You rarely find any material, other than books on "how to adopt", at the book stores. You can find several adoption-issue books on-line, but not in the mainstream market - the "cross-over" market.

It's ironic, I think, that books like "Beloved" by Toni Morrison - which deals graphically with incredibly violent atrocities innocent African Americans had to endure - can be published and made into movies. People can swallow that subject matter. But publishers think those same people can't handle books about the effects of adoption? It's apparently a very touchy subject, even a bit taboo and impossible to find in major venues for the general public.

I am immensely proud of my daughter. She is an honors student and will have a wonderful college experience. She's focused, ambitious and independent. She will not make the mistakes I made. And that is partly because I have been very open and honest with her about sex and my personal experiences from early on. And of course, she has witnessed first hand the fallout caused by the trauma I experienced. It wasn't just

me who was affected by the loss of my son. Or by my finding him. My husband and our children, my parents and siblings, my in-laws and friends have all been profoundly affected.

Kurt is an important part of our lives now. My daughter and younger son love him dearly. They know about his problems and that doesn't matter. He is their equal sibling. But such a price has been paid for the many years of separation.

So when I watch my daughter leave for her Christmas Ball and for her prom this year, it will be a much more poignant, emotional experience for me than it will be for many other mothers. And when she walks up to that podium in her cap and gown to accept her diploma, I don't know how I will keep from weeping.

I will weep for joy but I will also weep for my lost youth.

Linda Ehle Callens is an art director, illustrator and writer. She has written six books which await publication and is working on several others.

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For Information Call 408-356-6711

Or visit our web site: www.searchfinders.org

Thank You Ron!

Ron Bristol, the owner of Pro Image, is graciously allowing Search-Finders to use his new facility for meetings - and is even building a special cupboard for us to store the coffee pot, supplies and books for our meetings.

And Thank You Ruth!...for the yummy homemade cakes you provide for our meetings.

daughter has finally come true.

Being there to support my daughter in her search and reunion has brought us even closer as an adoptive family. When I hear that other adoptive parents are afraid of search and reunion because they fear losing their son or daughter, I am surprised that they don't realize that it actually strengthens their relationship. I cannot imagine not supporting your son or daughter in their search and reunion any more than I can imagine not allowing them to get their driver's license or go on that first date or leave home to attend the college of their choice. Why be afraid of more people that will love your son or daughter?

Adoptive parents have one more parenting task to do for their adopted son or daughter than biological parents have. That task is to support them in their search for their birth family as a part of the process of their growing up adopted and feeling good about who they are and where they came from.

Search and reunion is probably one of the most emotional experiences that adoptees will ever undertake. An adopted person needs the support and approval of their adoptive family. They need to share the experience with the only family they have known. Provide a forum for that discussion. Bring it up in conversation. Don't wait for them to talk to you about it, for they may feel that it only hurts you to acknowledge that they have "another family". Being supportive of their search and reunion can be as simple as asking them to tell you about what is happening and showing your continued love and interest in their search journey.

Adoptees often have abandonment issues from their original relinquishment. To feel abandoned a second time by their adoptive family, just when they are trying to resolve these issues through search and reunion, is an emotional hardship. To ignore or discount the importance of their biological family feels like genealogical genocide to an adoptee. If blended families are possible in families that divorce and marry new partners, then blended families are also possible in adopted families.

Searching is not about adoption and it has nothing to do with the quality of adoptive family parenting. Searching is about relinquishment and the search for self.

Colleen Buckner is a searcher and PACER board member. She may be reached at the right to know@yahoo.com. This article was reprinted with her permission.



"Reunion: A Year in Letters Between a Birthmother and the Daughter She Couldn't Keep"

By Katie Hern, Ellen McGarry Carlson

After decades of separation, 26-year-old adoptee Katie Hern writes to her birthmother, Ellen McGarry Carlson. Written over a course of one year, this book follows the women's progress - from elation to understanding to accepting - and efforts to create an honest relationship. After several months, mother and daughter finally meet face-to-face in an emotional and exhilarating reunion.

Available through Amazon.com

"Thank You Son for Finding Me: A Birthmother's Story"

By Beth J. Kane

This is an autobiography of a birthmother who was found by her son over six years ago and is enjoying a positive relationship.

Available through Amazon.com

"The Gift Wrapped in Sorrow: A Mother's Quest for Healing"

By Jane Guttman

This book is a memoir spanning three decades of loss and love, regret and remorse. The words serve as a candle in the darkness to those who have experienced the loss of a child through adoption. Along the way, amid the many saddening recollections, the author discovers the gifts which are ever-present. Author Dr. Jane Guttman is a non-traditional chiropractor, writer, lecturer and workshop facilitator.

Available through Amazon.com

Have you read any books lately which you would recommend to your fellow Search-Finders? We'd love to see your review. Call the editor at 408-298-3037.