



LOST & FOUND

SEARCH-FINDERS OF CALIFORNIA, INC. MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

April 2002

From the Editor—

TWO THINGS THAT REALLY BUG ME!

In this issue, we are very pleased to have three very moving personal stories for you to enjoy. We have the story of a teen named Andrea whose adoptive mother helped her search for her birthmother. This story is an important lesson for those who want instant reunion-gratification.

With the help of the internet and perhaps some divine cyber-intervention, Dana searched and, against many odds, found his mother, who is now 80 years old. He, too, had to be understanding, yet persistent in his quest for contact.

Then we have a “film review” by Susan Ito (first published in PACER). Susan is an adoptee who wound up at the movies one day and instead of simply passing the time she had one of the most emotional rides in that theatre seat.

Those two subjects have always gotten under my skin: the Birthmother Who Doesn't Want Contact and Movies about adoption.

Being a Birthmother who always planned to search and who has been reunited for ten years now, it is unfathomable to me that a woman could reject her own child. I mean, come on! It's not like...oh, here's a poor homeless waif who needs money and food and shelter. Everyone has their own personal tragic story. Boo, hoo. But it really is pretty basic.

We had sex, we had babies, we gave them up for adoption. Most of us regret it. Many of us had no choice. And now it's the year 2002. Are we not enlightened yet? People have babies by the kajillions every day. I say to any Birthmother who is still hiding in the closet....Get Over It! And if you don't want to search and you are found, be nice! You started it in the first place...so don't be such a WHIMP! There...got that off my chest.

Now, my other pet-peeve: that movie business. Did you see Snow Dogs? I didn't. Which was on purpose. But I'm glad that Susan gives us the lowdown on the story. One really interesting factor is this: the Birthmother is apparently - and quite conveniently - not in the picture. From Susan's account, I guess she's dead.

I didn't want to see that movie because I knew it was about adoption; and I hate the trivialization of such a personal and sensitive subject. I used to love Woody Allen movies until he made “Mighty Aphrodite”. I missed it in theatres and when I finally caught it on TV I discovered it was about an adoptive father, played by Woody, whose young son is an absolute genius. He decides to search for the boy's birthmother to thank her for his good fortune. When he meets the woman he discovers that she is a dumb- I mean really, really dumb - blond prostitute. See where I'm going, here?

Thanks for letting me get that off my chest. And thanks to our star reporter Irene Creager. And send us YOUR stories! Even if you just want to vent.

— Linda Ehle Callens, *Lost & Found* Editor
Submit your story! E-mail callens1@earthlink.net
or call 408.298.3037

ANDREA

A STORY OF PERSEVERANCE.

is 18 years old. Her adoptive mother is a wonderful, supportive lady who encouraged Andrea to search for her Birth Mother. They even attend every Search Finders meetings *together...*

Andrea found her Birth Mother who was living in Portland, Oregon. But the woman in Portland whom she telephoned denied she was her birth mother. Andrea followed up with a letter and did get a response in return. I will withhold the birth mother's name to respect her privacy, but this is what she wrote:

"Dear Andrea,

I should have known that you would not give up after your phone call. It is true that I did give birth to you. I put you up for adoption so that you could have a life that I was not capable of giving you. I am glad to know that my hopes for you came true and that you have a wonderful life.

When I gave you up I closed a chapter of my life that I am not willing to open. I hope that you can understand this. I do not want to hurt you in any way, but I feel that knowing you would hurt me in ways I can't

begin to explain. Please continue with your wonderful life, knowing that that is all I ever wanted for you.

As far as a medical history is concerned, there really isn't much to tell. You come from healthy American stock with no history of cancer or other hereditary diseases. I never really knew your father so I can't help you with that. I can tell you that you look like me and that I think you turned out to be beautiful. I was not meant to have children so you have no half siblings.

I'm sorry that this seems so heartless but I hope that you can understand why I am unwilling to enter your life at this point. I'm sure you have a loving family and I wish you the best that life has to offer. I just can't be a part of it. I hope you can understand. I'm sorry that I can't offer you more but I've always felt that I did the best thing for you when I gave you to your Mom and Dad. Please thank them for me.

Goodbye again,"

(signature - was typed, not written)

We all thought it was really a positive letter and very thoughtful. Andrea is hopeful that some day her birth mom will change her mind so they can meet. We all wish her luck!

Irene Creager, Search Finders Reporter

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For Information Call 408-356-6711 Or visit our web site: www.searchfinders.org

THIS IS DANA'S STORY

HE WAS LOOKING FOR GLORIA A., BORN IN 1921. SHE GAVE HIM UP FOR ADOPTION AT HIS BIRTH IN 1943.

WHICH PROVES IT'S NEVER TOO LATE.

In early January of this year, he posted to another Web newsgroup, and got another spate of messages from professional searchers offering to help out. He assumed that most of them are in it for the money, but being the polite person that he is rarely gave them much information. He did the same with Elizabeth Lamb, one of those searchers who wrote him a note. Elizabeth took the little bit of information that he gave her and produced information that he did not have. After giving her more information that he had, she produced a name and telephone number for an uncle he didn't know he had.

Dana called the uncle on January 7th and he told Dana, when he asked about his mother, that she was the uncle's half-sister, that she had married and had a child, and she had a different last name. So Dana contacted Elizabeth again, told her the new information, and within an hour or two she came up with a likely address for his mother and a likely daughter of hers, a half-sister to Dana. They are both living in Palo Alto which is very convenient - since Dana lives in Pacifica.

Without knowing how he should proceed, Dana jumped the gun and on January 8th he called his mother. She asked what he wanted and he replied, "I was born in August 1943 in Riverside, California." This certainly must have come as a shock to this woman, as she became quite angry, said she didn't want to talk about it, have nothing to do with it, she was sick and wanted to be left alone. Dana quickly apologized to her and hung up. He then wrote her a letter of apology, saying that he simply wanted to thank her for trying to give him a good start in life,

and that he would like to have some contact with her if she were in fact his mother. There was no response.

Two weeks later, he wrote again, this time telling her that he knew for certain that he had a living half-sister and that he would like to contact her. If Gloria was his mother, he asked that she tell his sister of his existence, or tell him that she was related to him so that we could move forward. He mailed this letter on January 26th.

On January 29th Gloria called and left him voicemail, saying that she had told his sister of his existence, gave him that sister's phone number, and asked that he give Ruth (his sister) a call. She apologized, saying that she was just getting over the flu and didn't want to talk right then. Dana also received voicemail from his sister asking that he send her email. That night, he listened to the two voicemail messages and called his sister. She was amazed since she had not given him her phone number. They spoke that night for about half an hour, sent tons of email that week, and on Friday, February 2nd (four days later!) they met for coffee, followed by having dinner together. Dana is blown away by the swiftness of this all coming about, as is his sister.

He says his sister Ruth is a delight. She is tall like him, there is a definite resemblance to him, but he adds that she is quite pretty. She is a professional musician, a soprano who sings Early Music, masses and madrigals and also teaches voice. The amazing part for Dana is that her personality is a lot like his, which is quite a shock since they grew up completely differently, raised by completely different families. His sister is working on setting up a meeting for him with her immediate family - YES, he has a niece and

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The Saga of AB 1349: California's Adoptee Rights Bill

From an article in PACER by Alicia Lanier

Conventional wisdom most likely would have bet on California - proud of its diversity and tolerant attitudes, to pass its adoptee rights legislation this year. But AB 1349 is now history, and we're left for now, with great memories and shared experiences, as well as pride in our accomplishments. We have also built a substantial base of support in California; we know much more about what our challenges and issues are and are planning to move forward.

The saga of California's adoptee rights bill, AB1349, began about two years ago with adoptee Ron Morgan, a leader of both PACER and Bastard Nation. Ron spent much of Fall 2000 driving up and down the state recruiting activists for a legislative effort. By early 2001, Ron had put together the country's first fully-inclusive adoption advocacy coalition, and assembled a board that included members from all parts of the adoption triad and California leaders from all the national reform organizations.

The California Open movement began attracting both supporters and donations. One supporter - adoptee Marsha Tempie, an LA area attorney - drafted a bill that would give adopted individuals access to all sealed files at the county level, which was used to show lawmakers what we wanted.

Shortly before the new bill introduction deadline, we found a legislator who could not author our bill, but who would introduce it to get the process started. With that news, the highly committed Sacramento

contingent began walking State Capitol Hallways searching for an author. With only two days until the cutoff date, they convinced Assemblyman Anthony Pescetti to author what became AB1349. Assemblymembers Elaine Alquist, Lynne Leach and Robert Pacheco all agree to co-sponsor.

Gathering Steam for Sacramento

In a few short weeks, the news that AB1349 was scheduled for hearing by the Assembly Judiciary Committee galvanized supporters. Dozens of adoptee Californians were eagerly flocking to dialogue on California Open's online discussion list and signing up for Action Alerts. We believed California would be the next state, and the biggest ever, to pass adoptee rights legislation.

Early on the day before the hearing, about 75 AB1349 supporters rallied on the Capitol steps. TV cameras were there and several of us were interviewed for what we believed would be victory story. But the Judiciary, chaired by Darrell Steinberg, was lukewarm and unswayed by testimony. Members chose instead to believe the legislative analyst's research, a straight recitation from a fact-book by the National Council For Adoption, arch-opponents of openness, and full of old, tired arguments against access.

Assemblymember Steinberg, an attorney who handles adoptions, insisted that AB1349 was a clear invasion of privacy for birthmothers. The birthmothers in the audience rolled their eyes and barely kept from leaping to their collective feet in outrage.

While a San Francisco birthmother testified; she explained that she had conceived and relinquished her child after having been raped and she firmly believes in adoptee's rights to their identity records. It was as if she had remained silent. ("Birthmother privacy" has been a key issue which reform forces across

The Saga of AB 1349 continued

the country have had to address in their legislative struggles, and is often a smoke screen cloaking other interests and opposition.)

After heated discussion, the committee told Asm. Pascetti that he could revise AB1349 and bring it back for a hearing in 2002. For a group primed to win, the moment chafed. It was also a lesson of too much, too soon. We had been so focused on getting an author that we simply had not focused adequately on educating the Judiciary committee. Despite a high volume of email directed to them, we had not provided enough factual data to counteract the opposition's point of view.

Making Our Case

Momentum lagged during the summer, and then key organizer Ron Morgan left the coalition. New joint chiefs were elected to replace him.

The clock was ticking. I wondered if it was possible to meet the November deadline for revisions. It felt overwhelming to thoroughly document our key AB1349 positions and educate Judiciary before early January. But we were all strongly committed and didn't want to let Californians and all activists down. But within a few weeks, California Open had a hefty three-ring binder full of documentation supporting

AB1349. We focused on meeting one-on-one with constituents of the Judiciary committee members. They presented lawmakers with the impressive new legislative binder. AB1349's prospects still appeared promising. It provided access to original birth records at the state level. A full page ad in the Sacramento Bee with the endorsements of 500 birthparents ran on Jan. 15, the morning of the second hearing. Huge posters of that ad appeared at the rally. TV crews again showed up for interviews. National activist leaders were there. But again in the courtroom, our case fell on deaf ears.

AB1349 is dead, but the movement is still alive. There are many, many supportive organizations behind us. Here's how you can help: every individual needs to take responsibility to ensure that their assembly members and state senators are aware of this issue, understand its importance to their constituents and are educated enough to support it.

Alicia Lanier is a reunited birthmother, who has been an adoption activist for almost a decade. She co-founded TxCARE, Texas Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education in Texas. She moved to California in 2000, and served on the California Open board for two years. Alicia is an AAC California State Rep and a member of CUB's national board. She can be reached at aliciakla@aol.com.

DANA'S STORY continued from Pg 3

a nephew and a brother-in-law - and his mother-who is 80 years old and a little fragile. He is amazed, delighted and happy. He is also grateful to Elizabeth, the searcher, who has refused to take a penny for any of her work on his behalf.

That is Dana's story thus far. Next he looks forward to meeting his mother and Ruth's family. Oh yes, there

are two other siblings lost out there still to be found.

Dana received his Broken Seal from Search Finders on February 14th, Valentine's Day. And in late breaking news, we hear that he received a valentine from his sister and her daughter that day as well.

Irene Creager, Search Finders Reporter

SNOW DOGS

WHEN AN ADOPTEE GOES TO A MOVIE ABOUT AN ADOPTEE

Disney, 99 min., Rated PG
A film review by Susan Ito

In January, our local newspaper rated the new Disney movie, "Snow Dogs", as the worst movie of 2002, regardless of what other trash would be released for the rest of the year. "A piece of schlock", said the reviewer, "the worst, most stereotypical, brainless humor imaginable." But my daughters had seen the trailers full of cute Huskies and silly shots of the black Miami dentist out of his realm in Alaska. They wanted to go, so I drove them and their friends to the mall and thought, maybe this will be a good place for me to take a nap.

But ten minutes into the movie I was startled awake by the words, "You're *adopted*". When the hero crashed to the floor in a dead faint, I sat up and began paying attention. I can't ignore that word, and suddenly, no matter how slapstick and stupid, the movie began to matter to me. I saw the adoptive mother's anxiety when her grown son (Cuba Gooding Jr.) received notice of a will from Alaska, from a woman she knew to be her son's birthmother. And I recognized the crazed pain and rage as the son trudged through deep sand in shiny dress shoes, his life suddenly making no sense.

It was a ridiculous movie on many counts, with lots of butt biting by the dogs, and flailing about in ice and snow. But I couldn't stop following the thread through the movie that I knew was pulling this man Ted through bitter cold and hardship. All he wanted was the answer to his questions: Who was his father? What had been the circumstances of his birth?

Ted's mother turns out to have been the only black in a small village in Alaska. The newspaper reviewers scoffed at the improbability of this, but I sat there in the dark theater, buzzing with recognition. My birthmother was the only Asian woman in a small town in Iowa, where everyone was Dutch; where they traced their heredity from Holland in the most public

way. "She was a loner," the villagers tell Ted, just as my birthmother was - unable to find someone who was willing to break from the homogeneous fabric of Pella.

Ted was conceived in a cave during a sled dog race, and this is how I imagine my own beginnings; in a secret, hidden place - a hotel room or cornfield or a car parked at the edge of a lonely road. And he was shocked to know that his father was a white man, when he had been raised by two African-American parents. It has never been a secret to me that my father was white, but I too was raised by Japanese parents who were not part of the American mainstream. They lived on the margins, clustered with their own people, relatives and friends from their Japanese church.

When Ted confronts the man he believes is his birthfather, he is met with denial and rejection. The man is more interested in the dogs that Ted has inherited than in any parental relationship. The son is put to the test, to many tests, as he must prove that he is worthy of the father's respect and of knowing the true story of his birth. At first the father only admits to the cave story, that there was a brief circumstance that drew him together with the birthmother, but that was the end of it.

When Ted returns to Miami, disappointed, his mother sees a photograph of the birthmother and gasps at the resemblance between the two. She has a hard time saying the words, "This is....your mother". And when she goes to embrace her son, the picture frame crashes to the floor, shattering the glass. Behind the smiling photograph of the woman and her dogs is a smaller, older black and white photo with crimped edges. It is a photograph of the black woman in a hospital bed, holding a small newborn child. The white man recognizable as Thunder Jack, is leaning over the bed protectively. One of his hands is on the child's head.

SEARCH FINDERS BROKEN SEALS 2001-2002

Jeannie Jordan, Adoptee, found her Mother in Concord, March 8, 2002

Sharon Faseer, Adoptee, found her Mother and full Brother in Sacramento, January 14, 2002

Dana Ellingen, Adoptee, found her Mother and Sister in Palo Alto, Jan 8, 2002

Christine Labagh, Adoptee, found her Mother in San Francisco January 24, 2001

Becky Hogue, Adoptee, found her Mother February 14, 2001

Irene Creager, Adoptee, found her Nephew in Daly City March 6, 2001

Diane Boudreau, Birth Mother, found her Son in San Luis Obispo March 13, 2001

Mary Kennedy, Adoptee, found her Mother in Brooklyn NY April 5, 2001

Mischelle Garcia, Birth Mother, found Daughter in Montana May 3, 2001

Julie Hankins, Birth Mother, found her Son in Talkeetna, Alaska, June 20, 2001

Andrea Hallgren, Adoptee, found her Mother in Canada July 28, 2001

Pam Norman, Adoptee, found her Mother near Chicago August 21, 2001

Frank Ducato, Adoptee, found Mother and Father married to each other in Oregon November 30, 2001

SNOW DOGS continued

It looks like comedy when Ted thrashes around in his urgency to pack, to return to Alaska to confront his father. The theater echoed with hoots and giggles. But my chest was tense with anxiety. This is the part of the story that I would go to Alaska for, that I would do anything for, the small square photo behind the public portrait, the hidden story. Every adoptee wants their story; the story that says someone cared. There was connection and warmth in the making of this human being, and in the decision to let them go into the world. The grown man weeps to hear his story from the grizzled old mountain man, 33 years later. "We cared about you. And we're proud of the way you turned out."

Ted's adoptive mother follows him to Alaska on his second trip. She is worried about him, about his safety, about his broken heart. And while he is searching the ice caves throughout the dark, frozen night, she refuses shelter, but stands motionless in the snow, waiting for his return. This rant for me as well; the adoptive parents who will do anything for the children to whom they have pledged their lives, and I

thought of my father, and all that I knew he would endure, did endure, on my behalf.

The movie ends with the son bringing his birthfather and his adoptive mother together. The birthfather thanks her for taking such good care of the son. They are both proud of him. I wiped my wet face during this scene, and Mollie reached over to squeeze my sleeve. She knew what was inside me, that I longed to pound my fists on the armrests and wail as loud as the howling dogs on the screen. She knew that my longing for such a little scene was burning deeply enough to char my bones.

It was a silly movie on so many levels, an absurd Disney comedy, superficial and sweet. And yet it was speaking my language; through all the goofiness, it was all there, the longing and questions that even silly people have when they are skittering on ice, the deep questions that even winking huskies can't disguise.

Oakland writer Susan Ito is a reunited adoptee and a PACER member. She co-edited the anthology A Ghost at Heart's Edge, and may be reached at skito@sprintmail.com

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BROKEN SEALS

Next Meeting

Thursday, May 9, 2001

Pro Image, 1865 Camden Avenue

Camden at Leigh & Hillsdale

Next to Arby's. Ample parking
in front & back of building.

Next Meetings: Thursday, June 6, 2002
and Thursday, July 7, 2002