

# **My Crooked Family Tree**

**by Lynn Calza**

From the beginning, I knew I was adopted. I was special, I was chosen. How I knew this, I don't have any recollection, I just knew. Being adopted was never an issue, it was simply a fact, a part of my life. It was reality. I have no idea how old I was when I knew about my adoption, so my parents must have told me stories right from the start. Since I was only six weeks old when they adopted me, my parents had lots of time to make all parts of my life mesh as smoothly as possible, and I feel that they did a great job.

One aspect of my childhood was that I was surrounded by other adopted people. My best friend was adopted, as were two of my neighborhood playmates. My grandfather was adopted, and many more adopted people crossed my path at every turn. These meetings were all random, and were not initiated by my parents. By the time I got into elementary school, and started to see the world from multiple angles, I began to realize that, at least at that time, being adopted was very unique. I remember trying to explain it to other kids in school, and never quite getting them to understand. It seemed like no one outside of my immediate circle of friends and family had ANY experience with adoption. When I was young, it was rare to find any facet of adoption outside of my circle of friends. It might have been my age, but I don't remember ever hearing anyone else except my family openly talk about adoption, trying to adopt, or knowing adopted people. What seemed normal for me was completely foreign to almost everyone else I spoke with. Fortunately, my own family never put any negative emphasis on the fact that I was adopted, and we openly talked about my birth family whenever the subject came up. Times have definitely changed, and now adoption is very public and openly discussed.

In my early twenties when I finally decided to search for my birth family, it was in large part due to my mom peaking my curiosity. Before I started the search, I tried to think of everything that could happen. I was ready to deal with the fact that I could have been the result of a rape, an affair or something unpleasant. I was ready for

my birth mother to slam a door in my face, or a phone in my ear. Yet, I just wanted to see what she looked like. I needed to hear her voice and see her face, if only just once. I needed to see if I was in there somewhere. Of course, I had questions, but I tried to prepare myself for the reality that I might not get any answers. I just wanted to meet her. Once would have been enough. When I finally started my search, the entire process took me less than eight hours. In just under eight hours, I was pulling up in front of the house in which my two "half" brothers lived. The next few weeks were a whirlwind of phone calls and meetings, trying to put a lifetime of information into just days. It was a surreal experience, in slow motion, and was totally and completely overwhelming. I jumped in so fast, and I quickly realized I wasn't really prepared at all for what I would face, I had not gotten myself ready mentally. I wasn't ready for what I found, and for what wasn't there. The main reason for my search, the biggest source of my curiosity was my birth mother, and I found out she died before could meet her.

I was devastated when I discovered that my birth mother was dead, and I would never have the chance to see or talk to her. Meeting my half brothers, their aunt who was raising them, meeting a birth aunt and uncle and several cousins took some of the sting away. The chaos of the first meetings and overall enormity of it also took some of the sadness away, but to this day I have moments where I sit, look at her picture and all I can do is cry. I needed so badly to see her and to touch her and to have her see me. The pain of this single loss, even now, is unbearable.

My birth mother died of cancer a few years before I found the rest of the family. She was going through a painful, draining death during the same time I was struggling to find peace as a teenager, when I was at the peak of a strange unhappiness and awkwardness. I have often wondered if there was a connection between us that I couldn't see, but could feel. Looking back, I have a strong belief that I was somehow feeling some of her sadness and anguish. I still wish I could get the chance to ask her if she could ever feel me as well.

No amount of pictures, stories, or words can convey what meeting my birth mother would have given me. My mom, my real mom, my adopted mom, was with me every step the entire way. She was there for every call, for every meeting. Every time someone from my birth family (or one of their friends) saw me, they turned completely white, and started crying. There were NO exceptions to this reaction. I am a mirror image of my birth mother. The sight of me evokes strong emotions in anyone who knew her.

It has been almost twenty years since I found my birth family. I found many siblings on my birth fathers side as well, and even met him once. I remain very close with my birth uncle, who actually lives a few miles from my parent's house. I remain in contact with two "sisters" on my birth fathers side, and occasionally see or hear from a random birth relative here or there. I am also close with my birth mothers last husband, his new wife, and their two boys. My "extended" and somewhat crooked family tree takes up so much space it takes a while to explain.

My parents gave me a wonderful life. I had a very good upbringing, good schooling, I learned manners, morals, respect and honesty. Knowing now what I do about my birth mothers family, I can't thank her enough for giving me up. I can't even begin to understand how hard it could have been, but she gave me a chance at a life that I could not have had with her.

I figure that life is what you make of it. I have my family, the ones who were there from the start, and the ones I have picked up along the way. We have all somehow made room for each other, and live somewhat peacefully most of the time. I do not regret having found my

birth family, only not doing it sooner. Had I waited until after college, I think I might have been better mentally prepared for what I found, but would have missed out on so much. Time alone has determined what place we all have in this huge extended "family" unit.

I will not look back and waste time on wishes and what-ifs. Now that I have a family of my own, I gain more and more understanding and insight into my own past. I feel extremely lucky that I found and know my whole family, to whatever degree we all interact. Some of the relationships I have with my birth family are wonderful, and I look forward to the time we spend together. Some of the relationships I could do without. I suppose the same holds true to my adopted family as well, because I don't think any kind of family gets along all of the time. It is hard to find a balance when you missed the first twenty years with people who are now suddenly your "family," but that first twenty years also created who I am today, and it didn't include any of them. I continuously mold and create the relationships that make up my family as a whole, whether it be contact by phone, email or in person, or no contact at all.

There still isn't a year that passes that I don't get more information, or meet new people, so this bumpy road continues on. And throughout this entire experience, my parents have given me their support and understanding, and we have all come this amazingly long way, relatively unscathed. Throughout everything, my crooked family tree keeps growing, and spreading out its roots to support the ever increasing reach of branches. Who knows what the future will hold. Some branches may break, some may have to be pruned. Unexpected shoots are always interesting, but they all add to the overall beauty of what my tree has become.

*Adoptee Lynn Calza lives in Petaluma, California with her husband and two daughters. She currently works part time, and is a full time mother, but takes time to write as often as she can. She has an enormous family tree made up of both blood and non blood relatives, and continues to add branches (and stories) as her oddly fashioned family expands and grows.*