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serving adopted children of color

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A Birth Father Story

by By Paul Weber

I am delighted to have the opportunity to tell my birth father story. All I can offer here is a small glimpse into the most profound event of my adult life, an ongoing event that continues to unfold.

In early 1979 I met my daughter's birthmother at a San Francisco community college music theory class. She was eighteen and I was twenty-three. We were both natives of San Francisco. She was a very cute, smart, funny, girl of Chinese descent, third-generation American. I am Caucasian, mostly Irish descent, and was working part-time at a psychiatric hospital as a nursing assistant. She was living at home with her sister and father. I was on my own. We dated and were intimate for about four months but broke up in May. In June she called me and let me know she was pregnant. While she was pregnant I was as supportive as I could be. I recall spending time with her going to Lamaze childbirth classes and I was in the delivery room when our very beautiful daughter was born February 1980.

We were ambivalent about adoption. However, despite our ambivalence, early in the pregnancy we had set in motion plans to give our daughter up for adoption. We worked with an adoption agency for several months prior to her birth. It was going to be a closed adoption. I don't think we knew about open adoptions. The agency provided profiles of three different couples who wanted to adopt. We wanted a mixed race couple, Asian/Caucasian. Of the three couples whose profiles were provided to us we selected a Caucasian man and a Chinese woman from Hong Kong. They were 35 years old, had been married for about twelve years, had no other children and from their profiles they seemed like very nice people who could give our daughter a loving, stable home.

I recall staying with my daughter's mother at the hospital after the birth. The hospital staff provided us, the new parents, a dinner of steak, lobster, and champagne. After the dinner, the nurse's aide wanted to know if we would like to see and hold the baby. It had been about 24 hours since the birth and we hadn't held her. We held our beautiful little baby girl for the first and last time. I just remember us both crying and holding this little bundle of joy. Even though I never doubted my decision, it was painful to leave my daughter and I also knew I was leaving her mother to whom I had grown very close through the pregnancy.

We were told by the adoption agency that the adoptive parents would tell our daughter that she was adopted when she got older. We were able to give the adoption agency cards and other mementos that would be given to the adoptive parents who would give them to her. I provided a short note on a beautiful card and my mother provided a knitted green baby sweater (remember the Irish!) and a very heartfelt note to her granddaughter and the adoptive parents letting them know of her birth family's Irish heritage.

We signed the "relinquishment papers" about three weeks after my daughter was born. Looking back on that particular time in my life, I was certainly of "sound mind" but emotionally I felt my life was a shambles. It took a year or more to get over the very acute feeling of loss. It was very painful time, both before and during the pregnancy, and I was trying to escape these feelings by using drugs and alcohol. For the most part, my birthfather status was pretty much a secret. My brothers and parents were aware I had a daughter as were some of my friends. But it was something that I rarely discussed with anyone, family or friends. I always thought about her, wondering "How is she? where is she? how are her parents treating her? what does she look like?" However, throughout the years, I often felt a hypocrite when someone asked me if I had children or some related inquiry and I said "no." The voices in my head would start: "What kind of man gives up his child?" "You are worse than a dead-beat dad. You didn't even try."

In 1985, five years after my daughter's birth, I met a woman who was an adoptee, who had searched and found her birth mother. She was the key to my understanding what I was going through as a birthfather. She was very empathetic and knew quite a bit about the adoption triad and made me aware of adoption support groups. I was finally able to share with others who understood my feelings of loss. Shortly thereafter I contacted the adoption agency and got more information about the adoptive parents. I was told I could update the agency file

with letters and that when my daughter turned eighteen we could be put in contact with each other if both of us signed consents. I signed the consent and began to periodically send letters, usually around my daughter's birthday. I kept in touch with an adoption support group, reading their newsletter and educational information. I went to a triad meeting a few times and learned about searches and reunions and other issues surrounding adoption. This group provided some perspective to what had happened and what I was going through. It all gave me hope that someday I might see my daughter.

Gradually, I got some outward semblance of order in my life and was able to complete law school and pass the bar and became a lawyer. In 1993 I married a Korean woman and we had a very beautiful girl in 1995. At the start of our relationship I told my wife that I had a daughter and that I was hoping I would be able to contact her in the future. She was not happy about this and we did not discuss it since it was possible a reunion might never happen. In the meantime, I continued to update the agency file and dreamed about one day seeing my other daughter.

At the end of September 2003, I received a certified letter from the adoption agency. Before opening my heart was pounding like a jack-hammer in my chest. I had not updated the adoption agency file for a couple of years so I was not expecting a letter from them. This letter provided my daughter's name, address and phone number. After twenty-three long years, my dream had come true. I called her the next day. I wanted to know, "How is your life? Do your parents treat you well? Are you happy?" She said her life was fine and she had good parents but I knew it would take time to satisfy myself to answer my real question: "How did my decision to give you up affect your life?"

My daughter and her parents were immediately welcomed with open arms into my extended family and into her birth mother's family. My mother had passed away in 1984 but my father and brothers and their families were overjoyed to meet her and her parents. Her birth mother's family was equally delighted. The love and respect we have for her adoptive parents is unmatched. She has great parents. Her adoptive mother even taught her to read and speak Cantonese and love her Chinese heritage. My daughter is now very connected to both sides of her birth parent's families.

After several hard months, my wife opened up to the situation and we told my younger daughter she had a sister. I think my wife will always have some mixed feelings about my daughter. However, she knows her own daughter now has a beautiful, intelligent older sister who comes from a loving family of her own. My wife greatly admires my daughter and has a deep respect and affection for her immigrant mother, a woman in many ways like herself.

The relationship between my daughters is very good. There is a sixteen year age difference between them but they share cultural similarities being raised by Asian immigrant mothers and speaking and reading in the language of their respective mothers. They email each other and send cards and enjoy each other's company. My younger daughter is only fourteen. As she gets older I really look forward to seeing how they relate to each other as adults. I have great confidence in both of them as loving people and feel there will always be a bond and affection between them.

I feel I am still getting to know my daughter. There is a great deal going on in her life and we don't see each other because she lives on the East Coast. She married two years ago. She and her husband are both extremely bright and busy people, completing their studies in the health care field. In a few weeks she will give birth to her first child, a boy, my grandson. Now, words like "surreal" and "mind-boggling" come to mind when I think of all the good things that are happening and flow from my relationship with her and her husband and her parents. All I can say is that I feel very lucky and blessed, and I am incredibly grateful for the ways things have turned out.