

ORIGINS

AN ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE LOST CHILDREN
TO ADOPTION

P. O. BOX 105, OAKHURST, N.J. 07755

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1983

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"GET UP, STAND UP"

The title of this article is taken from a song by Bob Marley and The Wailers, a Jamaican Reggae group, urging oppressed people everywhere to stand up and fight for their rights. I think it is an appropriate theme for birthmothers, and good advice to all of us, especially those who still have one foot in the closet.

Adoption is never going to change if only a few birthmothers, ORIGINS, CUB or other group leaders, "Get Up and Stand Up" for birthmother's pride, dignity and rights. There is much we leaders can do for you in providing search help, counseling, and moral support; but there is even more you can do for yourself, and for your sister birthmothers by coming out and standing up for yourself, and for truth.

So many birthmothers over-compensate for their youthful "sin", and try to become super-respectable, either as wives and mothers or as successful business-women. These women often have a hard struggle to integrate the woman they have become -- PTA president, rising executive, nurse, LaLeche League leader, member of Hadassah, or the Rosary Society -- with the "bad girl" that they were, the girl who got pregnant and gave away her child. The longer they have been in the closet the harder they have worked on their "respectable" life, the more difficult it is to come all the way out as a birthmother. Sadly, their silence perpetuates the myth that there are no "nice" birthmothers, making it harder for anyone to come out, for fear of losing overnight the "new life" that balances so precariously on a base of lies. Nobody wins, and countless women suffer in isolation and silence, when help may be only a word or a phone call away.

Although those of us in leadership positions have stressed the importance and the need to integrate our entire life experience before search or contact, in order to come to our lost children proud and whole, we keep hearing fear, defensiveness and excuses from some whom we are trying to help. We hear that it may have been okay for US to come out -- we are "so brave" -- but that your position is so fragile or special it would just destroy you to tell your kids, mother-in-law, boss, best friend, mailman, etc., etc. And yet, you demand that we stand up for you in fighting for adoption reform, that we help you search and that we sympathize with your situation.

Perhaps you think that the ORIGINS Co-founders and leaders had less to lose than you, or that our lives are so different we cannot possibly understand your fears. That is not true. We are women just like you; not extraordinarily brave, reckless, or free. We simply got tired of putting all our energy into maintaining a lie, and decided to "Get Up, Stand

Up" as all that we are. Our lives are much the better because we took the risk of fighting openly for our beliefs. Our world did not end, and neither will yours.

Maybe it would help some of you to know who we are, and what we do besides adoption reform. We do have other lives, in spite of our hours of volunteer work in the movement, and we all have managed to integrate our birthmother experience into those lives. We use our new-found strength to educate and comfort others. Come out and join us, and you can too!

You know me as a poet, a search counselor, and a radical birthmother. I am also a full-time mother to the three sons who live with me; and I can be found at BMX races, YMCA baby-and-mom swim class, and driving to Cub Scouts, Archery, Karate, and all the other activities my kids are involved in. I am now taking a night school writing course, and a course in the Polish language. My husband is an artist and mathematician who works in computer graphics. Both of us are proud of my work in adoption reform, and never miss a chance to educate friends and acquaintances. Many people disagree with my views, but I have never lost a friend because I am a birthmother.

Marsha is a former LaLeche League leader, as well as being active in PTA and other school activities. She has three young children at home, and is enrolled in part-time study in college. She is a free-lance writer, has written articles on adoption reform for magazines, for a women's newspaper, and for her school courses. Marsha's writing and speaking out have brought in many new ORIGINS members.

Kathy has a part-time job, four children at home, and is active in her children's Pop Warner Football League as well as their many school activities. She finds time to bake, and can her own vegetables and fruits, although she spends hours answering your letters and counseling searchers. Kathy surrendered two children, and was totally in the closet until she heard about ORIGINS. She then "came out" like a torpedo and has been very outspoken ever since, both in letters to the editor, and in public speaking.

Pat has two children at home, surrendered two children, and is expecting her fifth child soon! She works part-time as a hairdresser, and has helped several people she met through her job deal with their own adoption situations. Pat has the huge task of taking care of our P.O. Box, which has been over-flowing ever since the McCall's article; and she has aided several friends in making their contacts.

Janet, who has been Pat's friend for 15 years, is a legal secretary who also surrendered two children, her only children.

In spite of the emotional demands of her recent reunion with her son, Janet has taken over our registry.

Evelyn, who has devoted much time to our library in spite of personal crisis, is a respected and loved member of her community, involved in her two children's activities, a church member and member of other support groups. Evelyn always finds time to share her story with anyone it may help, and has started many birthmothers and adoptees she met outside the movement on the road to reunion.

Alison is an executive recruiter with a very conservative firm, a woman who has worked hard at her career in a field where men dominate; yet she has been outspoken and public about her only daughter, with whom she has a wonderful relationship, and about birthmother's causes. She risked alot to stand up and speak.

Lucy is a nurse, and single mother to two daughters, whom she supports alone. She is involved in animal rights groups as well as adoption reform, and spends her small amount of free time with her dogs and cats and kids. She has helped several adoptee patients (she is in nursing) to search in spite of official disapproval. She put herself on the line for all of us in the famous Betty Furness entrapment. Lucy lives in a community that has many young adoptees, and her door is always open to them.

I could go on about others in the movement all over the country. Those who have made your search and reunion possible, but I think by now you get the picture. We are not better or worse or different from most of you -- we have families, jobs, school and church or synagoge committments just like you. It was just as hard for us to come out as it is for you -- but we did it, and you can too!

Admitting that you were an unwed-mother and gave up a child when you were 13, or 17, or 22, does not change or invalidate who you are now, or what you have accomplished since. Nobody who matters will think less of you --

letting people know you are a birthmother does not mean you must resign from you job, the PTA, or your religious group, and hang out a red light on 42nd Street! If you have pride and belief in yourself as a person, there is nothing you can lose by coming out, except the awful sense of fear and unworthiness that comes from trying to live a lie.

It has been my experience that there is nobody a birthmother "can't tell"; anyone from whom the truth must be concealed, at all costs, then you are not free.

This does not mean you have to tell everyone you meet, but you should feel you can tell anyone you choose to tell; and, if the subject of adoption comes up in conversation, you should feel free to offer your unique insight and experience. Too many women in this situation bite their tongues and suffer in silence as some ignorant person laments the "baby shortage", or insults birthmothers or adoptees.

Everytime you tell someone your story, whether it is your Bible Study group, your friend from exercise class, your co-workers, or your in-laws, you are helping to up-grade the image of birthmothers, and to educate society about adoption reform. You are also helping to heal yourself, and preparing for the best possible reunion with your lost child.

Nobody is proud of giving away their child, least of all those of us in ORIGINS leadership. Our surrenders, like yours, were the result of pressure, bad advice and desperation; yet we carry the guilt, just as you do. However, we have learned that a stupid act does not make a stupid, or bad, or worthless person; and we are proud of all that we are now, and of our beautiful lost children, whom we hope all our friends and relatives will someday meet. You too can be free -- "Get Up, Stand Up" sisters -- and be ready to stand proud before the world and your child.

Mary Anne Cohen
Whippany, New Jersey

To those who understand,
no explanation is necessary.
To those who don't understand,
no explanation is possible.

LIFE HAS BEEN ANOTHER WORLD

To One and All at ORIGINS:

"WORLD STOP, LISTEN TO ME!" My daughter and two beautiful granddaughters have had our reunion one year ago and needless to say, I am still somewhere out there in the heavens. I am whole again and life is so much more beautiful. My daughter and I have a pact that we will not exploit our finding each other, but in the very near future, I will be sending a letter for publication of gratitude to the one and only ANGEL....MARSHA RIBEN for being supportive, giving of herself in guidance and offering the fortitude that we birthmothers need.

As a medical secretary with a more-than-full time career and the wife of a military disabled veteran, I find it somewhat difficult time wise to search the extra hours that are not offered in any given day. In a way of expressing myself by helping others, it will have to wait until I retire from my career and then I too will be able to give of myself wholeheartedly to the TRIANGLE OF ADOPTION.

You see, it was 41 years ago that my daughter was adopted and my search was vowed then "that some day, some where, some how" I would find her, and on August 3, 1982, her 41st birthday, we reached out to each other, tears, joy, and the very essence of hearing each others voice some 1500 miles apart brought sunshine to each other, just knowing we were both alive, and of course the two most beautiful granddaughters in the world. We had our reunion in October, 1982, and a story of unrealistic happenings unfolded. TO ALL IN ORIGINS.....GOD BLESS YOU ALWAYS. KEEP UP THE SPIRIT WHICH I FOR ONE CAN only relate by quoting my reason for not faltering. FAITH IN GOD.

With a plan of involving myself with you all in the very near future, I remain in the "triangle" with love and prayers to all.

Natalie Roberts Vargo
Mount Pleasant,
South Carolina

A BIRTHMOTHER'S STORY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

Most of you have read my first story in the newsletter, but for those of you who did not I will be brief. I found my daughter, Lisa, who was born on January 3, 1966, and surrendered on January 19, 1966. She was born at St. Mary's in the Oranges. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark was the proud winner of my white, healthy baby girl.

Lisa had just turned thirteen. I drove by the house in Scotch Plains, NJ, about one hour from where I live in Manasquan, NJ. I caught a glimpse of Lisa, and then I waited for two years and planned my next step. With the help of my friends from ORIGINS, I sent a letter to her parents when she was fifteen. I heard from them about seven weeks later. For the next two years, we wrote back and forth sharing and exchanging pictures. They were understanding, but said that even though Lisa knew she was adopted they were not going to tell her that I had made contact until she was nineteen years old.

Then in May of 1982, they wrote that they wanted to meet me. My husband and I met Lisa's parents the day before Mother's Day. We were together for five and one half hours. At the end of the night, they told me they were going to tell Lisa within six months. In the first week of November 1982, my husband left me and my two children after sixteen years of marriage. I was devastated. One week later I got a letter from Lisa, my first born. A beautiful letter. She wanted to meet me before Christmas. My emotions were drained. Any of you who knew me, knew I was a basket case. I do not know where or how I got the strength, but on December 16, 1982, I drove to Lisa's house and met my daughter. I had some special gifts for her, and my other daughter bought her a gift that said "A Sister Is A Special Friend". Lisa was delighted. They shared with me her clothes that they brought her home in, her Christening dress and her First Holy Communion dress. After an hour and one half, Lisa and I went out for dinner at a restaurant near her home. It was a perfect setting. I could not stop staring at her. We looked so much alike. We cried several times during dinner as I shared with her my album and personal story of what had happened. We left the restaurant; and before we got to my car, she threw her arms around me and told me she loved me. Then we went to where she worked. She wanted me to meet her friends. Then to her boyfriend's house to meet his mother and him. She had told everyone about me. I think that if she could have, she would have taken me to school for "Show N Tell". I went along with all she wanted to do. Then we went back to her house and had cake and coffee with her parents. I came home, and I felt many emotions.

I was scared to tell them that my husband was no longer with me, but felt I had to tell the truth. Lisa's parents seemed upset, but Lisa was just so concerned about me that I really do not think it bothered her as much as I had thought it would. We non-persons are like that.....

Since then it has been very special. We have seen each other many many times. My daughter Dawn, who is sixteen, and Lisa are so happy to be sisters. My son, who is eight, just loves Lisa. Lisa's brothers, Chris 23 and Joey 16 (natural children), have met Dawn when she spent the weekend at their house. Just a few weeks ago Lisa spent a week with us in Manasquan. And Dawn is spending this week in Lake George at Lisa's summer house. Lisa has nothing but love for me, and we have had some long talks. I love her so much, and I feel we will always be close. Lisa wants to find her birthfather, and we have discussed this at length. That is her decision; and if he rejects her, she will have to handle that. I wish I could spare her the pain if that happens. I have no idea what his reaction will be. I told her that if he wanted to talk to me I would be willing.

Lisa wrote two term papers on Open Adoption and Abortion this year. I would like to share with all my sisters the Conclusion Page of the Abortion term paper:

I feel very strongly against abortion. First of all, it is against my values, the values of my parents and the values of the Church. I see no reason why pregnant woman cannot carry their child for nine months and give it up for adoption if they do not want it.

There is a very long waiting list in adoption agencies across the country. Some couples are unable to conceive children because of reasons which are no fault of their own. Others murder their "unwanted" children, depriving those couples who want children through adoptions.

Another reason I feel so strongly against abortion is because I almost was a victim of it. When my birthmother became pregnant, things were not as accepted as they are today. Her parents wanted her to get an abortion because they were worried about what their "friends" were going to say. My birthfather was all prepared to pay for it. When my birthmother refused to go through with it, he refused to marry her and her parents disowned her. She was pretty much alone, and I give her a lot of credit for having me when most of society was against her.

To tell you the truth, I like doing this term paper better than I would like being in the bottom of a garbage bucket in a hospital somewhere.

I really felt that even though I was forced to give Lisa up, I made the right decision to have her. Even with all the pain that most birthmothers feel.

To all my friends who helped me and supported me during the years, I would like to wish them a beautiful reunion.....Knowing is better than not knowing. The truth will set you free.....

Evelyn Zeimetz
Manasquan, New Jersey

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IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT ARTICLES

In sending for articles please enclose a LARGE MANILA ENVELOPE if asking for more than one article. Common sense tells you that you need a large envelope to handle all the copies and also ENOUGH POSTAGE to cover handling. My address has changed. Address all requests for articles to: Evelyn Zeimetz, 54 Salmon Avenue, Manasquan, NJ 08736. I hope everyone does this so I can still send articles to people who do not have anyone to talk to and/or do not have any groups to attend for support.

SEA POEM

How are we tied?

Boy on a beach, wave-washed, sky-dazzled,
Spinning your voiceless dreams, star journeys,
Sea splendor, whale song . . .

Dreams untold unspoken because

The only words are waves are water are
breaking into diamonds into murmur
into foam . . . wordless things
You have always known
speak here

at eastern edge of dry land, soul home -

Let me tell you a story, my dolphin, my fine son -

Your mother was a mermaid, your father the west wind
And you

Are Prince of Shells, Lobster King
Riding far surf, fearless, sleek seal
Even in the teeth of storm.

The answers are here, Freedom, the End, the Beginning,
Taste of salt are all here swirling sinking rising
To Moon's call, First Mother, Our Lady
Of the Tides.

I am always with you, swimming just outside
Reefs of time, of memory, flying
with seabirds, Running
in your blood, in dreams, green waves . . .

Peace in my vision of boy on a beach, My mirror - Peace and Hope
The pain stills.

Look for me some morning, when mist parts dawn sea, Bringing
Your brothers, Your story, My own face -
Listen

The Mermaid sings
Only for you.

Mary Anne Cohen
Whippany, New Jersey



From: "Perspectives on a Grafted Tree", Edited
by Patricia Johnston, 1983, Perspective Press.

FINDING SON IN SAME TOWN

Can you imagine playing in the pool everyday with your son -- wrestling, dunking, and playing tag? Not if you are a birth-mother, and you last saw your son more than 11½ years ago, when you said good-bye through a nursery window in a home for unwed mothers.

It was a dream come true to find my son living in the same town. We became friends while spending our summers at the local pool. We found that we had similar interests, but it was two years and two months before I felt the time was right and I got up the courage to tell him that I am his birthmother.

July 20, 1983, will remain in my memory forever. While I waited for my son, almost 14, to get out of the pool, my stomach did cartwheels! Knowing that I wanted to talk to him, my son came over to me and sat down. Although I was terrified that he would never want to speak to me again, I handed him an envelope and said, "Read this all the way through before you say anything, okay? And if I have a heart attack in the meantime, just call an ambulance!"

As my son opened the letter and began to read, my heart was literally pounding, and I could not decide whether I would pass-out or throw-up! The letter explained that I felt he was old enough and had a right to know the truth, that I was 16 when he was born and my mother forced me to give him up for adoption without even allowing me to hold or feed him. I told him that I dreamed of the day I would see him again, never really believing it was possible. I told him that I would not put any pressure on him, and that it was up to him to decide whether or not he wanted his adoptive parents to know, and that I would abide by his decisions.

"Well, who is my birthmother?" he asked, when he finished reading the letter.

"I am," I said.

"YOU?? YOU ARE MY MOTHER?" My son seemed amazed, so I proved it to him by showing him the surrender paper and his amended birth certificate which matched his birthdate, place of birth, etc.

Then my son looked at me, smiled, and said, "Thank you for telling me. I always wanted to know."

He was surprised to learn that my husband is not his birthfather, and that his birthfather had a full head of red hair.

"Red hair?? He has red hair?? Oh, my God!! Well, at least he is not bald!" (His adoptive father is bald, and my son does not want to be bald!)

Then my son asked me a question about a movie we had seen on television, thanked me again for telling him, and went back in the pool!

After having to psyche myself up, preparing myself for the worst, I was a little let down that it had been so easy, that he had not asked more questions. Then I realized that I had taken him by surprise and it had not sunk in yet. He needed time to get used to it.

Now we are still good friends, pals, but it is better because there is honesty between us. I no longer have to pretend with him. My son does not want his adoptive parents to know, and I will respect his wishes. I just hope that it does not become a difficult burden for him to carry along, and that he will come to me if he needs or wants someone to talk to.

I am so relieved that everything has gone so well. I think kids are a lot stronger than we give them credit for. It is the adults that worry and fall apart. Kids have an uncanny knack for accepting things as they are and going on with their

lives, especially when they are young. After all, it should not have been a traumatic event. What is more natural than knowing your mother?

Although we have not talked about it, my son must feel more complete knowing who he resembles. During the past three summers, people remarked that we look alike, and some "mistook" him for my son. Now when that happens, we correct them and look at each other and smile, sharing a secret.

The pool closed for the season this week and the children went back to school. I will not be seeing my son as often as I did

in the summer. I hope he keeps in touch often over the course of the school year.

With all of this, there is still one more thing that I want. Since all the time we spent together was in a public place, in clear view of his adoptive family, or in the company of others, I never got to hug my son. At the first opportunity, I want to give my son a great big hug because he is ONE TERRIFIC KID!!

Adele
New Jersey



MY THREE SONS

I would like to share with you my experience in my search and how my closet door was opened completely.

I am a birthmother of three wonderful boys. The two oldest, Peter 18 years and Henry 16 years, live with me. Billy, age 13 years, is the child I surrendered through private adoption. In March of 1970, unknown to the lawyer, I glanced at the name of the adoptive parents on his folder. No knowing what I know now and no one to help me, I buried their name in my mind. I could not remember it.

In November of 1981, I found and joined ORIGINS. Through this wonderful group and meeting such super friends, I found the courage and confidence to go forward into putting a dream into a reality. For the first time in 12 years, I finally felt I was not alone. It was through this understanding and hope that enabled me to go on with my search.

On January 28, 1982, through a friend, I gave a bunch of names to check out. It took me a couple of frustrating months at totally concentrating on Billy and checking telephone books. At 2 AM I got a name and address of my SON! After 12 years of worrying and wondering, I found him.

Now I have a name, address and telephone number. I had a friend call there; not knowing who we are, the adoptive mother tells us she has a 12 year old son born in March. I am sorry to do that, but I needed to know if I had the right party.

On February 6, 1982, I received Bill's birth certificate. Truly another miracle.

On March 25, 1982, three days short of his 12th birthday, I think I saw Billy! It was hard to see his face for he was wearing a hat, playing on his front lawn.

On April 7, 1982, being public information, I called the county's surrogate's Office, wanting the adoptive parents lawyer's name. In case of contact. Gave it my best shot, told him what I know. Very understanding he was. He confirmed Billy is my son.

On July 22, 1982, right under my nose,

would you believe it, I met Billy's Aunt Kathy. After getting over the shock she gave me pictures and information. Finally, after carrying a baby's picture in my mind for 12 years, I have the real thing. God how handsome -- MY SON!

On August 15, 1982, I found out he races in Motorcross and went to the race. Not only saw Bill but his parents also. Took a whole roll of film of him. Because of Mary Anne, Julie and Linda, I got some information about Bill for we sat right next to the adoptive parents. How I just sat there minding my own business and acting so calm, I will never know. I was so nervous and scared they would realize who I was.

Did not see Bill for over a year, except to ride pass the house. During this whole thing Peter and Henry did not know what I was doing. They only knew I belong to a group on adoptions and helping other people. I did feel bad because I did not share with them any of my happiness in my search.

September 13, 1983 is another important date for me. Peter told me he knows about me and Bill. My ex told him. So many times I tried to decide when the right time will be. Now Peter tells me! Henry did not know so he was shocked. They both understood everything, even my decision on waiting to do a contact. I'm very proud of them.

On September 30, 1983, Henry got to see Billy in person. He did not say too much other than he's good looking like his older brother - ME! Now Peter can't wait to see him for he did not come with us. Not seeing Bill over a year. He looks great.

CONTACT??? I don't know when just yet. My gut feelings right now is to wait.

If you know of anyone who went through a private adoption or going through one, please have them contact me. Interested in hearing their experiences. 'Til my next move in my search, God Bless You All.

Diane LeMasson
Lodi, New Jersey

