

A Time To Gather

For many years my daughter had a dream
a dream of loving, caring, perfectly wonderful
birth parents of her very own.
Really special parents, who, for some unknown but
completely acceptable reason
had "Given Her Up" for adoption

And the reality?
Severe neglect. Extreme abuse.
Apprehension by the ministry.
Weeks of hospitalization followed by foster care.
A fifteen pound three year old,
unable to walk, unable to talk.

For her birth parents there were
charges of child abuse,
trial and conviction,
fines and probation,
compulsory A.A. Programs
(and extensive media coverage, with names included)

But for us it was a brand new beginning
and we were a real family, at last,
with our very first child; our precious only daughter.
We got started on adoption papers
the day she was made a permanent ward
(Of course back in the early seventies,
no one knew anything about
Alcohol Related Birth Defects.)
Our daughter asked a lot of questions over the next twenty years,
but the whole truth had to wait until maturity
and maturity came very, very slowly,
and so her dream persisted.
As the years piled up
her interest in her past lessened,
and I began to hope that there would never be a need
to explain the difference between
"seizure" and "relinquishment."

But when my daughter was twenty-five
and already three years away from the nest,
my youngest son, then only seventeen

became involved in his own adoption reunion.
And parties were held in his honour
and there were presents too
and an exciting new world of admiring people to explore.
And suddenly
my daughter wanted a piece of the action
for herself.

She said, "Mom, I've decided
to search for my real mom and dad.
Can you tell me what I should do?
Will you help me get started?
Will you come with me when I meet them?"
Adoptive moms of F.A.S. kids
learn to leave our own "Identity Crises" on hold
as we put hurt aside, again,
and place our adult child's needs first,
no matter how threatened we feel.

My daughter was finally ready
to face her own realities
We chose a neutral sport to meet---
lunch at MacDonalds – my treat.
Though her hamburger and my first coffee
we discussed relinquishment,
and dreams.
Through her fries and my second coffee
we struggled with apprehension,
and facts.
Through her milkshake and my third coffee
we finally reached the personal past
that I had always protected her from.
And loyalty to her long term dreams,
and to the tiny daughter she used to be,
along with the need to be truthful
and to avoid putting her on the defensive
about people she wanted to know,
nearly devastated me.
But she was ready for dessert.

And she was also ready
to see the old newspaper clippings.
I said, "Are you sure?"
"Yes"

And after she had read them
“Do you still want to go ahead with this?”

“Yes.”

It was expected, and anyway
I already knew that she would be welcomed
within the circle of her birth family
because of some sneaky homework

I had done two years before

(Her youngest brother knew her youngest brother,
except that nobody but me was really “in the know”)

The first meeting was a success,
and in the end, I’m proud to say, she handled it alone.

She showed her birth family a picture of her adoptive family,
and her youngest brother was thrilled.

“I know those guys!” he said. “I went to school with them!”

Luckily, he also liked them.

Because of my daughter’s problems
with both memory and sequencing skills,

I still don’t know

how contact actually happened,
or who arranged the first phone call,
or how they recognized each other
although she did involve a social worker.

And she obviously had more interest
in her birth brothers and sisters,
and in the presents she was given,
than in her natural parents.

She remembered two things that helped me though.

During her first telephone conversation
with her birth father,

he had mentioned her birthday,
and had suggested their initial meeting
be on that date.

And the other good news:
my daughter’s first family
had started their own search for her
more than a year before
she had started her search for them