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Editorial Style

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My Turn: One Adoptee's Journey

In the middle of the airport, genetics were staring back at me.

My parents are going to meet my grandmother next month. It sounds strange, like a parallel universe, and that is because, for the most part, it is. I am adopted, and when I was younger I wore it like a badge.

I always known I was adopted, and despite the great hole that was my biological past, I have always known who I am. It is those two dichotomies that have brought me to attending a family reunion with my birthfamily and my parents this coming October.

My adoption was through Catholic Charities in the late Seventies. It was still the time of closed records and secrets. But enough people have been curious, and now agencies that set up the original placements offer help to make connections with birthparents and adoptees possible.

I started the process of the search in my mid-twenties. Catholic Charities coordinated meetings and group sessions for birthmoms and adoptees in different stages of searching. I received a packet of information that was collected about my birthmother at the time of my birth including a letter she had written me. This simple note closes with, "You are always in my thoughts and prayers. Remember I loved you from the beginning and will love you to the end."

And so it came down to writing my own letter – an introductory note to an unknown entity with no idea what type of reaction I could get in return. What if I said something wrong? Or she couldn't be tracked down? Or she didn't want to be in touch with me?

I got a response to my letter a few weeks later, and after a few written exchanges, we talked on the phone. Suzy, my birthmom lives in Arizona with her three children, and her mom close by. She was raised in Nebraska and was one of six children.

She was thrilled to hear from me. I had so many questions. I just wanted her to know that I was fine, that life is good, and that I loved her no matter what. I was worried about my parents and what they thought about my search, and I realized that they were just as curious about her as I was.

Talk about emotional. And during the time my letter to her arrived, Suzy lost her father and started the process of getting divorced.

Suzy and I caught up on each other's lives through phone calls and a few months later, May of 2006, she came to Maryland for a reunion. I was shocked when she stepped off the plane. Of all the things going through my mind, out of my mouth stumbled, "oh, my nose." Right there as plain as the nose on my face were genetics staring right back at me.

Her visit went so quickly. We talked so much, answering questions and looked through stacks of pictures, introducing each other to the cast members in each of our lives.

Later that year, I flew to Arizona to visit and meet her family. Even now I am still in awe that I have siblings. Suzy's mom, Lou, is also in Arizona and we spent an

afternoon talking about family and the emotional decisions that were made in the beginning of my life.

I was invited to a ‘birth-cousin’s’ wedding last year to meet all of Suzy’s family. It felt like a homecoming. Here I was surrounded by aunts and uncles that not only look like me, but are loud like me. Nature versus nurture, indeed. I loved meeting Suzy’s siblings, and learning more about their stories. This is the text-book definition of a tight knit family, that in some way I have always been a part of. What I am learning is that I am just what Suzy needed, a light, something to grasp on for hope.

Parting after the wedding, my aunt Katie said she can’t wait to meet my parents, and that it would be like gaining another brother and sister.

I said in the beginning, I love my family, and I know who I am because of my parents. Adoptees struggle with this, because there are so many questions, one in particular is the “why?” I struggled with that too, but when it comes down to it, I have never been twenty and pregnant. And in the end I couldn’t have dreamed of being a part not just one, but two wonderful families. I can’t wait for them to meet.