

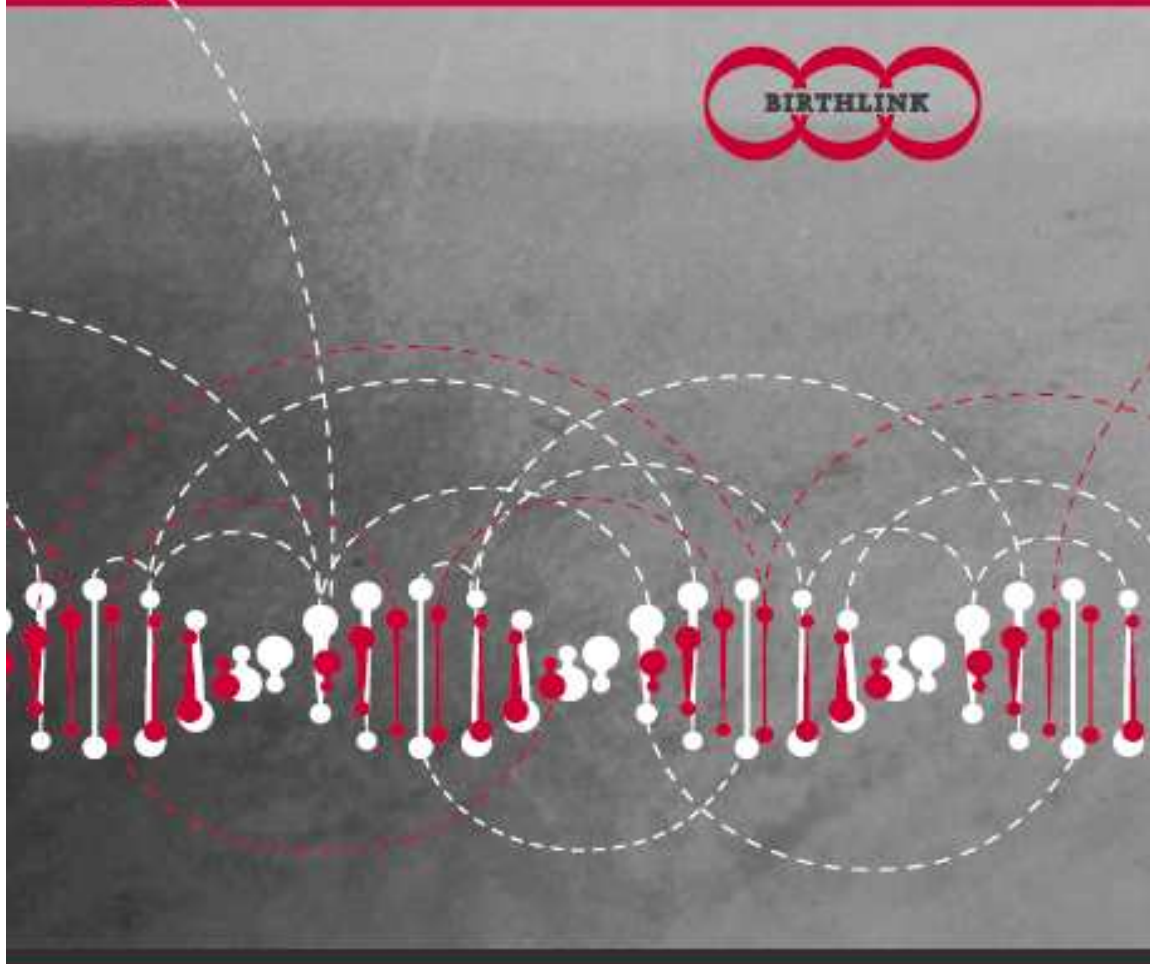
Autumn 2009

BIRTHLINK BULLETIN

New from
Birthlink

Relatively Clear

A SEARCH GUIDE FOR
ADOPTED PEOPLE
IN SCOTLAND



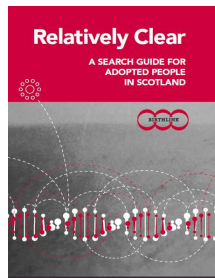
Editorial

It is a measure of our resilience that Birthlink can bring out a publication in these hard times. Our pride in being able to do this is shown by the decision to put the front page of *Relatively Clear* on the Bulletin's front page. Further details can be found in the separate piece. Elsewhere, staff's commitment and dedication can be seen in the articles about fund-raising efforts.

All of us at Birthlink wish you a good festive season when it comes and a constructive 2010.

Relatively Clear: a search guide for adopted people in Scotland - a brief history

*First of all an apology is due to two people whose names were left off the list of contributors. Sorry goes out to Vivienne Triseliotis and Ann Coulson for their invaluable help in reviewing the various drafts and proofs.



Relatively Clear is Birthlink's 1997 *Search Guide for adopted people in Scotland* twelve years on. The booklet has been revised and reviewed and the various minor changes (names, locations) updated. Writing *Relatively Clear* required some thought about what to do regarding the exponential rise of the Internet since 1997. Clearly a whole book could be written about searching via the Internet but it was decided that there was still room for a hands-on guide that took readers through the intricate process of accessing and using public records. As a compromise a short section on the Internet sets out the possible benefits and pitfalls.

The rest of the publication provides a step-by-step guide to the complex and complexing business of doing research in public records. From where to find

eye. As the back page blurb rather modestly says: "...this booklet could help you save time and energy in your search".

Why *Relatively Clear*? Followers of Birthlink's publications will have noticed our earlier publication on the adoption contact register, *Relatively Unknown: a year in the life of the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland*. Our grand plan is a run of publications whose titles begin with 'relatively'. Suggestions for the next publication about our Care Connect service for people who have grown up in local authority care are welcome, e.g. relatively speaking...

Lastly, we had three other titles before settling on *Relatively Clear*. The first was *Relatively Straightforward* but this was thought to be too much of a mouthful and not especially relevant. *Relatively Easy* was not liked because of, some said (!) dodgy connotations. And *Relatively Simple* was rejected because of associations, some said again, with lack of intelligence. Ho hum, the ups and downs of editing.

Reunions Round-Up

Tina is an Australian birth mother who first got in touch with us in 1997. No one else was registered on the adoption contact register and we referred her to an Australian support agency. In 2007 she re-



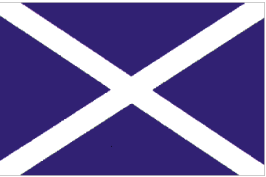
contacted us and then we were able to offer her a 'non-disclosure agreement' arrangement (an NDA in which we act on contract with a local authority or other adoption record-holder to find an adopted adult on behalf of a birth relative). In this case the NDA was with Aberdeen City Council.

Unfortunately our search discovered that Tina's daughter had died. We then found and contacted the daughter's adoptive father and he helped Tina to visit her daughter's grave. Tina's feedback: "I can only say what a wonderful job you have done even if my search was to find that my daughter had died years ago. I felt I was understood and shown great compassion throughout. It was lovely to

be able to deal with one person over the past year and I cannot thank you enough”.

Margaret is adopted (and also from Australia as it happens). She wasn't told that she was adopted until she was in her mid-50s. Margaret grew up as an only child in her adoptive family. In December 2008, she contacted us and we helped Margaret access her adoption records in which she discovered the names of her birth mother and father. We traced her birth mother but found out that she had died, however we found two sisters of hers on her mother's side. We then traced a third sister from her birth father's family. Margaret's feedback: *“totally pleased with your services and search work, delighted to have ‘family’ as both my adoptive parents are deceased now...many similarities with my sisters and strong physical resemblance to my birth mother”.*

These two short accounts are just the tip of the iceberg of Birthlink work every week. They also happen to be the ones that are in the editor's tray for inclusion in the Bulletin. What is common to them is that they both involve people who now live in Australia but for whom the adop-



tion in question happened in Scotland. If we had the resources to advertise in Australia, New Zealand, Canada etc, given the wide-

spread nature of the Scottish Diaspora and the inevitability that adoptive families will have migrated down through the years, we would surely be kept exclusively busy with 'overseas' work alone. The other feature that these stories have in common is, of course, that the searches discovered that people had died. This is not rare but as can be seen, the searches didn't end there and we were able to help bring some satisfaction - the word 'closure' doesn't seem right because, in this work, our experience is that reunions, re-connecting and in some cases, only contact with people who have known the person searched for, all open up new worlds and possibilities.

Our third account is a lot nearer home and involved one of our staff. The lovely Jennifer. In her case her 50th



birthday party was extra special. Held at the posh Dunbar Golf Course - not on the green - in the Club House, the party was



joined by her four years older sister Irene who now lives in Canada. This was the first time that the two had met. Tina, a third sister who Jennifer had already met in 2003 and lives in England, was also at the do. By all accounts it was quite an occasion. Until 2003, neither Jennifer, Irene or Tina knew of each other's existence. According to Jennifer *“it is through the good offices, persistence and dedication of Birthlink that we have now come together”.*

There are many other snippets of stories and feedback about what we do. Too many to include except to mention John's comments from inside an English jail after we had found his father and his father's large family: *“I feel so happy, I feel like I'm being embraced fully unlike ever before and I'm so grateful”.*

Lorna's story about her half-brother Dave bumping into the son of her birth father by chance on holiday in Egypt will have to wait. Either for the next Bulletin or it's own radio play what with finding out where she gets her musical ability from - turns out that her birth father *“can play the piano by ear (untaught) and sings quite well”* and that she has *“a further four brothers and one sister to add to Dave and my adoptive brother, plus a total of 8 nephews, 11 nieces and 2 great nieces all told”.*



Hey Lorna, Xmas presents will max out your plastic from now.

Hellos and Goodbyes

Anne Mitchell, one of our most respected and expert of our group of searchers is retiring. It is with sadness that we say goodbye because for twenty years Anne has been adept at fishing through the public records and finding details of the whereabouts of adopted people, birth parents and when she couldn't find them located those who might know where they were or had gone. Witnesses at weddings, GPs were all skilfully ferreted out.



Anne never blinked at the challenges of finding a Margaret MacDonald or John Smith and invariably would come up with a lead. So it is with great regret that we

wish her well. We are sure that she will bring her talents and energy to whatever it is she is now applying herself.

Fundraising

Dear Reader

This next piece is a shining example of what staff and supporters have been doing to support the work.

Firstly, a big thanks to Hazel who carried out a sponsored leg massage for those who completed the Ribbon Walk for cancer in June. Hazel's work raised £200.

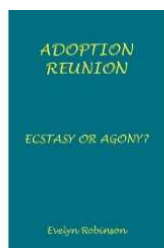
Next up, Michael took part in the BUPA Great Edinburgh 10k run. As is often the case with sponsored runs, the money is still coming in or rather, staying with athletics, being chased.

Most recently in November, all staff turned out to help at an alternative therapy day held in Dunfermline. That day's work netted a cool £700. Go Team Birthlink.

All similar gestures from readers will not go unacknowledged.

New or nearly new Books

"A reunion between family members who have been separated by an adoption can be a very emotional event. For most people there is great joy and excitement, but for some there can be anger and disappointment. ... The ecstasy of adoption reunions probably needs no explanation and is often enthusiastically anticipated. However, agony can also be experienced and this is often unexpected and alarming." (Evelyn Robinson)



Evelyn's third book, *Adoption Reunion – Ecstasy or Agony?*, (2009) is largely an updated and condensed version of her first two books. In it she explains simply

and concisely what it is about adoption separation and reunion which causes such intense and varied emotions.

Evelyn has included a selection of her responses to some of the many questions she has been asked over the last twenty years. Evelyn's answers are always gentle yet direct and exhibit the wisdom and knowledge she has gained throughout her wide-ranging experience of working with members of the adoption community and professionals in many locations around the world. Evelyn has been a valued supporter of Birthlink and her work and contributions to the adoption support, contact and reunion literature are always stimulating. This book will be no different.



Love Child: A Memoir of Adoption and Reunion, Loss and Love (2005)

"In this enthralling memoir, Sue Elliott tells her own story of growing up as an adopted child. She details her emotional search for and meeting with her birth mother, Marjorie, the heartbreaking tale of how Marjorie came to give up Sue for adoption in 1950s England, and the shock of finding that she, Sue, wasn't the only child given away by Marjorie...Weaved throughout is the vivid, emotional history of adoption in the UK. Drawing on a wide range of intimate personal experiences, it outlines the forces that shaped 20th century adoption practice, from baby-farming, the stigma of illegitimacy, incest and the bastardy laws, to children taken by force, the Magdalene laundries, mass emigration schemes without parental consent, to modern day adoption practices, buying babies from abroad, sperm donor fathers and tearful reunions on Trisha".



Finally, Birthlink wishes all its friends and supporters a peaceful festive season and productive New Year.