



Adults Affected by Adoption

Birthlink Bulletin Spring 2016

Editorial

Welcome to our Spring 2016 Bulletin. Seems like we've got a lot to tell you about, but the main thing is that it's all positive. Funding is on a better footing with continuing support from the Scottish Government and local councils guaranteed for at least another year (we just wish that these commitments could be longer, say for three years, this would allow us to plan ahead).

Demand for our services is on the increase and our work in supporting our colleagues involved in after adoption work is going forward in our After-Adoption Forums where considerable good practice is shared.

Our Heros in the Thrift Shops

Birthlink's shops go from strength to strength not the least as a result of the most recent fabulous window display in our Tollcross one:



(This cranes 'installation' needs to be seen to be believed) Both shops have a great buzz about them)



And we'd love for you to help out either at 6 Bruntsfield Place, 0131 229 4646 or at 26 Lochrin Buildings, Tollcross, 031 229 6939, both Edinburgh.

Ps The shops' Facebook Page is an entertainment alone.

<https://www.facebook.com/BirthlinkThriftshops/?fref=ts>

The forthcoming Meadows Festival on 5th June Edinburgh will have a Birthlink stall ([https:// www.facebook.com/meadowsfestival](https://www.facebook.com/meadowsfestival))



and office and shop staff are doing the Great Scottish Walk, same month.

Staying with funds, we are pleased that the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland has been funded for another year by the Scottish Government. Thanks Nicola. And our Care Connect service has been backed by City of Edinburgh for another year too. We must be doing something right. Lastly, on the money front, a huge thanks to the Edinburgh Bar Association Benevolent Trust for its £1000 donation.

Praise and a Story (real life)

'On the whole, our relationship is progressing slowly but slowly (adopted man united with his sister and niece) as none of us wish to push too far too fast. It will take a while, but I believe every day I now know my birth family is another day to be treasured. I cannot thank you and your team enough for the work you have done for me, and on my families' behalf, and will always be grateful for your kindness, guidance and assistance in helping me trace my birth relatives. The service you provide is invaluable, and I consider myself lucky to have had your assistance in tracing my family, and can only and hope and pray that your sterling work continues to help others to trace their families who may have otherwise given up all hope of ever finding them.'

(KM)

'To let you know, my demons have packed their bags and left me for good. I have been told I even look like a different person! It is such a relief to know that she (his daughter) is alive and well (R, birth father).

...

The 'Skeleton' in the Cupboard

The search for my birth family is one of contradiction, un-answered questions, intrigue, anger and joy. It has made me realise that in the world of adoption, there may be no right or wrong and perhaps it may never be ascertained. Looking back at the 1950s and 60s I see a Dickensian adoption system, class ridden, judgemental and ethically inappropriate in its decisions and actions. However I had a good upbringing, so was it 'right or wrong'?

I am in my mid 50s and only now question my very being. Where did that nose come from? The silvery grey hair? Not to mention the obvious tall stature with proportionally sized 14 feet, and that's without ever asking the more fundamental question of: 'nature or nurture?'

My wife of twenty nine years always suggested and supported the possibility of searching for my birth family. I must confess to having been closed and dismissive of the idea, retorting 'what right have I to cause possible upset in a family after all this time? After all, I have no baggage, axe to grind or need'.....Or do I?

Like my birth mother, I now realise that the subject was classified as 'taboo' and never to be talked about, which over the years had the effect of locking it away never to raise its 'ugly' head. I assumed I was named Andy M... at birth. No one ever said otherwise, so when I found I was called JS Mcl, I was totally overwhelmed. I walked proudly and even taller down the streets of Aberdeen. The silvery hair and size 14 feet were 'JSMclr', my identity. How dare they re-label me. I did have an axe to grind!! I've subsequently learned that I was named after my grandfather, a coal miner. Now that's what I call identity, and it feels good. Changing someone's identity at birth, hiding the truth is what one witnesses in a third rate crime movie and for me that's what it feels like: A crime, I've been cheated and denied the truth for 53 years. On saying this I would never hold it against my adoptive parents, it's the way it was and we've moved on half a century. Finding who I am goes way beyond physical appearance and I find my mother and I share traits, technical and artistic tendencies as well as a desire to hoard stuff for redistribution...

Finding my mother was not plain sailing, she hadn't left a vapour trail of social media tags, likes or online chat unlike her grandchildren, my nephews and nieces. This alone made the search agonising: so close yet so far. Birthlink were absolutely invaluable, counselling me back to rational thinking and instilling the much needed calm, collected patience that was required. It was not a process that could absorb haste or irrational actions like firing an email at a nephew. For as much as you want to, it's underhand and will probably close the door, quite possibly for ever. Remember, we most likely think the same way. I'd met my match. I must emphasise, I am very lucky. Not only is my mother alive, she was receptive to my contact. I believe the key was the mediation skill of Birthlink and the support given to each of us. It was also helpful going into the process with no baggage or expectations.

My mother and I have a very special relationship, one which is very different from what we'd have shared, had I been brought up by her. I felt instant unconditional love for her and a respectful sadness that she'd lived with the pain of giving up her 5lb baby boy. It wasn't all about my needs: it was about my mother's too. It's been a journey of immense learning and continual delight as our relationship grows and I meet my extended genetic family, sharing likes, dislikes and laughing at our similar lifetime antics. So, what about nature or nurture?

No question, 80% nature and it feels good. (AM)

Our Work

We have participated in a series of roundtables that will lead to a forum entitled 'How can the past inform future adoption practice' on Thursday 28th April in Glasgow. These discussions were prompted by Scottish Government reaction to some public pressure relating to the movement for adoption apology (see <http://movementforanadoptionapology.org/>) At the April event we are presenting on siblings and reunions.

Our After-Adoption Practitioners Forum is proving popular. The last one in October 2015 attracted 12 practitioners from all over Scotland drawn from local authority and non-statutory adoption teams. The Forum is consistently well-attended and there are calls for the event to be extended from two to three hours.

Especially valued is the regular case discussion and sharing item. The Forum is the only place where Scottish after-adoption practitioners can come together in a relaxed manner and chew over challenges and successes in their work with adults affected by adoption.

Some stats. In 2015 we received over 1000 enquiries to our After-Adoption Information Line, a record 244 registrations on the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland (resulting in 32 links), carried out 90+ searches of public records and mediated in 147 cases.

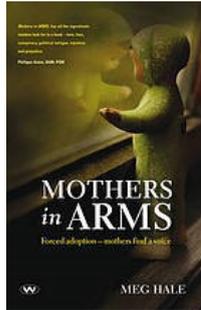
In the News

Friends of the Scotsman

Our forthcoming Friends of the Scotsman article is written by University of Edinburgh student Alex Palmer and Board member Ian Todd wrote the previous one in February on tracing his birth mother <http://www.scotsman.com/news/ian-todd-why-i-decided-to-track-down-my-birth-mother-1-4037627>

Books and articles

Mothers in ARMS : forced adoption and the fight to be heard (, Meg Hale, 2014)



In March 2013, the Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard made the National Apology to those who had endured decades of suffering. Figures were not recorded but an estimated 150,000 to 250,000 babies had been adopted in Australia in the 'best interests of the child', most in the 1950s to 1970s. Many were taken from single women unsupported by their families. The repercussions for mother and child have been immense. Mothers in ARMS tells the inside story of the women who formed the Australian Relinquishing Mothers Society. These mothers were determined to fight for their right to find the children taken from them through forced adoption by doctors, nurses, social workers and religious figures - often with the support of government agencies. They were told they had willingly abandoned their children and had no rights. But they would not be stopped. From an uncertain start in 1982, they gained strength and confidence. They educated the community and lobbied governments for information to discover if their children were still alive, and they fought fear and prejudice to have secret adoption records opened so they and their children could at last find one another.

Why I conducted 16-year 'affair' with my mother

The 'Family' section of the Saturday Guardian on 5th March carried a front page account of one woman's successful search for her birth mother and getting to know her, interestingly and commendably with the help of an intermediary. It is entitled 'Why I conducted 16-year affair with my mother' and the subheading reads 'Adopted at birth in Ireland, Caitriona Palmer eventually found her birth mother. But there was one strict rule in their relationship –it had to remain a secret'. Now read on: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/mar/05/why-i-conducted-a-16-year-affair-with-my-mother>



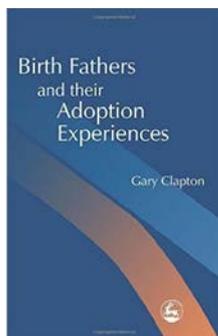
(Caitriona in 1978, aged six – the year she found out she was adopted)

Year of the Dad 2016

Year of the Dad is organised by Fathers Network Scotland with the support of the Scottish Government. Year of the Dad 'is a year of activity focused on embracing the potential of fathers and father figures, promoting their importance in child development and supporting them to be the dads they want to be'. For further information see <http://www.yearofthedad.org/>

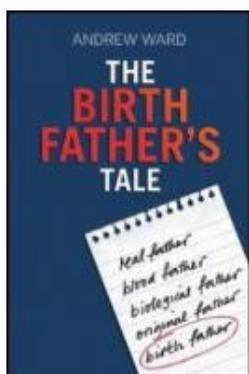


Birthlink's contribution to this initiative is to draw attention to the only book yet that concerns the experiences of birth fathers in adoption, *Birth Fathers and their Adoption Experiences* (2008) written by our very own Gary Clapton:



'Virtually all literature about birth parents of adopted children has focused on mothers. In this pioneering study, Gary Clapton gives us a fresh perspective: he recounts the experiences of thirty birth fathers separated from their children at birth, and suggests ways of applying this knowledge to work with adopted children, their adoptive families and birth parents. Discussing different notions of fatherhood, such as biological paternity, social fatherhood, sperm donorship and the 'father figure,' this informative book gives new light on issues such as the decision to give up a child for adoption, the child's desire to find his or her birth parents, and the facilitation of contact later in life. Written in an accessible style for busy professional readers, Birth Fathers and their Adoption Experiences offers a new understanding of the causes and consequences of adoption, and makes positive suggestions for working with those whom it affects.' (Amazon summary)

Staying with birth fathers, Andy Ward's personal memoir (2012) is also a highly interesting read:



'An extraordinary, moving and unusual account of a birth father's life being defined by a years-long search for his son who was adopted at birth. Revealing and disturbing, it demonstrates the primal power of the blood link, and the need for a father to find his son.'

Research

Early days yet, however we are planning to fund research into the long-term outcomes of reunions that have taken place via the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland. To our knowledge, despite much research into reunions, there has never been anything that has looked at those that have come about by mutual consent, nor is there much on the long-term outcomes, say ten years later, of such meetings and reunions between birth parents and their adult children, between adopted people and their birth siblings and so on.

Watch this space.

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