

I AM MY MOTHER'S DAD, SUSAN L. OPPAT, DAUGHTER

An adoptee reaches out, and her family tree grows

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I was 2, maybe 3, when I started to get it. My mommy and daddy picked me out. Other mommies and daddies had to take what they got. I was special. My brother was special, too. I helped choose him, I was told. It was a while before I understood that my parents fudged on that, to make me feel like a participant.

But it's my first real memory — skipping along in my ruffled white ankle socks, shiny new shoes and a frilly dress. It was a sunny, early spring day, and we were on our way home with my new baby brother.

I was born in 1958, my brother in 1961. We are adopted.

I never intended to search for my birth family. I had a family. But health concerns cropped up, and the past was the only place I could learn about what I had to look forward to.

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satisfy mild curiosity? Not worth it.

And what if we just didn't like each other? Sure, I'd heard the good stories. But I'd heard the bad ones, too.

Not me, thanks.

NATURE AND NURTURE

My family never treated my brother or me as anything other than family.

Mom was a room mother in school every year, the most creative. She's still a pip. For her 50th birthday, we skied for the first time. For her 60th, it was Rollerblading, and a computer course.

Dad let me go to Europe with a choir when I was 17. He paid part of the cost. I had to pay the rest. A good life lesson, he called it. And it was.

My brother, Keith, once faked Mom out, hanging from the kitchen door, screaming I was dragging him off for nefarious purposes. Unaware of the purloined drama, I strolled in through another door, and the jig was up.

Which is to say it was all pretty normal. There really is something to the "nurture" half of the "nature versus nurture"

See ADOPTEE, C2

Starting a search

While laws vary from state to state, Michigan law has three categories that determine how adopted people can obtain birth family information.

■ **People born and adopted in Michigan before 1945** can obtain any information held by the state.

■ **People born and adopted since 1980** can obtain information from the state upon reaching the age of 18, by contacting your local family/probate court for assistance.

■ **People born and adopted from 1945-80** cannot obtain information from the state, unless permission is obtained from all involved parties. Since 1995, these adoptees can petition the family/probate court in the county where the adoption was finalized for a confidential intermediary.

The intermediary has access to the sealed adoption record, and conducts a search for both parents. Both must give permission for release of information. If permission for contact is refused the intermediary may ask for medical or other information that does not identify those who want to remain anonymous. Birth families may also use the intermediary process to search for adoptees.

More information is available from the Michigan Family Independence Agency, Central Adoption Registry, P.O. Box 30037, Suite 412 Lansing, MI 48909, or 517-373-3513.