

balanced relationship – he the creative one, she the grounded financial manager – before he died after 33 years of marriage.

I called Mom with the news, and Gram got on the extension. They were happy for me.

I spoke with my birth mother a few more times, and with my sister and her husband – even my 5-year-old niece. Red sent letters and pictures. Photos proved what I'd long suspected.

I look much like my birth mother – hair, eyes, mouth, eyebrows. My new brother and I share our mother's features, but my sister and I look like we're from different planets. She's blonde, green-eyed, lovely.

My birth mother and I have a similar sense of humor, and a certain reservation in our spending habits. We love a deal.

Red, a widower, was warm. He sent every kind of picture – his parents, family, baby pictures. He had kept his and my mother's prom picture.

One picture clearly shows him confronting a superior officer in the Reserves. I'd say they went nose-to-nose, but Red's not tall enough, just a few inches taller than me. That photo is one of my favorites. A picture taken at our first meeting took our breath away. We're built just alike – a couple of fire-plugs, with chins to spare.

Red, bless him, handed me the reins. I would call, not him. He knew he could be a tad, well, like me. Overwhelming, if you will. He didn't want to blow it. It was tough. He clearly really wanted to rush over and sweep me up.

Finally I called, but we missed each other. I kept his first call on the answering machine for several months. I liked his voice.

### THE FIRST MEETINGS

At Trudy's emphatic urging – she's an adoptive mother, she's been there – my birth mother and I met alone. Plenty of emotion in the room, Trudy said, with just the two of us. More would be too much.

I knocked on her hotel room door on a Sunday morning. We didn't speak. She held out her arms, and I went into them. We talked there, then over a meal.

I learned more about the difficulty of her family situation when she was pregnant. I'd always hoped to tell her, and Red, I had never resented either of them, or the adoption.

When I finally did, her eyes welled, and she bowed her head. "I always thought it must be just the opposite," she said.

I took her home to meet Mom, and that, finally, is when she cried. Their arms went around each other, and they rocked, quietly.

"Thank you for our daughter," Mom said. The lady from California nodded.

Then we talked. And talked. About important stuff, and not-important stuff. We looked at my childhood photos, and I learned she had seen me once before I was taken at the

hospital. A moment after my birth, someone forgot she wasn't supposed to see me, and put me on her stomach. Then I was gone.

She liked Mom's pound cake – good call. We took some pictures, and hugged some more, and then she was the one who was gone.

I waited a few weeks, then met Red. We had a few hours alone, then Mom and Gram joined us.

Red, a diemaker who has worked in the same factory near Detroit since shortly after I was born, owned a 10-year-old pickup truck and one good suit. He showed up in a big, new rented car, and the suit.

He was freshly barbered and bearing roses – separate bouquets for Mom, Gram and me. I met him at the car and the roses were forgotten. I was swept into a bear hug. He brought along a silver necklace he'd made years ago, and gave it to me in a blue velvet case, along with a real "Dad" gift – a couple of knife sharpeners.

Several times that day Red reached over and hugged me, or held my hand, and told me he was happy. I was, too.

He's visited many times since then, meeting my new kittens, and my niece. We traveled to New Jersey in December, to visit his mother, sister and brother, Gray, and his wife and children, Gail, Erik and Tracie.

We gab on the phone and, true to his word, Red stands politically to the right of Genghis Khan, so we've already had a "discussion" or two. In a note, he pronounced himself a "daughter addict," and signed it "Dad." When he calls now, he announces it's "The Old Man."

Red held Gram's hand for a long time the week she died this winter, and she said it felt good. The plant he brought to the funeral read simply, "I wish I'd known you longer."

As for my birth mother, she's invited Mom and me to her home, to meet the rest of the family. She might visit again this September. Her brother turned up at my office recently, and introduced himself.

### THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR US

I have no idea what is right or wrong for other adoptees and their families. But I do know this seems to be going right for my family – families.

I finally told my birth parents I was proud of them. I was even able to tell them they really had done what I considered the right thing.

And we did it just the right way. They could have refused contact, and that would have been the end of it. Had they not had that choice, especially in my birth mother's case, I'd have been holding smoke. Even I could have backed out if I changed my mind.

But then I'd never have known where I got my distinctive laugh, or my pugnacious personality.

And that would have been a shame.

---

*I have no idea what is right or wrong for other adoptees and their families. But I do know this seems to be going right for my family – families.*

---

## 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.**