

Reunion - joys and pitfalls

This story was first published in Branching Out.

At last, at last the long search is over!

The day I've dreamt about for so long is finally here. It is now 29 years since I last saw her. A baby so small, pink and so perfect. So much has happened in the time between for me and, I am sure, for her. I have a million questions. There is a herd of elephants deep in my chest and a whole colony of butterflies that just won't rest in my stomach. My inner critic is working overtime now. All the money I have spent on counselling, all the skills I have learnt seem to be forgotten in this moment.

We have had some telephone calls and some letters so the basics are covered. Why did you give me up? How old were you? What about my father? Family medical history, other children etc etc.

When I first received the information in the form of an address it was so big. I had a million and one thoughts as to how I would handle this - what if she said she didn't know about being adopted, what if she wasn't interested, what if she said she didn't care why, who or how?

Could I handle this much rejection? How could I assure her that I would not reject or abandon her again? What if I didn't measure up to her fantasy of what her birth mother was really like? What if she just didn't like me? So I took some time to just be with my feelings, although my first thought was to rush off, knock on the door and reclaim my child. (Had I forgotten she is now a grown up woman not the baby I had left behind?) I had waited so long, why hesitate?

Then good sense prevailed- both my daughter and her now family would be in no way prepared for this. I am a Mother to others as well, what would it be like for me if the situations were reversed, if I were my child's adoptive mother? Would I be able to welcome this woman into my home, the birth mother of the child that I had thought of as mine all these years, without any preparation? No, I need time- hence the letter so carefully worded - rewritten many times over.

My daughter lived overseas so our first sighting of each other was at the airport. I felt her come through the doors before I saw her - what an incredible moment! She and her baby girl, my new granddaughter!

It is now 6 years later. Looking back on that time there are some things that perhaps may be of help to others embarking on such an important time as a reunion. Take it slowly - the temptation to rush in is very strong - after all, how long have you waited for this moment? The yearning to reclaim this child, the feelings can be overwhelming.

Like all relationships, it takes time to get to know one another. This is another adult that has grown up away from you, without your help or guidance, sometimes in

circumstances and with parents that are quite different to you. BUT this is her/his family, and we need to respect that.

Your son/daughter may have a completely different view of the world to you, which can come as a shock - or in fact, as in my experience, my daughter was/is so much like me that it was very confronting. All her wonderful beautiful qualities were fine, but when it came to the less likeable qualities (often the place where we would clash) I had to realise that these were also part of me.

They may be angry, hurt and bewildered and have difficulty understanding how could you have given them up. Sometimes it takes time to work through it together.

Of course too, this grown up person has opinions, ideas and plans of their own that have been unknown to you prior to the reunion, and they may not include you. Then of course there is her family. In my case I was no way prepared for a granddaughter - lovable and as precious as she is. I just wanted some of that precious time I had missed with my child. I had wanted to share time alone with my daughter.

I wanted to give my daughter the time that was now taken up by her child. I wanted no other distractions - just us, but that wasn't to be, Life has gone on for her as for me, even though I felt parts of me hadn't. She was a great gap in my life, my precious daughter. She has a family of her own and then of course a mother and father who in the past I had not given much thought to. I finally came to terms with the fact that although I am her Mother I was not the one who did the mothering, the one who was there when she was sick, her first day at school, all her achievements, I was not the one to see her joy, pain and sorrows. As sad as that is for me, it is also a fact- and most probably her first loyalty will be to those people she calls her parents. (Perhaps one of my lessons is about acceptance!)

Now what if your life has gone forward also and you have another partner, family and other children? What about the relationship with all these other people? Some will go well, others may not be accepting of your new found child, there may well be sibling rivalry even at this late stage! How do we deal with all this? How do we manage to keep everybody happy?

If you haven't told your children about the adoption then they may be hurt. New relationships will form between the children which may be quite separate to you - so many things that you have no control over and may find very difficult. Last but not means least - like all relationships in our lives there are many pitfalls if we want to truly relate closely to one another.

Sometimes in the past I have felt my daughter is testing me, challenging my love, demanding more than I could ever give- perhaps more than is humanly possible to give; and I know, even if she doesn't, inside her and also inside myself there lies a wound, a wound so deep that I suspect it will never heal. But as long as I am able, I will work towards a better healthy loving relationship for us all.

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