

Reunion Tips



Tips for Adoptees

Micki, birthmother: To any adoptee thinking of making contact, I would say this: You have to question your motives, to dig deep and ask yourself, Why do I want to find this person? What do I want out of this?

Recently I had a call from a young man who wanted advice about how to search and I was not short with him, but I said, “Why? Why are you doing this?” and he said, “I would like to see what she looks like,” and I said, “That’s not a good enough reason,” and I don’t think he liked what I had to say.

I said, “She is a not a curiosity like a china figurine in a store, to be picked up and examined and say, ‘Well, I like you, I’ll keep you’ or, ‘I don’t like you, so I’ll put you back.’” I said, “You can’t do that. She is a person with feelings, not a curiosity.”

Even if you’ve had a bad adoptive family situation or you find a birthparent who has never married, never had children, if you can honestly say you just want to have a friend and not a mother or father replacement, then go ahead.

If you are the searcher, make sure you have your head on straight. You should also realize that once you meet that other person, you will no longer be in control of the situation. In order to keep it somewhat in control, lay the groundwork when you set up the meeting. I’d be open and honest and say, “I would like to invite you to lunch. I don’t know what could ever come of this, but I would at least like to meet you and see what kind of a person I come from, and maybe we can take it from there.” Or, if for some reason you’re sure you want to meet only once, you could say, “I’d like to meet with you and speak with you. Maybe it can go further some time in the future, but at this point in my life, I’m not prepared to have it go further just now.” That may sound cruel, but it’s honest, and it lays out the ground rules so people won’t get hurt. Whoever’s doing the searching—either the adoptee or the birthparent—could say that to the other.

When you find this person, you had better acknowledge them to your family

and friends and the world. You can not expect them to go incognito because that would diminish their very existence. Good or bad, that is a person with feelings, a person without whom you wouldn't be here. If you can't acknowledge that, then don't go looking.

When adoptees look for their birthparents, if it's all going to be out in the open, then it's healthy. If not, it's only going to hurt people. When my first birthson found me, he was sneaky. He went behind the backs of his adoptive parents and didn't tell them about me, and it was the guilt that caused him problems. So if you can't be totally open and honest, and that includes being honest with your adoptive parents, then don't do it. An exception to that might be if the adoptee has their head on straight and if they're out living on their own, or if the adoptee is older with an aged parent in a nursing home, for instance, then I think then it would be okay.

Ricky, adoptee: I think the adult adoptee should have the opportunity and support to find his birthparents if he wants to, but there should be no way the biological family could initiate contact with him. Making contact would be a one-way street. I think an adoptee should be able to go to wherever his records are and be shown those records like I was in the State of Ohio. He should be at least eighteen so he could be somewhat mentally prepared for it, because doing it is a very traumatic and a very emotional experience.

To any adult adoptee who might be contemplating searching for birthparents, all I can say is, "Do it!"

Dorothy, adoptee and adoptive mother: With regard to an adoptee who searches for a birthparent, I agree with Micki that the adoptee should be in good shape psychologically. They should have attained a certain degree of maturity, and by that I do not mean being fifty years old, as I was. Some people are very mature at twenty-six, which is the age our daughter, Briana, was when she first discovered who her birthmother was. Part of her maturity came from the many discussions we had about adoption, and from witnessing my reunion with my birthmother.

When an adoptee wants to search and yet has been given negative signals by their adoptive parents, what should he or she do? I think there are three main possibilities.

One, they can wait till after the parents die, as I did. This obviously sidesteps the problem of upsetting the parents, but runs the risk that the birthparents may also have died. However, since parents are often ten to twenty years older than the birthparents, that risk is usually slight. Another big plus to this option is that, when the adoptee waits until he is forty or fifty, chances are his own life will be more stable, as will the lives of the birthparents. There will be fewer problems to contend with.

Two, they can proceed with a clandestine search and try to keep the whole thing hidden from their parents. I feel this approach is just as futile and wrong as when parents adopt and then keep it a secret from their child. Ultimately, the fact that a child has been adopted always comes out, and I feel that the fact that a reunion has occurred will also always come out.

Three, they can conduct the search, have the reunion, and afterwards confess the whole story to their parents. This approach allows the adoptee to concentrate on the search and reunion, and to deal with their parents later. This was the strategy a friend of mine followed recently. Her parents had never told her she was adopted, and when she was forty-five an aunt told her. My friend joined an adoption support group, and within six months she had found and reunited with her birthfamily. Subsequently, after weeks of agonizing, she went, with her husband for moral support, to see her parents and to tell them the whole story. She was careful to say again and again that they were her parents, and that the people she had found were her birthparents. At one point her mother said, "So you have met your mother?" and my friend at once corrected her: "No, no, Mom, I met my *birth*mother. My mother is sitting right here beside me." Fortified with such sensitive love and reassurance, my friend's parents took her news surprisingly well.

Keith, adoptee's spouse: All I can say to spouses out there is just to be patient and supportive and just let things go at their own pace. There's really not much you can do as a spouse, because you aren't in their place and can't really understand what their concerns or needs are. By and large, I think Briana's reunion with her birthfamily has been a pretty positive experience.

Ken, adoptive father: Undertaking a search for a birthmother is a pretty daunting venture for a young person. Most of them don't have an idea in the world how to go about it, and that's when adoption support groups can be helpful. Often adoptees do not know the names of their birthparents, and to get those names, access to their original birth records becomes a vital key in the search process. That's the reason adoption reform groups like the American Adoption Congress⁷ have, as one of their primary goals, the changing of laws to unseal original birth records for adult adoptees.

Once the adoptee has met his or her birthmother and is comfortable with it, the two sets of parents should meet. In the unlikely event the birthmother turns out to be a disreputable type of person, and the parents are decent people who live in an upscale neighborhood, is there still going to be a meeting? Absolutely. But in a situation like that, things have to be discussed beforehand and taken somewhat slowly. They could meet in some neutral place like an ordinary restaurant.

Where possible, parents should accept the birthparents into their extended family. Your son or daughter's newfound relations are going to be like existing relations: some you'll like and some you may not want to have around at all, like

the man who's alcoholic and uses foul language. Being related by blood doesn't mean people have to be your friends or be included in your family events.

If an adoptee opens that door and finds a birthparent who is a repulsive kind of person, can that door ever be closed? I think it can be partly but never completely closed because the adoptee has met them and knows who they are and visa versa. I think there may be times when an adoptee will have to say, I don't want to have anything more to do with you, and usually people don't go where they aren't wanted. In the worst imaginable situation, a court restraining order might have to be obtained.

Briana, adoptee: The best advice I can give anyone thinking of a search is not to move ahead until you're ready to put a lot into it, because it takes a lot of emotional energy either to make it happen or to deal with disappointments along the way. You can run into dead ends and get bogged down in the search process, and that's very discouraging.

Don't have your expectations too high, that's the big thing. Be mentally prepared to find someone real, someone average, not this perfect person who doesn't exist. Then if you find the person, and they don't want to have you in their life, you have to be mentally prepared for that kind of rejection. That was always my fear, that I'd find my birthmother and she wouldn't want to meet me.

So the bottom line is, before you search you need to have it together emotionally, physically, and mentally.

You need maturity and a real open mind, because you don't know what you're going to find. Your reunion and the relationship afterwards could be an absolutely wonderful experience, or it could be the nightmare from hell, you don't know. You have to have a certain amount of guts because you have to have the nerve to go in there and put yourself on the line. You might have to go in cold and talk to some unknown relative and possibly to ask questions before you even make contact with the birthmother or birthfather or siblings. So ask yourself if you have the guts to make that phone call. Why go through all this if you're not even going to follow through with it?

Having a good support system would be the other thing, because you need a lot of support. If at all possible, approach your adoptive family first and let them know what you're doing. Mind you, I know some parents just cannot be approached, they're too fearful and angry. Even when you're from a healthy situation and everybody's okay about it, it's hard because all these feelings come rushing out of you. I felt like I was on a roller coaster, up and down, back and forth. If your adoptive parents are alive, you still feel anxious and disloyal to them at times, and you can end up beating yourself up pretty badly along the way. You can join an adoption support group and that helps, as long as you don't let them pressure you into doing anything before you're ready. The more support you can have, the better, because you are never fully prepared. It's like death: you may know someone

you love is dying and that it's going to happen soon, yet when it happens, you're just devastated, and it's like that with this.

It's a scary event, and that's why I think all these people are so frightened. You're putting everything on the line, all of your hopes and dreams. It's like having major surgery, you hope it will work out but you can never be sure, because there are no guarantees anywhere along the line with a reunion. Even with Cheryl and me and our relationship, as good as it is, there could be some major blow-out ten years from now when we'd never speak to each other again. It's unlikely, but the fact is, unexpected things can happen in any relationship.

In spite of all the support my folks gave me with my reunion, at first I did feel guilty as my birthmother, Cheryl, and I got to know each other. So even when it's all above the board, because of your loyalty to them, it's always in the back of your mind that you're somehow being a traitor. You think, What happens if I really like her, I mean *really* like her, not just like an acquaintance you want to contact occasionally, will they feel threatened or left out?

One night my mom and I were at an adoption support group meeting, and she was surprised when I told the group that one time when the three of us had gone to lunch—me and my two mothers—I felt very on edge, because I had never had them alone together before. My fear was, Am I going to hurt Cheryl's feelings if I talk to Mom too much, or am I going to hurt Mom's feelings if I call Cheryl Mom in front of her? I found myself hesitating when I went to say Mom because I was afraid they were both going to look at me and wonder who I'm referring to. I try not to call Cheryl Mom in front of Mom, and yet it's important for Cheryl that I call her Mom when she and I are together. I started to feel more comfortable after I told both of them that being alone with the two of them was stressful for me.

Tips for Birthparents

Micki, birthmother: If you're the birthparent and the child you surrendered contacts you, in some cases you have to be honest and say "I can't deal with meeting you right now, because I haven't dealt with my grief yet, or because I have too much trouble in my own family right now." I was in a terrible upheaval with my own children when my first birthson found me, but still I made him the focal point of my whole life. It was as though my two kids didn't exist anymore, and that wasn't fair to them. Right after that was when my son started having all that trouble and ended up in prison, so I think I could have done a better job with him if I hadn't become so wrapped up in my birthson, Ken.

So I would say to a birthparent, if this kid finds you, at least meet him and get your questions answered, but do not expect anything. Because if your expectations are too high, you get nailed. That's what happened to me.

The other thing I would say is, don't come on too strong. If you want to avoid problems, you back off in the first place, you take it very, very slow. Be extremely

cautious about the role you take on and remember you are not the parent, and don't ever try to be. Acknowledge the role the parents have played in the life of this person, and make it very clear you cannot and do not want to replace them.

About two years ago my birthson Ken sent me a scathing typed letter: "You are not my mother, you could never be my mother, I love my mother!"

I went, "Fine, I'm not your mother, I don't *want* to be your mother, I got two kids of my own, I got my hands full!" So although I never wanted to be Ken's mother, the problem was that he *thought* I did. So you have to make it very clear you don't want to replace the mother, you want to be a friend, period. If they can be friends, then I say go for it.

So many of these birthmothers try to take over the mother role that they haven't been able to fulfill all these years, and that's frightening to these young adults, it really is. A few months after she found her birthmother, my young friend, Winnie, said to me, "My gosh, Micki, she was calling me all the time and I finally had to tell her, 'Just back off, I can't handle it.'" The birthmother felt very sad, but she was glad Winnie had been honest with her.

Then I know a young man who found his birth-mother, and it worked out well until she became very intrusive and bossy and kept phoning him all the time, expecting him to go there on Thanksgiving and Christmas and all this stuff. She became so demanding he finally had to say, "Back off."

I understand how these birthmothers feel, though, because after a reunion you're so excited after bottling up these feelings for twenty-some years, you have this big rush of maternal instinct, whoosh! But you can't let that happen. That's not your child anymore, somebody else raised it. You can't be their mother, but what you can be is their friend.

I just wanted to be a good friend of Ken's, but even so I had all my hopes and dreams going out on him. You know, Sunday for chicken dinner, I mean, come on over, no problem. The reality of it was, that never happened. I only saw him once, just that one lunch at Sergio's five years ago on the seventh of this month. When he sent me his letter telling me he couldn't have me in his life anymore, it was like saying goodbye to your child twice, and the second time it was all the more difficult because I knew where he was and yet I couldn't do anything about it.

In a situation like that, what can a birthparent do? You simply have to accept it, because there's not a damn thing else you can do. If you're gracious you say, I'm here in case you need me in the future, that way you're leaving the door open for future contact. I did that because I'm not angry at Ken. I feel bad for him that he didn't have the perfect life, but hell, I didn't either. I couldn't help how his life turned out.

On the seventh of this month I was planning to go to Sergio's and sit there with Ken's folder and read through his letters and just spend my time thinking about him. But I ended up taking my daughter to basketball practice, and I thought, Well, this is reality. But that's what my story is: it *is* reality, and people need to

face up to that, to deal with it, just as I have had to do. It's scary to read it, though, and to realize that a reunion might not work out.

The most important thing for me has been that, instead of my old fantasies about them, now I know who and where my two birthsons are, who they look like, and what kind of people they are. I really don't foresee us meeting ever again, but in spite of all the pain, I'm very glad it happened because the contacts I made with them helped me to put closure on the whole thing. I've learned you cannot go back and retrieve what you gave up and put the pieces back together. You have to take your life right where it is, right now.

Ken, adoptive father: I know that if our daughter's birthmother had contacted us when Briana was twenty-one years old asking if she could get in touch with Briana, I wouldn't have minded, but a lot of parents would have, they'd have been very threatened. However, if that had happened when Briana was sixteen and having all those teenage adjustment problems, I would have been very much against any contact with her birthmother.

In all fairness, both sides have to want it. When one side does not want a reunion, and the other party insists, that can be very disruptive. I tend to think both sides have the right, an equal right, to find the other. Remember that adoptees were not party to any agreements or understandings entered into at the time of adoption, and their welfare must come first.

To make sure both sides want a reunion to take place, a third party—like Washington State's Confidential Intermediaries—should be involved. These intermediaries, often a birthparent or adoptee themselves, have special training and are empowered by the courts to go into the sealed records and then to search for the birthparent on behalf of the adoptee or visa versa. These C.I.'s can talk to each party, they can protect privacy and prevent unwanted intrusion into a person's life. Many of them attend support group meetings and they can give a lot of good advice.

Lynette, birthmother: When you're a birthparent and you have a reunion with your son, don't try to get him away from the people who raised him. I tried to help Eric recognize the importance of the good things his parents gave him, like the way he is, his education, and his happy childhood. I can listen and understand and try to help Eric, but I don't want to pass judgment on his parents. I don't want him to feel he has to choose between us—he has us both.

Listen to the adult child. I think it takes patience and respect and a lot of honesty to understand your adult child, because he probably has feelings to express that are not always easy to receive. Eric was angry 'cause I left him and I understood that very well—it still touches me. But when he was angry wasn't the right time to talk about this, that was the time to listen and let him express his anger and to tell him you can understand his feelings. Later on I told Eric how hard it had

been for me, too. That I was sorry I had to give him up, that I agonized over it all these years and thought about him constantly.

Understand that he may not be ready to hug you at first. When we first met I would have liked to hold Eric in my arms for a very long time, to touch his hand and shoulder but I could see he didn't feel at ease with it in the beginning, so I had to wait until he was ready. Now it's okay. But I think we have to realize it's not the same thing for a mother who is waiting all those years as it is for a son who may be very—well, he wants to see you, but also maybe 'e's angry with you and 'e's not sure, exactly, how he feels towards you because he doesn't know you.

Realize adoptees often have certain fears. Eric was brought up always hearing “Why don't you do as your brother does?” so he was afraid I would love him less than my other sons, or that I would think badly of him because he drank, before we met. When he told me he was gay, he was very, very anxious I would not love him because of it. Of course, I think it's sad, because I know he loves children and would like to have a family, but I don't love him less for being gay. Another fear Eric had was that, if he went ahead and made contact with me, his parents might be upset. His relationship with them had been bad for a long time, but at the time he found me, his life had become a little more stable and things had finally become quite good between them.

Briana, adoptee: Many times people in the adoption triad don't really understand their role, like Corey, the birthmom who sat next to me at the last adoption support group meeting. Her birthdaughter had found her recently and Corey said to me, “I don't know what my role is. I don't know what I'm supposed to do.” She just kind of summed up the way I've felt over the years, because there are no rule books for reunion situations. Handling it well depends on the adoptee's emotional stability, which comes mostly from their relationship with their parents, from the upbringing they had, and the security that they feel.

When Cheryl came into my life, she didn't fit the role of being my mother because I was already raised. But I would say that—and maybe this is because she's fourteen years younger than Mom—with Cheryl it's a bit more like having a close girlfriend. Maybe some of it's genetic too, because we're alike in a lot of ways: we both talk fast and we never shut up, and we like to shop and we have a lot of similar tastes. We can really relate to each other and yet, just like with a girlfriend, things about each of us can annoy the other.

But there is a subtle difference between my relationship with Cheryl and my relationship with old girlfriends I've known for twenty years. Cheryl's still playing the mother role enough for me to know that she doesn't approve of certain things I might tell her, so those things I don't share with her and I'm sure she's the same with me. We're still—after knowing each other for ten years—cleaning up our act for each other, trying to portray ourselves as being perfect and good, so that keeps our relationship more surfacey. My old girlfriends and my Mom, on the other hand,

have seen my—almost—worst. Cheryl and I may never reach that level.

Dorothy, adoptive mom, and Briana, adoptee, discuss boundaries

Dorothy: I hope I didn't offend Cheryl that time I, in a not so very subtle way, laid out the boundaries. I told her my plan was that, after I die, she would become the number one mom. In other words, for now, I'm the number one mom. I read something recently in the area of adoption counseling, that it's important to lay down the boundaries and that we should all do that.

Briana: It is good, because then you're being very frank about what your expectations are in the relationship with that person. Then, too, when you know what the rules to the game are, then you know how to play it.

I know Cheryl's very aware of her boundaries because of little comments she makes. Like one Christmas, when we were all at your house, and I had given you guys the picture of me and Keith and afterwards Cheryl told me the expression on my face in that photo reminded her so much of my birthfather that it wasn't even funny. She said, "God, the minute I saw it, it was as though Rolf's face was looking back at me. I almost said it, but then I thought, Oh, I can't say that in front of Dorothy." So she's very sensitive of your feelings and I think she does know her boundaries. She'll often say how lucky she feels that you went as far as finding her, because she knows it's really rare that a mother would do this for her daughter and put their relationship on the line. I think the longer the three of us are together, the more Cheryl realizes how rare our relationship is, and that we all have to work very hard at keeping it good.

Dorothy: Finding your daughter's birthmother for her is like going out and finding your husband another wife.

Briana: Yeah, exactly. It is a little bit like that. Cheryl realizes that, and she said, "If the tables were turned, I don't know if I could have done that." I don't think she could have, to be honest with you, because that's not Cheryl's way; she's very protective of what she has.

Dorothy: But at the same time, if the tables were turned, and she had adopted you, you and she would have had the relationship we have, and she would have felt secure and confident enough to do it. So she might have been that nutty.

Briana: No, I'm not so sure about that. It's such a scary area with so much emotion and fear about adoptees reuniting with birthparents, I truly don't think a lot of people have it in them to do this. If you and I had not been close over the years, who knows what case scenario we'd be living right now?

Tips for Adoptive Parents

Micki, birthmother: If parents have a problem with their son or daughter finding a birthparent, then that's a pity, because in my experience, the best and happiest reunions take place when adoptive parents are supportive and understanding. Sometimes parents miss out on things because of their attitude. After my young friend Winnie found her birthmother, she got married, and her adoptive parents refused to come to the wedding because she had invited her birthmother. As it turned out, the birthmother didn't have enough money to fly here from California, so nobody came. Her parents didn't talk to her again for over a year, until after she'd had a baby.

Ricky, adoptee: What I cannot understand is the judicial system in the U.S. that makes it so people have to wait years, spend thousand of dollars, and travel to countries like Romania, Korea, or China to adopt a baby. There are tens of thousands of children needing parents right here in the United States, children that are neglected or abused or malnourished, have no education, and have no opportunity to get anything out of life. What is happening? We have some children living in foster homes their whole lives, and when such a child gets to be ten years old, no one's going to adopt that kid. The whole system needs to be changed to avoid foster care and get children into adoptive homes straight from the hospital, when they are newborn babies.

Briana, adoptee: I think a reunion with a birthmother is every adoptive parent's fear, because I've talked to enough of them over the years, including my physician. He and his wife had adopted a daughter, their only child. Preparing for my check-up, I had filled out several pages his nurse had given me, and when he saw that I'd written in the complete and current health history of my birthmother, he realized I'd had a reunion and he started asking me a lot of questions. He was quite concerned that his daughter's birthmother might come looking for her some day and I said, "You can count on the fact that she probably will, or your daughter may go looking, and so you need to prepare yourself and your child."

He looked a little panicky, kind of horrified, like, oh, my god! I said, "You have raised her with lots of love, you are her parents, and that will never change. You are never going to be replaced, I can assure you of that. I come from a good family and I have a good birthmother and so I can vouch for the way I feel. Unless there's a lot of hostility and family discord and your daughter finds her birthmother during her teenage years when she's trying to find herself, she is not going to switch her allegiance to a new set of parents. Someone can't come into an adoptee's life, twenty years later and say, Okay, now I'm your mom, it just doesn't happen that way. If people adopt a child and they have a loving relationship, they have nothing to fear."

My advice to parents is to be open and honest; don't be afraid to talk to your adopted children about their birthparents. Talk freely and be supportive and say, Some day, when you want to look, I'll help you. But you can't say, I'm not going to support your search, or, If you want to have contact you can't bring this person around me. If you challenge them on the whole issue like that, their anger at you might provoke them into searching before they're mature enough.

My mother was very sure of how I felt about finding my birthmother, and that's why she did the search herself while I was in college. It worked out well in our case, but I don't recommend it to other parents because it could easily backfire. That's because, if someone else is searching for you, or if they're pushing you into it and you don't really want to do it, that's unfair because once you open that door, a lot of stuff comes flying out that you need to be ready to deal with. Or if the experience turns out to be real negative, you are going to blame that person. I think it has to be the adoptee's own choice, because when they're really motivated to do it, then they're more ready to accept whatever happens and to shoulder the consequences.

Dorothy, adoptee and adoptive mother: Adoptive parents need to be very open and accepting about the existence of another set of parents in their child's life. They should understand that their child has a need to know and a right to know who his or her birthparents are and to meet them face to face at least once. That is a basic right of every human being.

Parents should expect that a reunion will occur some day when the adoptee wants it and when, it is hoped, he is mature enough to handle the outcome. When the adoptee embarks on a search, parents should be supportive and enthusiastic, but not pushy. After reunion, they should welcome the birthfamily into their extended family, the same way they'd welcome the family of a son- or daughter-in-law. If the adoptee finds a birthparent who doesn't give a rap about him, and because of that—or for any other reason—he decides to back away from the relationship, parents should not gloat but should be non-judgmental and supportive.

In the sixteen years that our daughter, Briana, has known her birthmother, Cheryl, there have been times when I felt jealous. Like when Briana told me about all the fun they'd had on a five-day car trip to the town where she'd been conceived. Eventually I told her I felt jealous, and she told Cheryl, who said, "How does she think *I* feel? I'm jealous of her raising you all those years." So some feelings of jealousy and rivalry between adoptive mothers and birthmothers are, I think, almost inevitable.

Adopted parents can only try to imagine the grief and the pain of surrendering a child. And the worst of it is, those memories remain forever. Parents are indebted to that birthmother, not only for the precious being she entrusted to them, but for the suffering that being cost her. Parents need to be sensitive to these things, and to share their love.

Having acknowledged those things, I think most mothers would agree that bearing the child—in and of itself—is the easy part. If you raise a child, you are that child’s mother. If you give birth to a child and give it to someone else to raise, then you are that child’s birthmother.

Parents deserve credit for their role. By reserving the terms Mom and Dad for their adoptive parents, adoptees recognize that role and show their parents love and respect. As far as I’m concerned, if the adoptee wants to call the birthmother Mom, or the birthfather Dad, the most appropriate time to do that is after the adoptive parents have died, that way nobody’s feelings get hurt.

Adoptees could call their birthparents by their first names, and introduce them by saying, “This is Anne Nelson, my birthmom,” which is honest and respectful. The birthmother could refer to herself in the same way.

Our daughter’s children have three grandmothers: their father’s mother is grandma McKittrick, I am grandma Morrow, and Cheryl is grandma Cheryl. This situation is no harder for them to handle than the complex family relationships children of divorce live with. Cheryl and I are both blessed: Briana is an extraordinary young woman who has done all she can to express her love to both of us. I know she calls Cheryl Mom, but not in front of me, and that’s something I really appreciate. The other very touching thing she does is to reserve Mother’s Day for me.

We all need to think ahead and try to anticipate problems. If we iron out certain details—like what adoptees will call their birthparents—before a reunion takes place, it avoids hurt feelings. Having such understandings with adoptees is an important part of what the birthmother Micki calls setting the ground rules.

As our daughter Briana says, right now there are no rule books. But things will work out if we can be understanding instead of fearful of each other, if we can touch each other with kindness, and if we can give love a chance to flourish in our new extended family.

Closing Thought

*Could we only draw the curtain
that surrounds each other's lives,
See the naked heart and spirit,
know what spur to action drives —
Often we should find it better,
purer than we judge we should,
We would love each other better,
if we only understood.*

— Author unknown

