

Eric: the Adoptee Who Found Understanding

When adoptees search for a birthparent, frequently—as in Ingrid’s case—they tell any lies needed. However, when they are honest, sometimes they encounter a sympathetic person who will break the rules to help them. Adoptee Eric, using leads from his adoption papers, went to the hospital where he’d been born. He met a clerk who, on hearing his story, decided she had to break the law. She gave him the name of his birthmother. After his reunion, Eric told his parents about it, but failed to have them meet his birthmother. Years later, this proved almost disastrous when Eric had open heart surgery and his two mothers were thrown together in his hospital room. Again Eric was lucky—his birthmother was a clinical psychologist and handled the situation very sensitively.



Eric, adoptee: When I was a teenager constantly fighting with my parents I always thought if only I had my “real” parents they would treat me better and it wouldn’t be this way. I think that’s kind of what started spurring my desire to find them, and of course I was sure they would be living somewhere wonderful in this beautiful house.

My parents will attest to this, I’ve always been someone who jumped into something with both feet without even thinking what would happen afterward. My search was no different.

My search actually started in 1989 during my first season as a tour guide. We were at a camp ground in upper New York state and I'd forgotten to buy some sugar for the coffee so I walked over to the next campsite to see if I could borrow some. I met this friendly older couple from Montreal, Canada and I knew I'd been adopted from a Montreal orphanage. I was really nervous because it was my first tour, but they were very friendly and loaned me some sugar. We ended up talking for about an hour. Afterwards I kept in touch with them, sent them postcards, talked on the phone. After about a year, we became close enough I felt I could ask them a favor.

I'd been told my birthfather was a professor at either the University of Montreal or McGill, and my birthmother had been one of his students. Today I know all this is false, but that's what my parents had been told.

The name my birthmother had given me on my adoption papers was Alexandre Joseph Gauthier, and I reasoned I could have been named after my birthfather. I figured if this couple would go to these universities and look in the yearbooks for 1966 they could maybe find someone, either a teacher or a student, with that last name. So I asked them if they'd go and do that. They did that for me, but they weren't able to find out anything. That was my first attempt to try to find something.

Then a friend of mine gave me a *Dear Abbey* column recommending people searching contact this International Soundex Reunion Registry⁵ in Carson City, Nevada. So I wrote them to get registered and to see if my birthparents were registered with them already, but nothing turned up.

In the summer of 1991, I was on the road in Alaska as a tour guide. When I got through with the tour, I decided to take a vacation and drive out to L.A. to see a couple of friends. I should explain that, even though my birthparents were from Montreal, Canada, where my adoption had taken place, my birth certificate said I'd been born at the Greeley Community Hospital, in Greeley, Colorado. So in my head, was, Why don't you stop in Greeley and see what you can dig up? I was just trying to follow any little ideas that came to me. So before driving to L.A. I stopped at Greeley and went to the hospital. I hoped to get the medical records giving my physical condition when I was born, but that was all.

I got there on a Saturday and they told me their medical records department was closed, could I come back on Monday? I didn't really want to stick around 'till Monday, so I told them I'd stop again on my way back from Los Angeles. They had me fill out some form with my name and address, date of birth and all that. It was going to help this person named Patti that wasn't there, to dig up information for me.

On my way out of town I stopped at a public golf course and went into the clubhouse to have a look at a Greeley phone book to see if there were any Gauthiers listed. I turned to the G's and there were two listings for Gauthier. So I thought,

5. Box 2312, Carson City, NV 89702-2312; write for free registration form.

This is a start. So I dialed the first one, but it had been changed into an unpublished number. The second listing was for a Jacques J. Gauthier, and that sounded very French, so I thought, Wow, this is a possibility. So I called that number and ended up talking to this guy, Jacques.

I explained my situation and he said he didn't know anything about it, but he was very understanding. He told me his parents had moved there from Montreal years ago. I thought, This is a really strange coincidence, a family of the same name moving here from the same city. But he said he didn't know of any woman in the family who had given up a baby for adoption in 1966, and I didn't have any reason not to believe him. So I drove to L.A. to visit my friends.

Linette, birthmother: I was born on March 30, 1948, in Montreal, Canada, the first baby born in the family. I've always lived in Montreal. I suppose I had a quite normal life, until the spring of 1966 when I was eighteen. I was a volunteer in a 'ospital where I met this man named Yves Lelong. He was about twenty-two and worked as a messenger taking medical records to the different departments. We were just friends for about two months until one night he invited me to a party at his place. We drank wine and well...

When I told Yves I was pregnant he wanted me to get an abortion even though we were both Catholic, but of course, I told him I just couldn't do that. He told me there would be no financial support, no help of any kind from him. The other thing he said to me was, "Don't you ever tell my parents about this!" His father was a doctor in Montreal and I did consider telling them, but there would be no point doing something for revenge. I was mostly concerned about the baby and myself and what would happen to us.

Before that Yves had been kind to me, but after I got pregnant I was surprised how easily he turned cold and distant. His parents must have had a lot of money because I knew soon Yves was going to have fun on a long trip to Europe. I felt very alone and that he'd taken advantage of me.

One rainy morning in July my mother and I were home alone at the breakfast table drinking coffee. I finally told her I was pregnant. Her response was, "Mon Dieu! This is the worst thing that ever happened to me! Why didn't you take the pill?" For her to say that seemed peculiar because she was such a pious Catholic.

When my father came home from his office that evening my mother told him. I remember 'e just came to me and took me in his arms and he was crying and just said 'e would 'elp as much as he could and that I had to take care of myself. That same day my father got the idea that if his brother Simon would say yes, then I could go to his home in Greeley, Colorado and stay there until the baby was born.

At the end of August, when I was four and a half months pregnant, I took the plane to go to my Aunt Monique and Uncle Simon's home in Greeley. Before that

my mother was very nervous because she didn't want it to show—she told me not to eat too much. Like many families in Montreal we spoke French so my parents told people I was going to live with my aunt and uncle in Greeley to learn English.

I have good memories from the months I was in Greeley my aunt and uncle were much more open-minded than my mother. I didn't have to hide at all but would go everywhere in town with them. They had two girls and two boys, all quite a lot younger than I was. I had a nice room in the attic, and sometimes I would paint pictures of a mother with a child. I would think a lot about the baby and talk to him often, you know, inside.

Eric, adoptee: Until my mom told me how different things were back in the sixties when a girl got pregnant and wasn't married, I didn't really understand what a family disgrace it was and how important it was for them to hide it. Mom defended my birthmother and enlightened me about how that must have been for her.

After I had made that call from the Greeley golf club to Jacques Gauthier, I turned these things over in my mind as I drove towards L.A. The idea came to me that, since I'd been adopted in Montreal but born in Greeley, maybe my birthmother's folks had shipped her off to relatives in Greeley until she had me to avoid scandal. I learned later that's exactly what had happened.

Linette, birthmother: My cousin Jacques and I have talked since then and he told me, about thirty seconds after he had closed the phone after talking with Eric, he suddenly thought, Ahh, that's probably why my cousin came to live with us, to have a baby!

Well within minutes Jacques called his mother, my aunt Monique, and immediately she realized who this young man was and she said, "Well, of course, he's Linette's baby," and she called me here in Montreal on September 20, 1991.

I was so deeply happy, you know, to hear her news. But I was also very nervous because Jacques had told Eric he didn't know the woman he was looking for, and it would be 'orrible if Eric didn't phone back and we were almost to find each other and then it wouldn't happen.

However, Eric had told Jacques he had been to the Greeley 'ospital trying to find something in the records, and he was going to visit friends in California and would go back through Greeley in about two weeks. So my cousin was feeling so bad that, first thing on Monday, he drove to the 'ospital and explained to the woman in the medical records department—her name was Patti—what was going on. He thought maybe they had Eric's phone number and address. They did have it and they gave it to him.

So Jacques rushed home and called me and 'e gave me Eric's name, address and phone number and right away I wrote 'im two or three long letters and sent a picture of myself so he would have these letters waiting for him when he got

home to Milwaukee. I also called Patti and told her who I was and that I was so grateful she had given Eric's address and phone number to my cousin Jacques. Patti told me legally she wasn't supposed to do it, but she felt she had to do it. I remember I was crying because I was so touched. I told Patti every year since Eric was adopted I would tell the Adoption Society in Montreal how to reach me in case something happened to him and his family wanted to contact me. Finally in 1986, when he was twenty years old, I asked them to try to find him to tell him if it was all right with him, I would like to meet him. They told me unless he contacted them asking to meet me, it would take them ten years to find him, because they had many, many people ahead of me. I got angry and went to court. The judge was really on my side, but 'e said all I could do was to write the Government to change the laws, something quite impossible. Four years later, Eric was twenty-four and he still hadn't contacted the adoption society so I thought he probably didn't want to meet me. I was discouraged and didn't do much the year after that, which was last year. I told all this to Patti and she was very sympathetic and told me if Eric came back to the hospital as he said he would, she would tell him I had called and would give him my name, phone number and address. I was so happy, I expressed my gratitude again.

So every day I was waiting for the phone to ring and I knew it would take some time because Eric had told Jacques he would be in Los Angeles visiting friends for a week or so.

Eric, adoptee: After visiting my friends in L.A. I drove back into Greeley on a Monday, September 30, 1991. I got to the hospital about eleven A.M. and went back to this records department where five or six people were working. I went up to the counter and said, "I'm back, how you doin'?" and so this lady called Patti who was handling my case came up to me and said, "In order to get your hospital birth records from us you have to go to court and get a court order," and she gave me a piece of paper with the information about how to do that. I felt pretty bummed at that bit of news.

"But," she says, looking at me, "I have something more interesting to tell you: your mother called." Right away I'm thinking of my adoptive mother. Why would she call? How does she know I'm here? Then Patti goes, she says, "She's been looking for you for five years."

Well then, right off, I knew she meant my birthmother. My birthmother had given Patti her address and phone number so now Patti, who was kind of excited, gave them to me and I just about dropped through the floor!

So I walked around the hospital in a daze for a while, thinking, Wow, this is the hospital where I was born! I was pretty happy, but I was overwhelmed. I was going to call her right then, then I thought, No, I just need to walk around for a while, so I went outside and walked around Greeley. I was pretty shocked. I didn't even know if she would speak English. I didn't think of it at the time, but probably

nobody at the hospital spoke French, so of course she spoke English.

Anyway, I decided not to call her that day.

I was born in Greeley, Colorado on November 11, 1966, so I'm twenty-five right now. When my parents, Ted and Nina Bauer, were in their twenties, they adopted my sister Deanna and soon after, my brother, Ted junior. They were living in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. They wanted a third child and were anxious to have all of us born close together, but Catholic Charities in New Jersey told them they'd have to wait a couple of years unless they got a child through Canada, and that's why they got me from Montreal, 'cause they didn't want to wait.

I was adopted from an enormous Catholic orphanage in Montreal, badly overcrowded with five hundred children. They didn't have enough people to give these babies proper attention. They fed and changed them—that was it. My mom said when they picked me up from the orphanage to take me home to New Jersey, I was ten months old and had never been outside before. I wasn't used to being picked up so I cried a lot whenever I was touched. I had all these infections in my ears and my eyes and my throat.

They had told my parents I was walking, and I wasn't even crawling yet. As I got a little older, my parents used to hang me in a sling from the railing of my crib so I would put my legs down and hold on with my hands until I learned to stand up. But my mom said I adjusted quickly and I know I was a really happy kid.

When I was about two, my dad was transferred to Des Rives, a suburb of Chicago. He was a municipal bond broker and he made pretty good money. My mom was always at home, the traditional housewife. Eventually we had a four bedroom house, a condo in Florida, and a summer home in Door County which they rented out as a tax shelter.

I don't remember my parents telling me I was adopted, so I must have been very young, probably three or four. My parents always talked about it openly, they'd say, "You're adopted. It's no big deal." I was a real happy kid, growing up; I felt fine about it then. My adoption didn't really start presenting any kind of problem until other people started asking me about it when I was in my teens. They'd say "Your brother doesn't look like you, your sister doesn't look like you, are you adopted?" and I'd say, "Yeah, we are." Strangely enough, the three of us kids never got together and talked about our adoption.

As a young teenager I had no idea what I wanted to be, and yet everybody my age seemed like they knew what they wanted in their life. When I was about sixteen, I started hanging around with people who drank and did drugs because it made me feel older and able to talk to people. I'd always been a good student, probably the best out of the three of us, but in my sophomore year my grades just went through the floor. I remember feeling how much my folks cared about me depended on my grades, and as my grades went down, my attitude changed. I just would hang around and drink. I had confrontations with my parents and mouthed

off to them constantly. They knew I was very influenced by friends, so they tried to be controlling and to shelter me. But it was too late, I'd already been exposed.

I started smoking pot the summer between my sophomore and junior year in high school. I used to work at a Baskins Robbins and we'd be stoned while we were working and go wait on people. Then we'd do these big metal cans of whipped cream. If you squirted them upright without turning them over, you could just suck the gas and you'd get high off that. We called it doing Whippetts. After the place closed, me and this one girl would go through whole cases and sometimes we'd pass out on the floor. Actually, it's really dangerous. Of course after you'd taken all the gas out of them, when you needed to squirt whipped cream on a sundae, you'd get this watery stream. Customers complained a lot about that.

While I was in high school, I would come home stoned on pot, and my parents never knew. But if they were awake and I came home drunk, they'd find out. Even with my bad attitude and not even trying in school, when I applied to three colleges, I got into all of them. I ended up at Marquette, but I had no idea what I was doing there. I still had no ambition or direction. I started college in late August, and a month later I'd already overdosed.

My cousin and three of his friends came up from high school for a visit, and I'd already drank a six-pack of beer before they got there. They were all under age so we went to this black bar that was the only bar I could get 'em into. But I was legal, I ordered, and we were all drinking kamikazes.

The last thing I remember was four of us carrying the other one back to the dorm. We had all gotten really trashed, but it was probably the fact I had already gotten half way there before they arrived. In any event, somehow we got back to my dorm. I don't remember anything after that, and the rest of what I'm going to tell you was told to me.

My cousin and his friends went back to my dorm room, and, for some reason, I had gone up to a friend's room, just a floor above mine. My friend said I knocked on his door and I came in and was standing there for a couple of seconds when I just dropped! So he put me on his bed on my back and pretty soon I started throwing up and choking on it. I couldn't breathe so he called the paramedics who came and rushed me to the hospital. They pumped my stomach and kept me there over night. You'd think that experience would have put the fear of God into me, but all I thought was, I've got to dry out for a while.

That first semester my drinking and drug use were more experimental, but by the second semester I was drinking every day. My roommate wasn't a big drinker, so to avoid his criticism I'd hide these bottles of booze in my sweaters. I was drinking shots in the morning, taking speed to stay awake so I could drink longer, and then coming down on pot at night.

A lot of my feelings about myself related to how things were going with my parents, and in college, our relationship was so bad I didn't believe it would ever be good again. I just wanted to escape my problems. The alcohol still worked, but

I wanted to find stuff that worked better. Although my parents paid for my college, I had to earn my spending money. To get money for my drugs, I would deal. I started withdrawing, started getting into some really bizarre, twisted behavior.

At this time of my life, I felt so much emotional pain, I started to cut myself. Believe it or not, cutting myself seemed to get rid of the pain. I remember the first time I cut myself I took a modeling knife to my forehead and I told people I'd been in a fight. I took a butcher knife to my face once, and another time I broke a bottle and cut the back of my hand. I made up lies, I never told people I cut myself. There was a lot of physical pain, but you learn to block it out pretty well and of course I was always on something at the time. I think cutting myself in places where people could see was crying out for attention. I was really messed up.

In my second semester when my drug use had gotten so heavy, I knew I was flunking out. One day I felt real suicidal so I went to the free counseling center to talk to somebody. I couldn't talk to the people I partied with, they didn't care. So I went in and this guy started asking me about my drinking and my drug use. He said, "There's this guy on campus, Stan, who goes to these AA meetings, why don't you go talk to him?"

So I looked up Stan and he took me to a big AA meeting, the first one I'd ever gone to. At AA meetings they start by asking, "Is there anyone here at their first AA meeting?" and if there is, you raise your hand, then you say your name and they'll hold what is called a First Step Meeting. Naturally, I was the only person there for the first time, and I felt extremely uncomfortable. After that I started going to some meetings with Stan, more because I felt like I'd found a friend. His friendship seemed really bizarre to me because, up until then, all my friends I partied with either bought from me or they were dealing drugs themselves.

Stan became my sponsor at AA. A sponsor shows you the ropes and gives you rules—you have to call 'em every day. Stan and these guys lived on campus in a house, and they were kind of twisted themselves. There were a lot of recovering addicts there. I was living two totally different lives. I didn't tell my party friends I was hanging around with Stan.

One of the first times I quit smoking pot, I quit for three days. I could not think for three days. My mind was blank, I couldn't even add. I was in such a fog, withdrawal was really bad.

Then of course I started using again and this time Stan took me into their group house and tried to get me off everything. I didn't have any D.T.'s but I was really shaky and I was throwing up every day. I couldn't eat for a week. Couldn't sleep, couldn't sleep at all. These guys at the group house would give me these six-packs of Coke bottles, they told me to go and break 'em to get my frustrations out, so I'd walk around town and I'd throw bottles at parking lots and everywhere else.

Not long after detoxing at the group home Stan and the guys sent me back to my dorm because they realized I needed treatment.

One day while I was out they came to my dorm room and my roommate let them in and they packed up all my clothes. Awhile later I came back. As soon as I walked in the room someone closed the door behind me and locked it. They kind of surrounded me and they told me they had called this alcohol and drug rehab and got it all set up, they'd get me in that day, they had a car waiting outside, they'd called my parents already. Of course I said "No," I kept sayin' "No," but the car was down there, and they kept saying "What are you goin' to do? You're goin' to die!" All this stuff, four of five of them, and only one of me, and I finally caved in, I started crying, I just lost it.

So they took me down to this rehab right in Milwaukee and I lasted three days. The routine there was to put you through detox first, but I hadn't used for week so I didn't need to be there, but I didn't tell them that. I kept telling them, I'm going through withdrawal, I gotta' have Valium, but they wouldn't give it to me. But I'd stay up all night talking to the nurses 'till they just went crazy, and finally on the third night they gave me Valium.

The next morning I woke up and there was this really bad emotional turmoil—suddenly a lot of stuff hit me. I tore up the room, I destroyed it. I broke everything in the bathroom, I broke the chairs in my room, except the two that these counselors were sitting on. They came in, of course, when I started to break up the room. They sat down. They just sat and watched me. They didn't do or say anything. I don't know why, but they didn't. So I broke everything.

The only thing they did do, when I picked up a lamp and was going to throw it through a window, and they said "Don't break any glass," which I thought was really strange, cause I'd ripped a door off the hinges, I'd punched holes in the walls, I'd broken everything, so I threw the lamp on the ground, and there was nothin' left to break. I started cryin' again and they sent me to a psych ward. The ambulance came, God, I can't believe I'm telling you all this!

They took my parents to the room I'd destroyed, showed them that. Then my parents came to the psych ward, asked me if I was okay. I was locked up in this ward for like a week.

It was probably one of my better experiences at this time, because being in there with all these loonies was the first time I saw some people worse off than me. Their problems were beyond their control, real psychoses. People hallucinating and people like this one lady that walked the halls all night, and this one guy who would stand up to eat, stand up for everything—he would never sit down.

After I got out of the psych ward, they took me back to the drug rehab and I finished it in twenty-nine days. They try and show you what you've done, where your life's going to go if you keep using, what the physical effects of the drugs are on you, over time. The main thing is, you try and find out the reasons why you use. They had me seein' psychiatrists, they had me in the creative art classes. I'd seen a lot of people at all different levels by then. I still didn't believe I had a problem, though.

Four or five of us became friends in treatment and said we'd stay close afterwards. Well, within a week after we got out, all the other guys were drinking again, and I was the only one that wasn't. I lasted another week, then I bought a couple of pints of booze and I didn't drink them but I brought them back to my parents' home in Des Rives and stashed them there. I was still living there at that point.

I was working at a Pontiac Dealership in Des Rives and my supervisor, Derek, knew I'd gone through treatment. One day I told him about the booze I'd bought. He told me to bring it to work the next morning and he'd buy it from me instead of me drinking it. I agreed to that, but when I got like a half a mile from work the next morning, I parked the car and drank one of the two pints of Jack Daniels. Then I went to work. Of course it hit me and I was drunk at work. Derek kept me away in the back where you wash the cars. I felt dizzy and horrible but he didn't let me go home. By noon I was throwing up, but he made me work through it by washing the same car over and over all day long.

That night I went to an AA meeting and met this guy who had become my first real long-term sponsor. His name was Chuck, and he asked me, "What's new?" and I said, "I drank today," and he said "What?" and he brought me into this other room and he kicked my ass. In spite of that, over the next ten months I kept drinking on and off. I'd go like a week sober and I'd still go to AA meetings drunk, I just wasn't ready.

By the end of the summer after my first year of college, my parents gave me an ultimatum: they said, "If you drink again, you're out of the house." My dad said if I didn't go back to college by January, he wasn't going to pay for it. I knew if I did go back, I'd just end up doing the same stuff, so I told my dad I wasn't ready for college.

I lost my job at the Pontiac dealership in September. I was binge drinking, and my parents finally threw me out. I'd saved eight hundred dollars for college spending money so I took four hundred of that and bought a junkie old car. In a rooming house, I got a crummy little room with a toaster oven, a common shower, that kind of thing.

In November, 1985 I got job parking cars for Vista Valet in Rosemont, another suburb of Chicago. I was nineteen. I made good money there, like three hundred a week. I was binge drinking and using drugs, but I didn't dare drink at all on the job. On my very first day at Vista Valet, this other parking attendant was driving this new red Porsche too fast and hit a Mercedes. He got fired on the spot.

Linette, birthmother: Eric was born November 11, 1966, two months before time. He weighed four pounds and three ounces and they had to feed him through a tube. A priest came to the hospital and baptized him soon after he was born; I named him Alexandre Joseph Gauthier. A few days later, I went back to my aunt and uncle's and I would call the 'ospital every day to see how he was doing. Finally they let me see him and I remember going there and sitting in that rocking chair holding

him and singing to him. They kept him in the 'ospital until January of 1967.

I took Eric on the plane with me back to Montreal, so I had 'im with me the whole day. A woman from the Catholic adoption society met us at the airport and my father was there also, but not my mother. I knew she wouldn't come—I knew she didn't want this baby. With my father, it was different. I remember he kissed the baby and it was very emotional. Then the woman took Eric away to the orphanage. She told me because he was so small, they would keep 'im there at least six months before they would put him in adoption.

'Twas really hard for me to sign the adoption papers but everybody told me if I really loved Eric I had to do this. They said the other children would call him names like bastard, and I was only eighteen and didn't have any profession, and maybe no man would want to marry me and take care of him.

Nina, adoptee's mother: When we adopted our three children, I was just happy to have a family, I wasn't concerned with their background as long as they were healthy. Eric had been in an enormous orphanage for ten months and hadn't been getting proper care, he was way behind in his development. But it didn't take him long to catch up, to get back to normal. All it took was attention and love, actually.

Linette, birthmother: By the fall of 1967 Eric was adopted into his American family and it was about then his birthfather, Yves Lelong, came back to Montreal from long travels in Europe and 'e called me and we saw each other once. Knowing very well Eric was already in his adoptive family, Yves suggested we get married and keep the baby. In other words, get 'im back somehow. I said that wouldn't be right. Besides, we didn't love each other and neither of us had a profession.

I had been dating a man called René Durand, and when we were planning to get married I told him about Eric. He also offered we could take Eric with us, but by then Eric had been in his family for some time so I said no. In May of 1968 I married René. I was twenty years old and working as a secretary. When I had our first son Pierre in 1970 I stopped working. By 1975 we had three sons. I was home with the children a lot when they were young.

In 1978, when the youngest one was three, I entered university. I would have liked to have stayed home until he was in school, but René was taking a lot of alcohol and drugs and I was afraid I would be the only person that could bring in money to support the children. I took a very heavy load during the year and took classes right through the summers; I had to make it fast.

In 1981 René and I separated and in 1983 we were divorced.

In between those two events, in December of 1982, I finished a maîtrise, a Master of Arts degree in psychology. I've been working as a clinical psychologist ever since then. At first my practice was small because I wasn't known so I did a lot of teaching, but now I don't teach because I have many people calling me, all and more than I can handle.

After my aunt Monique called me in September of 1991 to tell me Eric was looking for me, it was a long time before he called me. After a week or so I started to worry because I started to think maybe he had changed his mind about finding me.

Eric, adoptee: I worked for Vista Valet about eight months then quit in the spring of '86 because they had transferred me to a location I didn't like. I worked different jobs after that.

In the spring of '87, the friend I was living with told me a gay friend of his in San Antonio had seen a picture of me and wanted me to visit him. He'd pay my airfare and he had lots of booze. I didn't feel right about it, but I was in between jobs then so finally I said "Okay." I just wanted to be accepted and the guy had booze. At that time I was so depressed, I just wanted to get something in my system. This guy met me in San Antonio and we drove two or three hours down I-35 to Mexico. We drank a lot and had sex. We drove back to San Antonio and I caught a plane back to Chicago.

Today, I know I am gay. But five years ago, one day I might say yes, one day I might say no, so it's taken me a long time to accept it. Of course I'd rather not be gay, it would make life a lot easier.

I'm sure my being gay was real hard for my parents to accept, because they grew up in extremely conservative, strict homes. My mom's father was a very racist Irish Catholic police officer. Nigger this, nigger that, and when it came to gays, they were faggots. When I was home once in 1989, my mom asked me if I was gay, so I told her, "Yes," because I was tired of lying and it was time to tell her. She said, "Oh, it's enough to make your stomach turn," but immediately after that, she said, "If you ever got sick"—and I took that to mean AIDs—"I'd take care of you."

I was cold sober when I flew out of San Antonio on Friday, March 13, 1987, and the despair, the thoughts of suicide, got really, really bad as I sat on the plane. That date turned out to be very important for me because it was my first day of sobriety.

When I got back to Chicago I stayed in my room for two weeks. The guy I was living with would bring me food. I didn't drink or do any drugs, I just lay in bed and did some thinking. It was a severe, rock bottom depression, the worst of my life. It wasn't just those few days in San Antonio and Mexico, it was feeling that I'd accomplished nothing in the whole year before that. At this point I was twenty and the last six years of my life were just one big mess.

Of course, it was all tied to my drug addiction which had got to that point of drinking to feel normal: if I didn't use, I felt crazy. Yet I'd found out there was help available and I'd had a glimmer of what staying sober was like. I'd had so many people trying to help me, I decided I had to start making some real changes in my life.

Eventually I started going to AA meetings again and moved in with another

sponsor. He was really hard on me, but I was so desperate I was willing to do whatever he told me to do. The result was I've been sober ever since then. It was six years on March 13th, 1993.

The first thing I ever accomplished in my whole life was getting a year of sobriety behind me. I was really happy about that. That gave me some confidence.

Once I was sober, I tried livin' with my parents again, but we still argued so that only lasted a month. After someone drinks for a long time, they don't become well emotionally when you take away the alcohol. In fact they seem to get much worse because they don't have any crutches now so all that craziness just comes pouring out.

So I moved back to Chicago, moved in with Don, my first long term sponsor. He was going to a lot of AA meetings and we'd go together. He had a stability about him that I needed very badly. I lived with him a year and three months. Then I tried making it on my own, couldn't really make it so I moved back here to Milwaukee where it was cheaper to live. I was careful to avoid my old drinking buddies.

My first couple of years of sobriety were just kind of nuts— I did everything *but* drink. I just loved to drive, and driving became my way of escaping. I'd work for a couple of months, then instead of showin' up for work, I'd take off and drive hundreds of miles non-stop to visit friends in places like Richmond or Miami.

1989 was a kind of turning point when I started to feel somewhat stable. God, I remember noticing things like the seasons, stuff I hadn't had feelings about since childhood. I started to meet a lot more friends and to enjoy life, to have fun without alcohol and drugs, which I never thought would be possible.

I'd answered an ad for a tour guide, and this guy came out from the east coast and interviewed me. It's a job where you take these foreigners all over the country. I didn't have the experience, but I'd done these long jaunts in my car and he knew I really wanted the job so he gave me a chance. I studied all about the United States and I started to meet people from other countries and to find out about the world. Although I only did three tours that fall, I had a really good first season.

I made good money driving for Peerless Tours as a tour guide. That's become a really big career for me. Last year I drove over ten thousand miles throughout the Yukon, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and Alaska.

After that Alaska tour is when I went to the hospital in Greeley, got my birth-mother's name and phone number from Patti, and then decided not to call my birthmother right then. I was emotionally drained, exhausted, and I just wanted was to get home. I drove non-stop to Kansas City where I crashed at a friend's house, then to Chicago to Don's, my first sponsor, where I was living. It was from his place that I called my birthmother for the first time.

Linette, birthmother: The day Eric finally called, October 6th, 1991, I was having a birthday party for my granddaughter. My family had just arrived when the phone

rang. I was so 'appy, so deeply 'appy to hear my son's voice for the first time, I just told them they would have to entertain themselves because it's been twenty-five years of waiting so I don't want to wait any more.

So I took the call in my bedroom and we talked for an hour and a half. I found Eric surprisingly easy to talk to. We have many similar ways of thinking and feeling—many similar interests. We like the same books and movies. I like him so much, I love him. We decided I would fly to Milwaukee in the following months and we would meet.

Eric, adoptee: My first call to my birthmother went really well; she was really open. At first, of course, it was a little awkward, it was like, How ya doin'? How ya been for the last twenty-five years?

But we got along really well. I liked her and felt very comfortable with her. I certainly felt glad I'd found her and she seemed like somebody I would respect versus somebody that made you think, My God, who is this person?

We didn't really get into a lot of detail, not until she came out to visit the next month, that's a lot to throw on somebody! I didn't want to lower the boom on her all at once, in fact, there's a lot she still doesn't know about my life. I never told her some of the details of what I went through—I mean why does she have to know? Why put her through some of that stuff I did?

So the next month, in November of '91, she flew out here to Milwaukee and we met. I just have a one-bedroom apartment, but I work for a nice hotel so I put her up there. We spent a few days together and that first visit went real well.

Later that same month I told my folks I'd found my birthparents, the whole story. Afterwards my dad told me if I got close to them, they'd like to meet my birthparents some day. That totally shocked me! Then, after that talk, every once in a while my mom would ask, "How are things in Canada?" and she didn't really sound like she wanted me to get into a whole lot of detail. So I haven't told them I've really become pretty close to my birthmother.

I certainly wanted them to know they were my real parents and that's the way I would always feel and that would never change. Yet I think, not so much that I surprised them with how I had found my birthparents but I mean, that's got to hurt somewhat, despite their understanding.

Linette, birthmother: I think meeting Eric was the most important thing in my life, equal with when I had my babies. Very, very important.

On the plane going to meet Eric, I was almost laughing, I had a very big smile. As soon as the plane had stopped I was running down the *passerelle*, I don't know the word in English, the passage between the plane and the airport, and he was just right there at the end of it and I was the first one to come out of the plane.

I recognized Eric because he'd sent me a picture, but it was a bit surprising to see him so light colored, blond hair and green eyes and white skin, because my

three other sons are all dark skinned with dark hair like me.

He said, “You’re Linette?” and I said “Yes.” I kissed him on the cheek and we went to a restaurant and I know we were kind of—how do you say that? *tremblante*—shaking. I just felt I would have liked to hold him in my arms for a very long time, but he didn’t feel at ease with it at first. I always wanted to touch his hand and shoulder but I could see he wasn’t ready for that. So I restrained myself. When I first got off the plane I didn’t really embrace him very much, it was strange for him. Not for me, but for him. But when I left him to come back to Montreal, yes, I did then. Now when I visit him it’s better; I think we’re close enough now it’s all right for him.

Nina, adoptee’s mother: Eric is a very introverted person sometimes, and he wanted to know why he had been put up for adoption, whether he had been given up because he was unwanted. I told him the same things I told our other two kids, but he just didn’t buy it. He was curious and wanted to know where he came from and who his blood relatives were.

Then when he found his birthmother he didn’t know what to do or quite how to proceed. She was very happy to be found, but, from what he told me, she came on strong and then Eric held her at arm’s length with, “Wait a minute, now!” But that’s part of the Pandora’s box I warned him about. It amazes me adoptees don’t realize that, if their birthmother was happy to see them and overwhelmed with the reunion, naturally she’d want to know all about them and to be a part of their life. I’ve always been very honest with my children, so I told Eric, “Eric, you were the one who started this. I don’t think you’re being exactly fair to her.”

I have no problem with Eric finding his birthmother. It hasn’t bothered me because I’m the one that raised him. She was obviously in a position that she couldn’t keep him, and I feel bad for her. On their birthdays and on Mother’s Day, I’ve always prayed for the birthmothers of our three kids. I’m sure giving up their babies was a big heartache and a difficult thing for them to do, but they did me a favor. So I haven’t felt threatened by it at all.

Linette, birthmother: When my first visit with Eric was over I felt whole for the first time in twenty-five years. I cried a lot on the plane going back to Montreal because I was completely happy. It was as if I was finally able, at that moment, to touch how deep my suffering had been. It was as if before that I did suffer, but I wasn’t able to go as deep as it was. I just couldn’t bear it, I suppose. But now he was back in my life I could take back this part of myself. All the suffering could go out and all the happiness could come in. I don’t know if you can understand this; I usually speak about these things only in French, not in English.

I’m very close to my children. I don’t think I’m too present, I’m not bothering, but they are very important to me and it’s something very deep inside my heart

and body. It was the most unnatural thing for me to give up Eric. All these years I've been thinking about the decision I made and wondering if it had been the right one.

When Eric found me I was a bit frightened because I didn't know what kind of man he was. I was so surprised we can be so close, even if we didn't know each other for all these years. I think it's too bad I couldn't help him while he was in his sad years. Now I hope he'll ask if he ever needs help; everything I can do, I will. I think we have something to share and to bring to each other, so I'm really happy about it.

In the two and a half years since we met, I would say we have been together at least ten times. Between three, four days, and once for a week. But that's not enough for me. But these trips cost a lot of money and I also have three other sons and now grandchildren and am helping everybody.

Now Eric has dual citizenship, Canadian and American. Even though he was born in Greeley, Colorado, the Canadian government considered him Canadian because he was born of two Canadian parents. Now if he wants to live here in Montreal or come and work here in the summer, there's no problem. It gives him a lot more options.

Eric, adoptee: When Linette and I first met, I told her I wanted to find my birthfather, Yves Lelong.

Linette had not talked to Yves in twenty-five years. But a month or so after that she managed to trace him through his father who's a physician. She contacted him and arranged to spend the day with him. When I called her after to see how that went, she was kind of quiet. She mentioned she thought he had a drinking problem, but she wasn't sure.

Then she gave me his number and he and I talked a few times on the phone. Our conversations were awkward and he would always refer things back to me. He was very, very reserved. He told me he had been working at an antique shop but he wasn't any more and he wasn't married and, God! it was really hard to get stuff out of him, you know? I do know he felt guilty about what happened because he was really apologetic. He didn't reveal anything about his own childhood or his likes, dislikes, hobbies. Nothing.

He always sounded sober to me, but I don't know for sure. I realize many birthfathers are afraid the kid who finds them is going to want money. I suppose if he was thinking like that—especially since he was out of work—that probably didn't help matters between us any.

Then he moved and I wasn't able to contact him. To help me track him down, my birthmother called Yves' brother and found out Yves had been drinking for years. In March, 1992 he got drunk, was found in a snow bank, got pneumonia and frostbite and almost died. When he was well enough, they transferred him to

a drug treatment center and that's when my birthmother told me about the whole thing. After that, I didn't call her for probably a month. I didn't mean it to be that long, it's just that I didn't realize my hopes had been that high for my birthfather, too.

Linette, birthmother: When Eric was here for a week in February of 1993, he met Yves Lelong, his birthfather, and they spent some time together. It seemed important to Eric to see me and Yves together, so I invited Yves for supper twice while Eric was here. When Eric felt sick, I contacted my brother, who's a medical doctor, and because he recommended it, the three of us went to see a doctor. It was as if suddenly we are a family, so I felt peculiar, but I did it for Eric.

A few months later Eric had open heart surgery in Chicago.

Eric, adoptee: 1993 was a rough year for me. I had open heart surgery in June to replace my aortic valve. I had a congenital heart defect and had been sick for pretty much a year before that. The last couple of months I'm finally feeling back to normal.

Linette, birthmother: Eric called me the day before 'is operation. They had decided to do surgery right away so I caught the next plane to Chicago and I was there a few hours later. When I first saw him in the hospital his lips were blue and he had a lot of trouble breathing; he had a high fever. It was very serious.

At the time 'e called me 'e didn't know his mother would come for the surgery, because 'e was sick for a year before and his parents never came.

So when he called me he thought probably nobody would be there except his friends. He was very, very nervous and afraid. When I arrived in the hospital 'e had just talked with his mother on the phone and she said she would come in the morning for the surgery. So then he was very anxious and 'e was not feeling well enough to tell her I would be there because she would probably get very emotional. He needed all his strength for the operation.

So I asked him if it was better that I not come the day of the surgery and he said no, he would like me to be there, but maybe I should come after he was already in surgery, not before when he and his mother would be in his room together. He said he would probably not be able to tell her. So I said I would manage with that. He was so sick, I just didn't want to add any stress on him.

Eric, adoptee: It took them almost a year to find out what was wrong with me, and by the time they did, I wasn't in good shape. Also, a friend of mine was dying, so I didn't tell my mom my birthmom was going to be there, I just couldn't even deal with it. So afterwards she was pretty upset that I didn't tell her first. Which wasn't fair of me, it really wasn't. It was a shitty thing to do. If I had it to do over again, I'd do it differently.

My mom, of course, almost dropped dead, but after she did that I guess it went pretty well. But I guess they were both there because they love me, they had that much in common.

Linette, birthmother: When I entered his room after he had been taken to surgery, I knew probably it would be hard for his mother to have me arrive when she wasn't prepared for it. I tried to be delicate, but she was stunned.

After I introduced myself, the first thing she said to me was, "How come Eric's so stubborn? Does this come from you?" I thought it was a strange thing to say because Eric was having a very big, difficult surgery with four surgeons. Anyway, I just tried to stay as kind and calm as I could. I'm glad I'm a psychologist; at times, it helps.

After she cried, the nurse told her to calm down because Eric's surgery was almost finished and she could not take care of both of them. Well, I tried to talk with her, or not to talk when I could see it was better. Finally they said we could go in to see Eric even though he was not conscious yet. I offered to let her go in alone that first time but she said no, that maybe he would sense we were there together and maybe that would help him. This I appreciated a lot.

So we went in together, and she stayed only about an hour and then she left. She said she was too tired to stay any longer. I stayed 'till they sent me home that night. She called me to see how he was and said she would come for a few minutes the next morning.

The next morning I didn't go in with her to Eric's room in intensive care because I thought it would be better if she would see him alone. Eric was still unconscious at this time so she went back home and I stayed.

I'm very happy I was there because slowly Eric came out from his unconsciousness and he could not talk, he was on the respirator. But he would hold my hand very, very hard and he would write on my hand "I love you," and "Don't go away," because he was very afraid. So I think this is one of the things that brought us so much closer. I stayed there for a week.

His mother came back a few days later. It was the morning they had taken him off the respirator and I didn't go in with her, but one of his friends was there. Afterward the friend told me Eric's mother had shouted at him. She was very, very angry because he didn't tell her before the operation that I would be there.

Afterwards I talked with her for a couple of hours. I tried to explain to her why he hadn't told her I would be there, that he was so afraid of her reaction and he didn't feel well enough to handle it. After that she asked me to tell him she wanted to apologize.

Ted Bauer, Eric's father, came to the hospital once for about an hour. He was shy and didn't speak a lot, but he was kind to me. It seems it's Eric's mother, Nina, who is the chief leader of the family. She called me Linette, and when she went away she kissed me and said she likes me a lot and thinks I'm a good person. That year

they sent me a Christmas card. I'm pleased that I met Eric's parents. Now it may be easier for Eric to talk to me about his family and to talk to them about me.

The only thing missing for me is that Eric knows only one of his three brothers. He was going to meet all of them and the rest of our family when he was here in February of '93, but 'e got sick and couldn't do it. In October, 1993, Eric and I flew to Greeley and went to the hospital to see Patti to tell her how much we appreciated what she had done for us.

Eric, adoptee: Now that my birthfather, Yves, and I have spent some time together, we've gotten closer. He went to two treatment centers last year and he's been sober a little over a year. Now I have no doubt at all that my alcoholism is hereditary.

My birthmother calls me more than I call her. We called each other more at first, and then I think it began to hit me. I have three half-brothers in Montreal, two of them have families, and I kind of got overwhelmed. I was really happy about finding my birthfamily, but even though it's been very positive, it's been pretty overwhelming. I'm pretty lucky to have two sets of parents—a lot of people don't have one.

My folks have mellowed out a little, probably cause my dad's not a bond broker any more and they're out of the city and living their own life. They restored an old house on Lake Mackenzie and they've been runnin' this dinky little bar where all the locals go so they've probably opened up somewhat through that. They seem happier now than ever.

It had taken so long for our relationship to get good again, maybe they were afraid it would start wilting after I found my birthparents. But that's actually brought us even closer together, partly because I realize more how strong my feelings for my parents are. When I say parents, I mean my mom and dad who raised me.

When it comes to discussing my birthparents with them, I only tell my parents what they ask—I don't go on and on about everything. The last couple of years have been really, really good. I can talk to them about just about anything now. Actually, everything in my life has gotten better.