

Dear Representative Rachelson:

I am an adopted person, not from Vermont. Yesterday I watched you ask questions regarding H 629, a bill that would not allow all adopted people to access their original birth certificates.

I appreciated your concern about whether adoptees knowing the name of their birthmother might somehow harm a woman who relinquished a child, thinking that child would not know her identity. It is true, as Gregory Luce said yesterday in his testimony, that the law is not about meeting the person listed on the birth certificate; not everyone will want to. At the same time I heard your concern about whether having the birth certificate might lead an adoptee to try contacting the person named in it. By adding a contact preference to the process — not a veto blocking access to the birth record, just an indication by the birth parent of her preference of whether or not to meet — this will discourage adoptees from facing a rejection, which most would want to avoid. It may not really be necessary, though. A birth parent who does not want to speak to an adult child can always tell them that. This is an outcome we adoptees dread, but it happens.

The other side of this concern, something I know from being involved in this movement for a long time, is that many birthmothers WANT to communicate with their relinquished child. Most who fill out a contact preference want contact. Many relinquishing mothers do not know the records are sealed to adults and wonder why their child has not come to find them. This is a part of the story omitted by the concern you raised.

Please let me share my personal experience with this. It is best explained in my letter published by the New York Times in April 2021 (see link below). In brief, my own birthmother never wanted people in her community to know she was pregnant outside of marriage in 1950 (I'm 71). She hid in a strange city, gave birth to me, telling only one sister. In wanting to know about my heritage and see who I looked like, I was not interested in "outing" her or embarrassing her. As a feminist and a woman, I knew about society's attitudes.

When I contacted her discreetly by mail, using my birth date as a kind of "code" that only she would know, my birthmother was willing to correspond with me and later to meet me. As I said in the Times letter, our long-standing private communication was healing and positive for both of us.

You may also be interested in what I discovered when I went back to school in the 1990s to research the origins of sealed adoption records in my state of California. I later published it as a book, linked at the very end of this letter.

It appears that a woman named Georgia Tann who stole and sold babies to wealthy people was likely involved in getting records sealed in California in 1935. My book "Growing in the Dark: Adoption Secrecy and Its Consequences" details the discussions among professionals in the 1930s. The Child Welfare League was sympathetic to the needs of adoptee people to know their origins, while volunteer-led adoption agencies dismissed the importance of genealogy in their attempts to place children. It's a fascinating story.

From Wikipedia's opening paragraph about Georgia Tann:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia\\_Tann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_Tann)

**"Tann's custom of placing children with influential members of society normalized adoption in America, and many of her adoption practices (often designed to hide the origin of her adoptees) became standard practice."**

Well, this is a complicated issue and I hope my experience with it is helpful as you decide how to proceed with changing Vermont's law. I hope you will decide to match the laws of your neighboring states such as New York, Connecticut and Maine to allow adopted adults to know basic facts about themselves through their original birth certificates.

If you can access the New York Times, a series of letters to the editor on the topic of adoption reunions and birth certificates is at this link, where my own letter is the very last one. Another letter from a woman in Alabama explains how she had a choice to access either her original or her amended birth certificate.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/02/opinion/letters/adoption-children-parents.html>

**To the Editor:**

I was lucky. My adoptive mother had found out my birth mother's name when I was born after World War II and told me her name when I was a college student. I had been asking about this mysterious person since I was a toddler, so it felt like a long wait. What followed was a 47-year private long-distance correspondence between me and my birth mother that was healing and meaningful to both of us.

All adoptees should be able to know the names of our birth parents, if we want to, without waiting 50 years like Steve Inskip. These days many adoptees find this information using DNA tests or on social media, which are less private than being able to access one's own birth record.

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*The writer is the author of "Growing in the Dark: Adoption Secrecy and Its Consequences."*

Best wishes,

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AUTHOR OF

***Growing in the Dark: ADOPTION SECRECY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES***

<https://www.xlibris.com/en/bookstore/bookdetails/572366-growing-in-the-dark>