

Greetings,

I have just seen an article in our local weekly paper, the Mountain Times, that tells me now is the time to tell my story. For years I have been mulling over how to get this law changed but how and who? I would be willing to speak publicly on this and offer my story for publication.

The current law represents paternalism at its very worst. We are way past the point where secrecy and shame about one's birth are acceptable. It no longer need be a "dirty little secret."

Put briefly, as an adoptee whose original birth certificate was sealed (but somehow, who knows how, liberated by my mother), I can make the following points:

1. To seal the original birth certificate and replace it with one that asserts the adoptive parent is the one and only, is a lie and this lie can have repercussions throughout the adoptee's life, as you will see.
2. Who am I? Who am I supposed to be? The adoptee's true *self-identity* – the core of any person's mental and emotional existence – is challenged. Adoption is never a secret in reality, the truth always comes out one way or another. With adoption comes a host of challenges, not the least of which is being accepted wholeheartedly by those who know the secret that the adoptee does not, by the adopting family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and siblings. The adoptee is treated differently, even in the most subtle ways, as if the fact of being adopted is somehow the adoptee's fault. The adoptee wonders what is wrong with him/her... and most of all, why??? If for no other reason, the child needs to know why he or she was not wanted by their own parent... or if an institution, such as a church or adoption agency, intervened, talked her out of keeping her baby.
3. *Health*: When the birth parents cannot be contacted, there is no record of the child's genetic inheritance of health problems, the seeds of progressive diseases, perhaps damage in utero or even at birth from various causes. The health record is incomplete, esp. if the birth parent has disappeared, died, or otherwise inaccessible.
4. *Inheritance*: Also, as my story will show, whatever might have been set aside for the adopted child before the adoption, or even long past the date of adoption, will be lost. This could mean property, money, any kind of inheritance. The same applies as with health: if no one knows how to contact the birth parent and if the birth parent does not know how to contact the child, or what became of the child, the child cannot be the beneficiary perhaps at a time when the child really needs it.

OK: now for my story.

I was born in Rutland, Vermont in 1945. My mother was a Rutland girl, my father was an Italian national, whom she met in Italy while serving in the Red Cross in World War II. They did get married before I was born, and my original birth certificate does show his name as my natural father. My birth name is Giulia Ersilia Falanga.

She was mustered out and returned to Rutland. He followed 2 ½ years later, when he was permitted to enter the U.S. They stayed together under my grandmother's roof in Rutland for about 6 months, then the marriage fell apart, he left for New York City and she was on her own... a tough thing, to be a single mother under mysterious circumstances in a place like Rutland, in the 1940s. I am sure anyone could understand this.

She was introduced to another man who became my stepfather. They moved away from Rutland and in 1950, their first child together was born... my half-sister. It was only recently that, looking closely at the new birth certificate, I realized it is dated 1950 but

still gives my birth date as 1945 (they couldn't manage to lie about that)... so for the first 5 years of my life I was Giulia Ersilia Falanga, then suddenly I was Julia Breed Swain. Meanwhile, as I was told eventually when the truth finally came out, my mother told me that she and my father had agreed not to tell me anything about him. But they split in 1945, so maybe my mother already knew about the adoption law.

Anyway, as I was growing up, compared to my two half-sisters (5 and 6 years young, respectively), I clearly looked different for the whole world to observe. I was olive-skinned, dark-haired, wavy-hair, I tanned very dark in the summer, looked Italian! Although I had no idea at the time. They were fair-skinned, straight-haired, looked very English like their own father.

I was also treated differently by the cousins. Subtle, but a child can see the difference quite clearly, even though he or she may not be able to explain why. I couldn't either, so while they were always very polite and solicitous, there was clearly a natural affinity that I did not have, they seemed very cautious and cool around me.

That impression extended into my own direct "family," in which my mother became abusive toward me, joined by my stepfather, when the first half-sister was just a toddler. At age 10, I guess she thought I would eventually discover the truth, so she broke silence and told me my stepfather was not my real father, that my real father was an Italian somewhere in the world, that I also had some kind of Italian family in Italy... she had meanwhile been in correspondence with them from time to time. She gave me a packet of old photographs of my Italian family. She also produced my original birth certificate in a Xerox copy, I have no idea how she got it, but when I went to get my own in 2013, I was given the phony "official" one... I should mention that the new birth certificate is very impressive, very authoritative, on an engraved form printed in a lovely color of green, with the Vermont seal, and the sentence at the bottom: "This copy not valid unless prepared on engraved border displaying state seal of Vermont" ... "Any alteration or erasure voids this certificate."

So with the stroke of an eraser or edited on a scan, my identity could have been wiped off the face of the earth.

In any case, this information was a ray of sunshine in my life. It explained everything, and best of all, I had a way out! But the effects lingered... my whole life I have been unable to make the most of my intelligence and abilities, due to a deep-seated, ingrained sense of inferiority. It is difficult for me even to share this.

I finally met him in person when I was 13, when he actually called her on the phone, said he was in New York and wanted to meet me. I went, and from then he invited me to visit over school breaks wherever he was. He had never remarried, was something of a playboy. After that I was able to visit with him for some great vacations in Italy, Hollywood, Hawaii and Sardinia. He also visited me on occasion if it was convenient. Fast-forward:

In 2005, I was here in Vermont working and he was in Capri, his "hometown." I got a call from a woman in Italy who informed me that my father had died, and there were some possessions and a bank account I had to close out, or the government would have claimed the funds.

The woman in Italy, a live-in girlfriend of my uncle (who had died the same week), very kindly let me stay with her, walked me through the steps as did the bankers where my father had his accounts, and helped me with the funeral arrangements. I also was issued a

large sum from my uncle's bank, where my aunt had set aside money for me, unbeknownst to me.

How I accomplished that is a story in itself.... the essence being that my father's bank instructed me to provide a *family tree back to my Italian grandparents -- had my father never known me, had I never known any of the family or been able to contact him, I would never have been able to recover those funds.*

*Conversely, if anyone's birth parent – ever needed help from the child later in life, for example, possibly ending life without support from a successful child, for example... instead of being lost to each other.*

In conclusion: None of the difficulties within the family or the family dynamics should justify the withholding of the truth of a child's birth from that child. One of the very well-known strategies of bigotry and genocide is to break up family bonds – good, bad or indifferent – and this adoption law accomplishes that.

Please do feel free to contact me with anything you might need to know or have from me. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Julia Purdy