

## **A Birth Father's Story.....**

### ***“A CACHE OF FEELINGS BURIED IN A TIME CAPSULE”***

***In 1969 Gary Clapton gave up his baby for adoption. In 1996 she traced him and his life changed.***

Twenty-six years ago on Christmas Day I became the father of a baby girl. We named her Lorna. She and her mother had to stay in hospital a few days longer than usual because our baby had a stomach upset. I visited daily with flowers, magazines, and sweets... We never took her home. Twelve weeks after her birth she was adopted by a childless couple from a market town in southeast England. Lorna's new parents named her Jane, meaning gift of the gods.

This was in 1969, the height of the adoption boom in the late Sixties. Adoption was accepted and even promoted as the rational, right and most beneficial decision for all involved.

Until recently I could have given a credible explanation for most of the things I have done in my life. Looking back, it now seems as though, unbeknown to me, many of the events and choices in my life were determined or affected by having given away this first child.

I was 19 then and hell bent on the pursuit of happiness. There were free festivals to hitch to and demos to join. Fatherhood was the last thing on my mind. The adoption went through and I went about growing up. Unlike the baby's mother (we stayed together for eight years after the birth and adoption) I felt little urge to know about our daughter as she was growing up. As far as I was concerned she was in good hands - with a real mum and dad.

25 years later, my daughter came to find me. Her birth mother gave her details of my profession and of the city in which I was living at the time. First letters were exchanged through a social worker intermediary, followed by a short and strange phone conversation. Three months later we stood face-to-face in a railway station.

I still find it difficult to fully describe the overwhelming joy I feel now that I have been found. However there is a more fraught aspect to my feelings about being reunited with my birth daughter. Now, in the light of my happiness over our reunion I ask myself why I did not wonder about my daughter's welfare and development in the years she was growing up? Why was I not more attuned to her birth date and other milestones? Why was I not more enthusiastic about being traced when her birth mother told me that she was putting her name on an adoption register so that she could be easily found? Didn't I care?

When adoptees trace their roots they discover a world of information that helps fit together the pieces of their own jigsaw. For some this is a happy occurrence, for others finding a rejecting birth parent is tragic but still important. When birth mothers trace or are traced, a similar confirmation of long held feelings takes place. For mothers and their children it seems that the fact of adoption never fades, it is part of their identity. Is this the case for birth fathers?

My daughter's adoption had little or no bearing on my life. Or so I used to think. The truth seems to be that although I set my face against fatherhood in 1969 I almost immediately found many opportunities to play the part of a father.

Three years after my daughter's adoption I began work as a male nanny for two boys aged three and four. Later I became a social worker and worked mainly with adolescents. I particularly remember helping two seriously disturbed young women and their families. This was during my birth daughter's early teens. I carried out some adoption work for the courts.

Throughout the Seventies and Eighties I was an unofficial foster parent for two young women. A nervous breakdown in 1986 seemed to be precipitated by the suicide of a 16 year-old client of mine. She was the same age as my birth daughter would have been at the time.

Despite all this informal parenting, I put up fierce resistance to becoming an official father until I was 40. A number of close relationships foundered on this apparently immovable objection. The reluctance to make such commitment is not, perhaps, unusual in many men. Yet this behaviour never seemed to square with my ability to get on well with children and teenagers and my ability to care for them. Never once during all these events did I make the connection between my motivations and feelings at the time and any possible distress (or guilt) over giving up a child for adoption.

It is a truism to say that men rarely understand what makes them tick. In the emotionally charged area of fatherhood and adoption it is perhaps too simple to put what appears as male inconstancy or insensitivity down to plain indifference. If my experience is at all relevant or common, it seems that for some men, instead of any feelings of fatherhood being swept away with the signing of the adoption papers, it is a significant event - the significance of which is somehow buried deep underground yet still capable of causing explosions like the carelessly buried munitions of Beaufort's Dyke.

I still struggle to reassess my attitude to my baby daughter's adoption. Of material help now is that Jane and I are able to talk to each other about our respective lives.

We have pored over photographs of her life with her parents, she has told me where she got the scar on her knee and we have gleefully and obsessively compared skin tone and wrist sizes.

This last year has been the happiest of my life. It has also been marked by moments of the greatest sadness I have ever felt. Every so often during this fantastic roller-coaster ride, I ask myself this: if my daughter had not got in touch with me would I have carried on believing that I first became a father just six years ago with the birth of my eldest son?

**Gary Clapton** has done some research about birth fathers. You can read about this by clicking [here](#).