

Charles's Story

In November of 2014, I received a phone call from Katrina Carlisle while I was working at the Catholic high school where I taught science. (I am now retired.) I had requested SEC to do a search for my birth family a couple of years earlier and, frankly, didn't expect any results. So I was quite shocked when I received the call. Of course, I asked who my birth mother is and where she lives. The law in Indiana at the time prohibited Ms. Carlisle from releasing this information to me, but she encouraged me to write a letter to my birth mother via SEC. I did so and Katrina followed up with a phone call to my birth mother, Barbara. Katrina read my letter to Barbara and I learned that it had given her great peace to know that I was OK and had done well in life. I cannot imagine the overwhelming shock that Barbara felt when she received that call from SEC, but it was handled in a most compassionate and professional manner. The only information I knew about Barbara was that she had cancer. So, in June 2015 I followed up and asked Katrina to check to see if my birth mother had passed away; indeed she had died earlier in the year. So the law now allowed all of my records to be released to me. I received a thick envelope full of information, including her obituary and my original birth certificate.

I learned that my birth mother had returned to her home town after having me. She married about five years later to a successful farmer (now deceased) in the area. I also found out that – *I have two brothers and five sisters!* Katrina did some additional follow-up for me and made contact with the oldest, John. John was willing to talk to me over the phone, however I was reluctant to make the call. But it worked out well. We talked for about an hour, just like chatting with an old friend who had years of news to swap. I arranged to drive to their town in July; I got a grand tour of the town and the farms. I had dinner with him and my oldest sister, Janice, and their families. Great experience! In November, I returned to town and met my other brother, Gary, who lives in the old family farmhouse built in the 1890s. Interestingly, he and I have many of the same books in our homes. I met my four other sisters when our family was invited to John's home for their family Christmas party. Our family returned again in April for a pre-Easter gathering at Gary's. We've invited them to come to our lake house in August.

Social situations like this can sometimes be a train-wreck! But I believe that God has guided each of our steps and enabled a warm and cordial relationship to evolve. I am amazed how I have been accepted by all of them with unconditional love. My duty to the Lord, then, is to be a good steward of this precious gift that I have received. I talked to the priest in my birth mother's parish. He said that Barbara was a very giving soul who always put the needs of others first. The many stories of her selfless acts have served as an inspiration to me. The record shows that she had experienced great turmoil about the decision to give me for adoption, but her wisdom and selflessness lead her to make a prudent decision based in charity. I am sad that she felt it necessary to carry her secret to the grave. We know that her "sin" was forgiven on that Good Friday two-thousand years ago, but sometimes folks feel trapped in guilt and shame and have difficulty forgiving themselves for mistakes of the past. And the social environment at the time of my birth was no doubt punitive and oppressive.

I cannot imagine the shock that each of the seven experienced when they received their phone calls. (I think John did what most guys would do; he punted to his oldest sister. She made the rest of the calls.)

In my adoptive family in Indianapolis, there were four of us, three adopted. They're all fine hard-working people of the highest repute. But I am the only member of the family to go to college. I studied agricultural sciences, even though I am from the city. In my birth family, John remained home to run the family farm. Gary has a degree in physics. Of the girls, Janice has a degree in public health, one went to Notre Dame in engineering, and two have degrees in math. (My second-oldest sister, Betty, has Down syndrome and was, of course, unable to attend college. Barbara gave her the best of care and insisted that everyone treat Betty with love and respect.) It's clear that Barbara put a great deal of emphasis on education. My adoptive family did likewise for me, ensuring that I went to college. I feel closest to Gary; he studied physics but returned home to farm and to work in real estate development. We share similar political and religious beliefs. Tragically, we both played trombone.

I am most grateful to SEC, which acted as God's hand to enable and guide this reunion. While I'm sorry that I didn't get to meet my birth mother, I'm sure that the Lord welcomed her aboard with a hearty "Well done, good and faithful servant."

With gratitude, Charles



The Garden at the Farm House in Summer & The Farm House at Christmas time