



# LOST & FOUND

August 2002

SEARCH-FINDERS OF CALIFORNIA, INC. MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER

## *From the Editor—*

*We dedicate this issue to the memory of Sheila Allen. All of us at Search-Finders extend our deepest condolences to Sheila's family. She was a beloved and integral part of our Search-Finders family for many years and she will be greatly missed.*

On the opposite end of the grieving scale we say so long (and good riddance) to Ann Landers. Most of us stopped reading her column a long time ago because of her erroneous views on reunion. And wouldn't you know, even from the grave... one day I actually scanned her column which ran for several weeks after her demise and there it was again. "You have a family who loves you already, they picked you because you're special....why stir things up...." blah, blah, blah.

I'm sure that "Ann" meant well, but I can't even imagine how many people she may have helped to put on the wrong path. Wouldn't it be divine justice if Sheila could corner her in the white-light waiting room and set her straight?

All searchers are bound to butt heads with some kind of controversy sooner or later. When I first

found my son, even some of my closest friends had a hard time understanding. "Have you ever thought about what his adoptive mother thinks of all this?" Duh. Of course they have come around now and are much more understanding.

Sometimes resistance comes from people who claim to want to help. While you wait for their promises to come to fruition, they're busy doing absolutely nothing, and they charge handsomely for that nothing. In the article I penned for this newsletter, "Best Case Scenario", that very issue comes to light. On one hand, it is a wonderful reunion story - my sister Mary's story. On the other, the story serves as an exposé on the underhanded tactics some adoption agencies are using these days when a searcher looks to them for information.

In her article, "Miracles Waiting To Happen", Judy Gilford tells her own heart warming reunion story.

I am hoping that sad or happy, more of you will be willing to share your personal stories with us in our newsletter. Not every story has a happy ending. Just so happens in this issue we do have a few of them.

— Linda Ehle Callens, *Lost & Found* Editor  
Submit your story! E-mail [callens1@earthlink.net](mailto:callens1@earthlink.net)  
or call 408.298.3037

# BEST-CASE-SCENARIO

## A REUNION STORY by Linda Ehle Callens & Mary Ehle

There are two unique aspects to this story. First: ten years after my reunion with my son, I never imagined I would be writing a story about my sister, who kept the secret of her son's birth and relinquishment from us until just a few years ago. Two: when it comes to telling a reunion story, the details of the search itself are not significant; the important things being what happens during and after the reunion. But this time, in this story, some of the search details are significant.

I can't remember the exact moment when Mary's secret was revealed. And after the revelation she still couldn't share any of the details. It wasn't until last March that she really opened up and told me more.

Mary joined the Marine Corps after graduating from High School. It was the late 60's and for the young people in the military, off duty time was party time. Mary was having great fun until she fell in love and got pregnant. After her honorable discharge she left the base and her boyfriend behind and moved back to California, where she planned to give her baby up for adoption. When Michelle was born our Aunt went to the hospital and told Mary she had seen the baby, which she insisted was the most beautiful baby girl on earth. She then asked, "Mary, why don't you keep her?" It was as if permission had been granted, and Mary immediately claimed her daughter and brought Michelle home.

Nine months later I had my son and, against my will, gave him up. Not long after that, Mary moved to another state and went to work for a large company. She became good friends with "John", a young

married man with whom she worked. He went to visit her one evening and..well, things happened. They were both ashamed that they had let things get out of control and it never happened again. Mary was on birth control at the time and pregnancy was the last thing she worried

about, although she was having trouble with the pill...irregular periods and other side affects. So when she missed a couple of periods she thought nothing of it. But when she went in for a check-up she learned that she was indeed three months pregnant. For Mary, who could never even bear to see a tree cut down, termination was out of the question. She was already a single mother and the father was married with children. It was an impossible situation. Mary lost her job, her apartment, and although John helped her with her car payments for a while, she lost her car, too. She stayed with our Dad who had moved to the same state after he and mom divorced. She swore Dad and his sister, who helped out too, to secrecy. (Even after we found out and would bring the subject up, Dad would insist that he didn't know what we were talking about.) Mary carried her baby in secret, gave him up for adoption, and never spoke about it again.

She was no longer the happy person I had known. And as the years went on the sadder and more affected she became. I had been a long-time Search-Finders member and had been reunited with my son for years before she finally revealed her secret. So, of course my first question was, "Are you going to search for him?!". For months we talked about it and I did a lot of reassuring. Finally this March while we were in Hawaii visiting Mom we discussed it in even more



*Linda and Mary, sisters and future birthmothers.*

# BEST CASE SCENARIO



Michelle and Mary.

detail, and by the time Mary got back home, she was ready to start her search.

First, she went to Children's Home Society; the agency who handled the adoption. They found her file right away and discovered that her son had filed a waiver allowing identifying information disclosure to her, should she file the same waiver too. It was a day of rejoicing. "You are so lucky!"

I squealed. "This is it. You don't really have to search!" CHS said that as soon as Mary filed her waiver they could get started. And she simply had to pay a \$250 fee.... Mary also registered with International Soundex Reunion Registry. During those first days of her journey, Mary talked about how all the feelings she had suppressed for 33 years had come flooding back. It was almost too emotional to bear. We had lost our brother just a few years before and then our father. The sadness in my sister's heart from those losses and then the loss she had carried for so long had made her become a person who held everything in; afraid to feel.

Date: Thu, 19 Apr 2002 17:53:40 -0700

From: Mary R. Ehle

To: Linda Callens <callens1@earthlink.net>

*Do your moods come and go, or is it pretty much a steady stream of misery? ...You usually seem like such a naturally joyous person that I hate to see you so down. I myself am in a terrible mood most of the time and have to force myself to be nice around people at work. I don't know why I feel so angry and sad and mean...*

After Mary put her waiver into the adoption agency file, I thought for sure they would just give her the identifying info. But they said *they* had to make the contact and see if her son still wanted to reunite. Weeks went by and the agency did nothing. They told

**...the adoption mind-set has permeated our society in a way that it is fully accepted, even expected now.**

Mary that her son had moved and they just couldn't find him. They would keep trying. Day after day went by and CHS continued to drag their feet. I called Doreen for advice. I got in touch with Amy Kassenbrock, the Washington AAC representative, and she tried to find some clarity in the State's adoption law. Amy lead me to some web sites where I could review some legalese. Wading though the laws, I realized they must have been written by Dr. Gobbledy Gook, but according to what I found, CHS probably should have just given the file to Mary.

To: Linda Callens [mailto:callens1@earthlink.net]

Sent: Wednesday, May 22, 2002 12:40 PM

From: Ehle, Mary R

*Hi Sis; No, I haven't heard anything. Nobody was in the (CHS) office when I called there on Monday so I wrote SW a letter. I wrote about my frustration, cited the law, and told her about the involvement of you (I referred to you as a writer and activist in the adoption field) and AAC. I mailed it Monday and asked her to call me when she'd read it. She hasn't called yet. I don't know how you survived your long search. It's only been 3 weeks, almost a month, for me, and I'm extremely frustrated. In the meanwhile, am busy with work, which is good since it keeps me occupied. I have a feeling something will happen soon. Of course I'll call you immediately! Love, Me*

And so we waited some more. I sent several books to Mary to try and give her a little intellectual backup. She simultaneously started seeing a therapist and went on anti-depressants. She was so filled with anxiety. It broke my heart to see her suffer so...

Ehle, Mary R wrote:

*Got the books after work yesterday and started "Primal Wound"... It makes perfect sense, but isn't comforting to me. It just makes me feel as if I've ruined 2 lives. Michelle was like an incubator baby since I didn't see her or hold her for days, maybe a week, after her birth. I've always thought it was not having her father in her life that wounded her, but it was me.*

# BEST CASE SCENARIO

*The hurts that happened then can never, ever be healed...*

*From: Linda Callens [mailto:callens1@earthlink.net]*

*Sent: Friday, May 17, 2002 11:59 AM*

*To: Ehle, Mary R*

*Hi, Sis. I hope you stick with the book; it will help. If you really are having a hard time with it, go to Synchronicity and Adoption instead. One thing you have work on is the guilt thing. Whose idea was it that you shouldn't see Michelle? Not yours! It was the blinking doctors and nurses and adoption people; they had you brainwashed.... "don't see the baby... you'll forget.... the baby won't know the difference". Lies, lies, lies. You didn't do anything wrong; you were the unsuspecting victim of a twisted society which allows such horrific practices. We were both used, Mary. Used and lied to like thousands of other women. And this has been going on so very long that the adoption mind-set had permeated our society in a way that it is fully accepted, even expected now. The catch is that we women who have been affected by it finally "come to" after a while and realize how traumatized we were....and still are...e-me back when you can. I love you, Linda*

Mary continued to call the adoption agency almost daily. Finally a second case worker took over

## CHS needs to have their hands slapped for the complete absence of care for individuals they have displayed.

and renewed our hope that they would be successful in making contact.

*Amy Kassenbrock wrote:*

*Dear Linda,*

*I am so glad to hear you and your sister are making progress in her reunion! I continue to assert that perseverance and adamantly standing up for our rights is essential to reunion and ultimately adoption reform. I love your idea about writing an exposé about the horrible exploitation and gouging of triad members some of these agencies are capitalizing on in the wake of reunion awareness. I support your writing of just such an article!*

On Mary's birthday, June 11th, I came home in the afternoon from doing errands and there was a message on my machine. It was Mary, "I heard from

International Soundex. Call me as soon as you get back." Yes, I was pretty much aquiver at that point. When I talked to Mary she was levitating. "They made a match!" she gasped. And then, "they gave me his name and everything. His name is Christopher...". Which is what she named him when he was born.

## ...agencies routinely remove the fathers' names from original birth certificates

Susan from ISRR assured Mary that she would contact him ASAP and see how he wanted to proceed. Two days later Christopher called Mary. Twice. Then they were on-line all night, he sending her web-cam photos during their long conversation. He wanted to know all about our family history, about relatives. He was overjoyed to have a real sister. The next day Mary emailed a passel of pictures to me - Chris growing up, Chris with his adoptive family over the years, Chris cannon-balling into his swimming pool - current picture. Our Dad, whom we lost a year and a half ago, was a tall man with enormous hands; we have never seen hands like that until we saw Christopher's hands. He has a lot of Dad's other traits, too; artistic, musical talents, his strong jaw, his smile, his zest for life. How deeply sad I am that my father didn't live long enough to know him.

On Friday, June 21st - the first day of summer - Chris flew from Dallas to Seattle. On Saturday morning they emailed a photo of all three of them together and called me. It was magic hearing his voice - it was immediately familiar. Mary, Michelle and Christopher spent the weekend bonding and celebrating their reunion. Christopher stayed until the last possible red-eye on Sunday night.

On the weekend they also discussed the situation with Children's Home Society. Chris said he had kept them updated on all his current information. They have his address, phone number, everything. So, not only did they extort a large sum of money from Mary, they lied and did nothing to facilitate a reunion. They violated Mary and Christopher's civil rights. Chris said he filed several legal documents to prevent such a thing.

I had previously asked Doreen why CHS had charged that whopping \$250. She said that's one way

# BEST CASES

adoption agencies make their money these days; fewer women are relinquishing their babies. But still, she said, that amount of money was way out of line. One thing Mary did do is call CHS after the match was made at ISRR and told them she had found what she was looking for, but she needed one thing from them: the father's full name. Mary had acquired Christopher's original birth certificate, but the father's name wasn't on it. The first Mary asked CHS about this she was told that she had withheld the father's name from them, but Mary couldn't remember having done so, nor was she sure that she had intentionally left the father's name off the document. The same thing happened to me. Thing is I *know* I put my son's father's full name on that birth certificate, and when I got the original during my search it wasn't there. Susan at ISRR said that agencies routinely remove the fathers' names from original birth certificates. I agree with Doreen, who said, "It's criminal!". In Mary's case CHS did find the father's name in their microfiche records. It had not, therefore, been withheld by Mary but by the agency.

Mary made reservations to fly to Dallas the weekend following their reunion. And Chris already had plans to go back to Seattle in July. They also made plans to go to Hawaii at the end of summer to see our Mom. (I pray my broken leg is healed by then so I can join them there. Got calcium?)

Date: Tue, 25 Jun 2002 08:52:42 +0800  
From: Jerome Callens <callens1@earthlink.net>  
To: Mary Ehle

*Hi! I have to tell you; yes I did download the photo of the three of you....He looks so much like you and Michelle in his childhood photos and yes, I definitely see Dad in him. How beautiful is that?! You are so lucky. And you deserve all this happiness, Sis. ...One thing I wanted to say is that when I did see the photo of you and Chris and Michelle....You had a sparkle in your eyes and a smile from deep inside which I haven't seen for many, many years. It's like a dark cloud within has been completely exorcised. I can't tell you what joy filled my heart when I saw that smile. Ah, me. This is all so great. Takes the sting out of this broken leg....I love you sis. E-me. Love, L.*

Christopher insists that either Mary and



*Michelle, Christopher and their Mom, Mary*

Michelle have to move to Dallas or he has to move to Seattle....because he doesn't want to spend the second half of his life apart from them the way they had to spend the first half. So, it is the beginning of a new life for my sister. As for Children's Home Society; they could have reached Christopher at any time and simply chose not to. I am wondering how many other people have been exploited by them? I wonder about their mind-set.

Wed, 26 Jun 2002 10:56:13 -0700

From: "Ehle, Mary R"

To: Linda Callens

Hi Sis; I... told Chris you were hot under the collar about CHS and writing an article about us. Here's his reply:

*"I'm going to have to side with Linda on this, Mom. CHS needs to have their hands slapped for the complete absence of care for individuals they have displayed. They have demonstrated very clearly to me that their only concern is the conduct and closing of adoptions procedures for profit. I fully support Linda and her desire to get this information out there. Perhaps the story will save some other unsuspecting, and very hopeful parent or adoptee from putting their faith blindly into the hands of an organization that has no vested interest in reunification, only the profit of separation."*

The moral of this story? No matter how hard our enemies, such as CHS, try to hinder the search and reunion phenomenon, they cannot succeed, because sometimes, love does conquer all.

*Linda Ehle Callens & Mary Ehle*

# Miracles WAITING TO Happen by Judi Gilford

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I recently kissed my oldest son goodbye at the airport. He was returning home to Baton Rouge. We had tears in our eyes. Instantly I remembered the last time I had kissed him goodbye. It was May of 1963 and I had just signed the papers relinquishing him for adoption - he was three months old. I was a 15 year old runaway being returned to California and having to leave my son behind. They left us alone in a dreary and cold store room. I pulled my chair over to a window where the morning sun was streaming in and looked at my chubby, happy baby with golden blonde hair and the bluest eyes. Tears streamed down my cheeks; tears of guilt, grief, sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness. My heart was broken. It was the darkest day of my life.

People in my life told me to forget it and get on with my life. It was impossible to do so and they won't talk to you about it; the subject is taboo. I buried those tragic memories so deep only years of counseling, coaching, writing, and reading finally enabled me to face the fact that I needed to find my son. I needed to find him because I loved him and I owed him an identity. It was a gift only a natural parent could give. He didn't have to accept the gift, but I had to offer it.

I got stronger in my resolve and one day stepped out on that proverbial limb. I found that God was waiting to build me a tree house. The search took a year. When I would get discouraged and wanted to quit, there were angels all along my path to offer support. When I just did the footwork, God would make me a miracle, so that became my motto: "I'm just doing the footwork and leaving it in God's good hands." I'd turn over one more rock, tackle one more obstacle until I remembered again, no matter what happened, I couldn't give up on my son or myself.

One day I had a message from a searcher in Louisiana saying, "I think I can help you." A week later I had my son's adopted name, Gary, and though I couldn't get a phone listing for him, I found one for his adoptive parents. His adoptive mother answered. I was terrified and speechless but God built me another tree house and in a few minutes I had connected with that wonderful, loving woman who told me Gary was happy and healthy with a good career and a family of his own. I told her I had a million questions

and I would love to know him and his family but having talked to her had lifted the huge burden from my heart that I had been carrying for 39 years. I sent off a package for him, saying again that I was doing the footwork and trusting that God would know what should happen next.

Gary called on Mother's Day. He told me he had spent his life looking at other people's albums for someone who looked like him. When he saw my picture, nobody had to tell him I was his mother. We cried. An hour and a half flew by like a few minutes. Soon there were pictures and a letter. "Mom, today my world changed. When I first learned that you were searching for me, I was completely shocked, when I spoke to you this evening, I knew ... once and for all, that you are my mother. Words cannot describe what my heart feels now. There is so much more to 'motherly love' than most people understand. For all my life, I have had an emptiness in my heart that was impossible to fill. The missing piece was something I did not understand; I didn't even know it existed. When you spoke those words to me this evening, 'Gary, I love you,' the emptiness was gone..."

We met in person at the airport. What a precious feeling to hold him so close to me, to look into his eyes, to see his beautiful smile. A dream I never allowed myself for 39 years. We spent a week talking and playing, laughing and crying, getting to know, love and enjoy each other. We made plans for our future.

So I stood at the airport with tears streaming down my cheeks remembering all this. But this time they were tears of gratitude and thanksgiving, of hope and joy and inspiration. My heart was wide open. It was the happiest day of my life.

You may wonder why I would reveal all this. I did it to say that God is waiting to help you be the person you always wanted to be. Don't ever believe that dreams don't come true or that you don't deserve to make them come true for you. You never know whose life you are blessing when you step out in faith. I set out to give Gary a gift and in return God gave me the greatest gift of prosperity I have ever received. Our affirmation, "Divine Love through me blesses and multiplies..." is much bigger than our monthly tithe!

Come see me in my tree house, I live there full-time now.

# Remembering Sheila Allen

Sheila Allen died suddenly in her home on June 26th, 2002. Sheila was a member of Search-Finders for over 10 years. She was a wonderful staff member who over the years held positions of secretary, greeter, membership chairperson and support group leader. She had a warm smile and a huge heart. She was always interested in the other per-



son. We have especially fond memories of being with Sheila on the picket line with Search-Finder's outside of the San Jose Records Office carrying a sign asking for



open records. Sheila was a birthmother who had relinquished a son to adoption and then had been reunited with him. She also had two other sons and a daughter who will miss her terribly.

Many Search-Finders were in attendance at Sheila's funeral, where they learned she had requested that any donations in her memory go to Search-Finders. Even though she is gone, thanks to Sheila, donations in her name will help us carry on.

## SEARCH-FINDERS BROKEN SEALS 2002

Sharon Faseer, Adoptee, found her mother and full brother in Sacramento, January 14th

Dana Ellingen, Adoptee, found his mother and sister in Palo Alto, January 8th

Jeannie Jordon, Adoptee, found her mother in Concord, March 8th

Monica Escobar, Significant Other, found father in San Francisco, April 24th

Cecile Lusby, Birthmother, found her son in Pennsylvania, April 29th

Judi Gilford, Birthmother, found her son in Louisiana, April 29th

Kirk Allen, Adoptee, found his mother in Oakland, May 7th

Carla Danella, Adoptee, found her mother on the East Coast, June 6th

Mary Ehle, Birthmother, and her Birthson, Christopher Gunderson found each other, June 22nd

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