

THE SEARCH FOR A GRANDMOTHER

by Shari McAdams

I first learned that my mother was adopted when I was 13 years old. When she revealed this information to myself and my next oldest sister, I was surprised but it didn't really bother me significantly at the time. After all, when you're 13, life is pretty much centered around you. But after a while, I started realizing that the people who I had always considered to be my maternal grandparents were not really and I started wondering about who my birth grandparents might be. Not that I loved my grandparents any less, but the curiosity was still there. Whenever I asked my mom about any details, she never wanted to talk about it much, but she did know that her mother was a young unwed mother and had given her up for adoption. This seemed to be upsetting to her so I didn't press the issue.

Once I was married and became a young mother myself, I thought about it more and more and decided that I wanted to see if I could find the identify of my grandmother. My mother's birth certificate at adoption stated that she had been born in Kansas City, Missouri. Therefore, I looked into the adoption laws in that state and found that all adoption records were closed files. Since I had no experience in genealogy research, I didn't know where to go from there. In addition to this, add in working full-time, raising 2 children, running a household, etc. the task seemed overwhelming and was put on hold for the time being.

Fast forward 35 years – my children were grown and on their own and I had retired from my job. Therefore, I decided to join the Foothills Genealogy Society and try to learn how to go about this task. After a couple of years of attending meetings I felt like I had really learned a lot from this group, but still felt like a beginner and decided to start with looking into my father's family first since I had a fair amount of information to start with. This turned out to be an exciting experience and I was hooked! So last summer I took a deep breath and decided I was ready to tackle this.

My mother was now deceased and I hoped this might make the information a little easier to obtain. I sat at my computer and started thinking about how to start, so I entered "Adoption agencies in Kansas City, Missouri in 1924" (the year my mother was born). To my delight there was an abundance of information available. As it turns out, Kansas City was considered "the baby hub" of the United States. Information from one article stated "parents from all over the United States used to pack their pregnant, unwed daughters onto the train and send them to Kansas City... "It also stated that "Kansas City, Mo had devised a simplified court adoption system that gained a nation-wide reputation for its high standards, fine work, and success in the child placement field." After doing more digging, I found which court handled the adoptions at that time and also that the law had changed somewhat and would now allow descendants of deceased adoptees to request and receive information. This gave me hope that I might actually achieve my goal. But I had to get past my biggest obstacle and that was A NAME. I had no idea what my mother's birth name was. So I kept going.

I found a blog that another adoptee who was born in Kansas City had written about her search for her mother and she listed the name and email address of a man in Kansas City who had a lot of information and he also had a birth index of all the babies born in Kansas City between 1915 and 1988. I wrote him an email requesting the names of all the female Caucasian babies born on my mother's birthday and tried not to have too high of expectations. To my surprise, he answered my email within an hour with a list of 5 names. None of the names rang any bells with me, so I contacted all of my sisters (I have 5) to see if anything sounded familiar to them and 2 of my younger sisters recalled that one of the last names had been mentioned to them by mom as what she thought was her birth surname. I'm over the hump!!

I then wrote a letter to the Circuit Court requesting information and after providing them with several documents to prove my identity and relationship to my mother, they opened her file and provided me with my grandmother's name and birthdate. Then it was on to Ancestry and have since found a lot of information about her and her family. She married about a year after having my mom and it appears her early life was quite difficult. She had a daughter one week before her father died and then her mother died 3 months later. Then she and her husband also took in her youngest brother in addition to having a new baby. It also appears that her marriage was not a happy one since shortly after having a son two years later her marriage ended in divorce. It seems like this would have been quite difficult for a woman back then with three children to support, especially with both of her parents gone. However, she did remarry a few years later and apparently had a much happier life with her second husband.

So now, I have the basics to do more genealogy research on this side of the family. But, I still have an even bigger challenge in front of me and that is to find the identity of my grandfather. However, I have a few clues and have sent in a DNA sample to Ancestry and hopefully this will provide me with additional clues. So, stay tuned ... As all of you know a genealogist's job is never done.