



BIRTH PARENT NEWSLETTER

Spring 2016



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FEATURE STORY

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PLUS

The latest updates,
encouragement, events,
and more!

CHANGING HEARTS. SAVING LIVES. BUILDING FAMILIES. RESTORING HOPE.



and its programs



Mission:

To honor the sanctity of human life by assisting clients in life-affirming decisions with the love and compassion of Christ.

Vision:

Our vision is to one day reach all abortion-minded and abortion-vulnerable individuals throughout Minnesota with comprehensive pregnancy-related services and the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Values:

We believe that God is the author of life and has a plan for each life, therefore, we do not provide or refer for abortions.

We seek to empower our clients in their decision-making process by offering information about all pregnancy-related options. This includes medically accurate information about abortion, a realistic and thorough examination of parenting and adoption, and access to ultrasound.

We are committed to offering support to those facing unplanned pregnancy or struggling with a past abortion experience without judgment or condemnation.

We are committed to assisting our clients in choosing between adoption and parenting without bias toward either option.

EST. 1973

MINNEAPOLIS

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2900 University Ave SE
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Richfield, MN 55423
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THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN ADOPTION

From the Director of Social Services

When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write the ending.

~ Brene' Brown

Brene' Brown, author and research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, has written much on the power of vulnerability and storytelling. Her writings and her Ted Talks encourage people to tell their story even when it's hard and even when others may not understand. This resonates with me as I think of all of you and your unique stories of adoption.

Within the realm of social media, it is the power of stories that connect us. We all love a vulnerable, heartfelt story that inspires us or challenges us or gets to the core of our humanity. In adoption, we often hear only the sensationalized stories, or the adoptive family's story of adopting and not the story of amazing love of a birth parent that is essential to building an adoptive family.

At New Life, we recognize that behind every adoptive family, there is a birth parent who was vulnerable and who put the needs of their child before their own to make a difficult choice for the sake of their child. At New Life, we recognize that even in 2016, a birth parent's story is often misunderstood, and it takes great courage for a birth parent to tell their story, and we don't take this lightly. But as Brene' Brown says in her most recent book, *Rising Strong*: "When we decide to own our stories and live our truth, we bring our light to the darkness."

At New Life, we also recognize that birth parents need ongoing support at times throughout their adoption journey. We offer support for you regardless of how long it has been since you made an adoption plan. We can help you navigate bumps in the road with the adoptive family, help you find national adoption resources, help you find adoption competent therapists in your area, or connect you with other birth parents.

Adoption and openness in adoption continues to change, especially in how it plays out with the help of technology. But our goals in adoption remain the same – that some level of openness in adoption is a positive thing, and openness in adoption is about building and maintaining a relationship for the sake of the child. For some of you, open adoption was not an option at the time of placement. Matt's story (pg. 3) illustrates how openness has changed and how to open an adoption when an adoption started with secrecy. Whether your adoption started with some openness or not, we are here to help you navigate your adoption relationships as things change in your life and the life of your child and their adoptive family over the years.

As you read this newsletter, I hope you see a glimpse of the amazing work God continues to do in and through the adoption program at New Life Family Services!

Jennifer K. Patrick, LICSW
Director of Social Services

P.S. Be sure to RSVP for our Annual Birth Mother Dinner on May 6th (details on pg. 6). This is a special evening designed just for you!

RECOMMENDED ADOPTION RESOURCES

Articles, books, websites, and more



LOCAL RESOURCES

MN ADOPT HELP Line

MN ADOPT provides services to support all members of adoption relationships. The HELP phone line is an excellent resource for birth parents and adoptive parents who are looking for resources including therapists who understand adoption.
www.mnadopt.org • 612-746-5137

ADOPTION OPTION (AOCM)

Adoption Option offers scholarships for higher education to applicants who have made and adoption plan and wish to pursue secondary and higher education. Visit their website for application guidelines.
www.adoptionoptionmn.org

NATIONAL RESOURCES

BRAVELOVE

New Life is proud to be a partner agency of BraveLove, a non-profit pro-adoption movement that seeks to change the perception of adoption through honest, informative, and hopeful communication that conveys the heroism and bravery of birth moms. Read BraveLove’s blog for encouragement in your own journey.
www.bravelove.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION

The National Council for Adoption’s mission is to meet the diverse needs of children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and all those touched by adoption through global advocacy, education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. The National Council for Adoption provides a resource list for birth parents to connect with other birth parents on a national level.
www.adoptioncouncil.org

ADOPTION RESEARCH

THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE (DAI)

The Donaldson Adoption Institute recently launched an initiative called “Let’s Adopt Reform” aimed at raising awareness about adoption, inspiring solidarity within the adoption community and advocating for evidence-based policy changes. Join the conversation and track their efforts online.
www.adoptioninstitute.org

ADOPTION STUDY OPPORTUNITY: BIRTH PARENTS NEEDED FOR ADOPTION RESEARCH

University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work researchers are currently seeking birth parents to complete a survey concerning their experiences with relinquishing a child for adoption. This input is very important as it will help to identify gaps in existing practices and to develop better approaches to helping birth parents through the decision process. The survey is expected to take approximately 20-25 minutes and can be accessed online at <http://tinyurl.com/AdoptionOptionsSurvey>.

Survey participants must be 18 years of age or older and they must have relinquished a child for adoption in the United States during the last 25 years (after 1989).

Participants will be entered into a drawing to win one of six \$100 Visa gift cards!

RECOMMEND A RESOURCE

Do you have a favorite book or resource that has helped you in your adoption journey? Share your favorite adoption resource with us and we will include a few of your favorite resources in our next newsletter. Email your resources to adoption@nlfs.org.

DO YOU SHOP AMAZON.COM?

When you sign up for Amazon Smile, and select New Life Family Services as your non-profit of choice, a portion of your Amazon purchases will benefit New Life.





MEET MATT

A REUNION STORY

Matt was adopted through New Life Family Services in 1982. At that time, many adoptions were closed adoptions, in which little or no contact happened between the birth parents and adoptive family, as was the case for Matt's adoption.

However the world of adoption has dramatically changed since then, and most adoptions at New Life today contain some level of openness with regular contact happening between birth parents and adoptive families. A few years ago, Matt's birth mother reached out to us and with the help of our Post-Adoption Department, Matt met his birth mother for the first time. This is their story.

More than 3 Decades of Curiosity

When Nancy placed her son Matt for adoption at the age of 18, it may have technically been a closed adoption through New Life Family Services, but Nancy said she was never closed-off to talking about Matt.

"He was never a secret. Everybody who knew me, knew of Matt. I've thought about him every day for 33 years," said Nancy.

Nancy chose adoption because she wanted to give her son the opportunities she knew she couldn't provide for him. But Nancy was always curious about him.

"I hoped he'd reach out to me when he became of age. Several times I started to fill out the paperwork to contact him. But the fear of not knowing if he wanted to meet me prevented that," said Nancy.

Opening a Closed Adoption

Matt always knew he was adopted. His adoptive parents, Herb and Jan Eberhardt told him his birth mother was 18 when she had him, and that he was placed for adoption out of love.

"My parents always told me I was loved by my birth parents. I never really questioned why I was placed for adoption, my birth mom wanted the best for me and through adoption that is how she felt she could give me the best," said Matt.

"We shared that he had a mother who loved him, and that it took a lot of guts for her to place him for adoption," said

Jan Eberhardt.

Matt's parents told him if he ever wanted to get in contact with his birth parents or their extended family, they would help him do that. But Matt chose not to take that step in opening the adoption, until he heard his birth mom wanted to make contact.

"I was always a little bit curious about my birth parents, but not to the point where I had burning questions. When I found out my birth mother was trying to get ahold of me, then the questions really started coming," said Matt.

"I knew I was placed for adoption out of love. My birth mom wanted the best for me and through adoption, that is how she felt she could give me the best."

Starting a Relationship

"The adoption staff at New Life helped us navigate the process of reunion and suggested starting with letters as a way to break the ice. My birth mother reached out first with a letter to me," said Matt.

"With great trepidation I wrote the letter, probably 10 times. Pouring over every single word, wondering how he might interpret it. The great unknown was painful," said Nancy. "When I received his response back it was the most

joyful, heartwarming thing I could hope for.”

“God’s timing was evident to me through the whole process. It was the right time for Nancy and the right time for me. I had gotten married two years prior to getting her letter and we had recently discovered we were expecting our first child. Having the opportunity to reconnect with my birth family as we were preparing to grow our own family felt right,” said Matt.

Matt and Nancy exchanged letters for a few weeks, then exchanged phone numbers, and within



six weeks, they were scheduling a face-to-face meeting. Nancy lived in Alaska, but planned a trip to Minnesota for the holidays to see her extended family and to meet Matt for the first time.

“It was amazing how quickly it happened,” said Nancy.

“I was definitely nervous and I think she was too. I arrived first and knew it was her as soon as she came around the corner because we look very similar. We talked for about two hours that day and shared pictures with each other from our lives,” said Matt.

“It’s been a gift I didn’t think I was deserving of, it’s exceeded all of my expectations,” said Nancy. “My wildest dreams came true. He ended up with these fantastic parents. And he’s a happy, healthy, fantastic, smart and kind man, everything you could ever dream.”

Matt and his wife, Kelly were invited to meet Nancy’s parents (Matt’s birth grandparents) just days later. And soon Matt realized he was a part of an extended family he never knew before.

“When I visited (my birth grandparents’) home, I found a picture of me on their fridge taken when I was one-month-old. My birth grandmother told me it had been there since the



day they took it, 31 years prior. It was impacting to me to be part of a family, but never having met them before,” said Matt.

“My wildest dreams came true. He ended up with these fantastic parents. And he’s a happy, healthy, fantastic, smart, and kind man, everything you could ever dream.”

A New Love for Logan

At the same time Matt’s birth family was growing, so was his immediate family. Matt and his wife, Kelly welcomed a baby boy, Logan Tyler into the world, with unexplainable red hair.

“I was able to figure out that my son’s red hair comes from my birth mother’s father,” said Matt.

“Tyler was the middle name I gave Matt when he was born. I was blown away when they told me they gave Logan that middle name,” said Nancy.

Being a part of Matt, Kelly and Logan’s life gave Nancy and her husband a joy unlike anything they knew before. So they made the life-changing decision to move from Alaska to Minnesota.

Moving to be Closer to Family

“We see each other as often as possible, probably once or twice a month. I could never have expected or hoped that things would turn out this perfectly. I am the happiest I’ve been in my life and this relationship is the main reason for it,” said Nancy.

“Nancy is adding to my life and my family’s life. The coolest thing is having her be a part of my son’s life and for him to have another grandparent,” said Matt.

Matt says his parents Herb and Jan have been so supportive and welcoming of Nancy, who doesn’t go by the name “Grandma,” but rather the nickname “Grancy.”

“I relish the role as Grancy,

THINKING OF SEARCHING?

Are you interested in reuniting with your birth child(ren)? Have you lost contact with the adoptive family? Do you want to know if you have received any correspondence from the adoptive family over the years? Here is an easy step by step description of how to begin the process of reconnecting or reuniting.

Step One:

Contact our Post Adoption Social Worker by calling 612-746-5670 or emailing adoption@nlfs.org. We will ask you to tell us a little bit about your situation and what you are looking for.

Step Two:

If you are ready to proceed in reconnecting or reuniting, we will send you a post adoption application to complete and return to us. You will need to sign the application in the presence of a notary. You can find notaries at your local bank or you can schedule a time to visit one of our offices. Return the application to our Post Adoption Social Worker.

Step Three:

Once we receive your application, we will contact you at your preferred phone number or email address to review the next steps.

Step Four:

We will proceed with searching, or with the requested service, and keep you updated throughout the process. It is hard to predict what this process will bring, and it is just as hard to predict how long it will take. We encourage you to be patient during this time and we will do everything we can to support you!

What to Expect:

It is important to realize that the process of searching for your birth child can bring different results. Some searches result in an exciting and long-awaited reunion, but not all do. Take time to prepare yourself for any outcome.

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and I am having more fun than I should,” said Nancy.

Matt’s adoptive parents Jan and Herb Eberhardt have been welcoming to Nancy throughout the whole process.

“It’s been really neat. We got to meet her and see what her side of the story was. I always told her that I prayed for her on special dates like his birthday,” said Jan.

“Jan and Herb wound up being the perfect people to raise him. They’ve been wonderful to me and my family. They gave him so many opportunities that I could never have dreamed of,” said Nancy.

“Nancy has been incredibly respectful of my life and of my adoptive parents and not wanting to intrude. I haven’t seen it as intruding at all,” said Matt.

Advice for Birth Mothers

For birth mothers who worry about reaching out to their birth children, Nancy and Matt both agree, seeking a relationship was worth it. “Even if things had gone the other way, the not knowing is the worst part. The best thing you can do is to reach out and to know you’ve tried to make contact. Knowing anything is better than knowing nothing,” said Nancy.

“If you have any burning questions, I would encourage you to pursue them, otherwise they will always be there,” Matt says. He suggests allowing the introduction to happen at a natural pace. “Reach out and be patient in the process. Don’t push too hard, too quickly. And on the other side, don’t worry if you don’t get a response right away,” said Matt.

“It’s been an amazing journey,” said Nancy.



STAY IN TOUCH!

Even if you correspond with the adoptive family directly, it is still important to keep current contact information on file with us.

We would love to communicate by email, but having a current phone number and address on file is also a good idea. Here's why:

- Sometimes an adoptive family reaches out to us if they can't get ahold of you.
- If you are working through a change in your relationship with the adoptive family, sometimes it is helpful to talk it through with us or someone else who has been there.
- We can provide you with resources that would be helpful to your journey.
- We are expanding our post adoption services to better capture what birth parents and adoptive families are interested in. Hearing from you helps us know what direction to go in meeting your needs.

16th annual birth mother dinner

A SPECIAL EVENING FOR BIRTH MOTHERS

Every year, New Life Family Services hosts a Birth Mother Dinner the Friday before Mother's Day to honor those who have made a difficult, loving, and courageous adoption decision. This special evening will encourage you and uplift you as we reflect together on the quiet strength you carry inside every day from the initial decision to place your child(ren) for adoption, the courage to follow through with the decision, and the grace to continue on in your journey as you trust another family to raise your birth child(ren). This year's theme is "No Matter How Far." Our guest speaker, Sharon, will share her exceptional story of choosing to place her daughter for adoption in 1958, reuniting with her birth daughter 37 years later, and the relationship she now has with her birth daughter, Kathy. Kathy will also share her story of being adopted and how God had His hand in it all.

All birth mothers are welcome to attend regardless of the agency they placed with. Birth Mothers attend for free. Guests of birth mothers are kindly asked to pay \$5 for themselves.



The Pregnancy Support Social Workers at New Life Family Services (L to R: Talia, Caitlin, Emma, Britta, Amanda, and Rebecca) are honored to host the Birth Mother Dinner as part of New Life's ongoing support for birth mothers.

FRIDAY, MAY 6, 2016

6:00 P.M. Registration

6:30 P.M. Dinner & Program

CALVARY CHURCH

2120 Lexington Ave. N.,
Roseville, MN 55113

RSVP: www.nlfs.org

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING



"I attend the Birth Mother Dinner as a way to reconnect with my adoption story. Since the birth of our daughter, I have invited the adoptive mom I placed with and my mother as my guests to the dinner. This is a time for the three of us to be able to connect as mothers without the rest of the family. The dinner is a time to enjoy the company of women that understand the bittersweet pain of adoption. **I look forward to it every year as a way to pamper myself and my heart around the time of year that has the potential to be very difficult.**"

-Inga, Birth Mother

"Our daughter's birth mother has graciously invited me to attend this event every year. It is a privilege to celebrate with her what God has done through her. **The dinner gives me the chance to reflect on the adoption journey of our daughter's birth family (as well as my own) and to see the different ways the Lord has worked in the lives of others.** As I leave each year, I do so with a thankful heart. I have seen firsthand how the evening benefits the birth mother in my life. She shares a wonderful evening with her guests. She is able to connect with others who truly understand this particular and major life-event. She is free to be herself when talking about her baby. She sometimes cries and always laughs. She has fun, and makes new friends. I would love to see more adoptive moms encourage birth mothers in their lives to attend."

-Kathy, Adoptive Mother

"The Birth Mother Dinner is a sweet, safe place where **I am able to fully celebrate God's work in the life of my daughter, my granddaughter, and my granddaughter's adoptive mother.** Blessings are found in listening and relating to the stories shared throughout the evening, knowing those who are seated at the dinner table with us understand a strange mix of grief and profound joy in my heart. The theme, the music, the speaker, the conversations, the reflection time, the blessing of those who understand, and the environment of grace and professionalism all bring a measure of healing to my heart each year."

-Diane, Birth Grandmother



"I have been fortunate enough to attend the Birth Mother's Dinner that New Life hosts for the last three years. Placing my child for adoption was the hardest decision I have made, but it has been very fruitful. **My daughter and her mom have attended with me and our relationship has been enriched because of this dinner.** Thanks to New Life for supporting many birth moms in the Twin Cities."

- Victoria, Birth Mother



and its programs



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www.nlfs.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birth Mother Dinner

Friday, May 6

Calvary Church, Roseville, MN

Theme: No Matter How Far

Registration at 6:00 p.m.

Dinner & Program at 6:30 p.m.

All birth mothers are invited to attend and encouraged to bring a guest. Birth mothers attend for free; guests are asked to pay \$5 each to cover the cost of the meal.

More details at www.nlfs.org.



Walk & Run for Life

Rochester: Saturday, June 18th

Metro: Saturday, June 25th

This family-friendly event includes a 5k Fun Run, Kid's Race, 2 mile walk, and an optional lunch.



Banquet & Silent Auction

Rochester: Thursday, October 27

Metro: Friday, October 28

Keynote Speaker: Claire Culwell

Registration at 6:00 p.m.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SHARE YOUR STORY

Ready to share your adoption story with others?



Our Adoption Unit is looking for birth parents who are willing to share their adoption stories. Your story is unique and may be just the encouragement another person needs. If you are interested in sharing your adoption story, consider participating in our **storytelling day on Sunday, May 22nd**.

One hour sessions are being scheduled on May 22nd to include a photography session (this time could include the adoptive family and your birth child as well) followed by video interviews to capture your story.

New Life Family Services will be using these story for a variety of purposes ranging from a printed articles to social media or at an event. We also have a variety of opportunities beyond the storytelling day. Your story will encourage others facing similar circumstances and inform the community about what we do.

Interested?

Contact Marie, Director of Marketing, at anderson.marie@nlfs.org.

CONNECT WITH US:



vimeo

POST ADOPTION CONTACT

Rebecca Anfinrud
anfinrud.rebecca@nlfs.org
(612) 746-5670



REBECCA ANFINRUD

POST ADOPTION & ADMINISTRATIVE SOCIAL WORKER

Rebecca supports birth parents and adoptive families with all post adoption-related needs. In addition, she provides a variety of administrative support to the Adoption Unit. She is your first point of contact for all post adoption-related needs.

