

**The Search for My Mother**  
**Bethany Wild, New York City**

*Adopted at birth, Bethany Wild's search for her birth mother led her on a parallel journey to discover more about herself.*

*Let the flowers of the Law  
Bloom with beauty and purity  
Throughout this land of America  
— SGI President Ikeda, Feb. 27, 1990*

When I read this poem eight years ago in President Ikeda's "clear mirror" guidance to the women's division, I thought it was very nice. I didn't feel that it had much to do with me, though, because I had never thought of myself as flowerlike in any way. In fact, I felt that I was more like a freight train or a jet — dynamic and driving — pushing toward one goal at a time.

But what I've discovered recently is that my life has been opening just like a flower, unfolding in ways that I never expected.

I was adopted as an infant and had a wonderful family. My parents even gave me an extra birthday. It was Nov. 18, and they called it my family birthday. It was the day that we celebrated their bringing me home from the hospital.

When I started my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism 11 years ago, I began to make inquiries to the adoption agency about my birth name and family. The agency said that I was not permitted to have any identifying information because neither birth parent had been searching for me. I sent in a couple of requests after that but received no further information.

It bothered me sometimes that I was not allowed to uncover these secret facts about my own life. But I accepted it and continued to practice and move forward.

I often found myself chanting for my birth mother's happiness (especially around my birthday). I wondered if she wondered about me. I wondered if she were healthy. I wanted to tell her what a great family I had. (Even though my adoptive parents are deceased, I still feel very close to them.)

Then, last year I tried once more to find her. I made the determination to really work on my life and started seriously looking for my fundamental flaws and how to challenge them. The main guidance that helped me persevere is a remark that SGI President Ikeda once made about how opening the heavy, groaning door to your own life is more difficult than understanding all the mysteries of the universe.

I had just been through what seemed like a storm of difficulties with my career in music and with personal relationships. I think that by directly confronting difficulties and making efforts to practice Buddhism correctly, I was starting to transform some of my deep life tendencies: To reject and be rejected...to cut off and be cut off...to not trust or be trusted. All in all, I was on a campaign to "work on my own life," as SGI-USA Women's Division Leader Wendy Clark had once advised me to do.

I started making phone calls again to the adoption agency. This time, I was directed to a woman named Marilyn, who had lots of success with adoption searches. (In my prior attempts to find my birth mother, I never found anyone who could help me — but this time my determination was stronger and more expansive than before, and my environment changed in response to my inner change.)

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The minute I spoke with Marilyn, I knew something was going to be different. She was wise and caring, and she clearly explained the process. We would petition the court to appoint Marilyn as confidential intermediary, and it would be her job to try to locate and talk with my birth mother. That was in August 1997.

On Dec. 10, 1997, five days before I married my husband, I received a phone call from Marilyn. She had found and spoken with my birth mother, who had kept my birth a secret all her life. I was told that she had been extremely shaken by the news that I was trying to make contact.

I remember that day so well. It was a very cold and rainy afternoon. I was getting ready for a performance with the Sunrise Chorus and was supposed to be getting dressed, but instead I kept pacing around in my bathrobe full of tears and deep sighs, stunned. My birth mother and I were suddenly connected and aware of each other for the first time since birth. Marilyn wouldn't tell me where my birth mother lived or what her name was, but she said that she could hear similarities in our voices. I learned that my mother had a brother, a sister-in-law, nieces and a nephew — and that she never had any other children. At this point, she hadn't decided if she wanted to have a relationship with me, but at least she was interested in learning more about me.

The next day, I sent her some photographs and a letter through Marilyn. I could hardly believe I was getting the chance to tell her things that I had wanted to say my whole life: That I thought she had done the right thing. That my family who adopted me was warm and wonderful and loving. And that I was so appreciative to her for giving me the treasure of life.

I chanted a lot for her to be supported by her family and protected from any negative feelings. At Christmas, I received (through Marilyn) an unsigned card from her. It was a picture of two red birds on a tree branch overlooking a snow-covered barn. It was the first tangible item I ever received from her. I cherished it, put it on my altar and sent her daimoku.

On Jan. 1 this year, I got my first e-mail from her, and we began e-mailing back and forth to each other almost daily.

I remember how I felt when she sent me a photo of herself. I was overwhelmed by how much I look like her. I also thought: "Gee, she is amazingly young looking. I've got a great future!"

She explained to me that she had gone away to a home for unwed mothers when she was in her early 20s. There, all alone, she delivered a baby girl, named her Denise, held her for a moment and said good-bye, putting the birth behind her as if it had never happened. She had called home after the delivery, but her mother had someone over at the time and couldn't talk. I cried when I heard that — how alone she must have felt.

As we strengthened our new relationship, she decided to tell her brother and his family about me. It took so much courage for her to face all the questions and reactions of her family, but she did it. I thought of how many baby showers she had attended and how much celebrating there probably had been at each of her friends' births. And I thought of it in contrast to the shrouded situation she had to endure with her own birth experience.

I wondered how many times people had asked her why she didn't have any children. Or said things like "You can't imagine how it feels to have a baby."

As we continued to write, we began making plans for our reunion. I was scheduled to attend a chorus conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, and she and her husband arranged to stay in a condo in Fort Lauderdale at the same time. It was early in May, around Mother's Day.

I sat there on the runway at Miami International Airport with my palms sweaty and my

heart pounding as I waited for the captain to turn off the seat-belt sign. I was about to meet my mother for the first time.

At the gate, I saw a woman dressed in a green outfit like the one my mother said she would be wearing. My first words to her were “Are you my mom?”

Later in the car, I kept touching her hair saying, “Oh, so that’s where I got my baby fine hair!” We spent three days together and had a magical time connecting and just being together. It felt very natural — like I already knew her. We walked on the beach, and I asked her lots of questions. We shared our story with people in restaurants, and they were touched.

When it was time for me to go to the chorus conference, my mother and her husband drove me to the FNCC. We got there early, and I gave them a short tour and even had a chance to introduce them to Wendy Clark. In my wildest dreams, I would never have imagined that this could happen...my mom, her husband and I sitting in front of Toda Lake...my mom and I talking about treasures of the heart, walking past the swimming pool...it was miraculous!

I recently told my mom that I was working on my experience. In an e-mail, she wrote: “You really got me thinking. Your ‘experience’ is also my experience. You asked once how I felt when I heard the news about you? Well, to be honest, I didn’t like it. I almost had myself believing that it never happened. I was pretty sick for a while. Can’t understand now how I carried on with my life without everyone knowing that something was wrong. Maybe I should have been an actress. Now I think you are the best thing that has happened in my life. And learning from you, I am searching DEEP inside trying to make sense of my life.... I like the [concept of] human revolution that you talked about. That really makes sense.... I hope we will become ‘the happiest women ever.’ With your help, maybe we will be. Thank you for being in my life now.”

SGI President Ikeda said in volume 4 of *The New Human Revolution*, in the chapter titled “Rissho Ankoku,” that the surest way to bring peace to the land and transform society is to establish the truth in one’s own heart. Is it possible that I actually removed some lifelong barriers to the truth in my heart with this practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism? Is this the kosen-rufu of my life? I feel so much more happy and peaceful and whole.

With this wonderful benefit, I’ve opened an area in both my mom’s life and my own that had been closed for many years. As a result, I find myself reforming some deeply entrenched false beliefs about myself. I’ve found new confidence in myself and in my practice and really believe that I will make great dreams come true. In President Ikeda’s poem “To My Beloved Young American Friends,” he says: “Create and complete / for yourself and with others / wondrous lives / of eternity, happiness, true self and purity.”

This wonderful benefit — this reunion with my birth mother — has helped me get closer to my true self and to realize that with sincere prayer and honest efforts, I can develop beautiful, genuine and heartfelt bonds of trust and friendship with many other people. Up until now, I never honestly thought I could accomplish this.

I am more hopeful than ever. My faith and understanding of this Buddhism is deepening, my trust in the Gohonzon and this practice feels brand new, and I’m determined to make all my dreams come true.

I feel my life is becoming truly wondrous, opening beautifully, splendidly and petal by petal like a blossoming flower.

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