

## **Author's Note**

This selection from *M/OTHER* features found and appropriated text from official forms and documents related to the adoption process and the request for information about one's birth parents, entries in my baby book by my parents, and quotes from *Let's Talk with Adoptive Parents: A Supplement to ALL ABOUT YOU—An Adopted Child's Memory Book* by Marion A. MacLeod, published by The C.R. Gibson Company, Norwalk, CT, 1959.

## Welcome to You

*August 2021*

it reads, the box jewelry-sized,  
something precious, a rare thing,  
a treasure to adorn a neck or wrist.  
Inside, a booklet of instructions and  
an empty plastic vial awaiting my  
saliva. I read the directions, drool  
myself into the vial to the full mark,  
close it, release blue stabilizing fluid  
as I snap the cap closed, shake to mix  
well, the essence of me, all my genetic  
ancestors, invisible and unknown, all  
my songs and likes, tastes and talents,  
what angers and delights me, what may  
kill me in time, the gifts I was given  
to give away, to make myself empty.  
I seal the vial in a plastic pouch. I  
imagine a womb I occupied a half  
century ago, then left behind, a space  
in a woman whose hands I never felt,  
her voice a muffled dream, my form  
an absence, our parting marked by a  
scar in her womb, my navel the last  
vestige of her, the route back to her  
severed long ago. Inside the box,  
another empty box, ready to receive  
its cargo, millions of years of human  
migration and intermingling, love  
and separation, trauma and triumph,  
swimming in a few drops of mucus  
and acid, an infinite ocean of history,  
crashing out of the shell of me, story-  
less, ahistorical, colored by a palette  
of my choice on a wide, blank canvas,  
a field in which what was planted and  
nurtured, grew. I have absorbed the best  
of strangers who became mom and dad  
through the signing of papers and waiting,  
in the getting of me, the lifting and holding,  
the bringing home. I deliver the box into  
the hands of strangers who will pull back  
the veil, cut the amniotic sac surrounding  
my most elemental being, a mystery deeper

than knowing, a nowhere darker than myth.  
I begin my vigil for a dawn I have never  
seen in this most lightless night to illuminate  
a past I have conjured all my life, for the oldest  
music of my being to resonate out of centrifuges,  
petri dishes, data analyzed from crunched numbers.  
I wait for the first amber beam of realization  
to break across my ignorance, to rise and greet  
and warm my smiling face, for the birdsong of  
knowledge to herald my existence into a new day.

**Matt Hohner**

## **Double Helix**

Four letters arranged through infinite chance,  
random probability, dumb luck, organized by  
chaos and choice, germination to termination,  
birth and life, the balance in between. What  
thread, what yarn weaves my unspoken story?  
What 23-runged ladder spirals out of my dim  
adoptive past, a chain undone by a lost link?  
Science translates the CGAT of me, mapping  
movement through continents and dynasties,  
gone footprints tracked across my mitochondria,  
how a single body and mind emerged from egg  
and sperm, two chromosomal halves fused into  
one creature, tiny luminescent orb multiplying,  
dividing, growing first gills and tail, more fish  
than person; then limbs and lungs, an underwater  
mammal floating in a mother's ocean, birthed  
into breath and being, into cry and kick, a wail  
washed up where salt tide meets land and sky.  
Technicians extract the sacred from my profane  
machinery, sort the sticks, snails, puppy dog tails,  
the fables from the facts of me. What chemicals will  
echo the amniotic heartbeat lullaby heard by my fetal  
ears? What organic sequence will score the overture  
of my beginnings? How will I conduct myself in  
the new, full symphony of who I am and will be?

**Matt Hohner**

## Event Horizon

The e-mail appears in my inbox. Subject:  
*Your results are in.* Twenty-eight days, one  
full lunar cycle from my fiftieth birthday,  
nearly a half-century since my adoption at five  
months old. I think of oceans and blood, salt  
and sweat and tears, protein soup swirling the world,  
crashing on the shore of identity, a nucleotide ebb  
and flow old as carbon and rock, a name borne  
by the elements since the Big Bang, speaking  
itself in whispers as it spreads warm across  
the sand at my feet. Knowledge emanates  
in electronic pulses through eons and light  
years, spinning galaxies mile-marked by stars  
in the living void, a blessing of dust, my entirety  
in microns. I stand at the event horizon where  
self meets self, the vanishing point of my origins.  
With the touch of a finger, I click to open,  
wait for a new page of me to load.

**Matt Hohner**

*Although your child may at some time feel that he has no "ancestors," he should understand that heritage is an unstoppable life force which will appear in the physical person he grows up to be.*

## Search History: Adoption

Begin new search

Try *who am I* and include all results

People also ask

*In what hospital was I born?*

*Was it raining?*

*Did I cry when I left your body?*

*Did you cry when you let me go?*

*Does the story of my conception begin with love or violence?*

*Did you think of a name for me?*

Did you mean *who was I before I was conceived?*

Include results for *who is my mother?*

Include results for *birth father*

Include *genetic predispositions*

Past 24 hours   Past year   Past 50 years

Custom range: December 1970 to August 1971

Custom range: 1971 to 2021

Almanac for a Friday in August 1971

number one song

number one film

how cloud shadows ghosted across the treetops at noon

the cost of a gallon of gas

the cost of a gallon of milk

the cost of giving birth

the cost of giving up a child for adoption

Siri, how much paperwork must a mother complete to launch a newborn son on a raft made of official forms, made of hope, into the powerful currents of The System?

Find File

on this computer

in the City of Baltimore

in the State of Maryland  
on paper in a folder in an old metal file cabinet  
in the memory of a woman  
in the womb of a mother I've never known

Siri, who alive today carries the narrative of my nucleotides?  
Siri, who gave me my penchant for harmony?  
Siri, where did I get my rage?

New search

four proteins of DNA  
four chambers of the heart  
Earth, air, fire, water  
north, south, east, west

Siri, what's it like to be related to people who look like you?  
Siri, how do I prepare for the truth of how I came to be?  
Siri, does she think of me as a mistake or a gift?  
Siri, does she remember my birthday?  
Siri, when will I be me?

**Matt Hohner**



## Dear Person in an Office

*E-mail sent on the 50th anniversary of going home from the adoption agency*

*I am an adoptee seeking to unseal my records,  
a mystery to myself, my origin story cloaked  
in a language not covered by the Rosetta Stone.  
I seek a beginning, the lost Book of Genesis  
in the Old Testament of Me, to uncover fossils  
of my being before I emerged from the amniotic  
abyss, washed up like storm debris, a ragged pair  
of claws scuttled on the sands of a silent shore.  
I seek names and information, the pasts of two  
families, the fill-ins to blanks in my form(ation),  
some ink trail regarding my birth parents, etc.  
I do know that I will eventually need a drink,  
a hug, therapy or counseling, a court order  
to get my records opened to me, since I was  
adopted in Maryland after 1947, a discard  
missing the rest of the deck for half a century.  
I have visited the Department of Human Services  
website, where the State of Maryland serves its  
humans, and viewed the various forms required  
to know myself, electronic requisition affidavits  
for self-knowledge in lieu of stories of who I am  
told at the kitchen table over breakfast, clinical data  
entry points, teraflops of ones and zeros coursing  
through fiberoptics like songs carried on cyber wind.  
Which forms do I need to complete, which laying-  
bare of myself at my most vulnerable place shall  
I present to the swords and spears of truth and mail  
or e-mail back to you to get the ball rolling (not  
unlike Sisyphus) on this important matter? And  
how do I avoid being crushed by the boulder of fact  
careening down at me as it reaches the base of the  
mountain of my lifetime where I stand to receive it?  
I can print the forms, complete them, and return  
them by mail or email—whichever is the proper way.  
Thank you in advance for handling my personal request  
with the professional detachment of clerk in a cube farm,  
devoid of judgment or interest other than doing a job,  
a lineman on a pole repairing frayed ends after a storm,  
restoring order, power, and light to my darkness as  
thunder echoes from a horizon still flashing in chaos.*

**Matt Hohner**

# Consent to Release Information from an Adult Adoptee

*Form 2064*

## 1. Declaration

I am an adoptee who is at least 21 years old.  
My adoption was initiated and / or finalized  
in the State of Maryland / Ignorance / Trepidation,  
and the petition was filed by check one if known,  
in a local Department of Social Services in the city  
of my birth. I am acting in good faith, as my  
birth mother did when she released me into  
the arms of administrators, social workers,  
nurses, paid professionals skilled in the wiping-clean,  
the facilitation of starting over, moving on, in bearing  
a responsibility too much for one or two people to handle.

## 2. Pursuant to the Code of Maryland Regulations

I hereby give permission, or refuse to give permission,  
to the Department of Human Services / Social Services  
Administration (insert silly abbreviation for above  
departments here), a private child placement agency,  
some benevolent being of the spirit world who takes pity  
on my helplessness and intervenes, providence, or luck,  
to do the following concerning my birth parents, birth  
sibling(s) who has / have also been adopted, or in the event  
that my birth parent is deceased, birth relatives, including  
grandparents, adult brothers and sisters, aunts, and adult  
uncles, cousins, a neighbor who knew the truth and kept  
it to herself, friends of my birth mother who stuck by her  
as her belly grew beyond concealment, the birth family  
who urged her to keep me, abort me, or give me up.

## 3. Instructions

Print "Yes" by the actions you want to occur,  
and "No" by the actions you do not want to occur:

- ☐ Release updated medical information
- ☐ Release my name and address
- ☐ Release my telephone number
- ☐ Release my email address
- ☐ Facilitate written contact
- ☐ Facilitate telephone contact

- \_\_\_ Facilitate a reunion
- \_\_\_ Refuse to see me, talk to me, correspond with me
- \_\_\_ Slam a door in my face
- \_\_\_ Deny my existence
- \_\_\_ Lie about how I came to be
- \_\_\_ Ask me to lie about her / him
- \_\_\_ Make demands of me
- \_\_\_ Ghost me after meeting
- \_\_\_ Reject me a second time

I will notify  
DHS/SSA  
PDQ & ASAP  
of any change  
of name and / or address,  
death of self, etc.

In the event that I  
forget to notify  
The Department  
of these changes,  
especially of my own death,  
I am providing the name, address,  
and telephone number of a close friend  
or relative who will know how I can  
be contacted in this life or the next.

**Matt Hohner**

## Grace

*to a birth mother, 1971*

I don't know what to call you. Not *Mom*,  
since you didn't raise me. You loved me  
enough to know you couldn't, that a chance  
was the best gift you could give me. I don't  
know if you saw or held me after you gave me  
into this world, or if the doctors and nurses  
whisked me away like something excised, a  
tumor plopped in a tray, a thing best not seen,  
though I'm sure you heard me cry, knew I  
was alive, that your life could resume unheavied  
by a moment nine months prior, cradled all those  
interrupted moons by pelvis, sheltered by ribs.  
Whatever the circumstances, whether you chose  
or were forced to bear me, I honor your fortitude,  
your power. Faint echo, blurred face, recollection  
of touch relinquished to the mercies of time,  
I thank the myth of you. Perhaps some lost part  
of me would recognize the clear sound of you,  
unmuffled through your ocean of womb, your  
seawall skin. Years would wash away like blood,  
tears dispersing into a lifting air, all the brine spent  
and scattered between us returning its tart crystals  
back to the earth. Our shared wound closing, together  
we would praise and bless the scar that remains.

**Matt Hohner**

## **To a Foster Mother**

*Baltimore County Department of Social Services  
Location unknown*

A half century has turned since you held me,  
stared into these eyes with a charity reserved  
in the knowledge I was wanted by a hopeful  
couple whose love was my destination after a  
gauntlet of bureaucracy and paperwork, social  
workers' visits and record checks, interviews  
and stamps and signatures, the bang of a  
judge's gavel closing the door behind me.  
But in that brief dreamtime between birth,  
the giving up, and the going home, I was  
yours, fed, cleaned, swaddled, and held close,  
your breath and heartbeat my wind and drum,  
your voice like birdsong on a short hilltop  
stopover on my early migration from limbo  
to life. I was too young to know your scent  
now, though I must have enthralled in you  
each day as you spent time with me, that most  
precious human gift. Had you known that I  
would squirm and cry in discomfort against  
the chest of the woman whose hands received  
me—awkward intuition—that she would leave  
the family that became mine a decade later, you  
might have held me a moment longer, hummed  
one last measure of the song ending between us,  
given me one final, lingering, selfless gaze  
from eyes of kindness I cannot remember.

**Matt Hohner**

## Legal Adoption Finalization August 9, 1972

EX PARTE

*In the matter of the petition of*

Two blank lines, parents, with love and hope  
facing an undetermined future as a family unit

—*et al*

*for the adoption of an infant in the Circuit Court for Baltimore County*

*Docket / Folio / Number  
Providence / Luck / Work*

*Mother / Father / Son  
Body / Mind / Soul*

### DECREE OF ADOPTION

*The above-entitled cause, being ready for decree,  
and being submitted, the Petition,  
and all the other proceedings were  
by the Court read and considered.*

*It is thereupon, this otherwise routine day of August 1972,  
by the Circuit Court for Baltimore County,*

*Adjudged, Ordered and Decreed,*

*that the Infant Boy  
mentioned in these proceedings  
be and he is  
hereby decreed to be  
the legally adopted child of*

a father who will remain by his side his entire life

*and*

a mother who will give birth to a daughter in three years, but bail in ten years, his wife

*as prayed in said Petition,*

*It is further Adjudged, Ordered and Decreed,  
that the name of said Infant be and it is  
hereby changed to*

a new name and identity, erasing all previous legal selves

*and that the said Petitioners  
pay the costs of the proceedings  
to be taxed by the Clerk*

that above forementioned infant shall  
forthwith upon reaching the age of ten  
pay the costs of forementioned mother  
leaving thusly-decreed family the rest  
of his natural life until death  
to be taxed by circumstance,  
God, or no one in particular  
as the price of being alive on Earth

*The Clerk of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County  
does hereby certify  
that the above is a true copy  
of the decree taken from the record  
of proceedings in said cause.*

*In TESTIMONY WHEREOF,  
I hereunto set my hand and affix the seal  
of the said Court, this  
regular day of AUGUST, 1972*

**Matt Hohner**

*The law of adoption itself in almost every State, is just and good. This law makes the adopted child exactly the same, legally and spiritually, as the birth child. Parents are warned and adjured by a good judge that when they undertake to adopt a child, they undertake all the burdens and the privileges, in the fullest sense, of parenthood. The law is a beacon in the darkness.*

*Most boys and girls, after proper explanation, will accept adoption in others; their parents may not. Your child should know this.*



**1972**

My dad recalls the incident  
when my mom was pushing  
me down an aisle in a shopping  
cart at the supermarket shortly after  
I was adopted and saw a woman  
she knew. “One of *your mother’s*  
*friends*,” he snarled. They chatted,  
her friend cooed and fawned over  
me, then, flipping some brittle  
switch in her heart, said, straight  
to my mother’s face, “Of course,  
you can never really love him  
like he was your own son.”

**Matt Hohner**

*"We believe that the child's emotional development and security is predicated on the basis that his adoptive parents are emotionally mature and secure enough to recognize their role in their child's life." –Miss Dora Margolis, former Executive Director, Jewish Family and Children's Service, Boston*

*Respect, understanding, trust, and love bring and hold together a man and woman as husband and wife - not a blood relationship. These same qualities, when woven together, form an unbreakable bond between our adopted children and ourselves, their mothers and fathers.*

## **Note from an Adoptive Mother in a Baby Book, or Actual Results May Vary, with Addendum**

*You really cannot imagine how happy  
you have made us. We waited for you  
for a long time, and are so thrilled  
that you are here. God has really  
answered our prayers. I hope I will  
be a good mother to you, and that you  
will love us as much as we love you.*

Even after I decide in ten years to leave  
you, your father, and your younger sister  
whom your father and I will have three  
years from now, for the toothless jerk who,  
with his clueless wife, gave you a framed  
image of Jiminy Cricket and Pinocchio  
(how appropriate) for your coming-home-  
from-the-adoption-agency present. I mean,  
look, a mother can only take on so much  
full-time accountability before she gets  
bored and tired. My limit will be ten years.  
That'll be sufficient preparation for your  
teen years and the rest of your life, right?  
*Things happen and people change*, I'll tell  
you when you're ten. I'll reveal the whole  
truth when you're forty-eight. Anyway,  
that's the deal, and now I'm going out  
onto the back porch to smoke a cigarette.

**Matt Hohner**

## **Ocean City, Maryland, 1981**

It is the last week of August, less than a year before my parents split. A slow concerto of crickets serenades the night air on the edge of autumn, smell of old sand, whiff of popcorn and French fries, rhythmic thump of feet along the boardwalk. Aroma from burgers and hot dogs sizzling on the grill at the Alaska Stand on 9th Street wafts across our deck chairs at the Lankford Hotel. Women in fringe shirts and skin-tight shorts, mustachioed men in muscle shirts and cut-offs stroll past our porch, pink-necked after a day on the beach. A child melts down loudly as a family hurries back early to their hotel. Electronic noises beep and bloop from the oasis of noise at Funland on 11th Street. Lights of the amusement pier ten blocks south reach like a neon arm of the Milky Way out over the Atlantic surf. A river of faces relaxing or living it up comes and goes past our front row seat to vacationing Mid-Atlantic America. Pop leans toward his radio tuned to the Orioles game while he drinks his eighth Budweiser since noon. Uncle Kimmy, Mom, and Pete smoke and play cards in the dining room cubby while my sister and I in Levi's and sweatshirts beg my dad for two more dollars for quarters to play Frogger, Asteroids, Mission Control. Scent of low tide carries the rot of beached jellyfish and horseshoe crabs; heat lightning flashes below the east horizon from a storm far out to sea. I turn in late as the crowd thins to a trickle, the last drunks and stragglers staggering past at 2:00 a.m., college boys laughing or shouting at each other, young women belting the summer's hit songs jubilantly off-key, tired seasonal workers clutching their nightly tips under the glow of the Candy Kitchen and fluorescent-lit t-shirt shops. I fall asleep to the constant, thudding percussion of breakers mere yards away through open ground-floor screen windows. Decades on, I am still caught off-guard when they come, these moments and flashes, these fleeting glimpses of someone else's brief, contented life I once lived.

**Matt Hohner**

## **Your Last Entry in My Baby Book Before You Left**

*Lankford Hotel, Ayresbilt Apartments, Ground Floor South*

You once told me in my early teens that you'd thought about leaving the family three years before you finally did. Somehow, despite having

one foot out the door, you managed to keep up appearances, maintaining the facade, an A average in college you'd started a year earlier, harboring

the dim secret for your pulling away from us, and periodic entries in my baby book as unofficial recorder of minutes and moments in the meeting of my young

life and the world you were about to demolish. Your uniform, elegant, impeccably legible cursive decorates my early timeline like cake icing: first haircut, first

bicycle, first days of school, first adult tooth. Your last entry has no notes, only dates, as if jotted in the margin of an old polaroid with no image to show for it:

*Ocean City, MD, August 22-29, 1981.* By then, you'd checked out in spirit, still filling lunchboxes like a line cook, running errands, doing laundry, applying

iodine and band-aids to skinned knees with the rote concern of a school nurse. I remember nothing of that last vacation with you. What I know is what endures:

that the sand scorched bare feet at noon, the ocean was just warm and rough enough for a boy, the acrid stab of creosote from old boardwalk timbers stung my nose,

that the mild, salt air of my memory was a nighttime balm through open screen windows in our apartment on 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Had God been a lifeguard that summer,

He might have spotted the riptide forming in you, whistled the rest of us safely away from the treacherous waters you stopped struggling against that pulled you out to sea.

**Matt Hohner**