

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 unheaved 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 8th 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