

Search reunites mom,

4 little words: 'We have a match' initiate long-hoped-for phone call

The Arizona Daily Star

One cold, wet morning less than two weeks ago, Tucsonan Sherry Smith picked up the phone.

"It was this man whose voice I'd never heard before," she said.

"Are you Sherry Smith, and were you born Feb. 22, 1947?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did you have a son named Brian Kevin Willard, who was born June 23, 1964?"

"Yes."

The voice belonged to Brian — now Eric Hargrave — a son she had seen for only 15 minutes, the day after he was born 27 years ago.

"His voice was so beautiful," she said.

She might never have heard it if she hadn't read an ad placed by another young man that appeared in this paper in 1990:

"MERRY CHRISTMAS TO THE MOTHER THAT I'VE NEVER SEEN

"To My Mother Who Was Born On Nov. 9, 1947 From Your Son That Was Born On Oct. 2, 1965.

All Information About Adoption Will Be Kept Confidential."

She couldn't tell Bill Woodham, who had placed the ad, where his mother was, but she could tell him how his mother might feel.

"I wrote him a letter to give him a personal perspective to let him know my point of view, why

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO THE MOTHER THAT I'VE NEVER SEEN

"To My Mother Who Was Born On Nov. 9, 1947 From Your Son That Was Born On Oct. 2, 1965.

All Information About Adoption Will Be Kept Confidential."

"I wanted him to understand how it is on this side of the fence."

She'd been a 16-year-old 11th-grader in Denver when she'd gotten pregnant by a boy with whom she'd been going steady for two years.

"I was very much in love with Brian's father," she said.

She was sent to a home for unwed mothers.

"My parents did what they thought was the best thing they could for everyone concerned," she said. She made the decision to give up her child.

"I had no job, nowhere to go, no anything," she said.

"What do you do?"

For the other young women in the home, it was the same.

"They all cried, and they all loved their babies," she said of those who gave them up for adoption.

"It's probably the hardest thing you'll ever do."

Held son for 15 minutes

After Sherry's son was born, she was not permitted to have any contact with her child.

"A nurse didn't agree with the house rule, and

she brought him in to me," Sherry said.

After holding her son for 15 minutes, a nursing home official walked in and was furious that the rules had been broken.

"That was the last time I ever saw him," Sherry said.

"I'm sure that the nurse who brought him to me got into trouble, but I could thank her a million times over for it — it's a memory that I've carried with me."

She saw Eric's father once after he was born, and they went their separate ways.

"We were so young," she said.

~~"We only thought of ourselves."~~

Later, she was married, had two children, who are now grown, and was divorced. Since then she has remarried. Her memory of those 15 minutes with her son has continued to burn inside her.

"I've spent 27 years not talking about this and keeping it quiet, then dying a thousand deaths every time his birthday came around," she said.

Last Christmas, Bill ran another ad in this paper:

"TO THE SCOTTISH family that I have never seen. For my mother, from your son who was born on October 2, 1965. You are now a grandmother. Your grandson was born on January 6, 1992, 11:57 a.m. CST. Weight 7 lbs 4 oz. length 21 1/2."

Reading that was enough to bring to the surface all of the feelings that Sherry had tried to hide for 27 years.

In a "Dear Abby" column, she had spotted the name of a Nevada organization called International Soundex Registry Reunion, an organization that matches children and their blood relatives. She got in touch with them.

After so many years, the results were astonishing.

"I mailed it the third of the month, they received it the sixth and immediately there was a match," she said.

"I was sitting there watching TV, and all of a sudden the phone rings," said her son, Eric, who lives in Denver.

The call was from ISRR: "We have a match."

"It was a shock," he said.

He had seen the same "Dear Abby" that his mother had read and had contacted the organization three years before.

"I never thought anything about it because I didn't want to get my hopes up," he said.

However, when he got the news, he quickly called his mother.

"Because I haven't seen him, his voice means so much to me," said Sherry.

"It was hypnotic — it's hard to explain. It just did something to me."

As for Eric, he most wanted to know if she'd ever thought of him.

"I've always wondered on my birthday — I'd think, whoever had me had to be thinking of that day," he said.

Adoptive parents encouraged search

They talked for nearly two hours, and for Sherry the most enjoyable part was hearing about what had happened during all those years since she had held him.

"When a birth mother gives up her baby for adoption, they always tell her that they're going to a really good home, but you really don't know," Sherry said.

"But his parents did such a wonderful job of raising him."

And his adoptive parents encouraged him in his efforts to seek out his birth mother.

Eric, married and the production manager of a

Sherry
Denver
Hargrave
"I
"H
Wh
now th
"Hell, s
Sh
herself
like my
their c
are star
Bu
her exp
"If
found E
newspa
"T

m, son after 27 years



Ed Compean, The Arizona Daily Star

Sherry Smith is looking forward to meeting the son she gave up for adoption 27 years ago

Denver bakery, plans to visit Sherry soon with Cecil Hargrave, his adoptive father.

"I don't call him my adoptive father," Eric said. "He's my father."

When Eric wondered what he should call Sherry now that he had found her, Cecil settled it by saying, "Hell, she's your mother — call her mother."

Sherry, who is uncomfortable talking about herself, said, "Maybe there's a lot of other women like myself, who wouldn't do anything (about finding their children) other than think about it, but things are starting to come out in the open."

But above all, she hopes that an article about her experience might help Bill.

"If he hadn't placed this ad, I would never have found Eric," she said, looking at the year-old newspaper she had saved.

"This poor man has been searching so hard for

his mother that he believes lives here in Tucson."

"The paperwork I've got mentions that my father was stationed at the air base in Tucson," Bill said from his Troy, Ala., home.

Bill knows that he's of Scottish ancestry and that he has his grandmother's eyes, his grandfather's mechanical ability, his father's nose and his mother's eyesight. But he doesn't know his mother's name.

"In the state of Arizona, basically the only way you can find out about your birth parents is if you're dead or dying," he said.

He said the Woodhams are his family and they will always be his family.

"But there are ways that I am not like them, which makes me different from them."

And now that he has a newborn son, William Lee, he wants to know more about his heritage so he

Reunion

Continued from Page 1C

can pass it along.

He is proud of being a Woodham, and knows his son will be proud also.

"But I'll also say, 'You also have this Scottish ances-

try that dates way back beyond the Roman Empire.' "

Possibly someone in Tucson can help him fill in the blanks in his life.

For those who want to get in touch with Bill Woodham, his address is 116-B Murphree St., Troy, Ala. 36081. His phone number is (205) 566-6580.

The address of ISRR is International Soundex Registry Reunion, P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, Nev. 89702-2312.