

MONADNOCK LIVING

Edited by Pat Haley

Mothers who surrendered babies at birth finally meet their children

By United Press International

Betty Lucas of Puyallup, Wash., was reunited with the daughter she gave to adoption authorities before even seeing her 18 years earlier. Now they regularly exchange interstate letters.



'I am happy I satisfied my curiosity about my heritage but in no way should a reunion be forced on anyone'

The two women thank International Soundex Reunion Registry, based in Carson City, Nev., for helping reunite them. The national registry has helped reunite more than 1,000 blood relatives and has a registry containing 16,000 names.

The eight-year-old non-profit organization founded by Emma May Vilardi of Carson City serves as a link between "birth parents" and their natural offspring 18 or older, all of whom express the desire for reunion by registering their names with ISRR.

Meanwhile, out West, Susan Rodgers, 19, of Scottsdale, Ariz., after being informed of the match by ISRR, phoned her natural mother, Betty Lucas, a year ago. Then a friend in an adoptees' search group, TRIAD, told her that someone already had been reunited with a long-lost relative on the TV show "Fantasy."

So Rodgers, who lives with her adoptive parents and works in a shoe store, contacted Fantasy's producers and was invited to tape a show in Los Angeles in February 1982. The program aired nationwide the next month.

"I was so grateful to the registry (ISRR) for helping me, I thought I could talk about the registry on TV and get it some publicity," she said in an interview. "But they didn't tell me my mom (Lucas) would be there."

"When I saw her, I just ran up and hugged her and my little brother and sister. We were just so happy to see each other. During the commercial we ran out behind the stage and said, 'So, what have you been doing for the past 18 years?' and crazy things like that."

She hopes to visit the Lucases for a month soon and she continuously exchanges letters with her natural mother. Lucas, 41, explained in an interview that she bore Susan when she was unmarried, "still living at home and not a mature 22."

"I was sent to Arizona," she said, "to live with an aunt to deliver it. I was shipped away. That's the way they did it then ... Susan's father was living with someone else at the time and said he would not get a divorce."

"But it was the best thing for her that I did it that way. I ended up marrying Susan's father (Barney Lucas) four years later. That just was a disaster, it was a mistake. It lasted 10 years."

Lucas registered with ISRR a year before the reunion. "I think if you want to find the other person, the registry is a real good way," she said. "Both parties have got

a choice and you're not intruding where you're not wanted."

Besides her daughter having a "right" to know about her natural family, Lucas said, "It bothered me for years she might just turn up on the doorstep. I didn't think I



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could stand that waiting. I wanted to do something to initiate it."

Lucas said Susan calls her "Betty" and Susan's adoptive parents are happy about the reunion, and should be because, "I told them I wanted to add to and not take anything away."

"I told (Susan) I'd like to be like a special aunt," she said. "I don't feel like her mother. I'm not trying to take her place. I'm just somebody special in her life."

Lucas, a drafter for a civil engineering firm, said the reunion has given her "a sense of closure, of something coming together where before there was emptiness."

Rodgers, who also met her father when she went to Puyallup and writes to him now, said she is happy she did satisfy her curiosity about her heritage by registering with ISRR, but said "in no way should (a reunion) be forced on anyone."

"If the birth parent doesn't want the child to come back, that should be their prerogative and should be respected."

Still, she said, she would favor the states opening up records to facilitate reunions.

"ISRR is the essential difference," reads the group's literature, "between inherent right and statutory denial, a first step in open records."

George Anthony, ISRR's publicist, says the 5 million American adoptees are affected by public and private adoption bureaucracies.

Rep. Stephen Freind, a Pennsylvania state legislator, says in only Kansas and Alabama can an adoptee simply obtain on demand from state vital statistics bureaus a copy of his original birth certificate, which bears the natural mother's name and usually the father's name.

In other states, the names are not readily available to the adoptee, although many adoption agencies will furnish medical histories of the adoptee's biological parents, he says.

Freind has sponsored a bill pending in the state's Legislature to amend the vital statistics law and make it more difficult for adoptees to obtain their original birth certificates. But the bill also would create a state reporting system to facilitate reunions among adoptees and natural parents who want to find each other.

Registry reunites offspring with natural parents

by John O'Brien

United Press International

Joyce Brown of Englewood Cliffs, N.J., gave up her first baby for adoption, but now, reunited after a 25-year separation, she and her daughter are under the same roof again.

Betty Lucas of Puyallup, Wash., was reunited with her first offspring, a daughter, whom she gave to adoption authorities before even seeing her 18 years earlier. Now they regularly exchange interstate letters.

All four women thank International Soundex Reunion Registry, based in Carson City, Nev., for helping to reunite them. The national registry has helped reunite more than 1,000 blood relatives and has a registry containing 16,000 names.

The 8-year-old non-profit organization founded by Emma May Vilardi of Carson City serves as a link between "birth parents" and their natural offspring 18 or older, all of whom express the desire for reunion by registering their names with ISRR.

Brown, a divorcee who was living with two of her other three children, contacted ISRR after her fiancé, Martin Cohen, read about it last November. Six weeks later, ISRR made the match. The daughter, who had registered two years earlier, was identified as Angie Alexander and was living with a boyfriend in New Mexico. The long-separated mother and daughter talked on the telephone, then Alexander flew to New Jersey and met her biological mother and half-brother and half-sister on New Year's Eve.

"WHEN I FIRST saw her, I knew she was my daughter," said Brown, 45, an advertising set decorator. "She looks like her sisters and brother look. We hugged and kissed and cried.

"I had lived with the fact that I had a child some place on earth, a child I hadn't seen for 25 years. One part of me hoped one day I would find her, and another part said it would be impossible. Laws exist today that make it very difficult to happen."

Brown said that, when she became pregnant as an unmarried teenager,

her parents sent her from New Jersey to Texas to have the child.

"It happened in the 1950s, and people did not live together in the 1950s or anything like that," she said. "I was 19, living with my parents. Orders were given, and I followed them. The last I even saw her father was 23 years ago."

Alexander, who calls Brown "Mom," said her reason for registering with ISRR was medical.

"I was born with a heart defect and had other medical problems that were not easily answered without knowing my background," said Alexander, who grew up in Dallas. "But I expected after the reunion to resume my life as normal. I just didn't think there would be as much love as there is. I had a lot of fears."

ADOPTED PEOPLE should try to be reunited with their natural parents, Alexander said, "only if they feel strong enough about themselves that they can deal with whatever happens, whether it's rejection or something else."

She spoke of an adopted male friend who was reunited with his biological parents.

"His adoptive parents were very happy (about his reunion)," Alexander said. "But he stopped the relationship because of his feelings that he was hurting his adoptive parents, although he actually wasn't. His own fears stopped the relationship."

Brown said she would like to see the laws changed so people could obtain more information about blood relatives. She advises those in her former situation to "go for it."

"I have a feeling within myself that all of my children are with me now," she said. "My life is complete. It is a wonderful feeling."

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SO, RODGERS, who lives with her



UPI photos

TOGETHER AGAIN. After 18 years apart, Susan Rodgers (right) was finally reunited with her natural mother, Betty Lucas. Both women had registered with the International Soundex Reunion Registry, which made the match.

adoptive parents and works in a shoe store, contacted the producers of "Fantasy" and was invited to tape a show in Los Angeles in February 1982.

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For more information, write to International Soundex Reunion Registry, P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, Nev., or call 702-882-6270.