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I was born March 11th, 1969 in Sauk Centre MN. It is 100 miles NW of Minneapolis in Stearns County, where St. Cloud is the County Seat.

Knowing this is close to Red Lake Indian Reservation, as a child I imagined I might be part Native. Many people over the years had commented that they could "see the Indian in me," and I liked this feeling. My parents always supported my African American identity, and would have been open to any first nation roots I may have found. They also supported my desire to search for my birth family. When I was 13 my mom told me they would help me then if I was ready, even though it was illegal. I was not ready until I was an adult, and then went away to New York for grad school. I felt I really needed to be in Minnesota to do this.

I began my search 9 years ago after resettling in St. Paul. I was adopted through Hennepin County and found out that they contract with Children's Home Society for post adoption services. The state/county would not give me any information as Minnesota is a closed records state (one of 40 states where adoption records are sealed and adoptees do not have access to original birth certificates). The only exception would have been if I had a life threatening illness.

I met with a worker at Children's Home Society (CHS). For free, they provided me with non-identifying information (they omitted my birth parents names). I found out my birth first and middle name were Evette Gail, that my mother was the youngest of 13, and she lost her mother at one year old. I learned that she was dark skinned (I am medium), 5' 7" (I am 5' 6") and slender (I am full figured). She was described as intelligent, kind and had finished the 11th grade. She was very involved with my father, yet he did not offer to support her or get married. She did intend on parenting me, and I was staying with "someone" while she worked her county case plan to get me out of foster care. In the end she did not complete her plan (finishing school and getting a job).

When her visits to me tapered off and stopped in November of '69, the courts terminated her parental rights and an adoptive family was sought. I was placed in '71, adopted in August of that year.

Learning this information was good. It confirmed my suspicion that my mother was young (16 when she had me). It also provided the surprise revelation of my older sister, born in '66, when my mom would have been 13! Ever since then I have longed to know what happened to her.

The paper said she was placed in permanent foster care. Common knowledge and my years as a social worker lead me to be concerned about her welfare, as youth who age out of the system have less successful outcomes (higher incarceration, teen pregnancy, homelessness, mental illness and unemployment). All I can do is hope and pray she is OK. Finding out that I had 9 aunts and uncles between the ages of 25 and 40 at the time of my placement makes me mad. That I was not placed with one of them was bad social work practice. I fear that in the late 60's racial bias played a factor as there were not any foster families of color to my knowledge, and the adage- "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" may have been in effect; the belief that if birth mom was having difficulties, so was the rest of the family. Highly unlikely in my case as there were so many potential placement options if they had been investigated, which I assume they were not. Sadly, this practice continues today, with relatives losing their children to foster care and adoption.

Through the worker at CHS I was informed that for $550 (my fee based on my income), they would attempt to contact birth mom with information 34 years old. I was told I could be put on a long waiting list, with no guarantee of success. I was livid; being charged for information non-adopted people have naturally. With bitterness I gave my first payment of $220. Over time I became more incensed. I thought about all of the adoptees who could not pay, and the larger moral issues with charging county children who were taken from their parents the same as privately adopted children who were placed by their parents. In the end I made no additional payments. I chose instead to fight to change the law that currently barred me access. I joined the Minnesota Coalition for Adoption Reform (MCAR). My next post will be about my work with this group.