
Could You Secretly Be Adopted?

Red flags that could point to adoption

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In September 2017, at age 40, I accidentally discovered that I am adopted after getting a DNA match on Ancestry to one of my three full biological sisters. It was a life-changing experience that redefined (and simultaneously shattered) my entire existence.

Before my shocking discovery, my adoptive parents never told me I was adopted, and I never suspected. For 40 years, my adoptive parents made it their mission to ensure I would never discover the truth about my own origins. But they didn't simply fail to disclose my adoption status to me; over the course of four decades, they created an enormous web of lies to manipulate me into believing that I was *actually* their biological child.

I am a late discovery adoptee. Late discovery adoptees are adults who are adopted, but whose adoptive parents did not disclose their adoption status to them at an appropriate age. Any adoption disclosure beyond the earliest years of life is universally considered to be too late. There were darker reasons why I never questioned my genetic origins, but looking back, there was an *abundance* of red flags throughout my life.

With so many people today taking DNA tests to trace their family's history, more people will unexpectedly find themselves in similar situations — though hopefully not as extreme as mine. If you are questioning your own genetic origins, I hope my experiences can help you find answers because *everyone* deserves the truth about their own genetic origins.

Here are some of the red flags that were present in my life before my adoption discovery: *(in no specific order)*

NO PREGNANCY PHOTOS

There were no photos of my adoptive mother pregnant. Even as a child I thought this was strange. Whenever the subject came up, my adoptive parents always recited some variation of the same excuse: she didn't want to be photographed appearing "fat." My adoptive mother was *very* narcissistic, so this explanation was completely believable. Still, something about their explanation didn't feel right to me on a deeper level, and reinforced my belief that my adoptive mother didn't love me the way other mothers love their children. In reality, most women probably have at least one or two photos of themselves pregnant, *especially* with their first baby. If there are no photos of your mother obviously pregnant, this *could* be a red flag. If there *are* photos of your mother pregnant (or in which you've been told she is pregnant) but you still have doubts, look on the back of the photo for a date stamp or handwritten notes. Look at things in the background, clothing, hairstyles, etc. Photos often hold more clues than we think, and these little bits of information can be helpful to establish (or disprove) a pregnancy timeline.

NO BABY SHOWER

A baby shower is a party typically held for an expectant mother a few months prior to the birth of her first baby. In the United States, baby showers are usually held only for first babies, not subsequent pregnancies, but there are obviously exceptions to this. Also, not everyone has a baby shower, especially if they have more than one child. Other reasons people may not have a baby shower include financial concerns, not having a close relationship with family, living far away from family, or just not wanting one. In the case of my adoptive mother, she *absolutely* would have had a baby shower if she had been pregnant. My adoptive parents enjoyed entertaining, hosting lavish holiday dinners, having their friends over for big parties, hosting birthday & anniversary parties, and other events — all of which were heavily photographed. There was a bridal shower, a large traditional wedding, birthday parties, anniversary parties, holiday parties, and many more. And who could forget my Annie-themed 6th birthday party... So, it definitely would have been *very* unusual for them not to have a baby shower, especially since I was their first (and only) child. If it appears there was no baby shower, and that seems inconsistent with other life celebrations, this *could* be a red flag.

NO NEWBORN OR HOSPITAL PHOTOS

Most people born over the past few decades probably have at least one or two photos of themselves as a newborn. I was born in late 1976, and my adoptive parents had albums filled with photos from the years before my birth and after

my birth, yet there are no photos or other keepsakes that correspond with the pregnancy or my birth. This is *very inconsistent* with the way they photographed life prior to and after my birth. The first photo I have of myself is at about one week old and was taken at my adoptive parent's home. There were no hospital keepsakes, hospital baby portraits, no footprint certificate, hospital wristbands, hospital papers — absolutely nothing. I remember being young and noticing the lack of photos of me as a newborn and my adoptive parents telling me they “weren't allowed” to take photos of me in the hospital or as a newborn because the flash could have made me sick... (seriously!) Obviously, that was not really the case, and just another lie they told to maintain their story. If there are no photos of you and/or your mother in the hospital, no hospital mementos, or no photos of you in the days (or even weeks or months) following your birth, this *could* be a red flag. This is especially true if your parents took lots of photos in the time before your birth and after your birth, but there's an obvious gap from the time of your birth.

APPEARANCE NOT CONSISTENT WITH JUST GIVING BIRTH

I know what my adoptive mother looked like for most of the 1970s from the hundreds of pictures in their photo albums. As I mentioned before, there were no photos of her pregnant because she supposedly didn't want to be photographed appearing “fat.” Yet in photos taken the week following my placement with them, her body appears *suspiciously* normal — I can't believe I never noticed this detail prior to my adoption discovery! She was *obviously* wearing regular 1970s clothing with neatly styled hair, form fitting clothing, and her regular assortment of rings & jewelry (i.e. no swelling, weight gain, larger breasts, etc. which are very common in a full term pregnancy.) Women's bodies do not shrink back to their pre-pregnancy size within a week of birth — sometimes they never do. Look at your newborn photos, if you have any, and check for these types of details. While these clues alone do not prove you were adopted, they add to the big picture if other red flags are present.

NO FAMILY RESEMBLANCE / ALTERING YOUR APPEARANCE

I never really thought I looked much like or acted like my adoptive parents. This was something my friends noticed over the years, *especially* in my teens and twenties. Obviously there was a very good reason for this! Throughout my life, my adoptive parents always filled in these types of gaps with fabricated evidence to cover other lies they had told me. In this case, they always told me I didn't look like them because I got all of my features from my adoptive grandmother's family — the ones we *conveniently* didn't know much about and had minimal contact with. Over the years, any small resemblance that I may have coincidentally had to one of their relatives was *exaggerated* by them, and I was reminded of it over & over again to reinforce that I was, indeed, their biological child. In reality, I absolutely *did not* look like their relatives, but I wholeheartedly grew to believe it. It was one of those situations that if you're told something enough times from a very young age you will believe it without question. When I was around ten years old, my adoptive mother began convincing me that I didn't look good with dark hair. She would tell me that it looked ugly against my pale skin and, as a result, my hair color “had to” be changed. She then helped me bleach and dye my naturally very dark hair to the same shade of red as hers. My hair remained a shade of red well into my 20s. It's obvious now that this was her attempt to make me look more like her. I mean really, who bleaches and dyes a child's hair without the child wanting it? It is much more common for kids today to have dyed hair, but in the 80s it was not common for a *young child* to have dyed hair, *especially* when done by a parent with the intention of altering the appearance of the child to make them unrecognizable... It's so incredibly twisted! Sometimes, genetic children don't look exactly like their siblings or parents, but they usually have some obvious resemblance to each other. If you truly do not physically resemble anyone in your immediate family, this *could* be a red flag.

APPEARANCE DOESN'T MATCH YOUR SUPPOSED RACE OR ETHNICITY

There is no all-inclusive, universal appearance for any race or ethnicity. However, in some cases, people who *could* be adopted may feel the race and/or ethnicity they've been told doesn't match how they see themselves or how they feel inside. I experienced this deeply. My adoptive parent's ethnic backgrounds didn't correspond to my appearance *at all*. My adoptive mother was Greek with olive-toned skin and larger facial features. My adoptive father is 100% Italian, also with olive skin and larger facial features. Despite having naturally dark hair, I never believed I looked like someone whose *very recent* ancestors came from these places. I began to recognize these discrepancies during my youth when I was unable to see myself in any of my family members — *especially* my adoptive mother's closest family members who live in Greece. I was always told that these were my closest relatives on the planet, yet I couldn't see even the *slightest* resemblance between us. I remember my friends being surprised to learn I was Greek and Italian because they assumed I was British or northern European. (which I actually am!) Even Greek people that I met over the years

were surprised to learn I was Greek. Obviously, they were right! I think this lack of resemblance, not feeling like I fit in with my adoptive family, and not feeling fully connected to my heritage is what drove me to begin researching my family's history. I was genuinely seeking out the people who looked like me, acted like me, and felt like me — I think this is a natural need regardless if you are adopted or not. So if you are questioning your own origins, think about the people in your family that you physically resemble, if any. Think about your ethnic backgrounds and if they make sense in the context of you. If some of these areas don't add up, you may want to do further research or even take a DNA test.

BEING AN ONLY-CHILD, OR HAVING ADOPTED SIBLINGS

I was raised as an only-child, but I used to always wish for siblings when I was younger. I can't imagine the happiness and wholeness I would have experienced as a young person knowing that I actually had three beautiful little sisters! The grief of never having the opportunity to know my parents and sisters (or anyone from my biological family) as a child overwhelms me at times. As a child, whenever I would ask my adoptive parents about why I didn't have any brothers or sisters, they would always tell me that after they had me, they "broke the mold" because they couldn't handle any more kids "like me," or something along those lines that made it seem like it was *my own fault* that I didn't have siblings. This was just another one of their lies, at the expense of my mental health and self-worth, to conceal the fact that they were being extraordinarily dishonest with me. Another thing to consider is if you have siblings who are openly adopted; *especially* if hiding their adoption status would be very difficult (ex. transracial adoptee or if they were adopted as an older child.) Being an only-child or having an adopted sibling absolutely *does not* mean you are adopted, but if there are other red flags present in your life *in addition to* being an only-child or having an adopted sibling, you may want to look deeper into your roots, or even take a DNA test.

INHERITED MEDICAL CONDITIONS (presence or absence)

If you are diagnosed with a medical condition that typically runs in families, but nobody in your family has it, and there are no known carriers, this *could* be a red flag. When I was in my 30s, my adoptive father was diagnosed with a medical condition with a very strong genetic component. After his diagnosis, I was thoroughly tested but thankfully everything was normal. Obviously, there was no *real* risk to me, but I had no way to know that at the time. Rather than using his diagnosis as an opportunity to *finally* be honest with me (I was in my 30s at that point,) my adoptive father *chose* to allow me to believe there was a possibility that either myself or my children could have inherited this disease. I went through all of the medical tests, expenses, and emotional stress and he had *full knowledge* that there was no reason for any of it. Even my children's pediatrician was notified of his diagnosis and was keeping an eye on things since it is a genetic condition. All completely unnecessary. There is no excuse for placing another person's physical and mental health in jeopardy — *especially* your own family. For 40 years, each time I walked into a doctor's office I was being treated based upon a *completely falsified* family medical history — so did my children for the first few years of their lives. The reality is it was more important to my adoptive parents to maintain their secrets than to ensure the long-term health of me and my children. It's inexcusable. Even if a reunion with the biological family isn't possible or isn't desired, adoptees need access to and knowledge of their biological family's medical history.

EMPHASIS ON MOVIES, BOOKS & TV SHOWS INVOLVING ADOPTION

As a child, the 1982 movie *Annie* was pushed on me heavily by my adoptive parents. If you're not familiar, *Annie* is the story of a young girl living in a New York City orphanage in the 1930s who ends up being adopted by the billionaire Oliver Warbucks. My adoptive parents took me to see the play and the movie, I had all of the *Annie* toys, records, books, dolls, clothes, and even the little red and white dress that *Annie* wears in the final scenes of the movie. I don't remember being overly enthusiastic about *Annie*, but it was still pushed on me. I was *Annie* for Halloween that year, too. The following month, I had an elaborate *Annie*-themed birthday party. If you were force-fed movies, books, tv shows, etc. that are heavily focused on adoption, perhaps this is another clue to examine.

STRONG OPPOSITION TO DNA TESTS / GENEALOGY

If you've ever expressed an interest in learning more about your family's history by taking a DNA test such as Ancestry, but were met with strong opposition from your family, this is honestly very suspicious, *especially* if there are other red flags present in your life. I didn't actually experience this, but it's something to keep in mind if DNA testing is a sensitive topic in your family. Many people have legitimate concerns about privacy relating to DNA testing, but probably wouldn't order other family members to avoid such tests — unless they have something to hide. If this is something that seems questionable to you, it could definitely be a red flag worth exploring. Personally, this kind of reaction from my family would only make me want to take a DNA test *even more*, but do what feels right for your circumstances.

STRANGERS CALLING YOU BY A DIFFERENT NAME, OR ASKING IF YOU HAVE A TWIN, SIBLING, ETC.

Numerous times in my life, I recall strangers approaching me in public using a different name, or asking me if I have a sister or a cousin because I looked *a lot* like someone they knew. Usually, these people were very enthusiastic about how much I looked like the person they knew. Obviously my adoptive mother had a problem with this. At some point in my childhood, I remember my adoptive mother making it seem like this was normal, and that it happens to everyone — I even recall her telling me that everyone in the world has a twin out there, so it wasn't a 'big deal'. Still, I experienced these types of incidents throughout my life. One time in my mid-20s, a woman approached me in a store asking if I have a sister or a cousin named Jamie and asked me if I was adopted. I remember the name she said because I had a friend named Jamie, so it stood out to me — I never forgot that encounter for some reason. Another time, a friend of my sister's sent her a text message with a photo of a woman she saw on the train that looked *a lot* like her. Around that same time, I was living in a town that had a train into Philadelphia which I would use on a regular basis. My sister no longer has the message, but there is definitely a chance it was *me* on that train. I think this type of thing probably happens to everyone from time to time, but if you notice patterns or someone is adamant that you look 'exactly' like someone they know, perhaps it is worth investigating.

SUSPICIOUS OR UNEXPECTED BIRTH LOCATION

Before my adoption discovery, I never really thought about the location of the hospital where I was born. I now realize how strange it is that I was born an hour away from my adoptive parent's home. This never seemed questionable to me before; I think it was because we moved to a town very close to this hospital when I was very young, so it never really felt "far away" to me. In reality, unless there are unusual circumstances, I don't believe most pregnant women in 1976 (especially in the era before cell phones) would willingly drive to a hospital a long distance away while in *active labor*. In my case, it isn't logical considering there were other hospitals much closer to them with arguably better medical reputations. If you're questioning your own origins, check the location of where you were born, and think about your parent's residence at the time of your birth. If you have any siblings, find out where they were born as well. If the locations don't make sense, find out what circumstances led to you being born there (ex. you were born on a military base, but your parents have never been in the military, or you were born in a different state far from your parent's residence, etc.)

BOTTLE-FED AS A BABY

Before I write anything about this, I want to be clear that I pass no judgements on anyone for how they choose to feed their baby. I am a mother of three, and I primarily bottle-fed my own children for various reasons. If you are an adult wondering if you could be adopted, this is a clue that you may have overlooked. In the photographs of me as a baby, there are baby bottles frequently pictured — in my hand, on the counter, on the floor, in an adult's hands, etc. At some point when I was very young, my adoptive mother began telling me the tale (and frequently reminded me over the years) of how she *feverishly* tried to breastfeed me, but, according to her, I was "very hungry and aggressive," and that during her attempts to breastfeed me, I physically hurt her. As a result, she told me she had "no choice" but to bottle feed me... I remember hearing this over and over again as a young person, and wondering to myself "what is *so wrong with me*" that I couldn't even eat like a *normal* baby. After learning of my adoption in 2017, this story replayed in my mind over and over again, and I was so struck by the sheer cruelty of it. I imagine, in her mind, she needed to find some way to justify all of the baby bottles that were obviously visible in photographs, even if that meant throwing me (a young child at the time) under the bus to do so. Obviously many biological children are bottle fed, but I believe she must have viewed this as a possible red flag and wanted to curb any doubts in my mind before they arose. She could have said nothing about it, or told me that she just didn't *want to* breastfeed, that she wasn't *able to* breastfeed for some reason, or that she alternated between breast & bottle; but instead, she chose to make me believe there was actually something wrong *with me* that caused it. It's monstrous and perfectly exemplifies the type of cruel and twisted emotional abuse I was constantly subjected to. So look at photos from the first 1-2 years of your life, and look in the background, on counters, in your crib, etc. to see if there are bottles visible, especially if you've been told that you were exclusively breastfed. Again, being bottle-fed absolutely *does not* mean you are adopted, but if there are other red flags present, or you've been told similar tales about being "difficult" to feed as a baby, this may be something you want to look into.

EXPRESSIONLESS BABY PHOTOS / APPEARING IN NEUTRAL

If you have photos of yourself as a baby, examine your facial expressions, though only if you have a decent amount of photos to compare. If there are a large percentage of photos where you appear expressionless, or like you are existing in a neutral state at a very young age, this *could* be an indication of early separation trauma associated with newborn adoption. However, there are other reasons you could appear expressionless that are unrelated to adoption (ex. poorly timed

photos, your personality, developmental delays, etc.) In my case, none of those apply. I have hundreds of photos of myself as a baby, and in at least 50% of those photos I appear expressionless; even in photos where someone is holding me or engaging with me. In the remaining photos, I have either a slight expression, appear sad, or mildly happy at best. I never really thought about this much prior to my adoption discovery, but looking at the photos now, and *especially* after having three babies of my own, I see a very sad reality — that baby *absolutely* knew something was very wrong.

NOT FEELING CONNECTED TO YOUR PARENTS ON A DEEPER LEVEL

For most of my life, I didn't feel especially close or connected to either of my adoptive parents, *particularly* my adoptive mother who was an alcoholic and had untreated mental health issues. I felt out of place, in the way, and uncomfortable within my own family. I often found myself wondering why they even wanted a child in the first place, especially with the type of lifestyle they lived. I felt more like an accessory they could show off or brag about; often with *grossly exaggerated* or even *completely fabricated* accomplishments my adoptive mother would embarrassingly tell anyone who would listen. It was so humiliating and degrading! By the time I was around ten years old, I recognized several major differences between my adoptive parent's interactions with each other, and with me, and the interactions between the families of my friends. This became especially evident when my adoptive mother's drinking escalated and her behaviors became much more problematic. During that period, there was *constant* emotional abuse from my adoptive mother, and even occasional physical abuse — mostly in the form of cigarette burns and random punches while in a drunken rage. At one point in my mid-teens, my adoptive mother was lecturing me about the 'dangers' of premarital sex and informed me that the only reason I existed was because she got pregnant after a condom broke. Not knowing I was adopted at the time, I interpreted this to mean that I was unplanned and unwanted by them — which reinforced my long-standing belief that my adoptive mother did not love me the way other mothers love their children. Another time when I was in eleventh grade, she hit me in the face so hard during a drunken rage that she gave me a black eye. Despite my best efforts with makeup, a teacher at school, and my close friends, asked me what happened. I was programmed to lie about the realities of what went on at home, so I instinctively came up with some ridiculous story about accidentally bumping my face into a bathroom counter while drying my hair — a part of me believed it I think, because it was too difficult to actually believe my own mother would do that to me. Unfortunately, nobody ever questioned my injury any further — including my adoptive father who never *once* asked me what happened anytime I had an injury that she caused. When I was home from college for Thanksgiving one year, she became enraged about something and briefly tried to strangle me (while yelling "I hate you" at me) which left a bruise around my neck. Despite these types of repeat incidents, my adoptive father consistently did *nothing* to protect me from her, or to get her the help she clearly needed. He just stood by silent, allowing her to escalate and cause all sorts of serious problems — mostly at *my* expense. Even the relationship between my adoptive parents was extraordinarily dysfunctional and just a façade. When she died somewhat suddenly in 2010, I did not feel sad. In fact, I felt an enormous sense of relief. Clearly that is not the result of a normal, healthy, secure parent/child relationship, but that of a *deeply* troubled one. If you have these types of feelings, similar experiences, it may be something that calls for further investigation — especially if there are other red flags present.

EXCESSIVE FEAR OF ABANDONMENT / LOW SELF-WORTH

Nobody wants to be abandoned by someone they love; this is a very normal feeling. However, it is common for adoptees to have more extreme fears of abandonment and other attachment issues throughout their lives than the non-adopted general public. I experienced these issues, as many adopted children do; but since I did not know I was adopted, these issues were completely out of context. Throughout my life, I struggled with an intense fear of abandonment and attachment issues — especially in my friendships, and again, later in my romantic relationships. In my friendships, I believed that people didn't *really* want to be friends with me or socialize with me, and just felt bad for me or obligated to be nice. As much as I enjoyed my friendships, it was difficult for me to be the one initiating a night out with them because, in my mind, they didn't *really* want to hang out with me. When I was invited to do something or go somewhere with friends, I wanted to participate, though I frequently was not allowed to go — especially if any boys would be there. (*eyeroll...*) My adoptive mother would usually tell me, instead, to invite them over to our house. Obviously that wasn't always what teenagers wanted to do on a Friday or Saturday night, so I was sometimes left out, especially in high school. In romantic relationships, there was always a sense (in my own mind) that the relationship I was in — no matter how good it may have been at the time — was *destined* to fail, and that they would inevitably leave me because I was unlovable, unworthy, undesirable, ugly, etc. These repetitive thoughts triggered something *deep* within me that I couldn't explain, and didn't understand, but I also couldn't stop myself from acting them out due to pure fear. My heart breaks for my younger self and all that she went through without understanding why. My adoptive mother was very narcissistic, and genu-

inely saw herself as *irresistible* to men. Starting around when I was age 12, (or at least that's when I first became aware of it) she would be *very* flirtatious and *very* inappropriate with adult men and teenage boys — even my own boyfriends — and telling me that men enjoyed her attention (versus mine) because of how attractive and irresistible she was. (seriously! WTF?!) I can't express enough how much this impacted how I saw myself as a young woman. She would *frequently* exhibit these behaviors in front of my adoptive father as well, but he never once attempted to stop her. For example, one time when I was around 20 years old, my boyfriend & I went to dinner with my adoptive parents at a very nice restaurant. She was very drunk (as usual,) and during the course of the meal, she *repeatedly* reached under the table to seductively rub my boyfriend's thighs. I pleaded with her to stop, and clearly remember looking at my adoptive father for help, but she kept going and my adoptive father never tried to stop her. Eventually, I swapped seats with my poor boyfriend, who was too polite (and probably too stunned) to say anything. This is just one example among *many*. I always got the sense that she was competing with me (and all other women) for the love & attention of men, but this was a competition that only existed within *her own* mind. I never understood this behavior, but the ramifications of those behaviors *deeply* impacted how I saw myself as a young woman. It's unfortunate that I wasn't able to understand this part of myself earlier in my life to avoid these kinds of thought patterns and behaviors from happening in the first place. As a parent, it blows my mind that my adoptive parents *must have* seen these predictable patterns developing in me as an adopted child, but did not get me the post-adoption care I *should have* received; because doing so would have exposed them, and their lies. Just another example of their façade being *more important* to them than my long-term health and well-being... It's unforgivable. If you think you might have a deeper than normal fear of abandonment, or other attachment issues, this *could* be a sign that you are adopted, especially if there are other red flags present.

DOCUMENTS SUGGESTING AN ADOPTION

After my adoptive grandmother died, I was looking through one of her books and found a note in her handwriting. She lived with my adoptive parents for a few years before I was born, and continued to live with us until she died in 1999. The note spoke about the adoption of a baby girl and noted a date of birth in 1960. I vaguely remember she had written a first name as well, but I can't remember what it was. At the time, I wondered if my adoptive grandmother secretly had another child that she placed for adoption. She would have been 47 in 1960, and I thought maybe she couldn't handle another child at that point in her life. I gave the note to my adoptive mother expecting her to be shocked, but instead, she brushed it off as though it was no big deal. I never saw the note again, but I have *no doubt* my adoptive mother destroyed it. I never spoke to her about it again, but I also never forgot about it. After my adoptive mother's death in 2010, the subject re-emerged. I began to wonder if it was actually my adoptive mother who had a baby in 1960 (she would have been 15 in 1960) and that child, a girl, was placed for adoption. It seemed entirely possible. Over the years, I often spoke about the letter with my adoptive father and the possibility that she had placed a child for adoption when she was a teenager. He repeatedly denied any knowledge of this, but also actively participated in these conversations with *full knowledge* that the note was actually about me. Again, multiple missed opportunities for the truth to come out. I am positive the note had something to do with my adoption. My biological mother, Hollie, was born in 1960 — the same year mentioned in the note. I believe the date was simply my adoptive grandmother's note about my biological mother's age. It's positively maddening to know as far back as 1999 I held a vital clue in my hands but wasn't able to see it through all of my adoptive parents' lies. If you've found documents, notes, or other items that suggest someone in your family was adopted, or there are papers from an attorney, a child protection agency, etc. this *could* be a red flag.

AMENDED BIRTH CERTIFICATE (major red flag!)

In 2004, I was renewing my passport and needed my birth certificate. I asked my adoptive parents for it, but they told me it was lost. I found it very strange that they misplaced my birth certificate, but never questioned them any further. After my discovery in 2017, I learned that my adoptive parents intentionally destroyed all records pertaining to my adoption when I was very young — I'm assuming one of them did the same with my birth certificate. I do remember seeing it over the years, even into my teens, but it must have disappeared at some point in my early twenties. When I obtained the new copy of my birth certificate in 2004, it was a computer-generated form and looked nothing like the older one. One of the lines said "Date Amended (if applicable)" with the date of January 13, 1977 (44 days after my birth.) At the time this didn't seem unusual to me, though I do recall the Vital Records clerk asking me about my adoption status (which I would have denied at that point in my life.) I assumed that in the 1970s things just took longer to process (not as many computers) and this was simply the date my birth certificate was officially filed. I honestly didn't question it further until after I had already discovered I was adopted and learned the *true significance* of an amended birth certificate. The bottom line is if your birth certificate is amended, this should be an automatic red flag — more so than anything else on

this list. While there are a few other reasons a birth certificate could be amended, (error or misspelling on original, step-parent adoption, a name change) adoption is the most common.

YOU'VE READ MY LIST. WHAT NOW???

If you've read this list and have similar experiences, you may want to consider looking deeper into your origins. While none of these red flags, individually, can determine if you are adopted, they are all pieces of the puzzle to be evaluated. I suggest that you take some time to reflect on areas that seem questionable to you, and search for evidence to either prove or disprove them. I only suggest beginning this type of investigation if you are fully prepared for the emotional fallout that may follow if there are any unexpected discoveries (good or bad.) In those situations, I strongly recommend working with an adoption and trauma competent therapist or Psychiatrist, and to seek the support of other late discovery adoptees.

If you are ready to proceed with learning more about your origins, these are a few of my suggestions:

1) ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS – As someone who is adopted and was denied of the truth for forty years, I can tell you firsthand that some people will feel *entitled* to hold onto vital information about *your* origins and family history even though it's not theirs to keep. Ask direct questions, (ex. Am I adopted? Why is my birth certificate amended? Why wasn't I told?, etc.) but I would caution you that not everyone will provide you with honest answers or complete information. Do not let anyone else's discomfort about the truth prevent you from exploring it. Everyone is entitled to the truth about their own family history, medical history, and genetic origins if they desire such information.

2) DNA TESTING – People lie, but DNA does not. Read that again! The easiest way to get definitive answers about your genetic origins is by taking a DNA test such as Ancestry or 23andme. There are many services available, but I recommend Ancestry because their worldwide database is enormous, which increases your chances of being matched with someone who 1.) you are genetically related to, and 2.) knows information about your true origins, and 3.) is willing to share it with you. Not everyone is comfortable with DNA testing, but it is the most straightforward way to get a definitive answer (am I adopted?) even if your parents or other family members are deceased or are not willing to provide you with this information openly. Personally, I would rather know the horrible truth than believe a beautiful lie, but not everyone feels this way. Take some time to think about this and only proceed if you are emotionally prepared to deal with any surprises (good or bad), loss of family relationships, or even major disappointments that may come your way during the discovery process. I've heard so many LDA stories since 2017 with so many different outcomes — some are incredibly beautiful, some are incredibly awful, some LDAs are rejected by their biological families and some are welcomed with open arms, and sometimes, the biological parents have passed away before they could be found. Many LDAs, like me, even choose to cut all ties with their adoptive families once the enormity of the situation sinks in and people begin to show you their true colors. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine ahead of time which way your story, or your search, will go; which is why I say you need to be emotionally prepared for *any* possible outcome if you want to proceed. Regardless of the possibility of negative outcomes, I *sincerely* wish I had known the truth decades ago. Even with my beautiful and fairytale-like adoption reunion, it's still been a very difficult journey and I have just about as perfect of a reunion as there could *possibly* be. It's just not easy no matter what the circumstances may be. Every day I live with the realization that my entire life, until age forty, was built upon a foundation of lies and fraud. It has invaded every part of my life: my work, my children, my physical health, my mental health, my relationships, my appearance, my trust, my goals — everything. This is something I will need to work on for the rest of my life, but the bottom line is I am relieved to simply have the truth. I encourage anyone suspecting they could be adopted to take your time and do what feels right for you, when *you* are ready.

3) ADOPTION CONFIRMATION & DISCOVERY PROCESS – If you have confirmed that you are adopted, either through a DNA test or by asking your family directly, take some time to process what you've learned and think about how you would like to proceed. It is a good idea to seek the support of other late discovery adoptees, and a licensed therapist and/or Psychiatrist well versed in adoption-related issues and trauma, as soon as possible. While family and friends usually mean well and can offer you some level of support, there are very complex issues relating to late discovery that others will not fully understand unless they've been through it themselves, or have studied adoption-related issues extensively (i.e., an adoption competent therapist or Psychiatrist.) While it's normal to want to talk about your feelings with family, it's very important to also communicate with people not connected to them because you may unintentionally

ensor yourself from expressing your *true* feelings and thoughts. During your discovery process, you will likely be subjected to toxic positivity from those in your family who don't want you to "rock the boat," so to speak. Expect to hear things from many of them such as "life's too short to be mad" or "you need to forgive them" or "you need to let this go," or, my personal favorite, "they only did it because they love you." You should also expect for your *very real* and *very valid* pain and trauma to be minimized, or even *mocked*, by those who directly caused it, or those who enabled it. While everyone in your adoptive family may not react like this, unfortunately, it's been my experience, and most LDAs that I've communicated with as well, for your adoptive family to treat you this way following your discovery. Learning you are adopted as an adult is difficult enough without thoughtless clichés being thrown at you by people who have the *privilege* of not having to personally live with the trauma you are experiencing. It is for this reason I say you should *absolutely* seek support outside of your adoptive family, even if only to hear the honest opinions and perspectives of people not associated with your adoption, or your adoptive family. You will probably be *very* shocked by the extreme differences between your adoptive family's feelings about your discovery (*ex. it's not that big of a deal, you need to move on, life's too short to be angry, nothing has changed, etc.*) versus the reactions of those who have no connection to them (*ex. how cruel, how could they never tell you, this is so wrong, I'm so sorry that happened to you, etc.*) It's also very important to periodically remind yourself that your adoptive parents (and the people who enabled them) are the ones who have knowingly lied to you and withheld vital information from you until this point. That was very wrong of them, no matter what the circumstances may have been. You must think about yourself right now. If you're angry or upset, that is completely justified. If you're feeling numb and confused that is also completely justified. If you're not sure what you're feeling or rotate between emotions that is totally normal as well. Do not let anyone else tell you how you 'should' be feeling right now or how you 'should' be handling this mind-blowing discovery. I think the most important thing I can tell you is that this is a very difficult situation to be in and it's not always easy, but you are most certainly not alone. There are people out there, like me, who intimately understand what you are going through and can offer you peer-to-peer support. If you are a late-discovery adoptee looking for referral to an online LDA support group, please let me know. There are a few private/secret groups on Facebook, but you must be invited in by an existing member who can vouch for you. Please contact me if you would like to be referred. I also highly recommend working with an adoption *and* trauma competent therapist and/or Psychiatrist as soon as possible to help you navigate your new reality.

-Michelle

*This is a text-only version of an article originally posted in 2018 to theriessfamily.com
To view the full article, including links & images, please visit the website. Thank you!*