

Dear Connecticut Legislators:

Please support and pass Senate Bill 113!

I am an adoptee who was born, raised and adopted in New York City. I am passionate about Adoptee Rights and restoring adult adoptees' access to our original birth certificates nationwide. I am particularly connected to the Adoptee Birth Certificate Access movement in the State of Connecticut, having traveled all throughout your beautiful state presenting my award-winning autobiographical play, **The Good Adoptee**, that I also directed, doing lengthy in-depth talk-backs in each community following the show and raising funds and awareness for the incredible Access Connecticut. We did 9 shows over a 7 week period. You are so close to finally achieving the restoration of Civil Rights and Equality for adult adoptees in Connecticut! As I'm sure you are aware, my home state of New York just restored adoptees' unrestricted access to our original birth certificates, ending 83 years of discrimination and inequality and becoming the 10th and largest state with Equality for its Adopted Citizens. This happened with a Supermajority in the Legislature last June and Governor Cuomo's support and enthusiastic signature last November. The law went into effect January 15th and adult adoptees in New York are getting their original birth certificates every day now! Mine is on the way. Connecticut now has the unique opportunity not only to be on the right side of history, but to make history and become the 11th Equality State.

My play, **The Good Adoptee**, is the totally true story of my search for the truth of my origins in the face of New York State's sealed records, now thankfully a thing of the past. In the show, I share my absolute conviction, based on my lived experience and deep reflection, that adult adoptees must have access to our origins, history, heritage, ancestry and genealogy.

I am lucky in my adoption experience in many ways - I have wonderful parents (whom I would never dream of calling my "adoptive" parents, they are my parents) and I have always felt in sync with my family - like I belong with them. However, I had two very serious genetically-related health problems that surfaced at ages 11 and 15 that we knew nothing about. I didn't know where my illnesses had come from and on a daily basis, as an adoptee in survival-mode, I didn't know the basic questions that most people take for granted: where do I come from? Who am I?

You cannot underestimate the damaging impact of trying to grow up and form an identity with the presence of such glaring blanks - or to put it another way - with the absence of such essential personal information. We adoptees are called upon to pretend that we are blank slates who can be raised by any family and shape-shift to make that work, to pretend that all life begins at adoption and that biology doesn't matter. That it is normal and acceptable to not honor or understand biological ancestral connection, one's own complex ethnicity and history, that trying to stay healthy with a complete question mark on a basic medical form asking for family history is okay. The first time I was faced with filling out a doctor's form on family medical history, I got half-way through it having filled it out with my (adoptive) family's information before I crossed it all out and wrote: N/A - NOT GENETICALLY RELATED TO MY FAMILY. I've gotten a mammogram every single year since age 35 due to this particular blank.

Having worked with the blanks as I formed my identity and came into adulthood, it was scary to even think about finding out what the blanks were since I had become the person I was at that point without them. But finally, I was ready. I thought that that once I was ready, all I had to do was go into my adoption agency and request my file. I could not have been more wrong. What I discovered,

as an adult in my 30s, was that my very own file did not belong to me: it was the property of the government and of the adoption agency who had overseen the transaction of my adoption, the transfer of me from my family of origin to my (adoptive) family all those years ago. How could this be? How would this information be kept from me? This very basic, essential information about my life and my origins. I am an adult, a contributing member of society who pays taxes! How could this random social worker at the agency have access to all of my personal information and not me? A social worker, who, by the way, like the tremendous majority of professionals in the industry, did not agree with these laws in any way, but was forced to enforce them.

I was further flabbergasted to discover that the birth certificate that I had grown up with for my entire life was a fake. It was not my original, authentic BIRTH certificate but rather, what is known as an Amended Birth Certificate, which was created when I my adoption went through a year after my birth and lists my (adoptive) parents as if they gave birth to me instead of adopted me. Up to that point, I realized that I was at a distinct disadvantage due to the prevalence of the blanks, but it was then that I became aware of what a shocking civil rights violation was being perpetrated on me and my fellow adoptees - we were second class citizens under the law, denied access to the basic essential information that most take for granted. All other Americans have access to their original birth certificates. This is not right.

Then I found out that adoptees used to have access, that this was a fight to RESTORE access. The sealing of OBCs was perhaps well intentioned, to protect adoptees from the stigma of bastard status, but that was decades and decade ago. Thankfully the stigma around single motherhood has long since ended in our culture, children born into this world are no longer considered “illegitimate” yet the sealed records that remain actually perpetuate the shame and secrecy around adoption that existed years ago. It’s time to put an end to this. We adoptees are still being treated like children who need protecting from our true selves throughout adulthood in an obscene and inappropriate way.

Due to sealed records, I had to become Nancy Drew and conduct a search to find my origins that was extremely challenging and costly - both emotionally and financially. Again, for information that most people take for granted and have had the opportunity to integrate into their identities since early childhood. The more wholeness and fewer blanks, the more I could reclaim myself, my true self, my whole self and the more grounded and confident I became, the more available I became to myself and to my husband, dear friends and wonderful family. The more I could share of myself, now knowing who I was, and the more I could show up and contribute - and yes, pay taxes!

Facebook and social media in general have transformed the face of adoption search. The prevalence of consumer DNA is further bursting the field wide open. Adoptees and birth families need to find each other and we will, one way or another. I cannot stress how high the stakes are when you’re trying to get by with just the blanks. But social media and DNA are very public enterprises and don’t honor the privacy of the individuals trying to find each other. It is not the best way. Even if it facilitates connection and reunion, it does not restore the civil rights of adoptees which I believe is long overdue. An adoptee needs to be treated like every other citizen. Otherwise we remain stunted as children, forever denied equality, civil rights and true citizenry (while every other obligation is required and met). We need Equality.

For some inspiration from your fellow lawmakers, here is some deeply moving testimony, extraordinary clarity and in some cases, remarkable evolution, on this important issue. Please take a look at the Historic New York Assembly Hearing of June 20, 2019:

http://nystateassembly.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=7&clip_id=5185&meta_id=94776&fbclid=IwAR0yTXk4GIP986AD4o5rA5uS0uBwS8h9QJEn8FCRp8Y_e16w-8a0DBStmUc

One of my favorite articles about this topic is this fantastic piece,
Why All U.S. States Should Allow Adoptees Access to Their Authentic Birth Certificates
by Mirah Riben

Rather than reiterate its contents, I refer you to it:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mirah-riben/why-all-us-states-should- b_8858162.html

In addition, if you would like to hear more of my personal story, in much more depth and in a theatrical presentation with an exquisite and award-winning performance by actress Anna Bridgforth, please feel free to take a look at the video from an early Off Broadway performance of **The Good Adoptee**. It seems so appropriate that it is on a previously inaccessible, secret page on YouTube.

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUX85Z_mnu0&t=1s

Show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD6roVEFgmg&feature=youtu.be>

More Info: www.TheGoodAdoptee.com

Even though I have discovered so much through my search, there are still missing pieces. And there is still a missing piece of paper, my original birth certificate which I, along with my fellow New York born Adult Adoptees finally have legal access to once again and which I will soon be holding in my excited, shocked and grateful hands. I will finally, along with my adoptee sisters and brothers, be able to join the ranks of birth certificate possessors along with our fellow non-adopted citizens who have had all along. It means the world to me to have access to this sacred record of my birth and all that it entails and to be treated equally under the law like every other non-adopted American. I wish the same for my adoptee sisters and brothers across the nation and for my fellow adoptees in Connecticut – including the ones who happen to be born between January 1, 1944 and October 1, 1983.

This is an incredible opportunity for Connecticut to be on the right side of history and help propel the tide in restoring civil rights, and yes, human rights, to Adopted Americans living in Connecticut and join New York in leading the way towards Equality for All. It's not every day that you have the opportunity to end discrimination, restore civil rights and make the world a little more fair and just. We are counting on you to do the right thing.

Please support and pass Senate Bill 113! Thank you.

All my best,
Suzanne Bachner

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