

Please support and pass SB 113.

Every year the message is the same, only the bill number changes, my hope is that this is the last year I have to pour my heart out to complete strangers. That this is the last year I need to write an email and beg for what is a legal right to some adoptees yet eludes others. That this is the last year so many adoptees and birth parents in Connecticut have to question and wonder why they are treated like second class citizens.

My name is Nicole Gardinier, I am an adoptee born in 1977 in Middletown, CT and was put up for adoption through the Catholic Charities in Norwich, CT. As an adoptee, I was on the "search" for more than 20 years looking for answers to questions that only an adoptee could understand-questions that may seem trivial to other people but are a constant void of information, a hole in fabric of who I am. My search was started for so many reasons, some relatively small reasons (who do I look like, where do some of my traits come from), while others are larger and more complex (do I have siblings, where do I fit in, why do I feel out of place even among family that loves me, what is my medical history, does cancer run in my family, mental illness?).

For non-adoptees, one cannot grasp the magnitude of what growing up as an adoptee can mean to a child that has these questions, questions deeply attached to self-worth and the understanding of who we are. With this said, I have had a very blessed life with a family and parents who love me unconditionally, they have never made me feel as if I don't belong, never excluded me because I am not blood. But I always felt different, as if there was something missing, I needed answers and the only way I was ever going to get these answers was to find my birth family-this is why I support SB 113.

As a 42 year old adult, a mother, a wife-I was not looking for a replacement family, I was not looking to disrupt the life that my birth parents have made for themselves, I wasn't even looking for a relationship with them, only basic information and answers to my questions. The majority of adoptees in the group that this bill address are adults, grown men and women who are looking for the truth, the basics information that is awarded to so many adoptees in this country but because of the years we were born and the state we were adopted in we are being discriminated against. It's unjust and unfair and it's time to change the law.

I understand that birth certificates were originally sealed to protect the birth parents, to give them a sense of security that their secret would be kept safe....but this is not the 1970's and times have changed. Technology has changed and opened doors for adoptees looking for their truth. In 2016, I found Ancestry and bought a DNA kit as quickly as I could, hoping that this would be my answer, hoping to find my heritage, my ancestors and maybe even links to my birth parents. Two years after taking the test I finally received a match to a 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin who immediately responded to my message, he confirmed we were indeed 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins and gave me the name of another cousin, Sue, who was the family "history buff". Sue emailed me back within 5 minutes of me emailing her and said, "I always knew you would find us!". I cried and rejoiced and could not wait to read the rest of her email-she gave me the answers I had been looking for for over 20 years. She gave me names, informed me I had siblings and that she herself was even in the delivery room when I was born. I can't tell you how validated I felt-and how loved I was.

From there I reached out to my siblings and my birth mother (my birth father was not interested and I absolutely respected this and will not plan on contacting him unless he reaches out to me). Within a few months I was back in CT and met them all with open, loving arms. It was the most incredible experience

of my life, beyond words. It was natural and organic and as nervous as we all were it was an amazing cathartic experience that brought closer to all of us. I was able to ask questions and my birth mother was finally able to get peace knowing that I was loved and cared for by my family, that she made the right choice. And I was finally able to tell her "Thank you".

I am one of the lucky ones, I was able to end my search because of DNA but if I had to wait for the State of Connecticut to change their laws I may have missed out on so many more years of not knowing my family.

Please know that this is not a small thing, this is LIFE CHANGING! And although I found my happy ending, my answers, I want that piece of paper, I want to hold it in my hands and feel complete. I want this for all adoptees.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to share my story, I can only hope that I help another adoptee by providing testimony to pass SB 133.

Most Sincerely-Nicole Gardinier

*Nicole Gardinier*

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