

Leah L. Culler, an adoptee (adopted person, if you prefer), is a writer and editor living in Washington, D.C. She is fascinated by the effects adoption can have on individuals and their relationships and loves learning about other people's ties to adoption.



I started to think about the words we use to describe adoption and the parties involved at a pretty young age. When friends would learn I was adopted, they would often naively ask things like: “Do you know anything about your real parents?” I always found that choice of words strange, and my response was always along these lines: “My real parents are the parents who raised me and fed me and taught me about right and wrong. There is nothing fake or unreal about them.”

Of course, my biological parents are every bit as real as the parents who raised me. They played an essential role in who I am because they created me. But when I refer to my parents, I always mean my adoptive parents. They are the only parents I have ever known AS parents.

I know my birth mother now, and I have a friendship with her. I would never call her mom, but I sometimes wonder how I should refer to her. I choose to use her name, and I refer to her as my biological mother or birth mother when telling others about her. It's tricky for her, as well. When people ask her how many kids she has, she's always had an answer — does that answer change now that I've re-entered her life after all these years? When her nieces and nephews ask how I'm related to them, what does she say?

I have friends who have reunited with biological family members and feel closer to those people than the people who raised them. That's certainly not uncommon. And if it feels natural and comfortable for that son to call his biological mother “Mom,” then he by all means should.

Family is always complicated. Adoption creates a unique challenge when it comes to language, but there is no right answer. We should use the words that feel comfortable to us and to the people with whom we have formed relationships.

Lynne Connor is a Korean adoptee writer whose trigger word is “real” although she exists most comfortably in the world of creative non-fiction. The following scene is an excerpt from her work-in-progress memoir, ABANDON ME. She earned an MFA in creative writing from Mills College and has been published in the Asian American literary journal, Kartika Review, as well as other adoption publications. In between writing about themes of adoption, identity, race and grief, Connor founded Lost Lit, a literary arts space that hosts creative writing workshops and arts events in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, NY. She plans to start a writing workshop specifically geared toward the adoption community. Visit www.lostlit.com or email her directly at lynne@lostlit.com to find out more.



I sat next to my mother's hospital bedside reading a Danielle Steel novel. I wanted to completely escape into a world filled with love and hope. I needed someone to have a happy ending since the story of my mother and I, the story of us, was not getting one. It was supposed to though.

When she was 40 and adopted me from Korea, at the age of 2½, as a strong, independent single by choice, white woman, there was no question. We would live happily ever after without a man, without addressing race or adoption, without talking about the improper, uncomfortable issues that her 1950's coming-of-age era frowned upon. And for the most part, we were happy.

I loved my mother with a kind of ferocity that any only child without a father would. As a former librarian with a penchant for planning and control, she did not plan to die this early. Metastatic breast cancer at the age of 66 was ruining her frolicking retirement plans. The threat of her abandoning me, was ruining my happily ever after.

A nurse I'd never seen before came bounding in and stopped abruptly when she saw me. Her forehead furrowed together as her eyes moved from where I was sitting to my mom.

“Can I help you?” She asked.

I was alone in the room at the time, but I still looked around wondering what she meant. “No, I'm good.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m — her daughter.” I waved my hand at my mom’s immobile body. Duh I thought.

“I don’t think so,” she said.

My eyebrows shot up. Who was this woman?

“How in the world are you related to her?” She came closer to the edge of the bed squinting at me.

“I was adopted,” I replied.

“Ohhhh,” she said. She cocked her head to the side. “From where?”

“Korea,” I said flatly.

“Korea! Humm. So, you must want to search for your real mom huh?” she asked.

In normal circumstances, I hated that question. But this was ridiculous. My mother was lying right there. Right there. I wanted to spit on the ground (just for dramatic effect) and give a long-winded speech. I’d tell her it was none of her God-damned business if I wanted to search. I’d scoff, saying that the notion of a birth family search was the most clichéd and disgustingly glamorized rendition of the only problem adoptees had to face. And that if she had to know — I was not one of those adoptees claiming that if I found my birth mother, I would find me. Bullshit.

But mostly, I wanted to tell her that I was so sick and tired of justifying my right to be my mother’s daughter. So what — I didn’t look like my mother. Right now, all that mattered was that my mother knew that she would be the only mother to me.

In the past and in the future, I’d do things to try to reclaim that sense of lost ness. But one thing I would not do — was search for my birth mother or refer to her as my adoptive mother. My mother was lying right there. Right in front of me. I could touch her. She chose me and now I chose her as the only “real” mother I wanted to know.

Do you have a story to share? Send stories to Adoption Today at editor@adoptinfo.net.



Adoptions From The Heart®

Begin your adoption journey today.

6,066 Families
Placed With Children

27 Years
Of Experience

1 Infant

Will Capture Your Heart
And Change Your World.



(800)355-5500 www.afth.org

Call or visit us online to learn more about adoption.

Domestic Infant Adoption ♥ Home Study Services
Embryo Placement Assistance ♥ Surrogacy in India

“You can never have too many
people to love a child.”
—Patricia Dischler



Change Lives:
Book Patricia
Dischler, Best-Selling
Adoption Book Author
at your next event!



Patricia’s poignant account of a birthmother’s journey through open adoption will forever change your perception of birthmothers, clear away all the myths, and erase all the fears of entering an open adoption arrangement. For a roadmap to success for the families you serve:

Call today!
608-544-2733