

A top-down photograph of a desk with a green grid pattern. At the top is a white keyboard. Below it are a pair of brown-rimmed glasses. To the right is a white mouse. In the center is a photograph of a young girl with long brown hair and bangs, wearing a colorful plaid shirt and a blue patterned vest. To the left of the photo is a clear container with paper clips. The text 'LOST' is in a white box on the left, 'and' is in a white box in the center, and 'FOUND' is in a white box on the left below the photo.

**LOST**

**and**

**FOUND**

I was given up for adoption at birth and always wondered about my origins. When I turned 36, I hired a private detective to locate my biological family.

**I ended up discovering more than I was looking for**

BY JESSICA ROSE

**1.**

I decided to search for my biological family on September 22, 2014, sitting at the top of a double-decker bus, stuck in traffic in Shoreditch, late for work at the *Sunday Times Magazine* in London. I'd just turned 36, and it occurred to me that my biological grandparents—their existence at that moment distant, hypothetical and abstract—were also getting older. If they were alive, I had to find them now or face the consequences of never. I immediately consulted Google, searching, "Adopted Ontario Canada Find Biological Family." I clicked on a few of the results: an adoptee who found her family in a cemetery and now fills her own void by helping other adoptees search (dreadful), a support group for searching adoptees (still dreadful) and a retired police detective in Ontario with a track record of finding birth parents (significantly less dreadful). By the time I crossed London Bridge, even later for work, I had emailed the private detective.

I had lunch with a journalist at the magazine at Elliot's in Borough Market, who was clearly horrified by my decision to search. "You just opened Pandora's box." He was right. I had tried and failed to search before. If I was fortunate enough to find my birth family this time or at all, I had no idea who—or what—I would be inviting into my life.

To search or not to search was a choice my parents prepared me for. It was a decision I could make when I turned 18. Whenever I tell people I am adopted, the response generally goes something like: "I didn't know *you* were adopted!?" It's a statement and a question. They're asking, are you all right with this? (Yes.) Why did your parents give you away? (Teenage pregnancy.) Will you

PHOTOGRAPH BY HANA KNIZOVA



▲ As a child, Jessica Rose vacationed with her family in Prince Edward Island

◀ The author, in London in 2017, decided to search for her biological family three years ago

▶ This is Jessica at age six, in McNicoll Park in North York



search for them? (Yes.) Some adoptees, like my brother, have no desire to seek out their birth families. But I always knew I would.

Despite my parents' best intentions, the reality of a closed adoption meant that even when I turned 18, the ability to find out where I came from was way beyond my control—highly unlikely at best and impossible at worst. In accordance with Ontario laws, the identities of my biological parents were never disclosed. The information at my disposal was limited to a file the Toronto Children's Aid Society handed over to my parents when they handed me over, a few typed pages my father kept in a file folder in the bottom drawer of his oak desk. I was from a small town in Ontario, I was half-Italian, and my name at birth was Martina. That's all I got. My birth records were permanently sealed, the identity of my birth mother blacked out with an unforgiving marker, the identity of my birth father left off the form. The law upheld the idea that my biological mother's right to privacy was more important than my right to know where I came from.

When I was born in 1978, I was taken from my mother within hours of my birth. A temporary ward of the state, I was held in foster care for a cooling-off stage of a couple of months, during which time both my biological and adoptive parents could change their minds. Then an adoption order was issued, the birth records permanently sealed, and I was legally adopted. My parents, who were unable to have biological children, had been on a waiting list for over seven years. They did not change their minds.

For my birth parents, sealed adoption records were the point of no return. To relinquish me was to relinquish being identified, and to relinquish our identities in relation to each other. For my parents—my real parents—the past was sealed literally and symbolically to bring me into the family. A new birth certificate was substituted: I was renamed and reborn. A sealed birth record was meant to protect me, preventing any additional confusion about where I belonged. It was a paradox: how can you black out where you come from?

I grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, the daughter of two Jewish intellectuals—my dad a child psychologist, my mom a social worker. True to form, they always encouraged me to ask questions. “Why don't I look like you? Why didn't my parents want me? Are you my real dad? Can I look for my biological family? Am I really Jewish?” My parents told me it did not matter that I arrived in a different way than children born naturally into their families. I was loved as much (“but not more,” my dad would say) as if I was their biological child. I came in the back seat of a blue Punch Buggy, my brother in a maroon Dodge station wagon. My dad loved to tell me how he counted my toes, right then and there on the driveway: “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and oh! Where did 10 go?!” he'd joke. “Dad!” I would scream. “I have 10 toes! Look! Look! Look at my toes!”

“Sweetie, even if you came with a missing toe, it would make no difference to me. Counting them meant you were really here.”

I was curious about my biological family, who seemed real and vague, as if living in a parallel universe. But I embraced

my difference. Different meant special. As I got older, I became aware that different can also mean something is wrong. The beginning of me was murky territory. Any attempt to pinpoint the source of my difference came up blank. Origins? Blank. My beginning? Again, blank. I arrived on my parents' driveway from blank, blank and blank. Waves of suffocating self-doubt and uncertainty kept me up at night.

When I was 23, I acted in a play at the Tarragon Theatre, where my character had to face the truth about her adoption. For research, I devoured books on the subject and encountered what people other than my parents think: that a child separated at birth from her mother is “primally wounded,” that adoption is a childhood trauma. Taking method acting to the next level, I applied to the Toronto Children's Aid Society, the agency that facilitated my adoption, to obtain non-identifying information about my birth family. More than a year later, long after the play was over, they called me in for an appointment. In a badly lit room, I sat across from a well-dressed volunteer. She held a 15-page report labelled “Your Birth History,” compiled from my sealed records and information my biological mother provided in interviews before the adoption. Complying with the laws on disclosure, the volunteer had edited out information that could potentially reveal the identity of my biological relations. She said I was lucky. My birth mother had been forthcoming.

I was bewildered. Random Volunteer held the truth about my origins. She knew the identity of my biological mother and father. She knew more about myself than I did. In the report,

## My biological sister and I lived half a kilometre apart in Parkdale. How many times did we sit across from each other on the TTC?

I learned that some of my maternal relations have blue eyes (mine are brown). My maternal uncles are colour-blind (I am not). My paternal grandmother is Italian and glamorous (great, when can I meet her?). My biological father's name is Tony (so he could be anyone). His younger brother died in a boat accident before I was born (such excruciating information). The volunteer hoped the report would help me understand my identity. I also learned there is a room in the Children's Aid Society full of safety deposit boxes. A CAS officer showed me mine. Left behind, like a thread tying me to my birth mother, was evidence of my origins: a typewritten letter from a social worker who expressed compassion for my birth mother's decision, and a yearbook photograph, neatly cut to size, of my biological mother, a teenage girl I nearly recognized.

For the next phase of the official search, I applied to add my name to the Adoption Disclosure Registry, a provincial register for adoptees and birth relatives seeking contact. I was told there was, on average, a two-year queue for a “passive search”: the counsellor appointed to my case would check if a birth relative was registered. (No one was searching for me.) The counsellor would then start an “active search” to obtain consent from my biological mother to disclose her identity. If the counsellor located her, she would mediate contact between

us and, if all went well, facilitate a reunion. Within six months, I received the call: “We found her!”

Through the counsellor, my birth mother and I agreed to exchange letters within two weeks—the get-to-know-each-other stage before either of us could consent to be identified. I went first. I did not know what to say (truly a rare occasion). I was studying at OCAD at the time, so I sent my biological mother a handmade book about two ships harboured on distant shores, separated by a large expanse of ocean. The ships set sail, nearly cross course, and miss each other. Finally they meet, only to realize the sea connected them all along. After a year of waiting for a response that never arrived, I met with the counsellor. “Did I do it wrong? Was my book stupid?” I asked. She suggested I try again, this time by filling out a provided form. Months passed. Did I do it wrong again? Did my form letter have too many spelling mistakes?

In 2005, I received a letter from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The department was being restructured, and all searches were suspended indefinitely, including mine. The only channel of communication between me and my birth mother was closed, putting an end to any hope that she would one day get back to me. Soon after, I learned why: a new law was passed to disclose information and records to adoptees and birth parents. My birth records would be unsealed. When the law took effect in 2007, I was afraid it would be overturned, so I applied immediately. Three years later, my original birth certificate arrived in the mail. I was 32 years old and finally had the information I needed to search for my family of origin: my biological mother's name and place of birth. I stuck my birth certificate on the fridge and left it there.

It took four years, a move across the world and an epiphany on a double-decker bus to act. By definition, a search means something is missing. I suspected my missing blank was an essential blank. I sensed I had never been further from the blank place called home and from the blank people to whom I was inherently connected. I was a missing person. Less than 24 hours after hiring the private detective in Ontario, I woke up to an email. He'd located my maternal relatives. He sent a report, along with links to some Facebook profiles. I logged on and, for the first time, I encountered my birth family.

## 2.

Initially, I only wanted to see what my biological relatives looked like. From the detective's report and what I pieced together on Facebook, I learned I had five maternal siblings. I had two uncles and four cousins. And I had two living grandparents. For days, I was in a state of shock. Glued to my computer, I clicked back and forth between pictures. Like tracing a personal history that never was, connecting a cousin to an uncle to a sibling to a grandparent, I was looking at a gallery of artifacts from the parallel universe of my origins.

Knowledge of my family—and creeping them on Facebook—was not enough. As far as I could tell, my sister Krista was an architect living in Toronto. We had friends in common. I spent 15 minutes trolling her timeline, pieced together that she had worked at a friend of a friend's firm and procured her email address.

To contact or not to contact my sister? I was afraid of disrupting her life. She was a stranger who could be hurt by what I

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROSE AS ADULT BY HANA KNIZOVA; OTHERS COURTESY OF JESSICA ROSE



▲ One of the great revelations of Jessica's search was the discovery of her biological sister, Krista, who is an architect in Toronto. Krista is shown here at age 10 in North Bay, with her grandfather Larry

suspected was a 36-year family secret. I googled “How To Write A Letter To A Separated-At-Birth Sister.” The last time I’d written to a biological relation wasn’t exactly fruitful.

I sent the email, and Krista responded within 20 minutes. She later told me she’d fallen off her chair at work when she received my note. From that moment, my life changed. It was as if the years and years of unknowing were set right. The cycle of separation was broken. The blip or fracture or mistake that separated us stood corrected, mended, rectified by the act of our reunion. No one, no circumstance, no law, no black Sharpie and no decision made by a teenage girl could change this irrevocable fact: I had a sister. I found for the first time something that was certain.

Krista is my older sister by two years and two months. I was teen pregnancy number two. I had been told that I was adopted because my biological mother was a teenager who wasn’t ready or able to be a parent. A pertinent fact was omitted from my file: *by the way, she kept the first one.* When I found out that Krista and I have different fathers, I was disappointed—I wanted to answer the Who’s My Daddy question. I also discovered that before my email, Krista had no idea I existed. We suspected the rest of the family was equally oblivious. I was my biological mother’s secret.

Krista and I began corresponding non-stop over email. We had 36 years to catch up on. We compared our characteristics and looked for connections. We’re both athletic. We both wear glasses. We both had nose piercings in the ’90s. And we both love to talk. We traced our geographies and looked for points of intersection. Krista was raised in part by our grandparents in North Bay. After my parents divorced, I was raised by my dad in north Toronto. Krista moved to the Northwest Territories in high school. When I was in high school, I moved to Western Canada. We shared our journeys and significant moments to see if the plots of our lives overlapped. We eventually ended up on the same path and in the same place: Toronto. Between 2009 and 2010, we lived less than half a kilometre from each other in Parkdale. We both took the streetcar to work from west to east, our offices blocks apart. How many times did we sit across from each other on the TTC?

Once, Krista sent me an email: “What if we shared a lover?” (We did not.) We spent our 20s at almost the same places at nearly the same times, hanging out with some of the same people, always missing each other. One year, at a Halloween party in the building I lived in, a woman rocked up wearing an outrageous cocktail dress constructed from magazine pages. It was my sister.

We tried to sort out the mysteries to make sense of our separated paths. We imagined an alternate reality where I was not adopted and Krista was. Would we have found each other? Then there’s the one where we were not separated, where we grew up together. Such painful speculation. It was as if I had been standing at a threshold—she was there, right in front of me all along, on the other side of what was possible. I was hit by a delayed grief. In finding Krista, I had to wrap my head around her being missing from most of my life. I mourned the loss like someone had died.

My father was elated that I’d found my sister. “Mazel tov!” he said. “Potential disaster averted!” He told me that I had always been a certain way: distant, floating, lost in space. He hoped finding Krista would change things for me. “There are people we carry around with us in our hearts, no matter what. Now you carry your sister with you, and she carries you. She was always there and now you know. This brings you back down to earth. With the rest of us.”

Seven months after we started corresponding, Krista and I finally met in person at the Dean Hotel in Dublin in the spring of 2015. I saw her through the Georgian windows—petite, pregnant and in heels. When she sat down in front of me, I could not believe it. Krista and I don’t look alike, exactly. But if you had joined us that day, it would have been hard to tell us apart: the sound of our voices (nearly identical), our dispositions (strangely similar), our mannerisms (often overlapping) and the conclusions we arrive at (always out loud and almost always in tandem). For the next five days, it was like we’d never been separated.

Krista let me know our biological mother was planning a pilgrimage to the U.K. on a reiki retreat. I cut and pasted the email I’d previously delivered to Krista with so much care and sent it to my birth mother. This time she wrote back about the universe lining things up for us to meet.

### 3.

Meeting my biological mother was the beginning of the enormity of it all, of coming face to face with what it means to be adopted. It is impossible to confront the separation from my origins without tackling the mother-daughter relationship. Would the sacred bond withstand everything? The void of time, the uncertainty, the weight of secrecy? The taboo of giving away your own child? The grief that can’t be spoken, or acknowledged or mourned? Can it withstand such extreme severing? Or does it just break? Like skin breaks when we cut it, even if we tried to avoid that sharp edge, like glass breaks when it slips out of our hands, making unfortunate contact with gravity and cement, like hearts shatter when someone we love leaves us, even if we saw it coming.

My birth mother, who I’m calling Bio Mom for the sake of privacy, met me in front of Hackney Central station in May 2015. It was raining, of course—this was London. I waved from across the street as cars passed between us. I stared, waiting for the light to turn, waiting for it to register: the stranger standing at the lights 15 feet away gave birth to me. We don’t



▲ Jessica's great-great-grandfather Alfred was given up for adoption in England in the late 1800s

◀ Jessica spent months Skyping with her maternal grandparents, Larry and Beth, shown here after their marriage in 1958

look alike, but I had hoped I'd somehow recognize her as my blood. I was struck by the foreign and familiar sound of her voice. It was high-pitched, melodic, childlike and disarmingly sweet. Did I sound like that too?

The weekend hosting Bio Mom was pleasant enough. We sat around the kitchen table and talked—rather, she talked. Bio Mom said she was happy I found her. She told me she has five other children with different partners. She never wanted to marry; she is too independent for a husband. She worked in finance doing something that involved accounting, or insurance, or both. Her true vocation is as a reiki practitioner and a healer.

My birth father was standing in front of an SUV. “Hi?” I said. “I’m Jessica Rose...you must be....” Of course he was. We had the exact same smile

She walked me through the family tree, starting with the great-grandparents on her father’s side. When I thought she had covered everyone and suggested lunch, she said we were only halfway there. Lunch? Not yet. My heart raced as I braced in anticipation: was she going to apologize for abandoning me? She wasn’t. But she was sorry she never got back to me in 2005. There was a flood in her house and she lost the phone number of “that woman from social services.” She still had “all that stuff” I sent her, which she found a few years ago in a box in her basement.

I gave her the grand tour of my house, introducing her to my dog, Lucy, and my boyfriend, showing her the vanity Vitsoe shelves in my office displaying the magazine covers I had designed

for the *Sunday Times Magazine* and *Wallpaper*. “Look at you!” she said. “Beautiful! Successful! Rich! Healthy! Smart! Loved!” There were at least three inaccuracies on that list, but I was not going to correct her. The signposts of my life seemed to validate her decision to give me up. “You did just fine without me.”

The tour extended to East London. I bought her lunch, dinner, breakfast and lunch. She slept in my room, and I took the Cassina couch. I told her about my family, how I am loved, how I was raised. I reassured her of a mostly charmed existence, as if to say, *Don’t worry about it, you gave me to good people*. I had been refraining from asking The Big Questions out of politeness, not knowing her well enough—or at all—and because I felt uncomfortable. She answered some of them indirectly. Why did you give me up for adoption? “You probably would have ended up hating me anyway.” Why didn’t you tell your parents? “Giving you up was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” Why didn’t you look for me? “I always think of you on your birthday.”

I did not want to be a family secret. I wanted to meet my grandparents. I wanted my other siblings to know me. I desperately wanted to know them. And I wanted to know the identity of my biological father, without having to negotiate—with the law, or a volunteer doing charity work, or an adoption counsellor just doing her job, or especially with my biological mother. Toward the end of the weekend, over lunch, I finally addressed the elephant in the room: “Who is my biological father?” Bio Mom was holding all the cards to my missing self. And she was not prepared to tell me his identity. Instead she promised she would contact him on my behalf. “This is so much bigger than just you,” she explained. She said she would tell everyone else in her family about me, including my siblings, who were minors. She wanted to have the conversation with her parents first when she returned to Canada in a week’s time.



▲ Jessica's paternal grandmother, Theresa (left), was born in Calabria, Italy. Here, she lounges on a beach with her two sisters-in-law

◀ When Jessica met her biological father, Tony, she was shocked by how much they looked alike. He's shown here with his wife, Colleen, in Sudbury, in the late 1980s

Seven months later, on Christmas Day in London, an urgent message from Bio Mom popped up on the iPhone. Her Christmas present to the family was going to be a surprise—and I was said gift. As soon as the dessert plates were cleared from the table of my boyfriend's family's Christmas dinner, I bolted home to receive the Skype call in time for Christmas morning in Canada. I am not sure who was more stunned: my biological relatives, who had learned of my existence mere moments before, or me. The pictures of my family members I'd Facebook-stalked for more than a year came to life on the screen in front of me: my younger siblings and my grandparents. Surprise!

For the next eight months, Skyping with my maternal grandparents became a regular Sunday occurrence. Larry, otherwise known as Grumpy, accepted me immediately and without question. A retired air traffic controller, he was quick-witted, sharp-tongued and open-hearted to a fault. We got on famously. When Grumpy was 20, he discovered his true loves: aviation and my grandmother, Beth. They married in 1958 and flew off to an army base in France. Many European misadventures later, Grumpy and Nana settled in North Bay. When he found out about me, he called the family historian to add a branch back onto the tree. Separation and loss were familiar to my grandfather: his mother, Evelyn, was adopted. Before that, his grandfather Alfred. When he was eight, his father died of tuberculosis. Alfred's mother could no longer care for her younger children and handed two of her sons over to Dr. Barnardo's, a British home for poor children, perhaps hoping to someday get them back. Two years later, he was separated from his brother, put on a boat and shipped off to Canada. He landed in Ontario and became a Barnardo Home Boy, one of 100,000 children used as indentured farm workers or domestic servants. I learned from Grumpy that the other intergenerational family pattern is reunion: the missing people always seem to find their way home, eventually turning up on a relative's doorstep.

By June, I was making travel plans for a reunion at the end of the summer with my grandparents in North Bay. Turning up on my biological father's doorstep was not even a remote possibility. I had a good idea of who he was, based in part on the "non-identifying" information from the volunteer's report. I knew his first name, Tony. I knew the story of a family who had lost a son

in a boating accident in the mid-'70s. This led me to an Italian family from the area who looked remarkably like me in Facebook pictures. But after two years of looking at photographs, I was not prepared to send a letter to the number-one paternity candidate based on an educated guess. I needed 100 per cent certainty.

In the absence of proof, I believed Bio Mom was the one person who could confirm his identity. She had tried to contact him and said she knew he got the message. She was sorry he didn't respond. We reached a stalemate. I overcame the urge to jump to the worst conclusion or jump off a building. The belief in the validity of my search began to falter. Was it possible to return Pandora's box?

Days before the reunion, on August 22, 2016, Grumpy Skyped with news. At a bar in North Bay called the Portage, my uncle had run into a family friend: Tony. He congratulated my uncle on the acquisition of a new niece. Then he outed himself as my biological father—he later told me he had recently discovered Bio Mom's message on Facebook. I was still on Skype with my grandparents when I sent my birth father a Facebook friend request. He accepted immediately. I cut and pasted the email I had sent Krista and Bio Mom, adding: "I am 99.999 per cent certain I am your biological daughter." Tony responded that he was excited about our reunion in Canada.

## 4.

In August 2016, I returned to North Bay, the town where I was conceived, a place where a soy latte is a unicorn and motor boating is the official form of public transportation. A friend dropped me off at Webers on Highway 11, where Grumpy and Nana picked me up and drove me to their house on Trout Lake—they call it the Cottage in summer, the Chalet in winter. I was greeted by balloons, roses and my three youngest maternal siblings.

The next morning I went to Arugula, a stone-baked pizza restaurant, to meet my biological father. I was so nervous that I unfolded out of the car, proclaiming, "I am going to be sick!" Greatest first impression ever. Tony was standing in front of a black SUV—tall, dark, handsome and smiling. "Hi?" I said. "I'm Jessica Rose...you must be...." Of course he was. We had the

exact same smile. When we sat down for lunch, we compared medical notes. We both had the same scars across our necks because we both had half of our thyroids removed. I tried not to stare: is that my funny skinny lip? The shape of my face? The dark markings around my eyes?

Tony grew up in North Bay. Like half the population, his parents were originally from Calabria, the big toe of Italy. They owned a successful sporting goods store, which Tony eventually took over. Tony's wife, Colleen, is part Irish and part Nipissing Anishinabe. I have two paternal half-siblings: 29-year-old Nicholas, who had just been transferred to the North Bay military base, and 27-year-old Bella, who looks like an Italian movie star from the '60s. Tony said they could not wait to meet me.

I knew very little about Tony when we met. I figured he was just some teenage boy who got a girl pregnant and put a child up for adoption. He and Bio Mom knew each other from "around the lake." Bio Mom was almost 18, and Tony was 20. He told me that when he learned she was pregnant, about a month before I was born, she had already made the decision to put me up for adoption. He did not have a say. Within 60 minutes of our reunion, Bio Dad had filled in the big blank of the circumstance of my birth.

After I was born, Bio Mom gave him a photograph of me, with the name "Martina" written on the back. He locked himself in a dark room in the basement of a townhouse in Waterloo, where he was a third-year mathematics student at Wilfrid Laurier. He stayed there for hours, then days, then weeks. Eventually, he walked out of the basement, leaving me and Martina behind. He erased the adoption from his memory—a necessary omission. One day, more than 36 years later, he logged onto Facebook. There, he found a message from Bio Mom, time-stamped from more than nine months before, ending his self-inflicted amnesia about the adoption. He had also been keeping his family in the dark. He disclosed the story of Baby Martina, first to Colleen, then to my siblings, then to his parents. I was humbled. How could I have ever thought my adoption wasn't a major life event for my biological father? The moment I was given up was the moment I was taken away from him.

Tony gave me the grand tour of North Bay. It was the perfect day for a long drive. At Northgate Square Mall, we saw his family's old business. Everyone seemed to know Tony. He stopped to talk to a friend and with the woman who worked at the grocery store checkout, who mistook me for my sister Bella. He showed me the reserve, sharing his love of the area's natural beauty, on the way to his house on Lake Nipissing, the moody, windy lake that looks like a Canadian landscape painting. He built the house himself, modelling it after a classical ratio he was particularly fond of in the domed windows of the Hagia Sophia cathedral (Tony is Catholic). He eventually let it slip that I was probably conceived in Grumpy and Nana's bed at the Cottage. Mystery solved. By the time we arrived at the Miner's Son, the other good restaurant in North Bay, for a reunion with my two siblings and their respective families, he was the most familiar stranger I'd ever met.

The celebrations continued. On Labour Day weekend I was invited to join the family on a trip to the Nipissing First Nation powwow on Jocko Point. Amid birch trees, the smell of bannock and the beat of powwow dancers draped in Italian flags alongside their furs, Bio Dad introduced me to Chief Scott McLeod. He told the chief that I was his biological daughter visiting from London. The chief recognized our resemblance instantly. I was unmistakably Tony's daughter.

The power of reunion was familiar to Chief McLeod. He explained that the headdress of the Nipissing First Nation had been lost in the 1800s. With its physical absence, knowledge of its existence also disappeared. For several generations, the Nipissing adopted another headdress, one with lots of feathers that, unbeknownst to them, looked nothing like the one that went missing. Recently, elders and archivists pieced together information about the original. The traditional headdress was reconstructed, and a new element was added: seven eagle feathers. In a ceremony at sunrise that morning, the headdress was reintroduced to the community. When something goes missing and is put back together, it may not look like what you imagined, but it finds its way home.

On the day before I returned to London, Grumpy and Nana hosted another reunion with my paternal grandparents, Al and Theresa—their friends of over 40 years. Theresa was dressed like it was Saturday morning in Rome. I recognized her from the strangely accurate descriptions in the report I had received from the Children's Aid Society 14 years earlier. During the search for my origins, I followed a feeling that on the other end of all this unknowing, I would be found—and this feeling was embodied in Theresa. I was no longer a missing person. I cried. No one minded. My grandfather Al teasingly said, "*Sei la gioia del mio cuore*. Do you know what that means?" I gave him a hug. "You're the joy of my heart, too," I replied. From then on, I was to call them Nonno and Nonna.

## 5.

Whenever I tell people about my family now, to keep things simple, I say it's greatly expanded. It's impossible to keep track of which brother I am referring to (I have four) or which sister (I have five, including stepsiblings). I have two new sets of living grandparents. My biological mother and I were unable to form a relationship from a broken bond—we are no longer in touch. But unexpectedly, I've developed a father-daughter relationship with Tony. I now have two amazing dads.

I am still separated from all of my families—geographically, at least—but those I carry close to my heart are always with me. Now what keeps me up at night, beyond how to co-ordinate Skype dates across time zones and holiday schedules, is imagining a time when my siblings' children and my own future kids grow up together with no recollection of our separation. Our reunion has healed a generational rift.

On the first anniversary of my reunion in Canada, I find myself sitting in the front seat on the top of a double-decker bus on my old route to work at the *Sunday Times Magazine*. Tony has sent a note on Facebook Messenger: "And what a year...our reunion is like the bubbly foam on top of the best-tasting champagne."

I am on my way to the London address of my great-great-grandfather Alfred, before he was separated from his family. No need to type the postcode into Google Maps. The address is on Hackney Road, the same street where, three years ago and stuck in traffic, I hired a detective to find my origins. The house is also a familiar 20-minute walk from my home of seven years. When I moved across the world, I ended up down the road from the home of my long-lost relative. More than 120 years after Alfred's circumstances pulled him, in the most unfortunate of ways, to Canada, I discovered I was on his return ticket home. Once, I was floating, orbiting the earth, a missing person lost in space, separate and separated. Well, Alfred, I am certainly here now. ■