

My Adoption Story

By Angela L. Brinkley

This book is dedicated to:

To my Dad and Mom,  
Thank you for loving me before I was even born.  
I would not have wanted any other parents.

To Lucia, “my sister”  
Thank you for believing me and accepting me immediately.  
You are my best friend not just my sister.

To “Big Sister”  
I can hardly put into words how much you mean  
to me. I am beyond grateful to call you my “Big Sister”

To my Children,  
I know now all this had to happen in my life  
so I would have you two. I love with every breath I take.

To my husband,  
Thank you for coming into my  
life and being not only my husband, but best friend.  
I am so happy you walked beside me through this.

## Prologue

Growing up, I had everything I needed—a warm home, two incredible parents who chose to love me unconditionally gave a life full of happy memories. The ones who shaped my beginnings and who I am today. But there was always that missing piece. A question that lingered, a void I couldn't ignore: Who am I?

It wasn't just curiosity; it was a yearning for connection, for answers. I wanted to know where I came from. What did she look like? Did I have her smile, her laugh? And what about him? Did I have his eyes, his stubborn streak?

This journey wasn't just about biology. It was about understanding the story that brought me here.

I never could have imagined the twists, turns, and revelations waiting for me. What began as a search for answers turned into a journey of heartbreak, discovery, and, ultimately, peace.

But before we get there, let me take you back to the beginning. To a phone call that changed everything.

## Chapter 1: Coming Home

My parents always knew they wanted children, but life had other plans. After years of trying, they learned it wouldn't be possible for them. My mom had endometriosis, a condition that eventually led to a hysterectomy, closing the door on their dreams of biological children. But it didn't close the door on their dream of being parents.

They adopted my brother when he was 9 months old, and he quickly became the light of their lives. Still, they felt like their family wasn't quite complete. Years passed, and they continued to pray for the opportunity to welcome another child into their home.

It was a Sunday morning like any other. My parents were at church, standing at the front of the congregation, ready to sing. The melody they were about to share wasn't just a hymn; it was their way of praising the life they'd been given, the blessings they already had. Little did they know, their world was about to change forever.

As they waited for the pastor's cue, the phone rang in the church office. The pastor stepped away to answer it, and though my parents couldn't hear the conversation, they noticed him glancing their way, his expression softening with each word.

What they didn't know was that on the other end of the line was a nurse from a hospital just a few towns over. A young woman was about to give birth, and she'd made it clear: she didn't want the baby. She wanted no involvement. The child needed a home, and fast.

The pastor returned to his seat as though nothing had happened. My parents sang their hearts out, oblivious to the life-altering news waiting for them. Only after the final note of the service did he approach them.

"There's something I need to tell you," He began.

Curiosity flickered in their eyes. "What is it?"

"A call came in just before the service. A young woman is about to give birth, and she doesn't want the baby. I thought you should know."

Their faces lit up, but confusion lingered behind the excitement. “Why didn’t you tell us sooner?”

The pastor smiled. “Because I needed you to focus on singing. This is big news, and I didn’t want you to be distracted.”

Big news, indeed.

Far from that little church, my biological mother sat in a house in Virginia Beach, completely unprepared for what was happening.

She hadn’t planned to be in Virginia when she gave birth. In fact, she hadn’t even admitted to herself that she was pregnant. When a friend suggested a vacation to Virginia Beach, she’d jumped at the chance. It was an escape from her life in New York, a chance to ignore the whispers of doubt growing louder with each passing month.

For the entirety of her pregnancy, she denied the truth. She didn’t go to a doctor. She gained weight but hid it beneath baggy clothes. She told herself—and anyone who asked—that everything was fine.

But now, sitting in that house, she felt the first sharp pains. She thought, perhaps, she was finally starting her period. But as the cramping grew worse, reality became impossible to ignore. Her friend insisted they go to the hospital.

At Virginia Beach General Hospital, they were turned away. Without insurance, she wasn’t their problem. She was sent to Norfolk General instead.

It was there, in the delivery room, that two nurses began preparing for the birth of a baby whose future hung in the balance. These nurses, by chance or fate, happened to know my adoptive parents and the pastor who had just delivered the news.

When I was born, the nurses asked my biological mother if she wanted to see me. They didn’t even tell her if I was a boy or a girl. Her answer was cold but resolute: “No. I don’t want anything to do with this baby. Take it away.”

And so they did.

Three days later, I left the hospital with my new family.

For my parents, it felt like the perfect ending—a precious gift they'd prayed for, wrapped up in a bundle of new beginnings. But, as they'd soon discover, my arrival was just the start of a journey that would test every ounce of their faith, patience, and resilience.

## Chapter 2: Survival

My parents brought me home three days after I was born, hopeful and ready to begin this new chapter as a family. They were overjoyed—this was the baby they had prayed for. At first, everything seemed fine. They noticed a few things that felt a little “off,” but they chalked it up to an adjustment period.

But then, things started to spiral.

I began screaming at the top of my lungs—loud, piercing cries that seemed endless. I cried all the time, and nothing my parents did could comfort me. I was inconsolable. Family and friends stepped in to give my parents a break, but even they couldn’t find a way to soothe me.

Even my older brother, who had been so excited to have a baby sister, tried to help in his own way. He would come over to comfort me, talking to me or patting my back as if his presence could quiet my cries. But my screams didn’t stop, and the chaos eventually took its toll on him. One day, in a moment of sheer frustration and innocence, he turned to my parents and asked, “Can we just return her?”

Hearing that story years later, I couldn’t help but laugh. I could only imagine how overwhelming it must have been for him—a young boy suddenly thrust into the whirlwind of having a baby sister who seemed impossible to console. And yet, despite that rocky start, my brother and I grew to share a bond that has stood the test of time. Sure, we were opposites in almost every way—he was quiet and reserved, while I was loud and opinionated. He’d often look at me and sigh, “Can you just be quiet?” I’m sure there were plenty of times he thought to himself, “Can’t we just return her?” But no matter our differences, he was always there for me. He’s my big brother—

the one who has always had my back. If ever I doubted that family is more than blood, he's been the living proof.

Exhausted and desperate, my parents eventually called the pediatrician. The doctor reassured them, saying it was probably just the stress of adjusting to a new environment and that I might be picking up on their tension. "Give it a few more days," he said. "She'll settle down."

But I didn't.

In fact, things got worse. Along with the constant screaming and crying, I started shaking uncontrollably. That was the breaking point. My parents couldn't wait any longer—they took me to the hospital.

At the hospital, the doctors began running tests to figure out what was wrong. That's when they discovered the truth: I was going through drug withdrawals. My biological mother had been using drugs while she was pregnant with me.

She later denied it, but let's be honest—I didn't do drugs. I was a newborn. While I'll never know exactly what kind of substances were involved (it was 1974, after all), the effects on my tiny body were undeniable.

The doctors put me on medication to help ease the withdrawal symptoms. Over time, the crying and shaking subsided, and I finally started to improve. My parents, thinking the worst was behind us, began to breathe a sigh of relief.

But life had other plans.

One day, my mom was changing my diaper and noticed a severe rash. Now, if you've ever cared for a baby, you know how painful diaper rashes can be. My parents, already accustomed to my earlier screams, braced themselves for the worst. Strangely, I didn't cry nearly as much as before, but I was clearly in pain.

The rash wasn't a rash at all—it spread beyond the diaper area and soon turned into something much more alarming. My skin began to crack and peel. Washing me became heartbreaking; pieces of my skin would come off on the washcloth. My parents were horrified.

Even smiling would cause my skin to crack open.

They didn't wait—they rushed me straight to the hospital.

At the hospital, doctors began running test after test, trying to figure out what was happening. One doctor, who had recently returned from overseas, took one look and immediately recognized the condition. He diagnosed me with toxic epidermal necrolysis (TEN), also known as Ritter's disease.

In simple terms, my skin was falling off.

This rare condition had an extremely poor prognosis. My parents were told that my chances of survival were slim. And even if I survived, the doctors warned that I would likely be scarred from head to toe for the rest of my life.

Faced with such devastating news, my parents did the only thing they knew to do: they prayed. They prayed hard. They prayed for healing, for strength, and for a miracle.

And a miracle is exactly what they got.

Not only did I survive this terrifying ordeal, but I came through it without a single scar. Not one.

To this day, I carry no physical reminders of what my tiny body endured.

In just a few short months of life, I had survived drug withdrawals and a life-threatening skin disease.

### Chapter 3: The Questions Begin

By the time I had overcome the life-threatening challenges of my infancy, my parents were just grateful I was alive and thriving. They poured their love into me and gave me a childhood filled with as much joy and security as they could. Some might even say I was a little spoiled.

Growing up, I never felt unloved or out of place. My parents were everything I could have asked for—kind, supportive, and completely devoted to giving me the best life possible. My dad and I, in particular, were incredibly close.

We did everything together. I remember helping him build a playhouse when I was little—I'd hold the wood while he cut it, feeling so proud to be his helper. I'd go to work at the church with him, we'd go to the park together, just the two of us. We didn't have much money, but he always found ways to make the little things special. Like stopping at the gas station and buying a pack of cashew nuts and a drink for us to share. It wasn't extravagant, but it was ours, and I loved it.

One time, when we were leaving the park, we were rear-ended. The impact sent cashews flying everywhere. I was upset, but my dad, in his calm and steady way, just stopped to buy more. That's who he was—always finding a way to make things right.

He was my first Valentine, and still to this day, he brings me a Valentine's Day card and an orchid. One Christmas, my mom wasn't able to go to a Christmas dinner and party my dad was singing at because she was sick. She suggested I go in her place, thinking it would be an excellent idea for him to show me how a young man should treat a lady on a date. I was so excited. I got all dressed up, and off we went.

My dad sang beautifully that night. I remember being so proud of him as I watched from the table, mesmerized by his voice. At the end of the evening, the hosts of the dinner gave my dad a small gift—a pin to put on his jacket of an anchor. Instead of keeping it, he handed it to me. "This is for you," he said with a smile.

I still have that anchor to this day. It's always held so much meaning for me. It reminds me not only of my dad as the example of what a good man should be but also as my anchor—someone I could always depend on, no matter the time, day or night.

My dad was a pastor, but he was also the most non-judging man I have ever met. He wasn't just a man of faith; he lived it through his kindness, his love, and his example. He showed me what it truly meant to live without judgment, to love people where they were, and to see the best in everyone. He was, and still is, the truest example of how people should be.

My mom and I shared a bond too but though in a different way. As a teenager, like most kids, I went through my fair share of attitude-filled moments. My mom, however, had this way of breaking through my moodiness and making me laugh when I least wanted to. If we were in the car and I had an attitude, she'd put her hand out and say, "Give me five." I'd roll my eyes, resist, and try to ignore her, but she'd just keep holding out her hand with this determined look on her face. Eventually, I'd give in and slap her hand. The moment I did, she'd burst out laughing, and no matter how annoyed I had been, I couldn't help but laugh with her. It was her special way of reminding me not to take life too seriously, and it's something I still do with my kids today.

My mom also had this protective streak, even if her methods weren't always the most conventional. I remember one time, there was a girl in the neighborhood who had an issue with me. I wasn't one to back down from anyone or anything, so I walked outside to see what she needed. We exchanged a few words, and then I turned around and went back in the house. When I walked inside, I found my mom and my grandma peeking out from behind the blinds, watching everything unfold. "What are y'all doing?" I asked, startling them. My mom screamed, my grandma burst out laughing, and my mom said, "Well, I was watching to see if I needed to go out there and help you!" I couldn't help but laugh as I said, "A lot of good that would do when you didn't even notice I came back in the house."

She always joked that I got my forward, opinionated personality from her. It makes me laugh every time, especially as I get older and realize how true it is.

Yes, we are alike in some ways but very different in others. For instance, my mom was so organized—she kept everything. Whether it was important documents, sentimental items, or just things she thought she might need one day, she had a place for everything. Me? Let's just say I didn't inherit that particular trait.

My mom has always been a prayer warrior. She is deeply faithful in reading and studying the Bible, and her unwavering prayers have been a constant presence in my life. She was in constant prayer over my journey, which I truly believe was one of the biggest reasons everything fell into place.

My mom had told me that in the hospital there had been a paper with Baby Girl and the last name of my biological mother. That name was the only connection I had to the person who gave me life—a name I didn't yet know if I wanted to learn or not.

A few years later, my mom called me, her voice excited. "I found something my papers," she said. "It's her full name—and a note that she came to Virginia from New York to go to nursing school."

At the time, it felt like a major breakthrough. That name and those details became my only leads. Years later, I would uncover a completely different story about how she came to Virginia, but at that moment, it was all I had.

I often wondered about her. As a child, I would stare up at the moon and whisper to myself, "I wonder if she's looking at the moon too." It was the only connection I could imagine—a silent thread between us, no matter where she was.

By my teenage years, those fleeting thoughts had grown into a quiet but persistent curiosity. My parents were always honest with me about being adopted. It wasn't something they ever tried to hide, and for that, I'm grateful. They told me as much as they knew, but the details were sparse. My biological mother was young and couldn't keep me. That was the story, and for a long time, it was enough.

But as I moved into adulthood, the questions grew louder. Who were these people who gave me life? What were they like? What were they doing now?

At 19, I decided to try searching on my own. Using the last name my mom had given me, I flipped through the Virginia Beach phone book and found someone with the same name. My heart raced as I circled it.

A friend of mine offered to go with me. We drove to the address, but when we got there, I froze. I couldn't go to the door. What if I was wrong? What if they didn't know her? What if they did?

My friend volunteered to go to the door for me. I watched nervously as she knocked and spoke to the man who answered. A few moments later, she came back, shaking her head.

"He said he's sorry, but he doesn't know anyone by that name," she told me. Then she added something that caught me off guard: "Oh, and he's Asian."

I blinked, surprised. Asian? My eyes had looked somewhat Asian when I was a baby, so part of me wondered if this might be a clue. But in my heart, I had always wanted to be Italian. It was the dream I held onto, even if I couldn't explain why.

I nodded, trying to hide my disappointment.

One day, I remember asking to my parents, "Do you think I could be Italian?"

I have no idea why I latched onto that idea, but I did. Something about the thought made me smile—being an "Italian country girl," I called it. My twangy accent might not have matched, but the thought of being Italian felt like a piece of a puzzle falling into place.

Looking back, it seems silly, but at the time, it was one of the few ways I could imagine my roots. I didn't have a name, a face, or a history to cling to—just this vague idea that somewhere out there, a part of me existed.

It wasn't until the late 1990s, when I was in my twenties, that I started to actively search for answers. The internet was still in its infancy, and Ancestry DNA was just a concept waiting to be born. Back then, finding someone meant doing things the old-fashioned way: digging through phone books, writing letters, and hoping for a response.

I didn't know where to start, but I knew I had to try.

## Chapter 4: The Breakthrough

For years, I had only the smallest breadcrumbs to follow—my biological mother’s last name, a vague story about her coming to Virginia for nursing school, and the constant question of who I really was. One evening I received another call from my mom telling me she had found papers from the hospital. Not just a not like she had found before. She said that we had the spelling wrong which is probably why I kept running into dead ends. I remembered the man my friend had spoken to years before. I wasn’t Asian, no wonder he didn’t know her.

I sat up straighter, gripping the receiver. “What do you mean the wrong spelling?”

“I was once again looking through some old papers,” she explained. “And I found official paperwork from the hospital. It has her first and last name. My heart raced. For the first time, I had the correct spelling of her full name to work with—. It felt like the door to my past had cracked open just a bit, and all I had to do was push it the rest of the way.

When I saw the papers for myself, I felt a renewed sense of hope.

At the time, all I knew was the story about nursing school. It was only later that I discovered the truth. A friend invited her on a vacation to Virginia Beach. And while she was there, she went into labor.

Still, in that moment, with her name in hand, I felt like I was finally getting closer to understanding where I came from.

With this new lead, I turned to AOL. It was the late 1990s, and AOL was the go-to for just about everything online. I typed in her last name and waited for the results to load, hoping that somewhere out there, someone might recognize it.

After some searching, I came across a man with the same last name. Nervously, I sent him a message.

“Hello,” I wrote. “I’m looking for someone who might be related to you. Do you know a woman by this name?”

To my surprise, he wrote back.

“I do have a cousin by that name,” he said. “But I don’t know if she ever went to nursing school.”

That was it—the connection I had been waiting for. He couldn’t confirm much, but he had given me something priceless: validation that the name I had was real and tied to a family.

It was a small victory, but it was enough to keep me going.

## Chapter 5: Letters and Hope

With the small lead I had uncovered on AOL, I felt a renewed sense of determination. I was getting closer, but I still didn't have the answers I needed. That's when I decided to take a more direct approach: I started writing letters.

It was old-fashioned, sure, but at the time, it felt like my best option. I gathered names and addresses of people with my biological mother's last name, focusing on the New York area since I knew that's where she had been from originally.

I wrote fifty letters in total. Each one was carefully worded, explaining that I was searching for my biological mother and that I believed she might be related to someone with their last name. I included a self-addressed, stamped envelope with every letter, hoping to make it as easy as possible for someone to reply.

Then, I mailed them off and waited.

At first, the responses trickled in slowly. I'd open each envelope with a mix of hope and anxiety, only to find polite notes from people who didn't recognize the name or have any connection to her.

One after another, the letters came back with no leads. My pile of unopened envelopes got smaller and smaller, and my hope began to waver.

And then, one day, it happened.

I opened a letter and inside was a note that read:

"You have found what you're looking for. Do not contact anyone else."

The message was short and cryptic, but it included an email address to reach out to someone directly. My hands shook as I read it. Was this real? Could it actually be happening?

Taking a deep breath, I sent an email to the address provided. The response came quickly:

The man who had sent the letter was my biological uncle—my biological mother's brother.

He told me that my letter had been intercepted by him before my biological grandparents could see it. He explained that they had no idea about me and that my existence would likely cause a lot of pain and confusion. He wasn't ready to let them know yet.

Still, he was willing to help me. After emailing back and forth, he finally gave me my biological mother's email address.

The moment I had been waiting for was finally here.

## Chapter 6: Reaching Out

The moment I received my biological mother's email address, I felt a strange mix of excitement and apprehension. After years of searching, countless false starts, and endless wondering, I was finally about to contact the woman who had given me life.

And so, with shaking hands, I typed my first email to her.

"Hello," I wrote, keeping my tone simple and respectful. "My name is Angie. I believe you are my biological mother. I've been searching for you for a long time. I'm not asking for anything—just a chance to know more about where I came from. I hope you'll consider writing back."

I reread the message at least ten times before pressing "send."

Her response came within hours.

"Hello Angie, it's nice to hear from you," she began. "You can imagine my surprise when I received a call from my brother. I told him about you, and he told me to reach out.

"I want you to know that you have two brothers and a sister. I'm sorry, but I don't know who your father is. I met him on a camping trip. We were the only ones not doing drugs, so we hung out together. We were drinking, and... well, you were the product of that weekend."

Her words were simple and matter of fact. She went on to say that she would love to see pictures of me and that she had a lot to think about.

I sat back after reading her message, trying to process everything. I had two brothers and a sister? And she didn't know who my father was? A camping trip? My mind buzzed with questions, but at the same time, I was grateful that she had responded at all.

The next thing I needed to do was tell my parents.

My parents were camping that weekend, and we were going to meet them. The two-hour drive to their campsite felt like an eternity. My mind raced as I replayed everything I'd learned, wondering how they would take the news.

When we finally arrived, I sat them down and told them everything.

They listened intently, their faces a mix of curiosity and emotion. When I finished, they both smiled, and my dad reached out to hug me.

“This is good,” he said simply.

My mom, however, looked a little more hesitant. “Are you sure this is what you want?” she asked.

I reassured them immediately. “You don’t have anything to worry about. You are my parents, and nothing will ever change that. I love you both.”

She nodded, still processing, but I could see the tension start to ease from her shoulders. They were happy for me—truly—and I could see their support in their eyes.

“So, what’s next?” my dad asked.

I shrugged and smiled. “I don’t know,” I said honestly. “We’ll see.”

A few days later, I received another email from my biological mother. Attached were photos of her, my two brothers, and my sister.

I stared at the pictures for what felt like hours. There they were—my biological family. My brothers looked close in age to each other, and my sister had this bright, innocent smile that seemed to light up the room. Seeing their faces made everything feel so real. For the first time, I wasn’t just imagining them—they were real people with names, lives, and stories of their own.

In the email, she also shared something that surprised me:

“I told my husband everything,” she wrote. “After I explained the situation, he just looked at me and said, ‘So when are we going to go visit her?’”

Her words stunned me. I had expected hesitation or even resistance, but instead, her husband was completely on board.

She ended the email with a question that sent my heart racing:

“Do you have plans the last week of July? We’re planning to drive to Virginia to meet you.”

## Chapter 7: The First Meeting

The last week of July came faster than I expected, yet the days leading up to it felt like an eternity. My biological mother, her husband, and my siblings were driving down from New York to meet me. The idea of seeing them face-to-face was exciting, but it also filled me with nerves.

Would they like me? Would I like them? What would this meeting feel like?

We had arranged for them to stay at a hotel near us, and I promised to meet them there when they arrived. On the day of their arrival, I couldn't focus on anything else. My thoughts bounced between curiosity and doubt, my stomach twisting with anticipation.

Finally, the moment came. I stood outside the hotel room door, my heart pounding. I knocked softly, and within seconds, the door opened.

My biological mother stood there, smiling nervously. "Oh, hi," she said simply. "It's so nice to finally meet you."

She gave me a quick, light hug. It wasn't what I'd imagined—no tears, no dramatic embrace like the ones I'd seen on TV. It felt... polite. Almost distant.

My siblings stood behind her, peeking around the corner of the doorframe. She introduced me as "a cousin from Virginia" who they had come to visit. My brothers, ages nine and ten, and my seven-year-old sister all smiled shyly at me.

It was clear she wasn't ready to tell them who I really was. "They're too young to understand," she had explained in one of her earlier emails. "I don't want to confuse them."

I tried to focus on the positives: I was finally meeting my biological mother and siblings. Even if it wasn't the emotional reunion I had envisioned, it was a start.

Over the course of the week, we spent time together at the beach, shared meals, and talked about life. I got to know my siblings' personalities—my brothers were active and curious, while my sister was sweet and bubbly. It was surreal watching them interact, knowing we shared the same blood but had lived entirely separate lives.

One afternoon, my biological mom and I decided to take a walk. I thought it might be a chance for us to connect, to bridge the gap between our pasts and build something new. But instead, the conversation turned into another one of her tangled stories.

She started telling me—yet again—how she had been camping with friends when they met a group of guys. “Everyone was doing drugs,” she said, “but not me and this guy. We didn’t touch any of it. But we did drink a lot, and that’s how I ended up pregnant with you.” Then, out of nowhere, she added, “You know, Angie, I was a virgin when I got pregnant with you.”

I remember staring at her, trying to keep my face neutral, but inside, I was stunned. Why would she tell me this? Was she trying to convince me she was a “good girl,” to justify her choices? It felt unnecessary, forced, like an attempt to rewrite the past in a way that made her feel better about herself.

A few minutes later, her story shifted again. She claimed, “When I found out I was pregnant, I wanted to keep you, but I just couldn’t. Even though we were devout Catholics, my mom would have made me have an abortion, and I just couldn’t do that. So, I just hid you.”

And yet, moments after that heartfelt declaration, she contradicted herself. She told me about a cousin who had been pregnant around the same time I was born. “Whenever I see her child grow up,” she said, “I think, ‘That’s the age my child would be.’” It seemed like a genuine moment of reflection. But then, almost as quickly as the emotion appeared, it vanished. She shrugged and said, “It was so traumatic for me that I had to put you out of my mind. I couldn’t even remember your birthday.”

I stood there, letting her words sink in. One moment, she claimed to have cherished me, even in the face of her Catholic family’s judgment. The next, she admitted to erasing me from her life, reducing me to a passing thought. It was as if she didn’t know what story to stick with. Was I the child she wanted but couldn’t keep? Or was I the child she forced herself to forget?

This was a pattern with her—contradictions that left me questioning everything. She would say whatever suited her in the moment, as if she had lied so much over the years that even she couldn’t keep her stories straight. Her words didn’t comfort me or bring us closer; instead, they

built a wall of distrust. How could I believe anything she said when her narrative shifted with every breath?

As the week came to a close, my biological mother assured me that this wasn't goodbye forever. "You should come visit us in New York," she said. "We'd love to have you stay with us and meet more of the family."

I smiled and nodded, but I couldn't help feeling uncertain. Her actions didn't always match her words, and I wondered if this promise would be any different.

When the visit was over, we hugged goodbye. It wasn't tearful or emotional—just a polite parting. As I drove home, I couldn't help but reflect on how different reality had been from my expectations.

## Chapter 8: Broken Promises

After our initial meeting, I wanted to believe that things would continue to grow between us. My biological mother had invited me to visit them in New York, meet more of the family, and build a connection. It sounded promising.

But as the weeks turned into months, I started to feel the cracks in her words.

One day, I called her to discuss travel plans. “I was looking at flights,” I began, “and I just wanted to check which airport is closest to you.”

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Finally, she sighed. “Angie, I don’t think I can do this,” she said.

Her words hit me like a brick.

“What do you mean?” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

She explained, stumbling over her words. “I thought I could handle this, but... I just can’t. My parents—they’re older, and they wouldn’t understand. The kids might ask too many questions, and I don’t know how to answer them. It’s just... better if we keep this as it is.”

The “this” she referred to was our occasional emails. I felt my heart sink as I realized what she was really saying: she wanted to keep me at arm’s length.

I tried to focus on her words, but my thoughts were racing. She didn’t want me to come. She didn’t want me to meet more of the family. She didn’t want me to be a part of her life in the way I had hoped.

Her decision hurt, but it wasn't about me. I could see that now. She had built a life that didn't include me, and introducing me into it would have meant unraveling decades of carefully constructed lies. .

Despite her hesitation, we continued to email back and forth sporadically over the years. I learned little details about her life and her family, but it wasn't the deep connection I had hoped for. I wrote to her about my own family—my children, my milestones—and she would respond kindly, but always with a sense of distance.

I could tell that my existence stirred up conflicting emotions for her. She wanted to know me, but only on her terms.

One day, as I grew older and my health began to present challenges, I decided to ask her something important. I needed to know about my biological father—not for emotional reasons, but for medical history.

When I brought it up, her response was evasive. “I don't know who he was,” she said. “It was just that one weekend camping.”

Her words were the same as before, but something about them didn't sit right this time. I started to wonder if there was more to the story—something she wasn't telling me.

This doubt set the stage for the next chapter in my journey: the decision to take an Ancestry DNA test.

## Chapter 9: The DNA Test

As the years went by, the answers I sought about my biological father continued to elude me. My biological mother had remained firm in her story: she didn't know who he was, and she had no information to offer me.

But there was one thing she had told me during her visit that stuck with me.

"You're 100% Italian," she had said, smiling as if that would make everything better.

For a moment, it did. After all those years of hoping I was Italian, feeling it deep down in my soul even as a little girl, hearing her confirm it was the highlight of her visit. But later, doubt crept in. How could she possibly know that if she didn't know who my father was?

She had no idea that I listened closely to every word people said, that I would catch those little inconsistencies. And this was a big one.

That wasn't the only revelation she made during the visit. She also mentioned that she had another brother, someone I didn't know about. "But he doesn't know anything about you," she had said firmly. "And I don't plan on telling him."

The gaps in her story were becoming impossible to ignore.

It was that doubt—paired with a growing need for medical information—that led me to take matters into my own hands.

One day, while scrolling through the internet, I came across an ad for Ancestry DNA. At the time, it felt like fate. Here was a way to uncover more about myself—not just about my biological parents, but my heritage and roots as well.

I ordered the kit, and when it arrived, I carefully followed the instructions. Swab. Seal. Send. And then, I waited.

The results came in faster than I expected. When I opened them, I felt a wave of emotions: excitement, nervousness, and a hint of fear.

The first thing that jumped out at me was my ethnicity estimate.

89% Italian with the primary focus being in Sicily.

I stared at the number, my heart swelling. For as long as I could remember, I had dreamed of being Italian. Something about it had always felt right, like a part of me I just knew in my soul. Seeing it confirmed on the screen was like finding a missing piece of myself.

The rest of my results showed a mix of Greek and a small percentage of Cypriot heritage, but it was that 89% Italian that made me smile.

At least part of her story was true.

## Chapter 10: Family Ties and Turmoil

The years between my initial connection with my biological mother and the DNA test weren't a smooth road. While I wasn't actively searching for answers during that time, there were moments that added to the complexity of my story.

At one point, I began texting my biological sister. Of course, she didn't know she was my sister—she believed I was just a distant relative. Our conversations felt natural, and for a time, I thought we were building a real connection.

That all changed when my biological mother intervened.

She called me one day, her voice tense. “Angie,” she said, “I think you need to slow down and put the brakes on talking to her. She’s starting to ask too many questions.”

Questions my biological mother wasn't ready—or willing—to answer.

I could have argued. I could have pressed her to let things unfold naturally. Instead, I stayed quiet, though my thoughts were loud enough to fill the silence. How could she expect me to stop when I had spent years longing for connections like this?

Soon after, my sister stopped texting me altogether. The conversations simply ended, and to this day, I haven't heard from her again.

Years later, after my son was born—twelve years after my daughter—my biological mother mentioned they'd be vacationing in Myrtle Beach. On their way home, she wanted to stop by and meet my children.

I was cautiously optimistic. This was an opportunity for her to connect, not just with me, but with her grandchildren.

When the day came, we met for dinner. It was a pleasant evening. She finally met my son and daughter, and for a fleeting moment, I thought it might lead to something more.

But it didn't.

You'd think meeting her grandchildren would spark a desire to be more involved in their lives,

but it didn't. She remained distant, unable or unwilling to be a consistent part of our lives.

During this time, I received a call from her with news that weighed heavily on me.

"My mother passed away," she said, her voice soft.

I never got the chance to meet my biological grandmother. My biological mother told me she had finally shared my existence with her mother shortly before she died, but what good did that do? I never had the chance to say hello, to introduce myself, or to know her even for a moment.

A few years later, on Christmas Eve, I got another call.

"My dad's gone," she said simply.

This loss hit me harder than I expected. Maybe it was because he was the last connection to that generation of my biological family. Maybe it was the finality of knowing I'd never meet either of them. Whatever the reason, it left a deep ache.

Through all of this, my daughter had been quietly watching. She saw the highs and lows, the hopes and heartbreaks. And eventually, she decided enough was enough.

"It's time your siblings know the truth," she said firmly.

I didn't know what she meant at first. Then she took matters into her own hands.

## Chapter 11: The Truth Revealed

Without telling me, my daughter sent a message to my biological sister on Facebook.

“Hi, I’m [her name], and I just wanted to let you know that my mom is your sister. My mom is the daughter of your mom, and you are my aunt. Years ago, when you were seven, you visited her, and your mom told you my mom was your cousin. She’s not—she’s your sister. I just thought it was time you knew the truth.”

Her words landed like a bombshell.

My biological sister, understandably shocked, took the message straight to my biological mother.

I received a phone call not long after.

“How dare you let your daughter do that?” my biological mother spat. “You promised me you’d let me handle this in my own time!”

Her anger didn’t surprise me, but her next comment did.

“I almost told her your daughter was mentally unstable,” she said coldly. “That she misinterpreted things.”

My breath caught, but she wasn’t done.

“But I didn’t,” she continued. “I told them the truth. I told them everything.”

I took a deep breath, steadying my voice. “It’s been 20 years,” I said calmly. “They’re adults now, not children. We have every right to know each other. You gave me up for adoption—I’m not asking you to be part of anything, but at least give us the choice to connect as siblings if we want to.”

The fallout from this revelation was mixed.

My biological sister hasn't spoken to me since. I've sent messages—simple holiday greetings like, “Merry Christmas, hope you're doing well”—but I've never gotten a response. I'm not sure what my biological mother told her, but the silence has been deafening.

My brothers reacted differently. The oldest has always been distant, keeping to himself. The middle brother, however, welcomed me warmly. He was completely accepting of the truth and excited to have me as his sister.

He gave me his phone number, and we've texted back and forth ever since. It's not everything I hoped for, but it's enough.

For now, I'm grateful for what I have.

## Chapter 12: A New Connection

Checking Ancestry DNA had become a routine over the years. Each time, I logged in with the same hope: that a new match would appear, someone who might help unravel the mystery of my biological father. I sent countless messages to potential relatives, focusing on first and second cousins, but most of the time, the responses never came.

Still, I kept at it.

One day, something caught my eye—a name I hadn't seen before. It was a new match, a young woman whose numbers stood out. For those unfamiliar with Ancestry DNA, each match is ranked by how much DNA you share with them. The higher the number, the closer the relationship. This woman's numbers were significant—over 300, even over 400.

This wasn't some distant third cousin. She was someone important.

Without hesitation, I sent her a message. As always, I explained who I was: an adoptee searching for her biological father. I kept it simple and to the point, careful not to overwhelm her.

I expected silence. That's how it usually went.

Instead, she responded.

Her reply was friendly, and her story mirrored mine in some ways. She was searching for her biological father, someone who didn't even know she existed. She admitted that she didn't know his name but shared that she had a picture of him.

Her openness surprised me. After years of trying to connect with matches and receiving little to no response, it felt like a breakthrough.

We quickly moved from messaging on Ancestry to texting directly. I gave her my number, and soon we were exchanging pieces of our lives and searches.

As we talked, it became clear that we were definitely connected. Her DNA match numbers were unusually high, and the lack of any connection to my biological mother's side of the family made it obvious: this match was from my father's side.

And then, she sent the picture.

It was a photo of the man she believed to be her father. I stared at it for a long time, examining his features. His face didn't immediately spark recognition, but something about him felt familiar in a way I couldn't explain.

Curious, I showed the photo to my husband.

He studied it briefly, then turned to me. "His eyes look like yours," he said.

His observation took me by surprise. "What?" I asked, laughing it off. "There's no way. This guy looks like he's about my age."

He didn't laugh. Instead, he gave me a steady look. "Well," he said, "if it's not your dad, then it's your brother."

His words stopped me in my tracks. My brother?

The possibility lingered in my mind, impossible to ignore.

The more the young woman and I talked, the clearer it became that we were related. Our DNA match numbers were too high for us to be anything else, and since there were no ties to my biological mother's side, we knew this connection came from my father's family.

It was a pivotal moment. For the first time, I felt like I was standing at the edge of a revelation about my biological father. The pieces of the puzzle were finally starting to come together, and I couldn't wait to see where this new connection would lead.



## Chapter 12: A New Connection

Checking Ancestry DNA had become a routine over the years. Each time, I logged in with the same hope: that a new match would appear, someone who might help unravel the mystery of my biological father. I sent countless messages to potential relatives, focusing on first and second cousins, but most of the time, the responses never came.

Still, I kept at it.

One day, something caught my eye—a name I hadn't seen before. It was a new match, a young woman whose numbers stood out. For those unfamiliar with Ancestry DNA, each match is ranked by how much DNA you share with them. The higher the number, the closer the relationship. This woman's numbers were significant—over 300, even over 400.

This wasn't some distant third cousin. She was someone important.

Without hesitation, I sent her a message. As always, I explained who I was: an adoptee searching for her biological father. I kept it simple and to the point, careful not to overwhelm her.

I expected silence. That's how it usually went.

Instead, she responded.

Her reply was warm, and her story fascinated me. She was searching for her biological father too, but her situation was unique.

She explained that her mother and her father had met one weekend just as he was moving to a new place. He had given her mother his phone number, but somehow, it had been lost. He never knew she existed.

Over time, she had tracked him down on Facebook, piecing together her identity bit by bit.

As we talked, it became clear that we were connected. Her DNA match numbers were unusually high, and the lack of any connection to my biological mother's side of the family made it obvious: this match was from my father's side.

Then, she shared his name and sent me a photo.

I stared at the picture, studying his face. His features didn't immediately spark recognition, but something about him felt familiar. Curious, I showed the photo to my husband.

He looked at it, then back at me. "His eyes look like yours," he said simply.

The comment stopped me for a moment. "What?" I asked, laughing nervously. "No way. This guy looks like he's about my age."

He didn't laugh. Instead, he gave me a steady look. "Well," he said, "if it's not your dad, then it's your brother."

His words lingered in the air, impossible to ignore.

The more the young woman and I talked, the clearer it became that we were related. Our DNA match numbers were too high for us to be anything else. She wasn't connected to my biological mother's side, which confirmed this match came from my father's family.

It was a pivotal moment. For the first time, I felt like I was standing at the edge of a revelation about my biological father. The pieces of the puzzle were finally starting to come together, and I couldn't wait to see where this new connection would lead.

How does this feel now? Let me know if you'd like to refine further or move to the next chapter!

## Chapter 13: The Door Opens

I had finally found a lead on my biological father's side. After years of searching, it felt like a breakthrough.

But there was a catch. The woman I had connected with—my DNA match—didn't know much about her biological father. She was searching for him, too. She shared a few details her mother had told her, but it wasn't much to go on.

Then came the heartbreaking news: her biological father's father—my potential biological father—had passed away several years ago.

The realization hit me harder than I expected. It meant I would never get to meet him, never hear his side of the story, never know what he thought or felt about the daughter he never knew he had. That door had closed forever.

But don't feel sad just yet—because the story doesn't end there.

With the few clues I had, I started digging. The woman gave me her biological father's name, and I began searching online. That's when I found his obituary.

I read through it carefully, looking for anything that might confirm I had the right person. And then, there it was: his daughter's name Lucia.

Her name stood out like a beacon. That woman—listed as his daughter—would be my biological sister.

The excitement and nervousness I felt were overwhelming. I began searching for her online and quickly found her on Facebook. Her name matched, her location matched—it all lined up. This was her.

For a moment, I just stared at her profile.

This was my sister, yes my sister. The word felt foreign and familiar all at once. I couldn't stop thinking about how surreal it was to look at someone who shared my blood, someone I had never met but was so connected to.

After sitting with the moment, I knew what I had to do. I couldn't wait any longer.

I opened the message box and began typing:

“Hi, .... My name is Angie. I know this is going to sound crazy, but I believe I am your sister. I was adopted when I was 3 days old (I'm now 44).

Nineteen years ago, I found my biological mother. She wouldn't ever tell me anything about my father at the time. We are not part of each other's lives (not because of me), but a month ago, when I questioned her again about my father, she told me he was from Niagara Falls, he was about 30 years old when I was conceived, and he has since passed away.

I was devastated and hurt that she never allowed me to know who he was.

I decided to take matters into my own hands, and I did a DNA test on Ancestry.com. I narrowed down my biological father's side. I reached out to a young lady named <Neice from Ancestry>, whose DNA matched mine.

I sent her a message and found out that our DNA matched through her father, who is your brother (who she's never had the opportunity to meet). She sent me a copy of your dad's obituary (which is how I found your name, and more than anything, I'm sorry for your loss).

After reading it, the details fell into place. I told <Neice from Ancestry> I would send you a message because we are so excited we found each other.

This message isn't meant to upset anyone or cause any problems—we are just excited to hopefully be able to learn more about our paternal side.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Angie”

I reread the message several times before pressing send, hoping I had struck the right balance between honesty and sensitivity.

And then, I waited.

I expected days of silence. I expected hesitation or maybe no reply at all.

Instead, an hour later, my phone buzzed with a notification.

She had responded.

“Hi, Angie,” she began. “Well... I really don’t even know what to say right now. I’m not upset, I’m dumbfounded?”

“Sorry, as I’m sure you can imagine, I have questions... I guess the first & most important is who is your bio mom? I take it she is from Niagara Falls? This would mean I was 8 when you were born...

“I’m not shocked or surprised, just need to know who she is. If in fact you really are my sister, I would be more than happy to connect with you & share my (our) father’s information with you.”

Relief washed over me as I read her words. She wasn’t rejecting me. She wasn’t angry. She was open to the idea of connecting, and she was willing to help me learn more about our father.

The door hadn’t closed after all—it was just beginning to open.

## Chapter 14: The Connection Grows

The moment I received her response, I felt a mixture of excitement and relief. Her curiosity mirrored mine, and her willingness to connect gave me hope.

I replied the next morning:

“Good morning—my biological mom’s name was <Bio. Mom>, and yes, she is from Niagara Falls. Can I please ask that you not contact her or, if you know her, not tell her we have finally connected? She has kept me a secret all this time from her family. She pretty much denied she was even pregnant with me until she was about to give birth—at which point she thought she was starting her period. I know she was 18, and she said he was about 30 years old.

Thank you so much for not being upset. I never in a million years thought this day would have come. Here is my phone number: xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you’d like to text me, I work from 8:00 to 5:00 today and can’t take calls, but I can text periodically. Of course, after 5:00, you’re welcome to call. Thank you again... I can’t explain how excited I am.”

Her reply came quickly:

“Good morning... No, I won’t contact <Bio-mom>... I have no intention of ever contacting her. I just needed to know for my own personal, um, ease of mind, I guess? I remember the days of my dad cheating on my mom, the arguments... that’s another story. My mom is very much alive, so I guess I do need to tell her about this.

I’m sure you can imagine I was kinda beside myself when I got your message last night. My blood sugar dropped, and I got up to test it & eat something & checked my FB and BAM! there it was, lolol.

Of course, the first thing I did was check out your page & photos, then <Neice from Ancestry>. I don’t know if my brother knows she exists, and right now, I am not telling him anything. I did, in fact, wake my other brother up at 1 a.m. with this news... He was in awe but not shocked either.

He just called me this morning to see if I heard back from you. He is just as excited (I'm sorry, did I forget to say I'm excited about this too?). He wants to do the Ancestry DNA and match it up to yours to be absolutely sure we have a sister!

Hope you don't mind... but I kinda think you understand.”

From that moment, mine and Lucia's connection only grew. We texted regularly, shared stories about our lives, and compared family traits. Her brother she woke up at 1:00 am was just as eager to connect, and while they briefly considered doing the Ancestry DNA test, we all agreed it wasn't necessary.

For the first time, I felt a real bond forming—a piece of the puzzle finally clicking into place.

## Chapter 15: The Road to Family

It was a busy and emotional time in my life. I had decided it was time to look for a new job, and my husband and I realized the house we were living in was no longer suitable for our family. Between resumes and house showings, another part of my life was flourishing: my connection with my biological sister.

We talked and texted constantly, learning more and more about each other. The bond we were building felt natural, as though it had been there all along, waiting to be discovered.

As we were making plans for the trip to New York, life threw me an unexpected twist. I had applied for a position at the fire department as an office coordinator, and one day, I got the call I'd been waiting for—they wanted to interview me.

My excitement quickly turned to dread when I realized the interview was scheduled for the exact day I was supposed to leave for New York. My heart dropped.

I called Lucia to tell her the news, and we were both devastated. We knew this was my one and only chance to meet my biological family, but I also couldn't miss this opportunity.

Reluctantly, I called the fire chief back and agreed to the interview. Then, taking a deep breath, I explained, "I just want to let you know—of all days, this is the one day I'm supposed to leave to meet my biological family in New York. But this interview is more important."

What happened next took me completely by surprise.

The chief responded without hesitation, "Oh no, you will not miss that. We'll move your interview to earlier in the week."

My mouth dropped open. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Really?" I asked, my voice trembling with relief.

"Of course," he said.

My heart filled with happiness and gratitude. I thanked him profusely and accepted the new date. As soon as I hung up, I called Lucia to share the news.

“This is really happening,” I said, my voice filled with emotion.

Words can’t describe the feelings I had in that moment. After all the years of searching, disappointments, and letdowns, it was finally happening.

As for the interview, I’m happy to say it went well. I ended up getting the position as an office coordinator at the fire department—a role I still hold to this day, six years later.

When the day of the trip finally arrived, we loaded up the car and hit the road. My sister and I kept each other updated on our progress the entire way. As we got closer to New York, the anticipation was almost overwhelming.

When we pulled into her driveway, there they all were, standing on the porch: my sister, her husband, her grandkids, and one of my brothers.

The moment I stepped out of the car, Lucia and I hugged tightly. It was as if we had known each other all our lives. The connection and bond were immediate, strong, and undeniable.

During our visit, my sister shared even more stories about our father. It was fascinating to learn about the man I’d never had the chance to know. She also introduced me to her mom, who welcomed me with open arms.

The situation could have been awkward, given the circumstances of my father’s past, but her mom quickly put me at ease. “Don’t worry about it,” she said. “Welcome to the family. Let’s move on.”

Her kindness and acceptance meant the world to me.

One of the highlights of our visit was seeing Niagara Falls. The sight was breathtaking—its power and beauty were awe-inspiring. Standing there with my husband and daughter, I couldn’t help but feel like this trip was about so much more than reconnecting with my biological family. It was about finding my place in the world, and this moment felt monumental.

Later in the trip, one of my brothers hosted a big cookout. The other extended family came—cousins, nieces, nephews, and more.

The day was filled with laughter, stories, and the warmth of connection. I was learning so much about my biological family and wow did my family ever grow.

Here's the starting point of the new chapter in the polished book style:

## Chapter 16: A Sign from the Past

The cookout at my brother's house was the culmination of everything I had dreamed about during my years of searching. The yard was alive with chatter, laughter, and the undeniable warmth of family. Cousins, nieces, nephews, and siblings—people I had only just met but who already felt like home—were all there, sharing food, stories, and memories.

It was one of those moments where life seemed to pause, allowing me to fully take it all in.

But this day wasn't just about food and conversation. Something unexpected and extraordinary happened—a moment I will never forget.

Earlier in the day, my sister had shared something that had stayed with me. After our father passed away, she began noticing gray feathers appearing in the most unlikely places. She believed it was his way of saying hello, a gentle reminder that he was still watching over her.

I listened to her story with fascination because, coincidentally, I had my own connection to feathers. At different points in my life, I had found feathers—sometimes when I needed comfort, other times when I was deep in thought. They always seemed to appear when I needed them most.

Little did I know, this connection would make itself known in a powerful way later that day.

At one point during the cookout, I was sitting at a table, talking to a group of family members. We were deep in conversation, recounting the series of events that had led me here—how I had searched for years, how I found my sister, and how this incredible reunion had finally come to be.

Across the yard, my sister was chatting with her daughter, my new niece, who had recently connected with her own father after years of searching. That reunion had turned out better than anyone could have hoped, and seeing her happiness added another layer of joy to the day.

As I stood up to join them, something caught my eye.

There, on the ground, was a gray feather.

I froze, staring at it in disbelief. There were no birds around, no reason for it to be there. My mind raced, connecting the dots. It was as if someone—or something—was saying, “You’re exactly where you’re meant to be.”

I bent down, picked it up, and held it in my hand for a moment. Then, I called out my sister’s name.

She turned toward me, and I lifted the feather for her to see.

Her reaction was instant. She gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. And then, she laughed—a laugh filled with recognition, wonder, and a shared understanding.

There was no need for words. We both knew what it meant.

That feather was more than just a coincidence. It was a symbol, a sign that tied us together in a way that went beyond words or logic. It was as if our father, who neither of us had truly known, was reaching out to say he was there, a silent witness to this beautiful reunion.

The cookout felt like the perfect ending to our trip, but eventually, all good things must come to a close. As our time in New York drew to an end, I found myself filled with so many emotions.

I was happy, fulfilled, and most of all, at peace. But as the car was packed and hugs were exchanged, the inevitable sadness began to creep in.

“Okay, we’ll see you at Thanksgiving,” he said casually.

Everyone turned to look at him, my sister and I practically in unison blurting out, “What?”

He laughed. “Well, you didn’t think we were just coming once and never coming back, did you?”

I have to say, my husband played a big part in giving me the support and confidence to push forward and not give up. After all the letdowns I’d been through with my biological mother, there were moments when I wasn’t sure I wanted to keep searching or reconnecting. But he always encouraged me to keep going. When I found my sister, he was the one who really pushed

me to take that road trip. “What’s stopping you?” he asked. “You’ve waited long enough—go meet her.” His words lit a fire in me, and his unwavering support made all the difference.

That kind of encouragement means more than people realize when you’re going through something as emotional as reconnecting with your biological family. Even in the months and years that followed, there were times I wanted to visit my sister and Big Sister but hesitated. Each time, he’d remind me, “What’s stopping you? Find a flight and go.” He encouraged me, to prioritize those relationships, to make the connections that meant so much to me.

He’s given me the courage to take chances and reminders that these connections are worth every ounce of effort. I’ll always be grateful for that.

True to his word, we were back in New York for Thanksgiving a few months later,

Despite it only being our second trip, it didn’t feel like we were just visiting—it felt like we were coming home. The excitement of seeing everyone again made the long drive feel shorter, despite driving in the snowy mountains. We pulled into the driveway, the warm welcome felt just as genuine as it had the first time.

Thanksgiving morning, my sister and I were up early, preparing dinner together. It was the kind of moment I’d dreamed about for so long—two sisters, side by side in the kitchen, laughing, talking, and sharing the simple joy of family.

As the day went on, family and friends began to gather. The house was filled with love and laughter, and the smell of food cooking in the kitchen made everything feel even more comforting.

We ate until we couldn’t eat another bite, sharing stories and memories long into the evening.

That Thanksgiving marked a turning point for me.

For years, I had searched for answers, for connections, for a sense of belonging. And here I was, surrounded by the family I had always wondered about, feeling not just included but embraced.

I had truly come a long way, and I had so much to be thankful for.

## Chapter 17: A DNA Twist

A few months after my visit to New York, life was settling into a new rhythm. My bond with my biological family had grown stronger, and I felt a deeper sense of belonging than ever before. But then, one day, everything shifted again.

An email notification popped up: a new DNA match.

Excitedly, I opened it, expecting to find another distant relative or familiar connection. But as I looked closer, my heart stopped.

This wasn't just another match. It was a DNA match that changed everything.

I immediately texted my sister and told her she needed to call me right away. She responded quickly, already suspecting what the news might be.

When we got on the phone, I told her what I'd found: the DNA results revealed something completely unexpected.

The woman I thought was my sister wasn't my sister at all—she was my niece.

Confused? Let me explain.

During my trip to New York, I had met the woman I believed to be my biological sister's mother. At the time, I mentioned how meeting her felt a bit awkward since I was the "illegitimate child" of her husband.

Well, it turns out her mom wasn't just the wife of the man I thought was my biological father. She was actually my biological sister.

This revelation flipped everything upside down. The man I thought was my father wasn't my father at all. Suddenly, so much made sense.

During my visit, I had asked about his nationality because his last name suggested Polish descent. My DNA didn't include any Polish heritage, which had left me confused. Now, it was completely clear—he wasn't my biological father.

My sister/niece, however, was deeply upset by the revelation. But her mom reassured her, saying, “You and Angie would have grown up as sisters anyway, so that’s what you are.”

And she was right. By this point, DNA didn’t define our bond. We had built a strong connection that couldn’t be shaken.

I even joked with her about the tattoo we had gotten that said “sisters.” Laughing, I told her, “Hey, it is what it is—we’re still sisters to me!”

She laughed too, and in that moment, we both knew that nothing had really changed.

As the dust settled on this new information, another discovery came to light: my actual sister, whom I now call “Big Sister,” had also been adopted.

She had been raised by a wonderful Italian family and was of Italian/Mexican descent. Big Sister and I shared the same biological father, which deepened our connection even more.

But now the big question loomed larger than ever: who was our father?

The search was back on.

This time, I wasn’t alone. My sister/niece, and I were in this together, each of us determined to uncover the truth.

## Chapter 18: Closure and New Beginnings

A few months after confirming the identity of my biological father, I decided to call my biological mother again. Deep down, I hoped that, this time, she would finally tell me the truth.:

At first, she started to tell me the same story she always had. I listened for a moment, then interrupted respectfully. “No,” I said firmly. “I know, and you know, that’s not what happened.”

Caught off guard, she hesitated, then shifted tactics. “Angie, we weren’t even in the country when it happened. There’s no way to find him.”

I shook my head, refusing to let her deflect. “No. Just stop,” I said, my voice steady but unwavering.

With coldness in her voice, she snapped, “You don’t need to know. Just pretend you don’t even know who I am.”

I didn’t give in as I normally did. Instead, I said matter-of-factly, “I have gone along with what you’ve wanted all these years. I don’t want anything from you, but honestly, it’s time. Just tell me. I need to know for medical reasons,” I added, keeping my voice steady. “If for no other reason, I deserve this information.”

Finally, she relented, but her response shocked me yet again.

“Angie,” she began, “I didn’t want to tell you because he was a bad person. He was a predator who preyed on the young and vulnerable.”

My stomach churned at her words. But she wasn’t finished.

“And... he was in the mafia,” she added.

She claimed he had a son who was a prominent surgical nurse in the area. The story sounded far-fetched, but I listened closely. Over the years, I had learned to pay attention to every detail she let slip, no matter how small.

What I uncovered next only deepened my doubts about her version of the story.

My biological mother had named her firstborn son after my biological father. How do you name

your child after someone you claim is a predator who preyed on the vulnerable? It didn't make sense.

Even more telling, her second born son had the same name as one of my father's brothers—my biological uncle, who had passed away two years earlier. The pieces didn't add up.

Later, my actual cousins confirmed one part of her story: my biological father had been a bookie in the Mafia. They didn't elaborate, but that was okay.

What became clear to me was this: from the very first day I spoke to her, my biological mother had deceived me. It was evident she never intended for me to be part of her life, and honestly, I was okay with that.

Over the past six years, I've visited Niagara Falls twice a year. My biological mother lives just ten minutes from my sister, yet I've never visited her or told her when I was in town.

In 2019, I texted her to let her know I was in the area. She invited me to meet for coffee somewhere, but she didn't invite me to her home. That was the final straw for me.

At that moment, I decided she was no longer worthy of being part of my life. I texted her back, saying I wouldn't be able to meet after all. I haven't spoken to her since.

This journey has been an emotional rollercoaster from the moment I was born. But last year, I found the closure I needed in an unexpected way.

During a visit to Niagara Falls, my sister and I decided to find our paternal grandparents' tombstone. We had only a vague idea of where it might be.

As we pulled into the graveyard, I looked to my right and immediately spotted a tombstone. It wasn't the one we were searching for—it was my maternal grandparents' tombstone.

A chill ran through me. What were the chances of stumbling upon their stone, especially when we weren't even looking for it?

My sister drove over, and I got out of the car. I stood there for a moment, taking it all in. I said a few private words, kissed my fingers, and touched the stone.

That door was now shut.

Next, we continued our search for my paternal grandparents. We stopped in the area where we thought their stone might be, and within two steps, I spotted it.

Again, it felt strange and almost guided.

I spoke to him, kissed my fingers, and touched the stone. That door, too, was now shut.

At the airport, I hugged my sister tightly, reluctant to let go but knowing I'd be back soon.

"Okay, Sister," I said, smiling through misty eyes. "I'll see you in a couple of months."

With that, I turned and walked toward the gate, my heart full of the journey but also brimming with anticipation for the future.

## Chapter 19: Finding Peace

Over the years, my journey has been filled with emotional ups and downs. From the moment I was born, my story has been anything but simple.

I've faced the pain of rejection, the joy of connection, and the bittersweet reality of closure. I've learned that not everyone is meant to be part of your life, and that's okay.

Closing the door on my biological mother was one of the hardest yet most liberating decisions I've ever made. For years, I bent over backward trying to please her, hoping she'd welcome me into her life. But when I finally let go, I found a peace I didn't know I needed.

I could have let her rejection, inconsistency, and coldness define me. I could have used it as an excuse to feel sorry for myself or explain away bad choices. But I chose not to. I decided a long time ago that my worth isn't tied to someone else's approval—or lack of it. I am who I am because of the love and values my parents instilled in me.

For whatever reason, I was meant to be on this earth, and that purpose didn't require her permission. I'm not the one who hides behind masks to navigate life. Instead, I've embraced who I am and who I was raised to be.

Life is full of rejections, disappointments, and unfulfilled expectations, but we can choose how we respond. We don't have to let our past or someone else's decisions dictate our future. We can rise above it. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.

It wasn't just about closing doors—it was about opening new ones.

Meeting my biological families changed everything. I gained not just new relatives but a deeper understanding of myself. For so long, I'd wondered about the missing pieces of my identity. In finding them, I found a sense of belonging I didn't even realize I was searching for.

And then there's Niagara Falls.

Whenever I'm there, something shifts inside me. The air feels lighter. The world seems quieter.

For so long, I thought I was searching for answers about my biological family. But what I was really searching for was a connection to my roots.

As I reflect on this journey, one thing is clear: Niagara Falls is more than just a location on the map. It's where my story started, where my roots are planted, and where I've found the peace I've been seeking all along.

It wasn't until recently that I understood why.

It's home.

Because my story began in Niagara Falls.

## Chapter 20 - Unveiling the Final Pieces

This year, 2024, I received a message on Ancestry: a new DNA match. My heart skipped a beat when I saw who it was. This wasn't just any distant relative—this was my biological niece, the granddaughter of my father. She was the daughter of my biological brother, the “prominent surgical nurse” my biological mother had mentioned. I couldn't believe it.

Trying not to overwhelm her, I sent a brief message introducing myself and providing a quick synopsis of my story. I let her know I'd love to connect with her father but understood completely if it felt like too much. Then, I waited.

A couple of months went by before I finally received her response. She apologized for the delay and asked if we could set up a time to have a video chat. My nerves kicked into overdrive, but I eagerly agreed.

The day of the video chat arrived, and I sat anxiously, staring at my iPad. This was the closest I had ever come to my biological father—speaking to his granddaughter, someone who knew him personally.

When the call came through, I answered immediately. After our initial introductions, the questions began. She was curious, and I answered everything as openly and honestly as I could. Once she felt comfortable, she began to tell me about her grandfather—my father.

She said she remembered him as a kind man, someone her dad wanted her to remember fondly. But as we talked, she mentioned her understanding of his life wasn't perfect. He and his wife, her grandmother, had a tumultuous relationship, likely complicated by infidelity. Their marriage eventually ended in divorce.

Then, she dropped a detail I didn't expect: I wasn't the first person to reach out claiming to be his child.

“More siblings?” I thought, my mind spinning.

Our conversation shifted back to my father. She shared little pieces of his life that filled in gaps I never thought I'd close.

Then, she showed me a picture of him when he was probably in his late 40s. I stared at the image, completely captivated. There were similarities I couldn't deny, little hints of myself in the face looking back at me.

I asked if I could snap a picture of him for myself, and of course, she agreed. I held my phone up

and took the shot, knowing I'd revisit it time and time again.

She told me she was an author—imagine that, another writer in the family—and that she had a sister. I smiled at the thought: two nieces. My family had grown even more.

She confirmed that she had heard whispers about him being involved with the mafia but didn't know much about it. Then I asked her if she could tell me anything about his health.

"He was diabetic," she said, a revelation that made me pause. I'm diabetic, too.

She also told me he had passed away in an assisted living home due to Alzheimer's. That hit me hard. Learning this about him made his absence feel even more tangible, but it was also a piece of the puzzle I had been searching for.

As our conversation ended, we agreed to stay in touch. I thanked her for taking the time to meet with me and for sharing what she could.

When the call ended, I sat for a moment, overwhelmed by the mix of emotions. I had learned so much—more than I ever thought I would. Life, as it often does, had revealed this information to me in its own time.

And now, I wait, wondering what will be revealed next.