

The Power of Love: A Son Lost and Found

By Lisa Catanese

This is a story of love.

Social worker Christine Jones, her eyes shining with tears and her voice thick with emotion, sat quietly in her office one recent morning and shared the story of the son she gave up for adoption nearly 30 years ago, a story that is wonderful and heartbreaking at the same time.

Thirty years ago, when Christine told the man she loved that she was pregnant, he abandoned her and his unborn child. Her family sent her to California to have the baby; she decided that adoption was best for the child.

He was born in June 1963, after a long and painful labor that Christine endured alone. Leaving the hospital without her son, Christine says, "was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life." She pressed her face and hands against the glass of the nursery for one last look at her little boy, and slowly slid to the floor in tears. Hospital workers led her away.

In the years that passed, Christine married and raised two daughters, but she always kept the memory of her son alive in her heart. When she knew he turned 18, she decided to look for him, but at the time she was going through a divorce and money was tight. Many search groups exist to link adopted children with birth mothers, but the cost was more than she could afford.

In 1989, Christine's sister, who found out about the adoption when she was 16 and had always encouraged Christine to search for her son, planned a trip to California. With Christine's permission, she went in person to the agency that had handled the adoption and brought back information for her sister.

The information explained the procedure for arranging such meetings. In that state, three waivers must be presented to the adoption agency – one from the birth mother, one from the adopted child, and one from the adoptive parents. If one of these three waivers is missing, the meeting cannot be arranged.

"I put in my waiver in November 1989," Christine says. "Nine months later, he picked up the phone and started looking for me."

Her son's efforts to find his mother led him to the California adoption agency, which said it would forward a letter from him to his mother. Shortly after that, Christine received a letter from her son, Jon, who was now age 27, married, and living in Colorado.

For a year and a half, the two corresponded back and forth, but neither felt ready for a phone call or face-to-face meeting. They were tentatively reaching out to one another, Christine explains, and both needed time to adjust.

But on Christmas Eve 1991, Christine thought it was time to reach even further. She sent to her son's home a book about birth bonds – and waited.

"The people at the agency told me that it probably would be one to five years before I heard from him, because it takes that long for most people to take that step beyond letters," Christine says. "I heard from Jon in eight days."

The letter-writing continued for several more months, into the summer of 1992. Then one day, at home recovering from gall bladder surgery, Christine picked up the telephone at home and heard her son's voice.

"He was calling from MCI, where he worked, and he told his boss who he was calling so he could have some privacy," Christine recalls. "He sat in a conference room with a box of tissues while we talked for two and a half hours."

Three months ago, after more phone calls, Jon told Christine that he wanted to meet her. He was making a business trip from Colorado to Washington, DC, and asked if she could meet him there.

Christine Jones met her son Jon on Friday, September 18, 1992, in a hotel lobby, where he handed her a bouquet of red roses. They talked for more than three hours, then went to dinner.

The physical resemblance between mother and son is unmistakable. In addition, they both are left-handed and neither drinks coffee. They shared so much about the years they spent apart – Christine told him about his two half-sisters, and he described the wonderful childhood he experienced with loving adoptive parents who brought him on travels around the world and didn't feel threatened by his curiosity about his birth mother.

But Christine was not prepared for the pain of parting with her son after that weekend. When they said goodbye, after days of soul-searching and learning about each other, she felt as if she was giving him up all over again.

"I didn't know when – or if – I'd ever see him again," she says. "I wasn't sure I could stand the pain of losing him again."

Christine tried to prepare herself for the very real possibility that Jon would not try to contact her again. But Jon did call, and now mother and son are building a relationship that Christine hopes will last a lifetime.

Christine shares her story during this holiday season as a way to remind everyone how precious family truly is. She feels fortunate that the gift of love she gave to her son, when she put him up for adoption so many years ago, has come back from him – to her.