

# **Blessed Beyond Belief**

## **by 'Chelle Baxter**

Thirty-three year old reunited adult adoptee with over twenty surgeries - that is me.

My parents adopted me when I was 13 days old on August 7, 1974 from Edna Gladney Adoption Agency in Fort Worth, Texas.

Two high school teachers raised me. Papa taught senior level English at the same high school attended. My parents chaperoned my prom and my father sponsored my senior class. He handed me my diploma on stage at high school graduation. Yet, even with this abundant life I was given, I still never felt "complete," as if there was still a part of me missing.

While driving me to my elementary school one morning, Papa explained to me how I was "chosen and special" and how I was adopted. I reacted positively instantly and felt from that point in my life there was something unique God had made about me.

My grandmother, Nana took the movie theatre when I was 8 years old to watch, "Annie." Afterwards, I had many thoughts cross my mind, such as "Where is my birth mom and my birth dad? Do I look and act like them?"

I remember some of family teasing me that night after the movie as I had already memorized all of its' music and could not stop singing one particular song titled, "Maybe". I repeatedly sang my favorite lyrics,

**Maybe in a house  
All hidden by a hill  
She's sitting playing piano,  
He's sitting paying a bill**

My curiosity increased over the next several years. At age fourteen, I began having horrible pain several days out of each month. Several gynecologists told me nothing was wrong and that I simply had worse cramps than some other females.

As a twenty four year old college student, I realized I could not handle this pain anymore. By that time, I had become very anemic and had still not received any diagnosis. While my college sweetheart (now my husband) and I were chatting one day, he said, "'Chelle, I think it is time. I think you need to know your birth family's complete medical history."

He drove me that next week to the adoption agency. As we were about to leave, our tour guide asked me to wait a moment as she wanted to see if there were any items she could give me from my "file." I will never forget that moment as my life then began to change drastically. She handed me a letter; my birth mom had written to me. (This note had been remained in my file for a few years as the agency waits until both birth and adoptive family members both register to meet.) My birth mom wrote that she had to have a hysterectomy after I was born and never had any other children. And it was due to her having ENDOMETRIOSIS. What's that, I thought? I'd never heard of that disease by

that point in my life. I got to know a lot about it over the next ! few year s. She strongly encouraged me to get checked out for it. By the time of my diagnosis, my body was already in the the worst stage of it. I was my doctor's second worst endometriosis case. (His first worst case being a lady who was twenty six years older than me). The doctor explained to me how the disease had spread into many parts of my body, including intestines and ovaries. He said he believed this occurred due to me having it for at least ten years with no diagnosis nor treatment.

The adoption agency had many stipulations for the reunion process. My birth mom and I were permitted to write letters to each other, but only as long as they were sent almost anonymously through the agency. We could only sign one single name we each could choose. My choice was "Chelle" and hers was "Suzie." Also each of us had to pay seventy-five dollars for a counseling fee and were required to attend at least one session (if not more) before they would decide when we were ready to meet. At that time, I had been waiting on my tax refund to use for it as I did not have much money and explained this to my birth mom in one of my letters. The agency refused the offer my birth mom had given them to pay for my fee anonymously. She then went through another method and found someone who helped her in the search for me. She gave her helper any information she had gathered about me; a 24 year old female student named Chelle attending college. She guessed that maybe I attended a public university in Texas.

One of my close friends worked at the front desk of my dormitory on Tuesday night before Thanksgiving. Kazu told me there was someone calling for me and asked if I wanted to accept the phone call at the desk, and I accepted it. Since I had been waiting for my English professor to call me back about a research paper, I assumed it would be her. "Hello, this is Suzie" were the first words I heard. I began shaking as I realized it was my birth mother. I hurriedly apologized and asked if I could call her right back from my dorm room. As we conversed for awhile, I discovered she lived only an hour from my university. That very night, her husband and she met David and me on campus. We spent several hours together and formed a bond instantly.

Endometriosis caused many complications as it weakened my immune system. I have had over twenty surgeries since age 24, such as laprascopies. At 29 years old, I had a hysterectomy. My husband and I decided at that point in our lives that we would adopt whenever we are ready for a family.

For major holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and my birthday, we celebrate about a few times during that week with my adoptive and birth family. I love my life and I have no complaints. All of my experiences with my surgeries as well as being reunited with my birth family have humbled me.

Although it was difficult for my birth mom, she understood and helped me find my birth father. After my reunion with him, I met his other children. I have two birth brothers and birth sister. And all of us have gotten along very well. It amazes me how we do after not knowing each other for 20 years or more but we do and we keep a relationship. I also gained not only more parents and siblings, but also nieces, nephews, and one grand nephew. David and I are godparents to my birth brother, Josh's daughter. So not only do we have "Pumpkin" as our niece, but also our goddaughter.

She was the first baby I have known from day one in my birth family. Looking like someone else in the same family was a foreign concept to me before then. Even now, sometimes I find myself staring at a birth family member and compare our similarities.

When Grandpa Kelly died, this was the first death I experienced through my birth family. I had a relationship with him for two years. I wrote a poem and read it at his eulogy:

## **"GIVEN THE CHANCE"**

**by 'Chelle**

**Two years ago, I was given the chance  
The chance to meet a man  
Who I never knew before**

**He accepted me into his life with open arms  
He treated me as his own granddaughter  
He was my birth grandfather**

**Now, I grieve for the loss of Grandpa Kelly**

**Today, I am given another chance  
A chance to share, celebrate, and remember him  
!  
As I reflect upon the memories,  
I recall the similarities  
Between him and me**

**The same looks and the same taste**

**We both could be proud of our thick and wavy hair  
as well as how much chocolate we could eat**

**It amazes me after only knowing this man for two years  
How easy it could be to love him instantly**

**I have no doubt Grandpa Kelly loved me**

**He always treated me with respect  
and as a part of the family**

**He was there for me in my many times of need**

**At the end of his time, I was given one last chance  
The chance to hold Grandpa Kelly's hand and tell him,**

**"Thank You" for always having loved me.**

**Here are some quotes from my birth family members, best friend, and husband if you would like to incorporate them into the article:**

### **My birth father, Johnny Williams:**

I want to tell you how much rejoicing I did when I finally got to meet her And for her to get to know her brothers and sister was one of my main prayers ever since she was adopted

The real hard part of letting a child be adopted is you wonder each & every day r they ok – were they adopted by good people – every time u see a little girl u think is that her, could that be her

Birth parents I tell you never quit praying, never give up b/c u don't know what God can do for u – he will reunite you if u believe

To the adoptees I tell them also to keep searching, don't give up – if there's a will there's a way – to find each other – I mean this is living proof sitting right here

To the adopted parents – I say keep an open mind – if your child wants to know their birth parents & why, help them – they are never going to stop loving you for what u've done for them

### **ME - additional comment:**

I'm very grateful for them (my siblings) – my life has been filled with more joy, more celebrations; alot more thanksgiving & Christmas meals – I love having two brothers sister nieces nephew and grand nephew

### **Jana Pennington, my birth sister who is 5 years older than me, age 38:**

I think if u know that u have other siblings and other family when ur growing up and u haven't met them u always feel like something is missing and then when u connect w/ them it feels that empty spot & it completes ur knowing and ur sense of okay I've completed my family

### **Keebler Williams, younger brother (around age 29):**

It's been very interesting getting to know chelle – it's been a blast – you know about some family members that you have but then all of a sudden u find out u find u have somebody else and then at first u kind of get upset b/c nobody told u but then when u realize it u just take it one step at a time I guess and then u realize well whatever happened in the past happened and u just kind of look forward to the future

### **Josh Williams (around age 27):**

I like having all these sisters, brother, brother in laws – it's real nice to have family – because a lot of people don't have family – they don't care about u – I'm thankful for that – just getting used to – all that –

Chelle asks : don't u like having sister s- josh says I said that – sometimes they're a brat but they're okay" as he smiles/laughs.

## **Suzie Tatom, my birth mother, age 50:**

Without chelle there was a lot of sadness and a lot of grieving b/c I missed my baby so much – I went every day wondering where she was, what she was doing, what she looked like, did she look like me, and always wondering & hoping that I would find her and that we would get along & that she would have a place in her heart to forgive me – I didn't realize there would be such an emptiness in my heart when I let her go – so after I found chelle there was this completeness I felt in my heart and it's indescribable – I don't have to wonder where she is now – even if I don't know exactly where she is I know that she's okay – I went searching for my lost child but what I found was this wonderful woman who knew where she'd been where' she was going – she had a very stronghold on her life and her goals – and what I found was me – a lost mother

## **Dave – 'Chelle's husband, age 38:**

When I first found out that she was adopted I didn't think much of it – I'd met other people that were adopted – but then she was starting to have health trouble and she felt like she needed to know who her birth family was so that she could get medical history so that pushed me to go ahead and help her out in terms of trying to find them – we first went to the gladney agency and they gave her a letter for some reason they did not mail out to her which indicated her mother had endometriosis she should check up on it – she checked up on it and she had that

With that though in consideration that I think one out of 4 women have endo I'm suprised they ever tested her before – of course hindsight's always 20/20

After that though we were able to meet her birth mother suzie and form a relationship with her – she's been there for chelle she's been able to help her out and chelle's been able to her out too – she's met all of her birth family or most of them – and right now we're godparen! ts &ndas h; we have a goddaughter –

it's been pretty good – I'm glad we met them – they're a very nice group

for those who think it's a bad situation to meet birth family or if they are concerned that their adopted son or daughter may not want to spend time w/ them that's not the case at all – people r curious and they also have a medical reason to want to know

## **Blake, same age as me, 33- Chelle's best friend of 18 years:**

I've known chelle for a long, long time – actually we met my freshman year in hs and her sophomore year – I consider her one of my best friends – we actually refer to each other as brother & sister – as

we got to know chelle in our groups of friends hanging out – we learned of course what u learn bout friends, a lot about each other, music we like, interests, things like that

One of the things we learned at the time was that chelle was adopted – to us that was like an everyday thing, it didn't stand out – my parents were divorced – it was one of those! things our family was – we went on from there

As time went on and we got to know chelle more -  
It started becoming apparent that she had an interest in wanting to know moer about who she was and where she came from –

Having such a strong love and respect for her family that she lived w/ , her adoptive parents – she did not want to go against their wishes of wanting to not have her know about her birth family

She was still in high school just going into college, her future, her life , everything ahead of her - and then this one big mystery that she could not solve

And it was out of the love & respect – that's just chelle –that's what she's gonna stand by & do

As college though made her a little bit more free, liberal and crazy sometimes but all in a good way – she also had the maturity come in and decided that she wanted to puruse this more and go back to adoption agency & really learn what she could about her birth family – Chelle was very fortunate enough to be reunited with her birth mother while she was in college ; while I wasn't there I heard about it very quickly after it happened – and of course it prompted 100,002 questions from chelle about all kinds of things and I can remember her calling me asking advice & what she should do and it was good that I could be encouraging for her

It's helped everything come full circle for her – for her to know really about who she is and where she came from while at the same time still maintaining a loving and close relationship with her parents, her family she grew up with

I learned from my family being from a divorced situation that u can never have too many grandparents,aunts,uncles,& cousins – chelle has felt the same thing by having her new family & as well as the family she grew up w/ - she 's been very fortunate to have the whole group come full circle and be a part of her life – **and it's made her a much stronger, more confident and better person than she was.**