

A Family Secret

I had just hit send, when I sat back in my chair and looked up at the ceiling. I needed to process everything that had just happened in the previous days. Before I knew it, tears flowed from my eyes and down the sides of my face. I wasn't sure why I had reacted so emotionally as I sobbed, placing my face in my hands. My husband came running to see what was wrong with me. The only words I could utter to him were, "She kept it a secret for so long. Why didn't she tell anyone? She might have been okay if she would have just told someone."

Just days before, my brother, Mike, telephoned to let me know he had just hung up from a phone call with our other brother. I didn't think much about it, since our older brother, Jim, lived nearby. Mike said calmly, "No, our other brother." It turned out that apparently our mother had a baby out of wedlock when she was about twenty-years old.

Today, this wouldn't even raise an eyebrow, but for a young, unmarried girl in the 1950s, who was brought up under the guidance of a strict Catholic grandmother, this was shameful. We could only guess that her family forced her to put the baby up for adoption. We couldn't confirm this, since all of Mom's family was deceased. Mom had also passed away recently, at the young age of fifty-seven. There was no one to tell us the missing pieces of this story. My mother's half-sister, who was just a child at the time herself, was the only one who confirmed that we did in fact have another sibling, but that was all she knew.

Apparently, our newfound brother sent Mike scanned copies of a Christmas card and a letter that his adopted parents had received from our mother, many years ago. Mike sent the copies to me. The Christmas card was short and sweet, wishing them and the baby a Merry Christmas. The letter included our mom telling them how she was married now, with a baby boy of her own. She was referring to my brother, Jim. The pristine handwriting was unmistakably our mothers. It was proof in her handwriting, that we indeed had another brother.

I'm never one to leave any stones unturned, so I had to contact this new family member. I wanted to see what he looked like. Amazingly, he resembled my mom's mother, my grandmother. I wanted to know everything I could; what he did for a job, and where he was living. His parents had passed away, so he felt free to seek out his real mother, hoping he could meet her in person. Of course, he was disappointed to find out she too, was gone.

He and I spoke briefly, and then I told him I would send him a letter to fill him in on our mother's life. Perhaps he was looking forward to reading about the exciting life she had led, and how fulfilling her life had been. I wish I could have told him these things. The truth is my mother was a very sad woman when she died. She battled depression for as long as I knew her. I believe she married my father on rebound from a relationship that wasn't to be. Perhaps my new brother's father.

My father was in the Coast Guard, which made it impossible for the quickly growing family of six to make any solid roots anywhere. I remember violent fighting between my parents from a very young age, which led to their inevitable divorce. My father remarried his high school sweetheart, but he also died a very young man. My mother remained alone, trying to cope with four rebellious teenagers by herself. She was talented and beautiful, but she didn't take care of herself and her poor health, along with a family history of heart trouble, led to her early demise.

I did so want to write uplifting things about my mother, so I could give this stranger a peace about the woman that gave birth to him. Aside from sharing how artistic and intelligent she was, I found the task extremely difficult. She and I had a very tumultuous time as mother and daughter, a relationship that still haunts me today. Since that day I hit the send button to my new brother, we have never communicated again. I'm not surprised.