

## BIRTHMOTHERS – All of us Together

It's a piece of paper!! But on this piece of paper is the truth as to who you are, where you were born, who your parents are.

It is a legal document and it belongs to you and you only! It's called a Birth certificate.

### SHOW POWERPOINT OF BLANK BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Most people don't ever think about it until it's needed for something - a legal requirement to prove you are who you say you are.

You would all agree on this, Right??

To most adopted children who were born back in the 80s 70s 60s 50s or many years before their Birth Certificate means the world as it says exactly who they are. It gives them the identity they have been searching for once they have been told or discover they have been adopted. Some adopted people only discover that they **were** adopted when they go seeking their birth certificate in their later years.

### QUESTION FOR AUDIENCE.

I would like to ask those of you who has your birth certificate to think about where you may have it stashed for safety? Think about what it says about you on that piece of paper! All this information written on your birth certificate is kind of trivial and old news to you simply because you know the people whose names are on it.

### SHOW POWERPOINT OF SHORT AND LONG BIRTH CERTIFICATE

You may have a short version which only contains your details or the long birth certificate which also contains your parents' details.

If I had the power to release the thousands of birth certificates and records to all those wonderful innocent children now adults of all

ages born to those wonderful innocent naïve very young teenage single mothers going back for decades.

Believe me I would in heartbeat and a breath!

But I don't have that power! What I do have is a voice and here this morning I am going to use that voice to flick on the listening switch in all of you here present.

My voice is to represent the DANÚ birthmothers or first mothers as we are also known who have given me permission to speak on their behalf and the birthmothers who are still in hiding with their secret and not aware of what's happening here today or of how this legislation change will affect them or their adopted son or daughter.

My name is Maria and I am a birthmother. You would have no way of knowing this unless I told you! Hence the reason I didn't put a photo on my biography. Several years ago, I worked with a young woman who told me she was adopted and was trying to find her birthmother, when I had told her how I had to give my son up for adoption. A short while after that conversation this same young lady overheard me talking about a group I was involved in, which allowed me to talk about myself and the loss of my son and the benefits I was getting from listening to other members there. This young lady came to me later and told me that in overhearing my conversation she wanted to pucker me! I asked her why she wanted to pucker me? *What was it I had said that made you want to pucker me?* She replied "You made my birthmother sound real", I replied, *"but she is real, if you cut her she will bleed just like you and me"*.

This made me wonder - is this how adopted children now grown adults think about their birthmothers, as not being real??

Today that young lady is here in the audience at my invitation as we keep in contact, and today I'm going to try making all birthmothers very real.

We as birthmothers walk, talk, smile, love dressing up and looking good, taking part in every aspect of living every day, we bleed when we cut ourselves, we hurt if we fall, we don't wear a label to identify ourselves either. But we were labelled by others. We get on with our lives as best we can, having good days and bad days and cope as best we can with carrying our deep painful secret. Birth mothers are women just like me who became pregnant and had their babies taken away from them or were not allowed to keep them by the state, church, society, our parents, our siblings, all of whom decided we were not allowed to rear our first-born children. Totally dismissing we were human beings with hearts and feelings.

People think Birth Mothers all had their babies at a very young age but in truth the age range varies from those who were quite young to women in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Birth fathers overall are invisible and are not mentioned in many cases and their names were almost never included on the birth cert. it is only since 1988 that Birth Fathers were consulted about an adoption.

So, think about this Question I'm going to asking you all here this morning. Picture your grandparents, your mom or dad, older sisters, and brothers, how well do you think or feel you know them?

Is it possible any one of them could be carrying a deep deep secret which they feel they can never share or tell!

Isn't it possible they could have brought an innocent little baby into this world and were not allowed keep it before they went on to meet each other get married and bring you into this world? isn't it possible for you to be an aunty or uncle without you knowing! Something to consider folks!

My own sisters and brothers never knew my secret until I told them 20 yrs. later. My great grandmother dating back 150yrs ago gave birth to my gran mother out of wedlock and placed her with an uncle and his wife to be brought up as their own daughter, my mother didn't know this until I found out by doing my family tree. An aunt of mine now in her late 80s made the journey to England as a very

young girl back in the early 50s to give birth to her baby in secret and she will take her secret to her grave without knowing I found out her secret. All because of this horrible STIGMA and SHAME imbedded so deep it's too far for her to reach.

So, I will ask you all again how well do you know those close family members and friends you think and feel you know?

I am here today to ask everyone of you to open your minds and hearts and to be very mindful by giving dignity, respect, understanding and above all to be non-judgemental of the circumstances around your birth being the adoptee; as you don't know the bigger picture around the conception of anyone of you until you yourself find your mother, and I would ask for the same dignity, respect, understanding and non-judgemental in return for all birthmothers as it will be so very painful for her to tell you and explain to you in a way you can understand the reason or reasons behind your mother not being able to keep you and rear you.

I am hoping that the horrific reports coming out regarding the treatment of single mothers in those mother and baby homes and all institutions and in private family homes where very fearful pregnant young girls and women were shunned away out of sight out of mind has given a much bigger picture to all people who were adopted as to maybe your own birthmother was one of those innocent people behind those 10ft high walls.

A four-letter word called FEAR is very strongly restricting and holding so many birthmothers back from coming forward, at taking that huge step which is to firstly to admit her secret and give you - being her son or daughter - your rightful place as her first born or second born (as there are birthmothers who have more than one secret).

Many women never told their husbands or other children and this is one of the reasons why they may find it hard to come forward now – always thinking, *“What will people think of me?”* – that fear of being judged again.

Today mothers-to-be have the excitement of finding out if the baby they are carrying is a boy or girl. Babies are conceived through IVF now. I'm so lucky to be an aunty of one of those IVF baby miracles which all babies born are miracles. Back in 1977 when I gave birth to my baby I was told it was a boy and with the next breath my baby boy was taken away without me getting to hold him or see his little face or to count his little fingers and toes - this being the most important part of bringing new life into this world.

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED! People forget what Ireland was like in the last century and all those inhumane things happened right up until the 90s. I know people who are very shocked to find out that they have lost a sibling just because their mother was unmarried and was not allowed to keep their older brother or sister.

I remember telling my own children when they were quite young that they had an older brother. As they are all different individuals there was a lot of mixed feelings about the introduction of their older brother - they felt the family dynamics had changed slightly, it was a much bigger dynamic for them to understand at the time.

Don't think for one moment that your birthmother does not want to know you, to see how you are or to find you! Because I guarantee you she has never forgotten her labour, your delivery, the day you were born. She sends you a birthday wish every year in her own silent way. But I can also guarantee you the deep deep pain she is feeling is a huge fear - an unexplainable fear which has her frozen in time.

It's a fear she can see through, like looking through a large pane of glass, a pane of glass she is finding extremely hard to shatter to take that very important next step which will allow her to feel brave enough to come searching and looking for you - that tiny little baby boy or girl weighing only a few pounds that she can only see you as and remember you as - but who is now all grown up to be a man or woman with your own thoughts independence values and probably is a moms or dads yourself. I know all this because I was in that very same place.

Today I would like you all for a moment to just imagine wearing the shoes of any one of those extraordinary birthmothers who are still in hiding with heartfelt shame and extreme fear at acknowledging the birth of their babies aloud. It is not as black and white a procedure as you would like it to be and only educating people to see and feel this bigger picture can and will move all of this forward at taking the sting out of the fear and ignorance around it.

Becoming a birthmother for many of us - in fact for all of us - means taking off our comfortable familiar shoes. We find ourselves walking in a stranger's shoes - not our size colour or style and that hurt like hell. We become strangers in our own bodies to ourselves not knowing what will happen to us now, were pushed away moved away and disowned by our families and familiar surroundings left with strangers, left to fend for ourselves, put into all kinds of institutions, mother and baby homes, private family homes. When our babies are born and taken from us, we either move away or return home if we are allowed. What we have gone through is never talked about and we are left to carry the shame and secret.

Lies becomes our new language, pain becomes our new feelings. We are expected to pick ourselves up shake off the dust, smile and get on with our lives until we find a way to numb the pain and find the strength to take on a new identity that fits us and try to live with it.

### **Madge Simpson Quote**

Madge: *"Now Lisa listen to me, this is important. I want you to smile today!"*

Lisa: *"But I don't feel like smiling!"*

Madge: *"Well it doesn't matter how you feel inside you know, it's what's showing up on the surface that counts, that's what my mother taught me!! You take all your bad feelings and push them down, all the way down, all the way down past your knees until you're almost walking on them! And then you will fit in and you will be invited to parties, and boys will like you and HAPPINESS will FOLLOW!"*

**THIS IS WHAT WE AS BIRTH MOTHERS HAVE HAD TO DO, AND ARE STILL DOING.**

I was a very active sporty young teenage carefree girl, played camogie and ladies Gaelic football, threw the discus, and shot putt which I won medals for and ran relay races as the last member and brought the baton across the winning line to celebrate victory. That happy carefree journey ended the day I sat in a waiting room waiting to be called in and examined by my family doctor. My happy carefree world changed in an instant when I was told my symptoms that I was pregnant. This is the day I stood into those extremely uncomfortable ill-fitting painful shoes and took on another identity and the role of a stranger.

This legal document YOUR birth certificate is a huge thing for your birthmother to release to you because it identifies **who she is**.

What gives me the power to say this is the fact that I have found my baby boy who is very much a grown man and I have given him his real birth certificate and watched his face and his reaction when he took it into his hands and read it as it's telling him he is not who he thought he was either, which had to be very scary for him.

But today I must think of those mothers who hasn't had what I have experienced yet and we must respect and keep those mothers in a safe place until they are ready to shatter that large pane of glass.

Finding the strength and courage to go searching for my son, finding him, and acknowledging him, getting to know him, telling him the words I whispered into his little baby ear that I would come to find him, connecting my son with his brothers and sister, encouraging my siblings to acknowledge him as family, missing years of his childhood, the joys of finding my son, working at finding the way I needed to fit into his world and he fitting into my world, was a big fearful task, but a doable task and a wonderful rewarding task.

As the Garreth Brooks song goes, *"I could have missed the pain but I would have had to miss the dance"*.

We birthmothers hope here today and going forward to be able to go out there amongst the many different groups and different aged woman in their villages, towns, and cities in their ICA meetings in libraries and where ever they are meeting to introduce ourselves as a birthmother as we most likely will be their first real face-to-face connection being honest telling our story to sit and talk with them about our journeys the good the bad and difficulties we met while traveling our journey. But to also explain the importance of the new legislation happening and why it is so important for them to release the information for their sons or daughters birth certificates to allow them to find out who they really are. To let those Birthmothers know that we are listening and that it is A-OK to be feeling their fear and encourage them letting them know there is a safe place for them to come too to talk about their own individual story and the fears and concerns around them. To allow them the space and confidentiality to tell their secret and unburden the pain they hold very deep inside. And to allow them to feel the freedom of having released their pain.

### **DANU POWER POINT**

This QUOTE by Henry Ford explains very accurately what happens when people come together.

Coming together is a beginning.

Keeping together is progress.

Working together is success.

I found all of this in a safe place when I found myself looking to find someone else who had gone through similar circumstances and became part of a wonderful group called DANÚ Birth Mothers Support Group. The name comes from Danú, a wonderful Irish Goddess, whose name means knowledge, wisdom, teacher, wealth and abundance. Our Danú Birth Mothers Support Group meets 4 to 5 times in the year. We tell our horrific and sad - all very different stories when we feel safe. The trust which we create when we each



introduce ourselves many times and retell our experiences of being a birth mother to new members. We cry we laugh we feel each other's pain and support each other. Everyone's story is so very different in lots of ways but we all are the same because of our stories. Danu is 11 years in existence and I have been involved for 8 years. There are support groups in a few other parts of the country also.

Groups like DANÚ need to happen all over the country. We need to start a campaign to reach out to all those extremely fearful birthmothers to let them know there is a safe place for them to first meet other birthmothers, as we all felt we were alone and the only one carrying the shame until we met someone like ourselves, a place where they can feel safe to talk just like AL-ANON and AA meetings.

Today we are all here to give both parties whose real names on this piece of paper, this legal document, respect, dignity, compassion, understanding and bravery as both parties do not know each other even though they are mother and daughter mother and son, both total strangers to each other. It is their sons or daughters legal right to be able to own this legal document, but it is also their birthmothers right to stay unknown until she feels safe to be known.

Today I see my teenage pregnancy as a gift, it has caused me to a lot of pain loss anger tears and hurt through the years but it also has allowed me to grow and taken me on an amazing learning journey, and giving me an understanding of life in a powerful greater way. It also has given me a huge strength to feel the freedom after unlocking the shackles holding me back and stepping out of the stigma around the shame instilled in me by becoming a birth mother so I can reach out to others who are trying to live with their own secret of being a birthmother.

THANK YOU!!