

NOT SATURDAY'S CHILD

People often ask me if I am depressed or sad or if I miss my parents. These would be sympathetic and expected questions if my parents had recently died. But they haven't. They're very alive and well and live together with me, my brother and sister in a suburb of Boston. Why these questions, you ask? I'm adopted.

By "adopted," I don't mean that I was one of "Saturday's Children" in the *Boston Globe* who at 10 or 13 or even older are adopted into a family. I came to my parents at 5 days old, the newborn son of a teenager and her ex-boyfriend from Milwaukee, a couple who simply weren't mature enough to become parents. They made a good decision and I am grateful that they did.

People often assume that I am unhappy because I am adopted or that I am or should be frantically searching for the once-teenage couple, now, I guess, in their late 30s and approaching middle age. One friend in middle school kept asking me "Who are your real parents? Don't you want to find out?" A girl I dated briefly last year asked me if I wanted to search for my birthparents. "There are searching services, you know," she said. "People often feel more at peace with themselves if they know their roots." To placate her, I said I didn't have enough money. She offered to pay half the cost.

Why are so many people so worried about me? My parents are certainly "real" to me and to my younger brother, also adopted. (My older sister is my parents' biological child. But why am I telling you this?) My brother and I (predictably) look a little less like my parents than my sister. (My parents are Italian-American and Mexican-American; I am Lithuanian-American and Polish-American.) But this doesn't bother me or take up much of my mental space.

Sometimes I feel curious about my birthparents, but the curiosity is fleeting. I am about as interested in finding them as I am in someday visiting Seattle, which, I've heard from friends, is a really beautiful city. But I am in no rush to go and only think of it once in awhile. If I found my birthparents, I am not sure what I'd say or do. Do I want a relationship, a "reunion", as my former girlfriend put it? No. I have a pretty happy family and I don't need another.

So, I ask, why all the concern, all the misplaced sympathy? Maybe because many people believe that biological families are superior to adopted families, that all adoptees are like "little orphan Annie's" or "Oliver Twists." Perhaps it's not their fault. If we look at the daily newspaper obituaries, we often see adoption presented as "special" or worth noting. ("Stanley Smith, 72, is survived by his wife Mary and his two adopted daughters, Ann and Marie." Would an obituary ever say that Stanley was survived by his two "biological daughters?" I don't think so.) Often TV movies present tragic adoption stories in which pathetic adult adoptees spend all their time, money and psychic energy searching desperately for a birthparent who abandoned them long ago.

I'm not denying that some adoptees experience a deep sense of sadness or want to search for their birthparents. All I am asking, though, is that people not assume that I am in need of their help or support because of my "special situation." Direct your sympathy and concern elsewhere. Think about the language you use when you talk about adoption (I never want to hear "real parents" again). Consider the possibility that your "caring" may have its roots in prejudice. Adoption isn't a second-rate way to have a family; it's just a different way.

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