

# Do You Know Why I'm Calling?

*She Had Given Her Baby Up for Adoption in 1959. Now Her Phone Was Ringing*

**I**N THE SUMMER OF 1959, I FLEW FROM

Washington to Los Angeles with my dad. I remember playing gin rummy during the trip and the black-and-white suit I wore with a hat and white gloves. Most of all, I remember I was pregnant and very frightened.

When I had chosen not to marry the father of my baby—I was 19 years old at the time—my ob/gyn had given me what seemed the only viable alternative. Now I was flying across the country to live with strangers so that my child could be born in secret and put up for private adoption.

"This way you can return home and resume your life where you left off," my doctor had explained. "My advice is that you pretend it didn't happen, much less talk about it, and go on with your life."

On September 3, 1959, I gave birth to a little boy. I saw him once, lying in the nursery, but I was not allowed to hold him. The doctor and nurses felt it would be too painful for me. I flew back to Washington not long afterwards, signed the adoption papers, and, as the doctor suggested I continued with my life.

Although the pain of the parting diminished with time, I never forgot for a moment that I had a son or that I had given him away. Mother's Day was always the worst.

Then, on March 26, 1993, I found a message on my answering machine. "Elizabeth," a woman said, "I have some news that I hope will be of interest to you and bring you great joy and happiness."

Her voice broke—it was evident she was crying. "If you are the same Elizabeth Thring who did me a favor 33 years ago, please call me in Newport Beach, California. I would very much like to have a chat with you."

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Elizabeth Thring is a Bethesda-based real-estate agent. Last September her son flew to Washington to celebrate his 34th birthday—the first with his biological mother.



**A rare Mother's Day: the author and her son together for the first time since his birth.**

**I** CALLED BACK AND LEFT A MESSAGE.

Three days later, when I finally got through, the woman said her name was Susie. She asked if I knew who she was.

"I believe so," I replied, "but I'm not 100-percent sure."

"Oh, Elizabeth," she said, "I adopted your beautiful baby boy, and I am just calling to tell you what a wonderful son you have and that he is married to a terrific girl and you have two beautiful little granddaughters."

My son's name, I learned, was Bill.

For years I had fantasized about just such a moment as this. Now that it had come, I told Susie that I couldn't think of any other woman I knew with such generosity of spirit. She said that one day, while watching her granddaughters play, she'd thought, "What woman wouldn't want to know about such children?"

Susie and her husband, Nelson, had known my name from the beginning. They had been having a hard time trying to adopt in 1959 when their family doctor suggested they contact a doctor in Beverly Hills who was arranging private adoptions. The

Beverly Hills doctor was the one who delivered my baby.

For the past 15 years, Susie, Nelson, and Bill had looked for me, but all that time I had had an unlisted phone and was using the name of my ex-husband. In 1989 I decided to resume my maiden name, and that is how Susie finally found me.

She said that although Bill knew she was looking for me again, she had kept the details from him, to protect him in case I didn't want to see him.

Now she was sending me a letter with photographs of him, she said.

While I was waiting for the packet, I sent letters to both Susie and Bill. I told my son of my absolute joy at learning that he wanted to know me as much I yearned to know and hold him. "It is almost too fragile a thought to believe in for any length of time," I wrote, "yet wonder of wonders, it is true."

**I**N THE MIDDLE OF APRIL I FLEW TO LOS Angeles again. On the way, I wrote 33 birthday cards to my son, each with a short description of what I had done for one year of his life. He needed, I thought, to learn about me.

DeAnn, Bill's wife, videotaped me coming down the ramp at the airport. With her were my granddaughters, 22-month-old Violet and 8-month-old Lily. Standing just behind DeAnn was a very tall, blond, impeccably dressed man.

When he saw me, Bill stepped from behind his wife and walked towards me with arms open wide. Into this circle of love I stepped, feeling just like every other mother in the world holding her baby for the first time in her life.

By **ELIZABETH THRING**