

A Story with Many Happy Endings

By Kathy Zartman

May 22 is a red-letter day for State Representative Sara Feigenholtz. On that date in 2010, Gov. Quinn signed her bill which, in most cases, allows adult adoptees born in Illinois access to their birth certificates. Feigenholtz, who was herself adopted, called it "...the most meaningful day of my life!"

May 22 is also a red-letter day for Lois Baumann. On that date in 1947, she was born in Chicago, the first child (birth name, Jacqueline DeBurgo) of Catherine Calamia DeBurgo. Four days later she was adopted by the Baumanns, a German couple, who raised their daughter as Lois Baumann. Lois always knew she was adopted but had no further information. It was a wonderful home; the Baumanns, whom she considers her parents, are no longer living.

Both Lois Baumann and Sara Feigenholtz are members of The Village Chicago. Though they have never met, Sarah's legislative action dramatically changed Lois' life. Three of Lois's birth mother's five children were adopted. Using the new law to access their birth certificates (and aided by Ancestry.com), they eventually found each other and came together in a dramatic family reunion at Midway Airport on June 9, 2012.

At age 65, Lois learned that her heritage is Italian and Portuguese. And she discovered a "full" brother and half brother living in Kenosha WI, a half sister in Bellingham WA and another half brother in the Chicago area. The connections have been life changing for these five siblings and their offspring. Family bonds continue to grow.

Lois' dramatic story may not be representative of all adoptees, but there are now approximately 13,000 people from Illinois for whom that law has meant an end to the emotional questions about their parentage.

This is, indeed, a story with many happy endings.