

An Adopted Son's Family History Journey

*How was I supposed to do family history work for
the biological family I had never known?*

By Shane Clifford

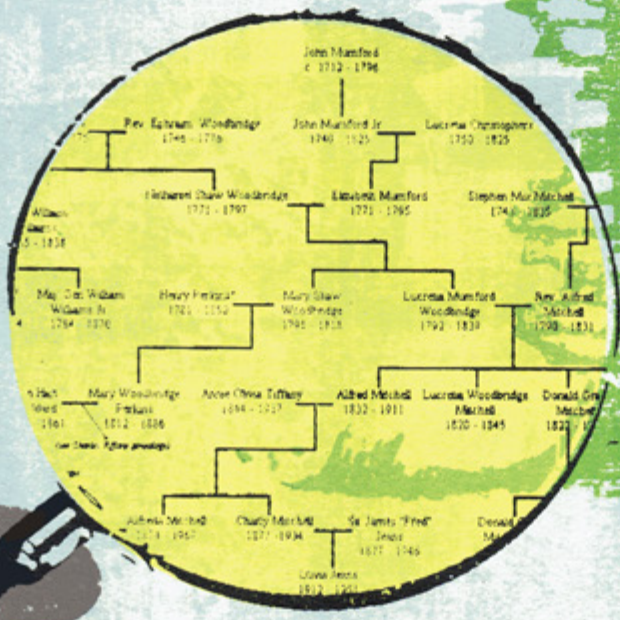
Some years ago, when our family lived in Nevada, USA, the stake presidency announced a stake pioneer temple day in memory of pioneer ancestors and included a request that made me feel a bit uncomfortable. They requested that we research our family history, find a name to take to the temple, and complete the temple ordinances for that ancestor.

My discomfort came because I was adopted in 1969, and I had never made a serious commitment to family history work. I knew I was born in a home for unwed mothers in Maine and that my birth mother had been only 16 years old. I was adopted by a faithful Latter-day Saint couple, who were told virtually nothing of my birth parents. Neither I nor the family my wife and I were raising had any connection to the family line that I belonged to by birth.

Could I Do Temple Ordinances for My Biological Family?

I wasn't sure I could find the information on my family. I wasn't sure I wanted to. I rationalized that I was too busy raising my own family to focus on extended family I had never met. Besides, my adoptive parents had already done a lot of work on my covenant line.

Around that time, I learned that adopted children are allowed to do family history work on their bloodlines.¹ I began to wonder, could I somehow be responsible for my blood relatives who had gone before? Should I be taking steps to seek out my birth parents?



My Search Begins

That year, my family and I had planned a summer vacation in the northeastern United States. I decided that this might be an opportunity to visit the place of my birth. About midway through our vacation, we arrived in the town in Maine where I was born. We searched for the home for unwed mothers, but we found only an adoption agency by the same name. We stopped at that adoption agency, where I asked for information regarding my birth parents. Though I had little hope of receiving any meaningful information, I was given a waiver to sign before a notary.

I finally found an available notary, and at some point I noticed a special feeling. I had the distinct impression that I was being pushed along by a divine force. I raced back to the adoption agency, where a worker shared some

“non-identifying” information from my file, including that my birth mother had called years later to inquire about me and that she had married and had two sons. The worker said she would make an attempt to contact my birth mother.

We left the adoption agency and continued on our vacation. A few days later, the worker from the adoption agency called. She told me my birth mother’s name and that she was at her home awaiting my call.

My Birth Mother

I immediately called her. When she answered the phone, she sounded excited but unsure. As we spoke, I said, “You know, I was about to tell you how old I am, but I guess you probably know that already.” She chuckled. She told me that she married a wonderful man a few years after my



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birth. She also told me that she had struggled with depression most of her life, along with guilt for giving me up for adoption. I told her about my wonderful parents, my loving family, and my life. I thanked her for her love and courage, and she seemed to take comfort in my words. She asked to meet my family and me, and I made tentative plans to return to Maine over a holiday weekend.

After the call, my wife did some research on the hotel computer. After only one search, she found a family history website featuring my birth mother's maiden name. The genealogist did not appear to be a Latter-day Saint, but he had done a great deal of genealogy work and had identified dozens of family members. We found out that my birth mother did indeed belong to this family. This family, my bloodline, had long been lost to me but not to the Lord.

The Temple Work

The weeks after we returned from our vacation were filled with excitement. While I was at work, my wife worked to prepare as many of my family names as possible for the temple. We soon discovered that we had enough information to do the temple work for over 60 people.

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Upon returning home, we began the temple work. My wife and I went to the temple with our two oldest children and performed baptisms. We then returned to perform initiatory work. We hoped to enlist the help of the stake with the endowments and sealings.

An Acceptable Offering

A few days before the stake pioneer temple day, a counselor in the stake presidency spoke in my ward's sacrament meeting. He suggested that all stake members should make a sacrifice on the pioneer temple day and told us that it could be a day of Pentecost for all those willing to make an acceptable offering.

I wanted to be found among those whose offering was acceptable, and I felt compelled to take the whole day off to work in the temple. Amazingly, everything that was scheduled at my work was quickly resolved.

On the day of the stake pioneer temple day, the temple appeared especially beautiful. My wife and I reserved a few special family names for ourselves and then turned the rest over to members of our stake. We began attending endowment sessions in succession for a few hours, broke for lunch, and resumed with more sessions.

At one point, the Lord blessed me with revelation regarding a personal matter. I could not hold back tears. I knew the Lord had accepted my offering.

My pioneer temple day was a culmination of many miracles in my life. Most important, the Lord instilled in me a desire to do the work of salvation for His children who have left this life. He turned my heart to my fathers from both my covenant family and my birth family. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. See "Individuals for Whom I Can Request Temple Ordinances," familysearch.org/ask/salesforce/viewArticle?urlname=For-Whom-Should-I-Do-Temple-Ordinances&lang=en.



WORK FOR OUR OWN ANCESTORS

"Any work you do in the temple is time well spent, but receiving ordinances vicariously for one of your own ancestors will make the time in the temple more sacred, and even greater blessings will be received. The First Presidency has declared, 'Our preeminent obligation is to seek out and identify *our own* ancestors' [First Presidency letter, Feb. 29, 2012; emphasis added]."

Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Joy of Redeeming the Dead," *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 93–94.