

# ADOPTION BY THE BOOK

## MOTHER WHO GAVE SON UP YEARS AGO TELLS HER STORY OF RECONCILIATION, ACCEPTANCE

BY AMY CONKLING

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Debbi Stone wanted to tell her story. She told it a million times.

But she wanted it in writing - her thoughts, her memories and her feelings. All the things circling the open adoption relationship she formed almost 20 years ago with her birth son and his mother.

Her wish came true last month.

The Hutchinson resident, along with her birth son, Danny Platts, and his adoptive mother, Diane Bueller, are featured in the book, "Making Room in Our Hearts: Keeping Family Ties through Open Adoption."

Stone, Bueller and Platts share their open adoption story in one chapter of the book.

The three were interviewed by the book's author, Micky Duxbury, in 2004 after Stone came across a request in a psychology magazine. Duxbury was in search of families experiencing open adoption. In open adoption, communication exists between the adoptive and birth families.

Stone said she hopes the book will serve as a reference for families like hers - a reference that didn't exist 20 years ago, when she and Bueller found just one book after hours of searching at the library.

"This book finally tells our story between two covers," Debbi said. "I don't feel like we're experts, but we learn from other people's stories. Our lives are stories."

And here is theirs...

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Debbi graduated Buhler High School in 1980. Two years later she found out she was pregnant.

She was 19 years old, and the baby's father was her high school boyfriend.

She told her parents three or four months into the pregnancy. She knew earlier but said she kept it a secret out of fear and embarrassment.



LESTER BARNUM/The Hutchinson News

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Her parents experienced the typical shock, she said. That soon faded. She didn't have much time before she gave birth.

Her parents knew this.

One weekend, she remembers her parents laying out her options. They included everything - abortion, adoption and keeping the baby. Her parents told her they would support whatever decision she made.

She thought about the abortion option. It took one sleepless night for her to realize that wasn't going to happen. She also knew keeping the baby wouldn't work out.

Debbi went to a monthly checkup, where her doctor told her he knew a couple interested in adopting a baby. He didn't give her specifics. She knew only that the couple lived in western Kansas.

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March 31, 1983, arrived.

Debbi, then 20, gave birth to Danny that day.

Two to three days later, Diane said she arrived from Hutchinson to pick up Danny. Debbi gave birth to him in Missouri, where she moved shortly after she announced she was pregnant.

Diane didn't meet Debbi that day. Debbi had checked out of the hospital, and Diane said that's how she probably wanted it.

Debbi married in 1985. Two years later, in April, she gave birth to her oldest daughter, Lacey.

Lacey's birth jarred memories of Danny's birth. Memories she thought she had hidden away on March 31, 1983.

She occasionally thought of Danny those last four years. Her thoughts soon were replaced with a tiny voice in her head, telling her that Danny would seek her out if it were meant to be.

But Lacey's birth did it. She had to know where Danny was, what he was like and whom he looked like.

She wrote a letter to the attorney who handled the adoption. It was for Diane, if she ever decided to read it.

Diane and her husband received the letter. Diane responded.

Debbi remembers receiving that package in the mail.

It was from Diane - pictures, a letter and a package. All about Danny.

She and Rick lived in Dodge City at the time. She called Rick at work, sobbing. She called her parents in Hutchinson, sobbing. Rick returned home from work; her parents made the two-hour road trip.

The four of them sobbed through the package, together.

Debbi and Diane shared letters back and forth for a year. Diane said it "was just the right thing to do."

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A housewarming-plant waited for Rick, Debbi and their newborn daughter when they moved back to Hutchinson in 1988 and arrived to their new home.

Diane sent the plant. She wanted to meet Debbi for lunch.

The two met at the Prime Time restaurant on north Main Street. Around the corner, Danny was in kindergarten class at Morgan Elementary School.

Diane asked if Debbi wanted to go with her to pick Danny up from school. Debbi, full of doubt, went along.

Out of the school came a bubbly boy He looked like Debbi's brother - and acted like him, with his arms and feet gangling all over the place.

He plopped in the back seat of Diane's car and talked to mommy about his day.

He then met Debbi.

Diane and Debbi decided to open the adoption and allow Debbi contact with Danny.

From that time on, the three grew closer.

Diane said they never discussed arrangements for Danny and Debbi. Debbi was invited to the house any-time, and attended several birthday parties, holiday events and other momentous occasions.

Diane and Danny moved to Boulder, Colo., when Danny was in middle school.

Debbi traveled to Colorado when he graduated high school in 2001.

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Diane said Debbi is one more person for Danny to love in his life. Actually, it's more people to love, she said.

Each year, Rick Stone takes Danny to the Final Four basketball tournament. Danny said he comes to Hutchinson almost every holiday break to visit Debbi and the family along with his mother.



Courtesy photo

**DANNY PLATTS**

Diane and Debbi remain in touch, too.

The pair enjoyed dinner during Thanksgiving weekend in Hutchinson. Danny went to Las Vegas with his father to watch KU play basketball.

Danny, now 23, attends the Art Institute in San Francisco. He'll graduate with a degree in graphic design this spring and hopes to attend the Vancouver Film School in Canada next fall.

He's used to telling his story.

Debbi received her degree in social work a few years ago. She now does contract work for Adoption and Beyond in Kansas City, Mo., where she works on home studies and placements with families interested in adoption.

During school, Debbi would often call upon Danny and Diane to tell their adoption experience for her college classes.

In turn, Danny called on his mother and Debbi to tell their stories for a school project in high school.

The book, he said, was just another avenue; a way for more people to understand what open adoption is all about.

"Growing up in Hutch, people would see Debbi and my mom standing with me, so we've been used to talking about it and explaining our story to people," he said. "I hope the book serves as a valuable resource."