



Being briefly switched at birth started my adventures in self-discovery!

LOST AND FOUND: The Younger Years - A Grand Adventure In Self-Discovery

by Kenneth Kerr

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Lost and Found

A young child with curly hair, seen from behind, is walking on a sandy beach. The child is wearing a navy blue and white horizontally striped hoodie and light-colored shorts. They are walking on a piece of weathered driftwood. The background shows the ocean with gentle waves under a clear blue sky.

THE
YOUNGER
YEARS

A GRAND ADVENTURE IN SELF-DISCOVERY

Kenneth W Kerr

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KENNETH W KERR

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-63491-758-2

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-63491-757-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

These stories are based on the author's recollection of actual events. They have been related accurately to the best of his knowledge. For the privacy of others, some identities and locations have been changed.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2016

First Edition

Dedication

This is dedicated to the family members and friends who touched my life during these events and strangers who befriended me with acts of kindness and generosity. You are among my angels.

God bless you all.

Kenneth W. Kerr

Acknowledgements

Thanks to kids with the courage to change tomorrow.

Thank you Lynda my wife, my best friend, my soulmate.

Thanks to the people who inspired me to share my experiences.

Thanks to three people who worked tirelessly to make it happen.

Thanks to anyone who offers children three extraordinary gifts:

-Faith, Hope and Love

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Introduction

The earliest experiences of my childhood convinced me to approach life with passion and apply liberal amounts of courage and curiosity to each new situation that I encountered.

The more I came to understand other people in this way, the more I came to understand myself.

These are the true stories of my childhood, as I cycled through life, lost and found, during my younger years.

Our Family

I had a happy upbringing in a small, rural community in South Carolina. My mother, who was a born storyteller, passed that trait along to me, and also taught me to be a “people person.” She used to say, “We are all like ripples in a pond – you never know how many lives you’ll touch.” That’s why I was inspired to share my own stories.

My parents met in 1937 in Virginia’s gorgeous Shenandoah Valley where they attended college on nearby campuses. Daddy, who was from New Jersey, was working on his undergraduate degree in business at Washington and Lee University. My mother was studying toward her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Richmond, VA at what is now Virginia Commonwealth University. As Mama described it, “We ran in the same circles; we knew the same people.”

She first noticed him at a ballroom dance, pointing him out to her friends as “the best looking man in the room,” but they didn’t meet until she was sitting with friends at his fraternity house when he came in from playing tennis. They shook hands and she thought that he looked “flush in the face you know, red faced.” She figured he was just hot from playing tennis, but that wasn’t the case. “Two days later,”

she told me, "I fell terribly ill. As it turned out, the first time your father touched me, he gave me German measles!"

Daddy was the strong and silent type, a trained athlete and hard-working business man who was as honest as the day was long.

"The War," as they referred to it, made a significant impact on their lives. Mama said that when they graduated during 1941, in the months leading up to war, everyone came together one last time on the campus of Washington and Lee for the graduation dance. These were grand events and featuring top bands. She said that "We held those handsome men and danced until the sun came up. The band kept playing and we kept dancing. These were among the brightest, most affluent young men in America, and we knew that soon they would all go off to the war, some never to return."

The following year, as America selected volunteers to serve the nation, "No person wanted to be left behind when the call came." Daddy said. However, due to an asthma condition, my father was not permitted to serve as an American soldier during World War II. Then, during 1944 in New York City, he was accepted into the American Field Service organization as a volunteer ambulance driver. He and his assigned ambulance were put on a ship in

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Charleston, South Carolina and sailed off to the war. "Thanks to those little books, I taught myself to operate and repair that ambulance during the long boat ride." Daddy was assigned to the French Fourth Infantry. He transported wounded allied and American soldiers in front line combat areas in France and Germany where he was when the war ended.

Mama worked as a file clerk in a major radio station initially and later published a newsletter for a large military hospital where she also processed information about the real cost of the war effort, filing records that described American casualties.

One day when Mama discovered that Daddy's best friend from college had been killed in the Pacific War, she contacted his mother and they informed him.

Since my father had her postal address, he wrote to thank her and they stayed in touch often until the war ended and he returned home. They soon fell in love and were married in a small chapel in New York City.

They lived for a time in Puerto Rico where he managed a pineapple farm, until she became pregnant and they returned home to raise a family. We lived in the charming community where she was from in Bennettsville, South

Carolina, close to the North Carolina state line. She eventually inherited much of a large family farm from my grandfather. Throughout my childhood Daddy developed the farm into a successful cattle and grain business.

I was born the last of four children. My brother Tom was seven years older than me and we often entertained one other as brothers do. We had two wonderful older sisters. Mary Margaret and I shared more childhood experiences than Katherine who began to attend boarding school when I was still quite young. As for me, I was labeled the "baby" at birth and "spoiled rotten" as a matter of Southern tradition after that.

My parents were already forty years old when I came along and lacked the interest and energy to chase a little boy through our big center hall colonial home. They recruited a highly skilled nanny to do that. Her name was Lucille Pipkin. She had studied Chemistry in college, yet chose to raise children which she felt was her true calling in life. I became her full time job for five years. "Cile," as I called her, could shut me down in my tracks with a grunt or a glare. After her retirement, we remained close friends. In the days before she passed away many wonderful years later, we enjoyed a laugh together about a dramatic experience that happened after I had been born, just before we met.

Switched at Birth

Daddy knew a thing or two about hospital management, and that came in handy when I was born. He operated a successful agricultural business in Marlboro County, South Carolina – one that included a big feedlot for cattle and a major cotton and grain business. During World War II he had been an ambulance driver. When our local hospital needed an administrator but couldn't afford to hire one, he agreed to do it as a volunteer.

Mama appreciated a good obstetrician. She had been born without one present in her mother's bed at home, ironically as the nation celebrated Labor Day of that year. "My mama had me right at home, in her bed." she would tell her friends to amuse them.

After her birth, a neighbor kindly offered the use of his fishing scale so that the midwife could record my mother's birth weight. Mama was a huge baby that weighed in at more than eight pounds, that is until the Post Office opened up the following day. There, on the only "legal" scale in Bennettsville, the Postmaster documented once and for all that Mama mysteriously shed a couple of pounds overnight. Born into a bit of a mystery, Mama cautioned everyone to be

wary about the size of fish anyone claimed to have caught, offering herself as “living proof.”

Years later when I came along, her obstetrician was based about an hour up the road in Moore County, North Carolina, where her mother lived – so my three siblings and I were all born there. I was born in December of 1959, when Mama was 40 years old, and she said I was the product of a second honeymoon. Older mothers tend to have smaller babies, but I was an exception to the rule, described as “a whopper.” I had reddish-blond hair, what Southerners call “strawberry blonde,” but the nurse, who was rather gruff, remarked to my mom, “That’s not red hair, that’s rust!”

Daddy had been there beside Mama around the clock, and got to hold me for a while before driving home to catch up on his rest. But when he returned early the next morning and the nurse handed him a baby, Daddy suspected something wasn’t quite right. He told her that it was too small to be his.

She dismissed his concerns, telling him that he was probably just sleep deprived and nervous, and explained that “it happens to all the dads.”

“Then where did this bad rash come from?” Daddy asked. “The baby didn’t have that last night.”

“Oh, that’s normal,” she said.

“Okay,” he persisted, “then how do you explain that this baby’s sex changed overnight, from a boy to a girl?”

The nurse stood there staring at the infant, dumbfounded. Daddy handed her the baby girl – who was wearing a little hospital nursery bracelet with *my* name on it – and rushed off to find the hospital administrator.

Not until they did a head count in the nursery did they discover that, sure enough, a baby had gone missing. Someone had switched me, along with my ID bracelet, and although I had only been in the world for about 18 hours, my whereabouts were unknown.

During what my mother described as the longest hour and a half of her life, the hospital staff tried their best to reassure her. But back in those days, rural hospitals had no real security protocols in place for that sort of thing. While someone made public appeals over the intercom system for anyone matching my description, the police arrived and starting searching the premises high and low.

The way Mama told it, “It was just as if time just... stopped.”

Finally, footsteps echoed down the cold corridor. Hospital officials entered my mother’s room and told her “Mrs. Kerr,

your baby is safe and sound. They're bringing him to you right now."

They explained to my parents that someone had found me in the hospital's laundry room, in the arms of a young female inmate who was working there as part of a prison program for nonviolent offenders. When they asked the woman why she took me from the nursery she simply told them "I always wanted a baby boy."

Mama said that when the nurse returned me to her, she looked up and saw a beautiful woman standing in the doorway. "She looked like Lauren Bacall," Mama said.

When their eyes met Mama asked the nurse, "Who is that?"

"She's the one who took your baby."

Mama was stunned and perplexed. She had imagined a cruel, ugly, and evil baby snatcher – not a radiant young woman who looked like a Hollywood star.

We never talked about that event unless Mama brought it up, and whenever she did retell the story she would become rather pensive and wonder aloud, "*What if?*"



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