



“There’s so much love in my life now. It’s given me purpose.”

they would take the news well, that they would be as accepting of him as Jeanne and Dianne. Either way, he’d found his mother, and he’d never lose her again. That night, he slept more peacefully than he had in years.

Jeanne, on the other hand, did not. She felt blessed, truly blessed, at finding her son. Such a gift! But what about the girls? Would they be angry with her for keeping this from them all these years? Would they think poorly of her? Would they be ashamed of her youthful indiscretion and her decision to “give away” a child, even though she had no means of supporting him? All those years ago, and still today, Jeanne knew she had done the right thing. But deep in her heart she carried a sense of guilt. Perhaps her daughters would also lay blame.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. The next day, at the mysterious family meeting, the girls—then ages 30 to 43—reacted

to their mother’s announcement with anything but blame. There was a moment of shock. There was a moment of sorrow that their mother had suffered with such a secret for so very long. Then there was elation.

Soon Dianne was on the phone with D.L. “They’re all here, and they all want to meet you!” she exclaimed. “Would you mind driving up to Cherry Hill?”

D.L. could not believe his good fortune. “Are you kidding?” he said. “Of course I’ll come.” Within minutes, he and Leslie were on the road. When they pulled up to Dianne’s house, it was surrounded with family vehicles of every sort. Standing alone at the end of the driveway, tears streaming from her eyes, was Donna Lee, the eldest sister. They embraced even before introducing themselves. In the next instant, a half-dozen women rushed from the house, arms flailing, swarming the big brother they’d never met nor knew existed.

D.L. Byron would never feel isolated again. The tall, soft-spoken man with the fine, uncalloused hands had come home. He could drop his bags. And his baggage. ■

▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶ From page 50

“family announcement.” The news of that mysterious meeting created quite a buzz among the six grown sisters.

That Saturday morning, D.L. had to force himself to breathe. He’d just stepped from the shower when Leslie called out, “They’re here!” By the time he dressed, everyone was seated in the living room. The moment he spotted Jeanne, he felt he would have known her anywhere—the fine, pale-blond hair, the fair skin, the big, almond-shaped eyes, the smile. *That’s my mom!* he thought. Though she appeared frail, the resemblance was startling.

He sat beside her on the sofa and took her in his arms. The connection was immediate. And strange. It was a feeling he’d sought since his earliest memory, but he was unprepared for it, unsure how to respond. Finally, holding her close, wishing to put them both at ease, he whispered, “I want you to know I’m not angry about any of this.”

Once more, Jeanne was awash with relief. Meeting her son was a gift she thought never possible, but she worried he might harbor some resentment. His words were such a blessing. She cradled his face in her hands and looked into his hazel eyes. “I’m so glad,” she said. “So very glad.”

The remainder of the day seemed to pass in minutes. They exchanged stories about their lives. They ate lunch. They hugged. They cried. They nuzzled next to one another on the couch. They ate dinner. By late evening, it was time to go before anyone realized it. Dianne promised to call her half-brother the following afternoon and let him know how things went with the other sisters.

As they prepared to leave, Jeanne turned to the son who towered over her and put her arms around his waist, her head against his chest. “I never got to do this when you were a baby,” she said. “You know, I’ve always loved you.”

D.L. could hardly contain himself. “And I’ve always loved you,” he said. He presented her with several copies of his latest CD, which had his picture on the cover, to give the next day to the other daughters. He could only hope

(Left to right):
Donna, Sandy,
Denise, Jeannie,
D.L., Kim, Toni,
Dianne.

Epilogue

Since their reunion, Jeanne’s heart condition has improved, and D.L. has gathered with his new family often, building layer upon layer of loyalty and commitment.

Christmas has been especially meaningful, says D.L., “...with massive gatherings of sisters, husbands, kids, cats and dogs—all swapping gifts and eating rich foods in a setting of controlled pandemonium. Growing up as an only child, I never knew the holidays could be so wondrous, so filled with giving and sharing.”

D.L. has also rediscovered his music, writing as before, starting his own record label and performing regularly. “There’s so much love in my life now,” he says, “so much validation. It’s given me new purpose.” As for the shortcomings of his adoptive parents, he’s moved beyond that. “They did the best they could, and I refuse to be stuck in the past any longer. Forgiveness is the most healing thing of all.”