

[00:00:00.190] - Melissa Corkum

Before we jump into this episode, we are putting together something special for December, and so we need you to call in to our listener hotline and tell us about the most memorable gift you've been given.

[00:00:12.310] - Lisa Qualls

It's really easy to do this, and we promise that this line does not ring anywhere at all. It just gives you a chance to record your message to us. So just call the number 208-741-3880 and tell us about your most memorable gift.

[00:00:30.010] - Melissa Corkum

We can't wait to hear your stories.

[00:00:32.770] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast, where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:40.690] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you.

[00:00:45.610] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, friends, welcome to episode 109 of the Adoption Connection Podcast. Today we have the honor of interviewing two adult adoptees who've written a really special book. Rooted in Adoption, a collection of adoptee reflections. And Melissa, you got to interview them.

[00:01:02.950] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so I was really excited to connect to Veronica and Shelby. They both live in Florida, which is, I think, how they connected. Veronica was born in New Orleans and adopted as an infant in a closed adoption, and she graduated from the University of New Orleans with a degree in art. And then now she's also a pre licensed therapist, so she went on to get a master's in mental health counseling. And Shelby was born in Korea and adopted by a white couple kind of like me, and probably around the same time she actually came home a little bit later, just before she turned one. And then in 2012, she started documenting and interviewing folks who had been adopted or in the foster care system. And so with Veronica's art degree and Shelby's film background, they got together and partnered on this book. We talk a little bit about it in the interview. It's just a fantastic book. It's just unedited entries by people who are just writing about their story. And I did have a chance to read it, and some people just wrote a couple of sentences and some people wrote a couple of pages, and so I think it does a beautiful job of something that I talk about a lot here on the podcast, which is every story is so different. And I thought this book gave such a beautiful space of diversity to just listening to adoptee voices. And I know that's really important to a lot of you who are listening. So here's my conversation with Shelby and Veronica.

[00:02:41.090] - Melissa Corkum

Shelby and Veronica, welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast!

[00:02:45.530] - Shelby Kilgore

Thanks for having us.

[00:02:47.150] - Melissa Corkum

So I wanted to start by just having each of you share a little bit about your stories. All three of us are adopted, which is kind of fun, so just tell us a little bit about your experience. Yeah, I guess, can you give us, like, the one or two minute overview of your story and what you remember and what your experience as an adopted was? Shelby, do you want to jump in?

[00:03:14.930] - Shelby Kilgore

Sure, I'll jump in. So I am adopted from Korea. I was about, almost one years old when I flew over on a plane with other Korean babies back in the early 1980s. And that's when I first met my parents. And then, I first lived in Maryland up until I was around eight or nine, and then we moved to Florida, and I

grew up in a predominantly white community. So for a long time I didn't want to be Asian, but I never actually explained that to my parents when kids would make fun of the way I looked or my eyes. But about adoption, my mom and dad were very open, and they created a very safe environment for me to talk about all the different range of emotions that I had if they were positive or negative, or if I were mad at them, you know, so they were really good about that. Even my mom went to conferences where adoptees spoke. So, she tried to get as much as she could information wise about adoption and the trauma that could be from adoption. In the 1980s when there is much more limited to what is available now for resources. And they also adopted my brother, Garrett, from Korea too. We're not biologically related, so for me, I was really glad that we could share that because we didn't know that many other adopted kids. And then when I was 17, I went on a homeland tour to South Korea with my family and with some other adopted families, and I was able to meet my first mother there and my aunt and then also my foster mom. And so it was like a dream come true. And then later was kind of the aftermath of everything about processing the whole trip and the circumstances of my relinquishment.

[00:05:09.150] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, did your family kind of connect you to Korean culture growing up before your trip?

[00:05:16.410] - Shelby Kilgore

Yes, it's so funny, I'm plugged into a lot of different support groups on Facebook for adoptees and just adopted families and just resources for parents. And they call it kind of the postcard culture experience. So I would say that I definitely had that where they exposed my brother and I to the food and not the language, they really wanted us to be put into a Korean school on the weekends to kind of learn more about the culture, but I guess the person, like, the main contact person there basically advised us against us going because the kids would make fun of us, like because we weren't being raised by Korean parents, we weren't really Korean. So that was hard to hear that, you know, you're always trying to find your place in the world and where you fit in, especially as a kid, that's really, really hard. And then the Korean-American group wasn't even going to accept you, so yeah, that wasn't a good experience. But we also did Tae-Kwon-Do, I got a second degree blackbelt. So, yeah, we got some. I know a few words in Korean.

[00:06:28.470] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. That's basically where the most of my Korean vocabulary these days comes from, too, is Tae-Kwon-Do. I'm sorry you had that experience. I want to jump back to something you said about processing your journey in your 20s, but I want Veronica to jump in here and share a little bit about her story first.

[00:06:44.670] - Veronica Breaux

I was also born through a closed adoption like Shelby in the early 80s, and my parents brought me home when I was six weeks old. I think it was evident from early on that the trauma was there, of course, my adopted parents, they didn't really understand the trauma associated with adoption. Like, I think a lot of people didn't realize back then. When they brought me home, whenever they would touch me, I would shake. And this is something that they said I did throughout the entire six weeks that I was waiting to be placed, whenever somebody would touch me, I would shake. At one point, my dad even told me he was concerned about that, and they had even considered bringing me back. I don't know why that's something he would tell me, I wish that they had the education that people have now to understand about the trauma that comes with adoption, like, we know today because clearly that's what it came from, the separation from the birth mother, which we know now. My whole life, I pretty much wanted to know more about where I came from, like, a lot of adoptees do. My adoptive mum was also an adopted, and a lot of people think that because my adopted mom was an adopted, that it made it easier for me because I would have somebody that could relate to me and understand, but that wasn't the case. My mom, actually, I guess, because she was born during a different era, and the relationship with her parents was different. I believe she was adopted through the foster care system, so she wasn't a newborn when she was adopted, so her views on it were a little bit different. She wasn't open about talking about her experiences and her emotions regarding adoption as much. So nobody really asked me how I felt about my adoption. So a lot of times I kept my emotions inside, I didn't really discuss it with anybody. Whenever I did, my parents didn't really, I guess I feel like they

didn't approach it in the best way they could have. Because it was a closed adoption, I didn't have any information. I had very little information, I'm sorry, very little on my birth parents, and it did not have their names on it, I had no pictures, I had absolutely nothing. I think the piece of paper I had had their weight, their height, their skin complexion, and if they had any talents. And one day I remember being in high school, and I believe my school pictures had just come back. And I asked my parents, I said, I just want to know who I look like, who do I look like? And my dad just jumped in and said, you look like yourself. That was it. He didn't really try to process the emotions I was going through or ask me anything else about it. He was pretty quick to say that. So when you have experiences like that growing up in your adoptive home, it makes it hard because you don't know how their reaction is going to be when you start to talk about your adoption. And it's not to say that my parents didn't love me. They gave me everything. As for, like, the education and I did all kinds of hobbies, and they were very supportive of those, whatever I participated in. It's just that emotionally, I feel like they weren't there for me in the best way they could have been. And I also want to point out that both my adopted parents are black and I am also black. I know that's a shock to a lot of people when I do tell them that I am adopted. One of their first questions is, usually, are your parents black? Because I guess a lot of times when African American babies are adopted, you usually hear about them being adopted into white families.

[00:10:41.670] - Melissa Corkum

How do you think that shaped your adoption? What do you think the benefits have been of being able to be adopted into a family where all your skin, more or less matches culturally? It's not considered a transracial adoption?

[00:10:58.830] - Veronica Breaux

It could be considered multicultural, because even though I am African American, black people just like anybody else were mixed. My adopted mom is, she's half white. She identifies as a black person, so she is black, if you ask her. She looks more on the fair complexion is more fair on the fair side. Her features are more European dominated. I also have people in my family who have Filipino descent. So even though we all consider ourselves African American, and I don't know if I mention this, but I'm from New Orleans, so being from New Orleans, Louisiana we have a lot of Creoles in New Orleans. And for anybody who doesn't know what Creole is, back then, it usually meant a black person who may have been on the fair complexion side. They had the ancestry of African, French, Spanish, and different things. So my grandparents were also black. That's what they identified as, but they were also very light complexioned, and things like their hair was not the same texture as mine. So just because my family was black, there are also those differences that were pretty evident. And I remember when I first started searching for my birth mother, I went to some adoption support groups, and there were not a lot of black adoptees there. I think there might have been one other girl in one of the groups I went to and they had spoken about being adopted into a family that was lighter complexion than she was. And in the black community, we have something called colorism, which it not only happens in the black community, but other races as well, where sometimes you're perceived to be better than somebody else because your skin is a lighter shade. And that happens all the time in the black community. So they're adoptees that just because they were adopted into a black family, they're still dealing with issues like that. That isn't something that's talked about a lot, that aspect of colorism and things.

[00:13:18.750] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, thanks for sharing that. You said you searched for your birth family. Were you successful in reuniting with them?

[00:13:26.310] - Veronica Breaux

Yes. I was still getting my undergrad degree. So I was probably in my early 20s. And like I said, I had absolutely no information. All my birth family had no names, I had absolutely nothing. It took me about eight years. I went through different searches, I went through search Angels, and I just was having no luck at all. And then Hurricane Katrina happened in the middle of my search, and everybody just got misplaced everywhere. I was nervous that records were going to be lost because of my adoption. Probably maybe a year or so after the storm passed, a friend of mine said, I know somebody who runs a company. She's extremely good at what she does. I think you should give her a

call. She said it's probably going to be expensive, but if you want results, this is definitely what you need to contact. And I went ahead and contacted her, and she found my birth family, probably within 48 hours I want to say.

[00:14:29.910] - Melissa Corkum
Wow, that's incredible.

[00:14:32.250] - Veronica Breaux
Yeah, so I did speak with my birth mother and some other members of my birth family, and unfortunately, it didn't really go too well. My birth mother was not as welcoming as I hope she would be. She was not honest with me about a lot of information. She was not forthcoming with who my birth father was, or even the half brother that I still have that's out there. She wouldn't tell me any information on him. She was really upset that I found out who she was. It's like she had intended to take that secret to the grave with her.

[00:15:08.370] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah. That must have been really hard after all that searching.

[00:15:11.370] - Veronica Breaux
Yeah.

[00:15:12.210] - Melissa Corkum
Shelby, can you talk a little bit about your experience and kind of what you expected, at least emotionally, when you went on a Homeland tour and you were able to meet some of your birth family, what your experience was actually. Were those two things different?

[00:15:27.330] - Shelby Kilgore
Oh, sure. Well, we knew for, like, probably a couple of years, like, we were definitely going to go on this trip. My parents had always talked about it, and that was something that they were going to do for us, for the family. And the summer after my junior year of high school, probably like a couple of months before, like, my parents decided it would be good to go to family counseling just to kind of emotionally prepare for the trip. And so I thought that was really great. My brother not so much. He didn't really want to talk that much. What also was interesting is my mom went to see someone separately because I think this is very normal for parents or adoptive parents, like when they know their kid is going to meet their first mom, or possibly it makes them feel insecure. And so she just wanted to make sure that she got those feelings out so it wouldn't come out in front of Kara and I because this is about us, it's not about them and anything that we're wanting or desire to know our family over in Korea, you know, it's nothing to do with them or their love is not inadequate. So it's just something different. Yeah, I think I just really wanted to meet my birth mom. Like, that's all I was focused on. I wanted to speak Korean, stuff like that, but I had wondered about her since I was five or six when it clicked what adoption meant. My parents had always used the word adoption, but I didn't understand I had another mother somewhere else until I was five, and that's when I kind of had, I had a breakdown. Like when I was really young, I became so upset and I'm like, is she so poor that she couldn't take care of me? Why don't you go find her and she can come live with us? That was my thinking. Like, she's so poor. You guys you live in this huge house, yeah, go find her, and she'll remove in with us. It didn't make any sense to me as a five year old. And yeah, my heart was broken. And ever since then, I had always wondered who I looked like, what kind of personality, sorry, I have a golden retriever if you hear her, like making noises. Yeah, so I wanted to know who I look like, where I came from, what personality traits that were similar. And that's what I wanted to know. And the thing is that they found her prior to us leaving shortly after, but she said that she was reluctant to meet me. It wasn't like a phone call or anything, they sent this letter. And then also they decided to send information that they had withheld for 17 years. It's like one sheet of paper about how my mother and father met, like what the situation was, that they were unmarried. I found out that I had two half brothers and on my mother's side. And then on my father's side, I had several half brothers and sisters. It was just so much information. It was one piece of paper, but it was like so much information and I remember I got that, and I got the letter that she didn't want to meet me. And I remember just crying, like, my heart out when I read those right before the trip. So I told my mom I

didn't want to go at that point. Like, what's the point of going if I'm not going to meet her? I don't care about seeing Korea right now. I mean, Korean-Americans rejected me in America, so why would I want to go over there? But, you know, through counseling and stuff, we worked it out. And then when we went on the trip, I told our contact they're like, please just tell her I'm here and I just want to meet her. And it still makes me emotional, so she did. And she had to come meet me in secret because she had gotten remarried and she brought her sister along for support. And the funny thing is, my parents and brother and I, we all thought I looked more like my aunt than my first mother. But I remember when I first met her, like, she just hugged me, and I felt like the love that I had wondered about my entire life. Did she love me? Your parents say that, yeah, your mother gave you up out of love to give you a better life. But you still doubt that. You still look at in the movies and TV shows, the lengths that parents will go to keep their children with them. Yeah, so I remember crying when I first met her, and she helped me, and she said she wasn't going to cry. She was going to stay strong. I'm like, okay, so we're totally opposite there. I'm this huge emotional where all my emotions on my sleeve. But we had a meeting. I didn't know Korean, so we had a translator there. And she told me she always knew she was going to place me. That was kind of hard to hear. We'll actually I processed that later. A lot of things went over, and I, someone was writing down notes that I still have because she was unmarried with the man that she had the affair with. And they were both factory workers, and she just said that he had a good heart. It's hard to hear that she kept my two half brothers, but I guess because that was from her previous marriage. They wouldn't have been, like, illegitimate. And as an illegitimated child, I wouldn't have been considered a citizen, so I would have been able to go to school and get an education. And so all this has told me in this meeting. I think the most important thing for me was that I got to see her and I knew that she loved me. And then later on, I processed everything and it made me very angry. It's like when I was a kid, like, well, I had that breakdown at five, I never was angry at her. You know how some kids get angry at their first mother about placing them in the first place or angry at their adoptive parents for being there to adopt them or they go through both of those. I never got angry when I was little. It's just angry that they wouldn't find her so she could live with us, that's it.

[00:21:38.980] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah.

[00:21:40.290] - Shelby Kilgore
So the anger came like my senior year of high school, and then when I was going to College and processing all of that. So it was kind of like a big identity crisis I went through. It was just very exciting to me. I mean, the trip overall itself was amazing, like eating the Korean food, just touring and seeing everything. I love Korea in that sense. But my brother and I, when we were after the trip, we did a student documentary about our experience over there. And when I did that, it was a very healing experience for me to kind of talk about it through the camera and tell my story that way. And I felt like as a filmmaker myself, I wanted to definitely do that one day for other people to help show their stories. So I started filming interviews with all different perspectives in the foster care adoption world back in 2012, and I released my first videos in 2013. I've been documenting stories from first mothers, adoptees, adoptive parents. And then I branched out recently in 2018 to social workers, trauma therapists, and a legal Guardian, and just foster parents.

[00:22:59.970] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, what a beautiful way to kind of take your story and be able to use it in your work and your passion. And that brings us right up to Shelby, you and Veronica together. So Veronica, will you tell me kind of how you and Shelby met?

[00:23:16.230] - Veronica Breaux
I think it was someone else that I had been speaking to that had mentioned Shelby's name to me because she knew that we both lived in Florida. I think I may have reached out to Shelby, I can't remember exactly what happened, but Shelby told me that she makes films and she asked me if I would be willing to be interviewed. And I told her sure. And she came down to where I was living at the time, and she interviewed me. And I believe that's how we first got in touch with each other.

[00:23:49.890] - Melissa Corkum

Shelby, tell me a little bit more about the Rooted project.

[00:23:54.810] - Shelby Kilgore

So actually, it was Veronica's idea. And it's so funny because these videos, like from early on in 2013 and 14 and 15, I still get messages, usually private messages from people saying how thankful they are for me, helping other people tell their stories because one for some people, it's very difficult for them to articulate in the words that they're going through. And so one young lady reached out to me via Facebook and told me how Veronica's story was so moving to her because she said everything that she had not been able to say herself. And I think these people share the videos to others, their close friends or family to say this is what I'm talking about. This is something I haven't been able to say. And when she messaged me that she also asked me to thank Veronica, and we hadn't talked in a couple of years, so I found her contact information and reached out. And then we started emailing back and forth, just catching up. I just feel like I meet so many kindred spirits along the way, and it's just like five years have passed, but it really hasn't when you start talking again. And then she talks about this project about making a book where we collect different adoptive reflections. And I'm like, I love this idea. And I know there's just such huge push to elevate the adoptive voice and put at the forefront of everything because we are the ones living this experience, so I wanted to definitely jump on board with her and be a part of this project.

[00:25:32.010] - Veronica Breaux

I was going to say I could probably tell you a little bit more about where I got the idea for the book.

[00:25:37.470] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah.

[00:25:39.030] - Veronica Breaux

I'm not sure if you're familiar with a book called PostSecret, but it came out probably maybe 15 years or so ago, but it's by a gentleman by the name of Frank Warren. And one day he decided, wouldn't it be an interesting project if I could have people all over the world tell me something that they've never told anybody? Like, what secret do they have that no one else knows? So he created this project and he asked people all over the world to do like, I guess, a handmade postcard and design it themselves with no name on it. It was completely anonymous and write down something that was a secret that nobody else had known before. And it could have been like anything. One thing I remember was somebody said that they over use office supplies because they don't like their job and they hate their boss or something. But it was like secrets that really nobody else knew. And I thought to myself with adoptees, like Shelby said, it's really difficult for adoptees to articulate and verbalize what they're dealing with because it's so emotional. And then at the same time, we're afraid of what society will say about us, because adoptees are often seen as angry and ungrateful, so we keep a lot of our emotions inside. So I said it wouldn't be a cool project if adoptees were allowed to say something that they felt about adoption without anybody really knowing who they were. So that's kind of like where the idea of the book came from.

[00:27:22.230] - Melissa Corkum

I love that, thanks for sharing. I had a chance to read the book, and one of the things that I appreciated about it was there weren't any common themes outside of adoption. There were so many different perspectives, and it really did a great job of illustrating all the different lenses and views and experiences that adopt these have. And there were some that were hard, and there were some that were simple and some were long, and some were short. And I find that, like you said, Veronica, the adoptee has been represented at least in recent years as being hurt and angry. And I know that that's been the experience of a lot of adoptees, but it's not everybody's experience, and I think that for those of us who haven't had a really big hole in our hearts or a lot of big feelings to process, or we process in a different way that the adoptee voice is unrepresented, kind of in its broadness in its diversity. And so I love how your book was able to include so many different perspectives and voices. So thank you. I appreciate I have no idea how you pulled all these people out of the woodworks and got them to contribute. It's a much needed work, and so I really am thankful for the book.

[00:28:54.390] - Veronica Breaux

You know what, we had a lot more people that wanted to contribute to the book, but when it came down to it, we only got about 50 reflections, and we extended deadlines, and we reminded people and they really wanted to participate, but I think when it came down to it because there's that trauma associated with adoption that a lot of people don't really know about that adoption agencies don't talk in detail about and anybody that's gone through a traumatic experience, it's difficult for them to talk about, you know, maybe they have a lot of suppressed emotions, and when the time comes for them to actually write down your true feelings, it's like, oh, my God. I think a lot of people just became overwhelmed by what they were dealing with. And maybe it's something that they've never really processed on their own before. So I think it just became too difficult for them to do.

[00:29:52.770] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it can be heavy stuff. One of the many complexities of adoption is a lot of times, you know, I can't tell you how many medical forms I've filled out and just put big X's through huge chunks of them where family history is involved. And tell me, I know you're walking through an experience right now that kind of relates to that, so will you share with us just a little bit about what's going on and how just a closed adoption with very little medical history, and you've even connected with your birth family, but I'm guessing that didn't help you uncover all of your family history that would have been helpful. And so how's that kind of impacting what you're going through now?

[00:30:37.290] - Shelby Kilgore

Yeah, just amidst the global pandemic, I found out on April 15 that I have stage three breast cancer. And it was something that I noticed. I noticed a lump in my right breast, and then I immediately tried to figure out what to do. And so I got a mammogram and an ultrasound just a few days later. And then they recommended a biopsy. They actually said after the mammogram and ultrasound that it could be cancer and I remember I had to go to all these appointments by myself, and I was driving home like tears starting to fall down my face and probably driving 10 miles, 5 miles per under the speed limit and everything just seemed to drift to the wayside and all I could think about was it could be cancer. And filling out those forms, oh my gosh, it's just like a stab in the heart. No, I don't know. Why aren't you guys as doctors and nurses fighting for the adoptees to have open health records? You know how it's important to administer a full base knowledge treatment, if you know, family medical history. So anyways, that's been hard to say, "no, I don't know." And then after the biopsy results came in, that's when I found out it was cancer. And it was a huge shock to me because all my life I've been, I feel like, very healthy. When I met my Korean mom, none of us really thought to really dig deep to ask about family health history. Like, did anyone have cancer? We didn't even seem to ask any of that or any kind of rare diseases. And I didn't stay in contact with her because we would have to write letters and then they'd have to be translated and then they'd have to be given to my aunt, and then given to my mother in secret because she's married. She didn't tell her new husband about me. I was still a secret, which is hard to know that she can't be open about that. So we just never stayed in contact. She never reached back out to me because I wanted her to initiate it since I was the one that had initiated it to begin with. I didn't want to, like, force a relationship, and I just never thought about the health stuff. Now I did when I was 31 or 30. Yeah, I was about 30- 31 when I went back to Korea on a second trip to follow another adoptee just looking for information about her family. And we went to tour for one of her orphanages, and she was adopted through KSS, Korean Social Services, so he went there as well, and it was intense. Like the lady had a packet of information like this full, and Cathy got to see this much of it, and a lot of it was just reductive anyways. So, yeah, that was tough. And I had done a second birth search with no results, so that was pretty heartbreaking for me because I was actually thinking about time to just actually meet my siblings and my birth father and also maybe reconnect with my mother because interviewing all these adoptees, talking about meeting, like Veronica, talking about wanting to meet her half brother and other adoptees actually reconnecting with family other than just their biological mother. Yeah, that just got me thinking. But more on relationship, still not so much on the medical health history. And then everything that's going on right now, since it's still so fresh and new, it's been a whirlwind of emotions for me, and I've been documenting it when I can, because I feel like this is so important for adoptees to know if you don't have any open family health history, like in your early 20s. This is when I think I should have done it, work with a genetic counselor to screen, to test for if you have any rare hereditary diseases, because I found out that I carry the BRCA2 when there's a mutation. And actually, Veronica reminded me that in 23 and Me, which we both have done, they test for that. But apparently they only test for three

variants, and it's not common knowledge, but there are over 1000 variants that could cause cancer. And so, of course, mine on 23 and Me said that I did not have a variant in bracket one or two. So I was like, that completely left my brain, didn't even think I needed to worry about breast cancer. And then I did. Yeah, you could be super healthy up until your mid 30s or mid 40s, and then could be you get the wind knocked out of you with a diagnosis like this, it's still hard to process. I mean, I've accepted it, but I think when I found out about the mutation, that's when I first started getting angry because I do, I do try and skip the anger stage because I feel like for me, it doesn't do any good. I needed to get stuff done. It wasn't going to change anything, and I'll feel angry later. But when I found out it was hereditary and had I known that I could have caught this earlier because I keep getting connected to people in different support groups that like, oh, a twin decided to get tested because their aunt had breast cancer, and then she was a carrier of the gene. And then the other twin did, and then some early testing. She found it at stage two from an early mammogram, and she's only 28 years old because they don't recommend mammograms until after 40. But if you're a carrier of one of the mutations in your gene that can lead to breast cancer, then they recommend as early as 25 or 30. Yeah, it just seemed like it popped up overnight, and I mean, I hear those stories from other women, too, but, yeah, I'm a huge advocate now for open health records and how they need family health records and how they need to be updated as new things come to light. If the family members don't want to have any kind of relationship with the baby they relinquished or the kid, okay. But that is vital information, and it could be life saving, and it can also give them the option to do early screening and testing to catch things like this early on before, mine is stage three, so it's pretty far advanced, and it's scary.

[00:37:24.730] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, thanks for sharing that. Veronica, I know you didn't have a continued relationship with your birth mom, were you able to keep in touch with any other members of your birth family?

[00:37:36.250] - Veronica Breaux

I have one cousin who's about the same age as my adopted parents. And every now and then I'll get a text message from her. But aside from that, nobody really talks to me. And I think it's because they just want to keep the peace with my birth mother. And it's a large family, my birth mother was one of ten children, and I have a lot of different cousins and things. And growing up in a family where I was an only child and I didn't really have any interaction with my cousins, it was overwhelming when I found that out, but right now, I really don't have any relationship with them.

[00:38:15.370] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, thanks for sharing. As we wrap up, Shelby, I'll have you go first, is there anything that you would want adoptive parents who are listening to know?

[00:38:26.050] - Shelby Kilgore

Yes, I feel like I had a wonderful adoption because I love my parents and very close with them, but even though all through their love and all through their ability to create a safe environment for me to talk about my feelings, I still felt a hole inside of my heart growing up and I had low self esteem. It was really hard for me emotionally. And even with all of the help in going to therapy here and there, I guess even though you can love your parents so much, just know that your child may still be feeling a little bit like something is missing and that's nothing to do with you. You can support them and help them walk through what they're going through as much as you can. Also, for adoptive parents and when your kids are older, I think adoption is a lifelong journey. And there are so many things that come up that makes you grieve again about different things and remind you of the loss in adoption. And for me right now, I carry this hereditary thing that gave me cancer. Yeah, that was really tough for me. Among other little things that have happened over the years, like, one of my friends when she's pregnant, she tells me, oh, I talked to my mom if this happened to her when she was pregnant with me. Oh, it just kind of makes me feel a little pain inside that. I'll never be able to ask that to know that even when your adopted kids are adults, they're still going to be feeling things that will come up just from life experiences that will remind them that this is another loss that they have. It's just lost upon loss, even little losses, but it's just there that so many people take for granted.

[00:40:28.210] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, thank you. What about you, Veronica? What would you want to tell the adoptive families listening?

[00:40:34.330] - Veronica Breaux

I guess one thing that I always emphasize with people is mental health and the importance of it. And right now, I'm a pre-licensed mental health therapist. I'm working toward my license, and I've been working in the mental health field for about 15 years, and I have come across so many adoptees and people who have come from the foster care system in the field, it's just unbelievable. And a lot of times people don't know that adoptees and people who have a background in foster care are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. I think it's a lot because of the emotional baggage that we have and just not being given an outlet a lot of times to express what we're feeling. I've worked in situations where I have met adoptees who were suicidal. I've even spoken to adoptive parents who did not tell their adopted child that they were adopted. I've worked with kids who come to me with behavioral problems, and it turns out that they have a background they were adopted, it was closed adoption, and another therapist before me had labeled it as a behavior issue when they never, ever discussed the trauma that's involved. And it's very important to find a therapist that has some sort of training and adoption competency, because not every therapist does. I went to graduate school and probably the majority of the people in my class and even a lot of my professors didn't really have a lot of experience dealing with adoptees or the adoption triad and the trauma that's there. So there are therapists that are trained to work with adoptees and adoptive families. It's just a matter of when you're looking for someone they can work with, you and your family to ask know what questions to ask them. And most of the time, when you're looking for a mental health professional, they will give you, like, a free 15 minutes consultation. So make sure you're asking them, what percentage of the population do you work with that are adoptees and would you be open to having, if it's an open adoption, the birth mother or whoever it is, participate in the session? And just make sure you're asking the right questions, because not every therapist will be able to understand the special needs that adoptees have.

[00:43:29.630] - Melissa Corkum

Thank you. We are huge proponents here at the Adoption Connection of working with the trauma informed, adoption informed mental health provider. And you're right, there needs to be more resources around mental health and especially for kids who have come to their families through foster care and adoption or have early adverse experiences, so thank you for that. Thank you both for your stories, for your authenticity here, for your project. We'll link to all of that in the show notes. Shelby, what's the quickest and easiest way for folks to connect to you?

[00:44:05.990] - Shelby Kilgore

You can just go to my website, wearemirrorlight.com, and then you'll be able to be linked to all of my videos and everything there. And also I have a page for the book as well.

[00:44:16.910] - Melissa Corkum

Perfect, and Veronica, what about you?

[00:44:21.830] - Veronica Breaux

Rootedinadoption.com and you can also find us on Facebook. We have our author page for the *Rooted and Adoption*, and we also have another group page that Shelby just opened up call *Rooted and Adoption Conversations*.

[00:44:37.250] - Melissa Corkum

Awesome, thank you guys so much.

[00:44:39.350] - Veronica Breaux

Thank you.

[00:44:39.950] - Shelby Kilgore

Thank you for having us.

[00:44:45.990] - Lisa Qualls

Well, thank you, Melissa. I enjoyed that conversation so much. I can never stop learning because like you said in the beginning, every adoption story is different. Every adoptee's experience, every first and birth mom experience, adoptive parents, and so the beauty of this book is that we can just take in the adoptee experience and the adoptee voice without, and they're all different. It's not all the same and I know that's something that's been a conversation we've had a lot is that not all adoptees experience the same thing. So anyhow, I think this book is very valuable and it's a great conversation.

[00:45:26.550] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I really appreciated both of them sharing their stories, the hard parts, the vulnerable parts, and for Shelby sharing her recent medical journey and diagnosis. And she even just brought to lights and things that I had never fully considered about. I always kind of shrugged it off, I didn't know my medical history, I didn't really think it was that big of a deal, and just her perspective now on the value of having access to records, different perspectives, different things, just more and more to learn and think about, so I really appreciate them coming on with us. If you want to grab the book or read more about them, their website is rootedinadoption.com. They're also Rooted in Adoption on Facebook, and then for their individual projects and all the places to connect with them, you can head to the show notes at theadoptionconnection.com/109.

[00:46:18.750] - Lisa Qualls

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as [@theadoptionconnection](https://www.instagram.com/theadoptionconnection).

[00:46:26.430] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening, we love having you. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a quick review over on iTunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:46:36.570] - Lisa Qualls

And remember, until next week, you're a good mom, doing good work, and we're here for you.

[00:46:43.650] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Rosevere.