

When Amanda's mother fell pregnant with her in the early 1960s in Dorset, South England, the odds were stacked against a happy outcome. She was 16, the unmarried daughter of a vicar, and the father was a much older man. The sixties were nowhere near swinging and Amanda's grandfather and birth father joined forces to insist the child be given up.

Amanda was adopted by an older middle-class couple who were childless and would go on to adopt a baby boy. At the time adoptive parents were told there would be no way of the adopted children tracing their birth parents.

"When I was a teenager, knowing where I came from was a big issue and my parents did not want to talk about it," says Amanda. "As far as they were concerned I wasn't going to trace. I realised very quickly I was going to get nowhere asking questions.

"I always imagined what my mother would be like. I would walk down the street and imagine, 'Is that her?' Watching TV, I'd wonder if she was famous."

The law changed following the introduction of the Adoption Act 1976, meaning children could trace their birth parents, so when Amanda was 18 and studying at a Stirling University, she began her search through Central Regional Council without telling her adoptive parents. She stopped for a year as she was troubled by the thought that her mother may have been raped and Amanda's reappearance might cause her distress, but the desire to know was too powerful to resist.

"I had such a burning desire to find out who my mum was. I felt guilty about the fact I knew my adoptive parents wouldn't want me to do it, but I also felt it was my right to find out who I was."

Within two years she had located her birth mother, Helen, who had remained at the same address and was on the electoral roll. "She was very willing to meet me," recalls Amanda, who lives with her own family in Central Scotland and is a teacher at a local school. "We corresponded through letters and then I went to see her. It was amazing. She met me at the train station and my Nan was there, my aunt, a full sister and cousins."

A few months earlier, Helen had told her family of Amanda's existence, a fact only Helen's mother had known.

"I can picture it clearly," Amanda says. "We both knew who we were when I got off the train. It is amazing to meet your mother for the first time. We looked quite similar; tall with dark hair. I've been so lucky because she is the best person in the world. She's like a really good friend; she's only 16 years older than me.

"The exciting thing was that, in the end, my mum had married my birth father and had two more children, so they are my full brother and sister. My father had since died because he was a lot older."

Her birth brother is five years younger and her sister 10 years younger. "My worry for many years was that I would be coming into this family and somehow upset it, and they would be resentful, but



they have been so accepting of me. I couldn't have asked for a better family."

It's important to state that Amanda does not resent being adopted. While her birth parents' relationship was a long-term one, it was not happy. "My birth mother has said it was the right thing that I was adopted and I do have two very good adoptive parents. Knowing what I know about how things panned out for my brother and sister I think I was lucky to be adopted.

"With my birth family, there are no taboos. We said from the start there would be no secrets and we talk about anything. Saying that, with my brother and sister, I am careful never to put them in a position where they might feel annoyed or aggrieved at me.

'My adoptive parents were devastated when I told them I had traced my birth mum'

"With my adopted brother, even though we are not as close, we can have a laugh and tease each other all the time, because we've got the security of having grown up together. Although I have a good laugh with my birth brother and sister, I am cautious. I wouldn't want to risk it."

Medical conditions are also something the siblings share. "We are all asthmatics and have back problems and other mannerisms that link us. It's great having family that are totally related and we are all very similar, even though we've grown up separately."

Amanda is now a mother herself to three boys and a girl. "I've found it hard, the fact I've had four children and each time got pregnant quite quickly, when my

adoptive parents didn't experience that. I think they also found it quite hard to relate to me in that whole area." While she has built a positive relationship with her birth family, for her adoptive family, the fallout from tracing her roots was far-reaching. "My adoptive parents were devastated when I told them a couple of years later that I'd done it. My adopted brother was not pleased either. It caused quite a big problem. He will not trace [his birth parents] while my parents are alive. Whether he will later on I don't know and I respect that, but for me, I couldn't live with myself, knowing that I could and then not doing it.

"Looking back, I'm sorry I hurt my parents, but I wish they appreciated the fact the laws have changed, and why shouldn't somebody trace their genetic origin to find out who they are? I don't have any regrets, except perhaps I should have told them earlier, but as a young person it is really hard to know what the right thing is.

"It has taken a lot of hard work from me and my parents to work to a position where we are probably closer than we've ever been. They're in their eighties and it's not been easy. They don't ask and I don't tell about that side of my life. I'd love to be able to talk about it with them but it's not going to happen now. It's too hard for them."

Amanda's experiences have influenced her own family. "I didn't want any secrets and that's why I was up-front with my children about me being adopted."

Finding her birth parents felt like completing a jigsaw, she says. "It's made me completely feel calm and whole. I feel more confident now. My birth brother and sister and I have given each other a lot of support. We are stronger together than we are individually. I only take positives from the fact I was adopted. There is no point in being negative about life. I know it's rare to be so lucky."

For Amanda tracing her birth mother was a revelation, but she admits it devastated her adoptive parents

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