

BROWN, Nancy

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## Searching for family taught city woman lessons in life

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Family Editor

Although it happened five years ago, Nancy Brown remembers distinctly the first message she received from a sister she never knew existed.

"There were some emotional moments when we first met. I was scared and excited at the same time."

Since then, the two women, Nancy, 43, and Margaret Hertzberger, 48, have become close, seeing each other several times a year.

And although it has been several years since she first learned of her half sisters and brothers — she has five of them — she wanted others to learn from her experience.

Brown's story is somewhat unusual. Unlike many birth mothers who are unwed and young, her mother was married for the second time.

During her first marriage, when she had four children, she gave Hertzberger up for adoption.

When her second marriage started to fall apart, she gave up her second baby, Brown. It wasn't a legal adoption, however.

"She just walked into a store and asked my foster mother if she wanted a baby."

It wasn't until after her foster mother died that Brown found out she hadn't officially been adopted.

"My foster mother died when I was 12 and I went to live with her sister-in-law and brother."

When she applied for a birth certificate at 15, she found out the adoption had never been finalized.

Hertzberger's story was also a difficult one. It wasn't until she was about to leave high school that she found out she had been adopted. She was told by her guidance counsellor.

When Hertzberger's own children were starting to grow up she decided to look for her natural family. It took

her two years to find Brown.

Now the head of the Niagara Region chapter of Parent Finders, Hertzberger works to help others find their natural parents.

Brown did meet her natural parents when she was younger — she was first introduced to her real mother when she was only 13.

"I was too young then; I wasn't ready to meet her. The whole visit was a disaster."

It was also the last time she met her mother, who died several years later.

The introduction to her father went much better.

"I was older then. We wrote for two years before meeting."

This is one important bit of advice she'd give children searching for their parents.

"Make sure you're at least 18 before you try to find them. I really don't think most children are ready emotionally before that."

She also recommends going through the proper sources, getting help from organizations like Parent Finders.

"They shouldn't do it by themselves. There could be some difficult circumstances they run into."

"You always have to be prepared for rejection. You'll need support."

Another problem children may face is resistance from their adoptive parents who may feel threatened by the search.

"It's a good idea to get their support. And make sure you reassure them that your loyalty will always remain with them."

Brown has now met all her family but one half brother. She hopes it won't be long before that happens.

For a woman who was raised as an only child, discovering she had five half brothers and sisters was particularly special.

"I know now what it means for an adopted child to find her roots. For your own peace of mind, knowing where you come from helps a lot."