



Unlocking adoption secrets

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Ami Dessen (left) of Urbana and Illinois Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, both adoptees, share a moment outside the Illinois Office of Vital Records where Dessen was requesting copies of her original Illinois birth certificate. | AP Photo/Seth Perlman

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Every year, families and adoption advocates recognize National Adoption Day as a day to celebrate adoptive families and all of the joys, gifts and love that come with adoption.

But this year, Illinois-born adoptees will have a little bit more to celebrate. National Adoption Day 2011 falls on Nov. 19 — just four days after adult adopted persons born in Illinois finally became able to do something we have been denied all of our lives: apply for a copy of our original birth certificates.

To adoptees, a birth certificate is the key to understanding their original identity. They finally have the chance to know the name given to them at birth, where they were born, and the name(s) of the birth parents who loved them enough to let them go.

As an adoptee, legislator and advocate, I have come to know many adopted persons. Some have reunited with birth families, and others have no desire to search for fear of rejection. Some have gone on to adopt children of their own. Some have spent their entire lives living with the desire to know their original identity, while others only learned of their adopted status as older adults.

All of our experiences with adoption have been different, but there is one common thread: we are thankful for the opportunities given to us, the adoptive parents that loved us and raised us, and the birth parents that made that courageous decision many years ago to give us a chance at a better life.

On Nov. 19, I won't just be celebrating my adoption. I'll be waiting, in the not too distant future, for that envelope with my birth certificate to arrive in the mail.

For more information on the new law, I encourage readers to visit www.NewIllinoisAdoptionLaw.com.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago)