

Pamela Burdick Ponsart

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Presentation to the Children, Youth and Families Committee April 22, 2004

To the Honorable Senator Rawson, Chairman, the Honorable Senator Carlton, Subcommittee on Adoption Chairwoman, and Committee Members:

My name is Pamela Burdick Ponsart. I am a Birthmother. I live in and relinquished my daughter in Nevada.

There are two issues I want to address: One is the issue of birthparent confidentiality; the other concerns the right of Adult Adoptees to have unrestricted access to their birth and adoption records.

I came to be involved with Catholic Community Services, due to the practices of my physician, from whom I was receiving care during my pregnancy in 1962. He wanted only to deliver babies at St. Mary's Hospital, here in Reno. I was informed, therefore, that my adoption plans must be handled through Catholic Charities.

The day after the birth of my daughter, while still in my hospital bed, (we had a 3-day stay back in 1962), a Catholic Nun brought a woman to my bedside who asked me to sign the necessary papers. I was told at that time that the birth would not be published in the newspapers. I was not given any copies of any paperwork, nor at any time since.

As a matter of information, in 1962 I relinquished my daughter into an "open records" system. And because of that, I doubt I had been promised "anonymity" or even "confidentiality" from my own child. I know I sure don't recall as having been promised "total confidentiality". I was under the impression that my daughter would *always* be able to find me, if she chose to do so. Little did I know, approximately 11 years later in 1973, her vital records would be sealed and all prior adoptions would be sealed retroactively.

Throughout the years, I thought that Catholic Community Services had handled the adoption. However, when I decided to try to find my daughter, I was told that any records of my adoption could not be found. I contacted the Agency here in Reno, only to be told that all of the records had been moved to Las Vegas. When I contacted the Las Vegas branch, in May, 2001, I was told (again) that they could not find my records. But that they would do a search for \$100.00, and would accept payment in 2 installments of \$50.00 each.

I contacted the Nevada Mutual Consent Registry and did obtain some non-identifying information regarding the adoption. (At least I now knew that the adoption had, indeed, taken place and that my daughter did not spend her years in a foster home.) By letter from Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada in July, 2001, I was told (and, I quote) "It appears that you have all the information available to you, by Nevada law that we can legally provide."

Continued on Page 2

EXHIBIT <u>I</u> ChildFam	Document consists of <u>4</u> pages
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entire document provided.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Due to size limitations, pages ____ through ____ provided.	
A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775-684-6827 or e-mail library@icb.state.nv.us).	
Meeting Date <u>4-22-04</u>	

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However, according to NAC 127.220 (3) and NAC 127.260 (2), I am entitled to more than that. I am entitled to a copy of my signed relinquishment papers. I submit a copy of the letter dated July 25, 2001, from Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada, labeled EXHIBIT "A" for reference.

Further investigation reveals that my case was, in all probability, completed by the Nevada State Welfare Division. I have recently found my daughter and because of that, I knew her Adoptive Parent's names. Catholic Charities was, then, able to find a file for her Adoptive Parents but still nothing on me. I was advised of this by letter from Catholic Community Services of Northern Nevada dated April 12, 2004. I submit a copy of this letter, marked EXHIBIT "B" for reference.

My point being: Pamela M. Burdick, now known as Pamela Burdick Ponsart, got lost in the shuffle; and IF there was such a thing as "total confidentiality", it doesn't appear to have been the case in my situation.

Now to address the rights of Adult Adoptees to access their birth records, As I previously stated, I have found my daughter. I can speak for her and for her entire Adoptive Family, including her Adoptive Mother and her Adoptive Father, when I say they are thrilled that I have found her. We have a wonderful reunion.

When I had my first face-to-face meeting with her, she indicated a desire to meet her biological father, whom I had not seen in 40 years. Because of this, I felt it was my responsibility to contact him, which I did.

I had heard that he had a very serious disease, which I later learned to be ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease. He has the familial form of this disease. His uncle, on his mother's side, passed away from this horrible affliction. The genes may, or may, not have been passed to my daughter, but she is very glad to have this knowledge.

Additionally, her biological father's mother passed away at the age of 52 from a heart attack. This is another genetic condition, which may, or may not be passed to my daughter.

On my side of the equation, both of my parents were alcoholics. My daughter, now 42 years old, (thankfully) shows no sign of this disease, but if she had had any children, those children might have been afflicted with it, or any of the other medical conditions I have mentioned.

At the time a young woman makes a decision to relinquish her unborn child, much of this information is yet unknown. However, by the time the relinquished child becomes an adult, these conditions may have started to surface.

My point here is that with restored open records statute, this information can be made readily available or, at the very least, the ability to contact the biological parents will be possible.

I can speak for my daughter when I say that she, now, feels complete.

You have the ability to give all the other Nevada born Adult Adoptees that peace of mind. To understand what they carry within their genetic make-up. I urge you to do so. They have a history – and a right to it.

Thank you.



Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada Adoption Services

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E-mail: adoption@catholiccharities.com



Ed Skonicki
Executive Director

EXHIBIT "A"

July 25, 2001

Ms. Pamela M. Ponsart
1175 Glenda Way, #13
Reno, NV 89509

Dear Ms. Ponsart

We are in receipt of your notarized request for non-identifying information regarding your adoption. After a careful search, I was unable to locate any information pertaining to your placement through Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada. I spoke with Jann Young, Nevada Adoption Registry, Carson City, NV, to help with the search. She said she completed a non-identifying search for you at the end of June 2001. She also mentioned that you are registered with the Nevada Registry. It appears that you have all the information available to you, by Nevada law that we can legally provide. Please remember to keep a current address and phone number with the Registry in case your daughter should also register a quick match can be made.

Please contact me if you should have any questions. Best wishes for you in your search endeavors.

Sincerely

Susan C. McManus

Susan C. McManus
Program Assistant

*This is the same person
I spoke to on May 31st
who told me they would
do a "search" for \$100⁰⁰
(or 2 installments of \$50⁰⁰-ea.)*



Catholic Community Services of Northern Nevada

Most Rev. Phillip Straling, D.D., Bishop of Reno
Executive Chairman, Board of Trustees

Kevin T. Day, *Executive Director*

EXHIBIT "B"

April 12, 2004

Pamela M. Ponsart
4438 Matich Drive
Reno, NV 89502

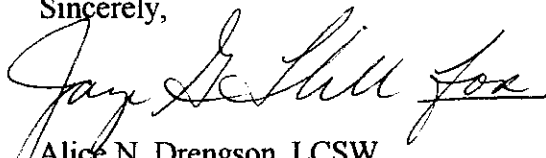
Dear Ms. Ponsart:

I am responding to your letter dated March 9, 2004. We have no file for you, Pamela M. Burdick. I did find a file for Kent and Eleanor Yelland, Ely, Nevada, adoptive applicants. In April, 1961 their case was closed by social worker Amanda Ting because they had written that they had applied to Nevada State Welfare Division for adoption.

I think it is fair to assume that state agency handled both your part and the adoptive family part of your daughter's adoption. I recommend you call Sue Lavin at the Nevada Registry (775) 684-4415. I think she can help you find directions for the next part of your inquiry. As you may know, the Nevada State Welfare Division has been reorganized and you will be contacting the Division of Children and Family Services. The District Court that finalized your daughter's adoption may also be helpful.

My sincere best wishes to you in your quest. Thank you for your patience.

Sincerely,



Alice N. Drengson, LCSW
Adoption Director