

## ‘You did the right thing’

# Pastor reaches out to birth mother

By Rev. Mark Alan Nebel • District First Vice-President

Hearing of my adoption story, Monica Shannon, district Advocates for Life coordinator, asked me to write an article. What I have included is a shortened version of the letter I wrote to my birth mother in Louisiana when I first found out about her. She received it the day after Mother’s Day in 2015. My birth father, a chiropractic student in St. Louis, was from Canada. He did not want to take a wife and child back north of the border with him. My birth mother was a nursing student at Lutheran Hospital. Her father told her that she would not come back home pregnant or with a baby.

I recently learned that you have been looking for me. I was born on April 13, 1964 at Booth Memorial Hospital (Salvation Army affiliated) in St. Louis and given the name Robert Alan. Three days later I was placed into the custody of Lutheran Children’s Services. Two months later I was adopted by a couple who had been unable to have children of their own. This happened despite the fact that my father was officially too old (45) to be an adoptive parent. The director had been there long enough to know when and how to “bend the rules.” A year later my parents asked to adopt a girl, but a new, by-the-book director had taken over and would not allow it. I was raised an only child. They kept my middle name of Alan.

My parents were very open with me about being adopted. I have always considered it a special part of my life story. I know that they went out of their way to have me. They raised me well, providing me all I needed in spite of the modest means we had. They brought me up in the Christian faith, baptized, educated and confirmed in Lutheran congregations and schools. They provided me a loving home and in return I believe that I gave them joy, pride and very little in the way of trouble. I have been an advocate for adoption both personally and professionally.

Mom and Dad told me that my birth mother was a young, unmarried nursing student named Kathleen. My birth father was studying to be a doctor. On occasion over the years I have wondered if my birth parents ever thought of me, but I did not feel a need to look for them, certainly not while my parents were living. They said that it would have been OK with them, but I would have considered it to be a slap in their face. I had great parents. I did not need to look for any oth-



Pastor Nebel is pictured with, from left (front row) his half-sister, Leslie; birth mother, Kathleen; (middle row) half-brother, Jimmy; nephew, Joey; (back row) daughter, Mary; and wife, Cindy, at Joey’s conformation in 2018.

ers. My dad died of bladder cancer in 1997 at age 78. My mom passed away in 2012 at age 83.

While not looking for my birth parents, I never have been opposed to the idea of finding out who they were. I expected that this day would come, but was still surprised when it happened. My best friend growing up is the one who came across your information and passed it on to me. I have no illusions of a tearful reunion and the making of one big, happy family. I do not want to impose my family upon yours. I am also concerned about how this will affect my family. I have been married for almost 28 years. We have five children. My children have had grandparents and I want them to remember them as such. I do not want to introduce stress or confusion to your grandchildren or my children. This is the reason for my anonymity at this point. I hope you will understand my hesitancy and appreciate my caution.

I was shown your Facebook post of June 17, 2012. Ironically, that was just a month after my mom passed away. In response, you can be assured that I have had a good life. I do not feel unloved by you. That is why I am writing. I am glad to have this opportunity to tell you that you did the right thing. You gave me life and then you gave me to two people who were not able to make a life themselves. Though I do not know you, for those

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# Celebrating Rosa Young

Rev. Brian Downs, senior pastor of Zion Lutheran Church and School, Belleville, introduces elementary students to Dr. Rosa J. Young on Feb. 10 during a chapel message in the sanctuary. Dr. Young pioneered Lutheran, Gospel-centered education throughout Alabama in the early 1900s. Pictured also on the projected screen is Rev. Nils. J. Bakke, a Lutheran missionary who assisted Young and other pastors in planting surrounding schools and congregations.



## RISEN

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He comes.” This extends further. The apostle writes, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor. 4:16-18), and, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

(Excerpt reprinted from Bo Giertz, *A Year of Grace*, V. 1)

A blessed Eastertide to you all!



Bo Giertz, pictured in Sweden in the 1950s.

## LIFE

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two good decisions I do love you. And though this letter has gotten long, the one thing I always told myself I would say to you is simply “Thanks!”

I pray that this letter finds you well. I also hope that it adds a sense of peace and relief to your Mother’s Day this year. If this is enough to set your mind at ease that I am alive and well, I am glad to have introduced myself to you and am satisfied in doing so. I don’t want or need anything from you, though as a nurse you might understand that some family medical history would be helpful (thankfully no problems to this point, but that has been the one frustration of being adopted, nothing to tell a doctor when he asks those questions). I called a pastor at a Lutheran Church. I did not tell him your identity but let him know that one of his members is my birth mother. He is willing to provide you pastoral care and confidentiality if you wish to let him know of this. If you want to have more contact with me, I will work through him for now. He is open to having me call him back in a week or so.

Perhaps the pictures have provided enough of a physical resemblance to prove that this is not some strange hoax.



If not, I still have the one thing that you passed on to my parents for me. On

June 21, 1964 I was baptized in that little white suit. Our sons have been baptized in it as well.

**Sincerely, The one you know as Robert Alan**

P.S.: That little white baptism suit was purchased by the grandmother of Rev. Mark Wiesner (Signal Hill, Belleville).

She was a nurse at Booth Hospital and a mentor to my birth mother. She also held me in it when I was baptized at that hospital (and again in worship at Faith Lutheran Church, Jefferson City, Mo.).

In August 2015, Cindy and I, along with our daughter, Mary, visited my birth mother, Kathleen, in Louisiana. Her mother was still living (she was actually four months younger than my adoptive father). When she saw me, she said, “I have been praying for you for 51 years.” She died of a stroke four months later.

Kathleen married after she returned home and has a daughter and a son. Kathleen and her daughter have visited and attended the weddings of our daughters. Kathleen and I am in regular phone, text and email contact. It has been a positive and pleasant outcome, and reinforces my support of adoption as an alternative to abortion.

*Pastor Nebel serves at St. John, Red Bud.*