

“Not Even A Bridge” by Karolynn Pargo – Awarded Third Place

Photo - Bridge

He's over there. My Son. He's over there on the other side. It is too dark to see the other side, but it is there. The bridge proves my point. Why would they have such a bridge unless there is an other side? But sometimes a bridge, even a magnificent one, cannot connect me with my amazing son.

His story starts with me as a young woman, beloved daughter of a preacher, as pure of heart as any person that ever walked the earth. Two weeks before my wedding my fiancé left me pregnant and afraid. My Dad collapsed in tears when I told him, but one look at my Mum's face and he knew the future of this baby would not be with me.

I left town to go live with some girlfriends. They were a committed couple way before same sex marriage was recognized. But that is another story worth telling on another day. I missed my parents and called them every week. Mum was always cheerful and full of news from back home. She would go on and on about all the details of the lives around her, but would never speak of the baby. She said she kept herself sane by believing I was staying with my friends until a tumor was removed.

When I signed the adoption papers, the judge said that under no circumstance was I ever to try to contact the child. It would be a felony. Period.

After his birth I did what all good girls do; I returned to my life. Only I was not the same girl. Everything was different. I was a childless mother.

Years passed. I married and had three babies. But not a day went by that I did not grieve for my first baby. Most folks told me to just get on with my life and be happy for what I had. I did. I was. But there was a void that could not be filled by anyone else. A constant longing and wondering. I secretly adopted a teddy bear that I would take to the park to hold while I cried. Especially on his Birthday. That poor bear got pretty messy. And even ripped up a little on the times my grief turned into rage.

On his 40th birthday a friend suggested I use the internet to try to find him. I told her the warning the judge gave me, and she said that times are different and she would look. She posted his birth date and birth town on the web. And nothing happened. For almost three years.

I did not know that he had been looking for me. After years of searching on his birth date and place, he tried changing the format of the date and whom. There was my friend's post. After some initial emails to her, he sent his first message to me.

"My dear stranger. Expect a long letter later today, but for now you need answers to some questions. Does he think of me? Does he think I loved him? Does he think I still do? Does he in some inexplicable way love me back? Did I do the right thing? The answer to all those is "Yes."

In the history of messages, that was the best first message ever.

We spent a month sending emails several times each day. I was constantly amazed at our similarities. Our views on the world, our passions, our hobbies were the same. Both of us had our lives changed by the play "The Fantastics". Dark Side Of The Moon was our favorite music. We learned about each other. We learned from each other. We fell in love. The night I was sent the results of the DNA test proving our relationship we spent 6 straight hours talking on Skype. And we Skyped every night for over a year and traveled to be together for at least five days every month. We

were obsessed with each other.

He fit into the family like the missing jig saw puzzle piece that he was. He finally felt like he belonged. He was no longer punished for being artistic. His intelligence was respected and his opinions had value.

We also celebrated our differences. His actions were thoughtful and deliberate. It made him seem elegant. I always acted from gut instinct. He marveled at my spontaneity. His vision and hearing were beyond the human range. Mine were failing.

He had told me of his lifelong battles with unknown demons. Sometimes he had gotten lost in his own self just trying to make sense of himself. Trying to understand what he had done wrong to have been punished by his parents for not "acting right". He told me that sometimes the autism and depression had gripped him so completely that he was trapped in "Silence", unable to communicate. In truth, I witnessed some autistic moments when he experienced an emotional discovery of his new family. But he said that meeting me had cured him of the demons and the "Silence". I had given him life. Again.

Our bliss lasted only a few glorious years. Then he began to lose himself. Sometimes for days or weeks. Now it has been two years. I get an occasional text that says "XOXOXOXO" or "I love you". I know he does. I know he longs for me. But he is over there. On the other side. A bridge cannot help us. And it is so dark.