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PERSPECTIVES

Adoptees should gain access to family roots

State Ballot Measure 58 would allow adult adoptees access to original birth certificates

It's true. I am not my parents' daughter — at least not biologically. And though my adoptive parents have provided a good life and a loving home, they cannot answer those nagging questions that insist on lingering in the back of my mind. What is my mother's name? What is my father's race and nationality? Why did they give me away? What kind of medical history do I have? Do I need to worry about breast cancer, and are my chronic allergies something I inherited?

Opinion

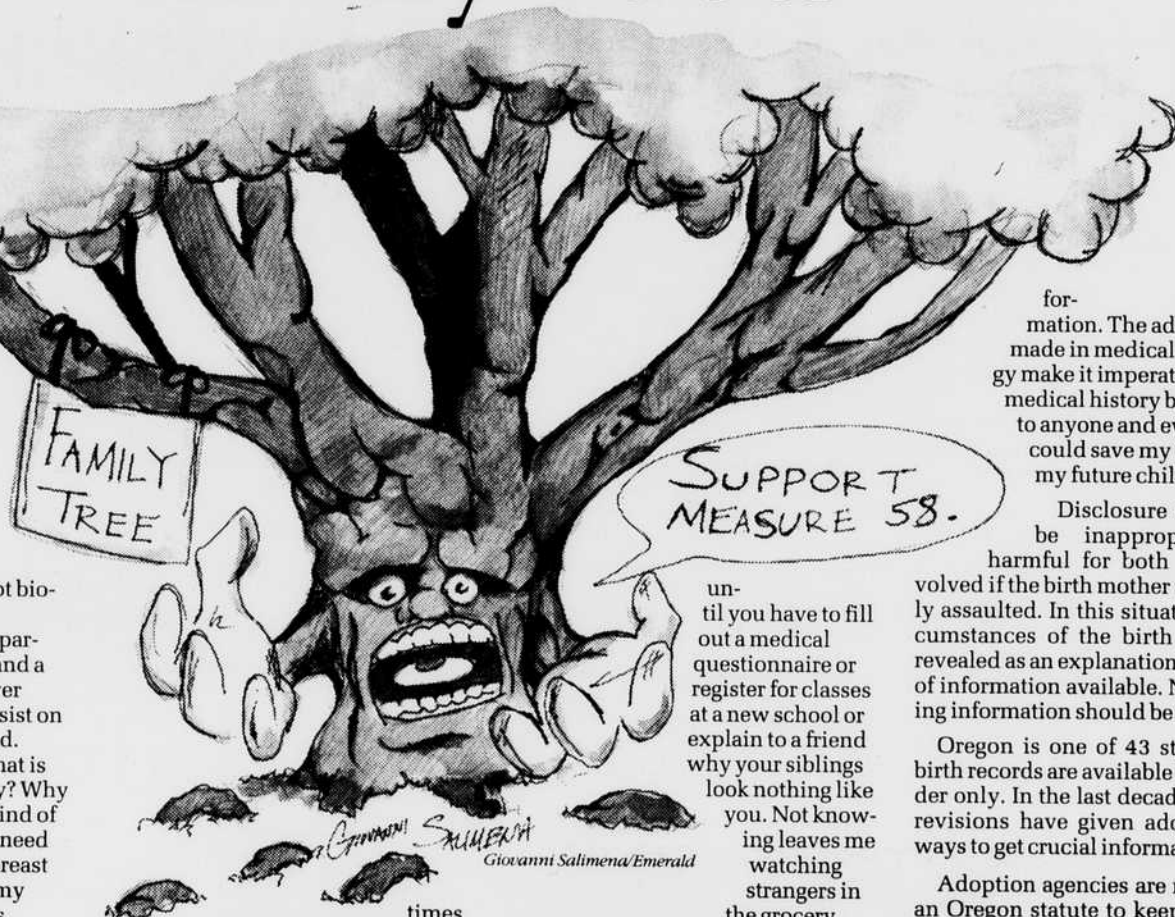


Tricia Schwennesen

I believe that I am entitled to the answers to these questions. I have earned that right by striving to get ahead, moving forward in life and becoming my own person. I have successfully reached adulthood, and now I want some answers.

Oregonians have a chance to answer these questions for hundreds of adoptees by voting yes on Measure 58. Measure 58 could abolish the 1957 law that sealed away original birth certificates leaving adoptees to forever wonder about the possibilities.

The lack of family information leaves many adoptees with a huge gaping inner wound that can some-



times lead to feelings of shame and insecurity.

Being adopted never bothered me until I had to make a family tree in elementary school. The assignment was torture on my little girl heart because naming my family members seemed to me to be a bloodline of lies. I was ashamed that I didn't have my mother's smile or my grandmother's eyes. I didn't have my father's height or my grandfather's nose. But my parents were smart. They never hid my adoptiveness from me or anyone else. They taught me that family was more than biology and genetics.

You would think that coming to terms with being adopted and accepting your adoptive family as your one and only would ease the doubt that comes with not knowing the biology of your existence. It doesn't.

It's easy to set the questions aside

until you have to fill out a medical questionnaire or register for classes at a new school or explain to a friend why your siblings look nothing like you. Not knowing leaves me watching strangers in the grocery store, in the mall or at work, wondering if the woman with the dark curly hair might be my mother or the man peppered with freckles across his nose might be my father. It doesn't matter that I'm not a native Oregonian. My biological family could be from anywhere and might currently live right here in Eugene. Who knows? I know I don't.

I understand that there was once a time when illegitimate children left a permanent black mark against unwed mothers. But that time has passed.

Today, if a woman accidentally gets pregnant, it's more acceptable to give the baby up for adoption because the only other alternative is abortion. And no one likes the idea of killing a child.

Birth parents have a moral obligation to provide family history and more importantly, vital medical in-

formation. The advances made in medical technology make it imperative that medical history be available to anyone and everyone. It could save my life or even my future child's life.

Disclosure could only be inappropriate and harmful for both parties involved if the birth mother was sexually assaulted. In this situation the circumstances of the birth should be revealed as an explanation for the lack of information available. No identifying information should be divulged.

Oregon is one of 43 states where birth records are available by court order only. In the last decade, state law revisions have given adoptees new ways to get crucial information.

Adoption agencies are required by an Oregon statute to keep voluntary registries for birth parents and adoptees. Agencies must also conduct searches if requested by either party. Unfortunately there are no guarantees for a thorough search, registries are inconvenient and the alternatives can be expensive.

Before I have children of my own, I should be able to provide them with an accurate medical history based on biology as well as family history based on life and love. Accidental parents need to quit being selfish and the law needs to recognize that adoptees have the same right to build a life based on truth not a fabricated birth certificate.

Tricia Schwennesen covers the College of Arts and Sciences, the University Foundation and the Oregon Public Employees Union for the Emerald. She can be reached via e-mail at tschwenn@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Letters to the Editor

Students must vote

All of the sudden half the term is finished. Mid-terms are the subject of our nightmares. Some of us are wondering if we will get through our classes, how little sleep we can survive on, how long the sun will last and even more students are wondering how they will vote on Nov. 3. Students are proving that we want to be recognized. We no longer think politics are frivolous, that propositions are pointless or that our vote doesn't matter. As of the voting registration deadline, 3,500 University students registered with ASUO. This number doesn't take into account those students who are already registered. In other words, the students are ready to be heard.

Students have made the connection. The only way the government will work for us is if we hold them accountable. Yes, we have registered to vote. Yes, we are educat-

ing ourselves about the issues at hand, but it's that last step we need to take. We need to make intelligent decisions and get to the polls and vote. We must strive to understand what issuers will impact students and our state.

Last session, students voted and legislators saw that we not only care, we matter. Legislators saw that some progress on the tuition freeze was necessary. This year we have the opportunity to do the same and affirm a tuition freeze. As student voters we have taken that step. As a fellow student, I thank you for caring.

Janette Sherman
ASUO Intern

Escaped animals a hazard

I am disappointed that the Emerald gave

a thumbs up to the monkey breakout at Tulane University Primate Center (ODE, Oct. 22). This poor attempt at journalistic humor did not recognize the seriousness of escaped research animals and how their lives and the research they aid are affected. The escape of these animals does not correlate to a gain of freedom, but rather results in stress to the creature and possibly premature death. Released research animals often die in new, unfamiliar surroundings from starvation, trauma caused by cars, animal attacks and fear. These monkeys are extremely valued creatures used in the study of cancer, malaria, leprosy and AIDS. Their escape is not a matter to be taken lightly, nor is it to be summed up as a gain of freedom for these animals.

Jocelyn McAuley
Institute of Neuroscience

CORRECTION

In the "Private donations, grants on the rise" story (ODE, Oct. 23), a statement attributed to Paula Burkhart, assistant vice provost for research and faculty development, should have said federal research dollars have declined in the last 10 years nationally, but the amount of federal research dollars at the University during the same time has risen due to its quality faculty.

Said & Done

"People see it more as a family tragedy there."

— Bob Huff, Vili Fualaau's lawyer, on France's reaction to Fualaau's tour to promote the book, "Only One Crime, Love"

"It's not just a place to come and sit and be sad or worried. It's a place that attempts to dignify the life of the people."

— Carlos Marrentes, director of Centro de Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizas, in El Paso, Texas. The center provides free shelter nightly for farm workers who work in West Texas and New Mexico during the picking season.

"I'm not one to gloat over these things. It's just part of doing our business."

— Eureka Police Chief Arnie Millap, on a federal judge dismissing a lawsuit Monday by anti-logging protesters whose eyes were swabbed with pepper spray.

"I do think it's a great sadness that the Oxford dictionary is doing this. Hearing split infinitives is like listening to Mozart when the pianist keeps hitting all the wrong notes."

— Loftus Jestin, head of the English department at Central Connecticut State University, on Oxford dictionaries ending its centuries-old ban on splitting infinitives.

"I don't like to kill things. I like tools and problem-solving."

— Allen Ingling, University of Maryland veterinarian who is in Neah Bay, Wash., to help the Makah Indian Tribe with their first whale hunt in more than 70 years.