

Adoption and the Steve Jobs' Legacy

By Joanna Felger

Since the passing of Steve Jobs, we can't help but marvel at his many accomplishments and all he has contributed to computer technology. An area of his life reported on almost as widely as his inventions is the fact that he was placed for adoption as an infant. His adoption story is yet another gift he gives to society. It portrays the importance of healthy adoption practice.

Those closest to Mr. Jobs explain that he loved his adoptive parents deeply. To him there could be no possible distinction between his love for them and the love anyone could have for their birth parents. Nevertheless, until he met his birth mother, he had always felt a sense of abandonment and emptiness at not knowing his personal history. It's a common scenario in adoptions of his generation.

When Mr. Jobs was born, the standard in adoption practice is referred to as "closed adoption". In a closed adoption there is no exchange of information or communication between a birth mother, adoptive couple and the adopted child. A woman places her child for adoption, never knowing who will raise her baby. Many birth mothers describe an existence plagued with guilt, always wondering if her baby is healthy, happy and cherished.

Life for children in closed adoptions has its difficulties as well. Having no information about their birth parents, they were provided no context of personal history. Many children growing up in closed adoptions describe issues with personal identity, depression, and are haunted by questions like; "why was I given up?" or "Why didn't my mother want me?"

The common perception of closed adoption is one of pain for all those involved and can give society a negative view of adoption in general. While there have been many successful closed adoptions, the pain we perceive about adoption hinders the view of many to acknowledge it as a viable option for those facing an unplanned pregnancy. In fact healthier practice has evolved and Mr. Jobs' personal story helps exemplify it.

About ten years after Mr. Jobs was born, a trend became common in adoption practice called "open adoption". Open adoption involves a birth mother choosing the couple to raise her child. The adopting couple, birth mother and adoptee continue contact as the child grows. This contact can range from occasional letters or birthday cards to personal visits. The child grows up knowing his/her personal story. The birth mother can move on with her life, assured that her baby is being raised in a loving, nurturing environment, and know that her decision to make an adoption plan is celebrated, not secretive.

Mr. Jobs was a victim of closed adoption and struggled through his youth with feelings of abandonment. As a young adult he initiated a search and met his birth mother and biological sister. One can only imagine his birth mother's relief in learning that he had grown up in a loving family who gave him every opportunity to flourish. Indeed, his talents were nurtured by his adoptive parents and without their support and encouragement he may not have been able to accomplish all that he had in his lifetime.

Likewise, meeting his birth mother and biological sister completed his personal story. He was no longer tormented by the “unknown”. The mystery was solved and as a result, he gained a better understanding of himself and an appreciation for his birth mother’s selfless decision.

In Mr. Jobs’ story, what began as a closed adoption became a healthy open one, erasing much of the pain each had felt through the years. Mr. Jobs and his birth mother continued a healthy relationship for the rest of his life that did not hinder his love and devotion for his adoptive parents. In fact, his biography infers that opening the relationship with his birth mother gave him an even deeper appreciation for his adoptive parents.

There is much that our society needs to learn about adoption. Since November is National Adoption Awareness Month, take time to reflect on Mr. Job’s adoption story and share it with someone. His lesson teaches the beauty of open adoption. It is yet another wonderful part of his legacy.