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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Washington Attorney Advocates Open Access to Adoption Records**

“Back in the 1940s, records were sealed to shield birth parents and their children from the stigma then associated with adoption. But society’s views have changed, and the laws are slowly granting adoptees access to their original birth certificates and, in some cases, other birth records. Those are positive changes, and I fully support giving other adoptees the information they need to connect with their birth families and, perhaps, even a chance to form permanent relationships with them. My life is fuller and, ultimately, more satisfying because I’ve had that opportunity.” So says David R. Ford, an attorney, business advisor and writer based in Washington, DC, whose professional life is now dedicated primarily to seniors housing and issues relating to elder care. He was given up for adoption at birth in the 1950’s.

In his memoir, *Blind in One Eye: A Story About Seeing the Possibilities* (FordWords Publishing, 2010), Ford recounts a friend’s telling him that she’d spotted his older lookalike on the DC subway. Ford had grown up knowing little about his birth family except that he’d had an older birth brother. As far as Ford knew, his brother was out there somewhere, and Ford wanted to find him. “I had an idealized view about what it would be like to have an older brother, because I grew up as an only child,” Ford explains. “My adoptive family was wonderful and supportive, but having an older brother to look up to and to share adventures with was an appealing dream. The subway incident fed into that old fantasy and spurred me to try harder to find that older brother. That’s when my search for my birth family began in earnest.”

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These were the days before Facebook and other social networking tools made it easier for people to connect with one another, and Ford used the investigative skills he'd developed as a legal professional to track down his birth parents. It was an arduous and time-consuming project and, so far, it had yielded only a birth mother who wasn't happy – and, in fact, was downright belligerent – about hearing from the child she'd given away. Ford still hadn't found that older brother, but he hadn't given up the search. In the meantime, just days before his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, Ford received an unexpected call from a woman he didn't know. By the end of that phone conversation, he had learned that he was one of seven – not two – children, and that his married, middle-class birth parents had secretly given up four of their children at birth and raised the three others. The caller herself was one of his siblings.

“My birth parents' children came in two varieties: there were the ‘keepers’ and the ‘throwaways.’ I was a ‘throwaway,’ and the woman who had called me was another ‘throwaway’ who had already established a relationship with our birth mother and the other two ‘throwaways.’ It turned out she'd been looking for me for years, and now – because I'd put out feelers to find our birth family, and my sister had discovered I'd called my birth mother – she had found me. I had an instant sister, and a rapidly expanding group of relatives who would become an important part of my life in the weeks, months, and years to come,” recalls Ford.

On the way to developing relationships with six of his seven siblings, Ford laments the few relatives who “got away” from him and couldn't be integrated into his family: along with his reluctant birth mother, there was his silent birth father and one elusive “keeper” sister. “Connecting with my birth siblings has been an overwhelmingly rewarding experience, but it hasn't been exactly what I might have expected. In some ways, it's been far richer than anyone could imagine and, in other ways, it's been tougher, and more puzzling, than I would have believed. It was challenging for my wife, too, who unexpectedly had an entire clan of in-laws to deal with, but she's been terrific. We knew that the search for my birth family could have turned out many ways, and not all of them great, but she encouraged me to keep on.”

Ford emphasizes that his birth parents, now deceased, were not anything like Ozzie and Harriet, nor are his birth siblings ever going to be confused with the adorable tykes from the “Brady Bunch,” “Full House,” or “Cosby” households. “We're not a perfect family that can break out decades-old shared stories the way we might have been able to if our birth parents had decided we were all ‘keepers,’ and if we had grown up together. But we have each other now, finally, and that's becoming more important to us with each passing day. We are creating memories together despite the long-stalled beginning we had.”

All of which brings Ford back to his support for open access to adoption records. “I found my birth family members, largely because of my lawyerly fact-finding skills and plain old good luck and coincidence. But it would have been just as possible for my biological family members to miss the clues that led us to each other, and it would have been a shame if we hadn’t been able to meet. I believe that adoptees have a right to know who they are, biologically speaking, and why their birth parents made the decisions to give them up. And I also believe that birth parents have a right to find out what happened to the children they (in many cases) unselfishly gave up for better lives. Access to their adoption records can give adoptees and their birth parents back what they’ve missed, and I think the time is right to remove the cloak of mystery from the adoption process. Transparency in adoption can change lives for the better as, ultimately, my life was enriched by finding out the truth about my birth family. And also important to me is the fact that now I don’t have to scribble the word ‘adopted’ over the formerly unanswerable questions about my family medical history when I go to a new doctor!”

*Blind in One Eye: A Story About Seeing the Possibilities*

By David R. Ford

FordWords Publishing

April 2011

[www.blindinoneeye.com](http://www.blindinoneeye.com)

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## David R. Ford

David R. Ford is one of seven siblings, but he grew up as an only child. When he isn't writing, or pursuing his enthusiasm for photography, Ford works with businesses ranging from start-ups to industry leaders. For the first two decades of his professional career, he was an attorney in private practice in Washington, DC. His business life is now largely dedicated to senior housing and issues relating to elder care. He is a graduate of Rollins College and the University of Virginia School of Law.

His published writings range from a political-humor piece in the *Washington Post* to technical articles in mind-numbing legal journals. Visit [www.blindinoneeye.com](http://www.blindinoneeye.com) for more information.

## Suggested Interview Questions

1. You always knew you were adopted when you were growing up as an only child. What did you know about your birth family?
2. Why did you begin to search for your birth family, and how did you begin? What were you hoping to find?
3. Just days before your 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, you got an unexpected call from a woman you didn't know. By the end of that call, you had learned that you were one of seven children of a married, middle-class couple who had secretly given up four of you at birth and raised the three others as if you had never existed. What was it like to hear such shocking, exciting news about yourself?
4. Your birth mother was, to put it kindly, not happy to hear from you at first. What was it like to be faced with such animosity from her?
5. Did you ever meet either of your birth parents face-to-face? What was that like?
6. Your birth parents seemed to have a normal, middle-class existence, and weren't the stereotypical candidates for producing so many unwanted babies. What was going on?
7. You label the three children that your birth parents raised as the "Keepers" and the four of you adopted kids as the "Throwaways." That sounds kind of harsh. Is that truly the way you feel?
8. What was it like to learn that the three other "Throwaways"—sisters who were older than you but whom you didn't know existed at the time—had been looking for you for many years?
9. How was your birth mother able to hide all of those pregnancies from her family and neighbors?
10. What sort of relationship do you have with your six siblings now that you've known each other for years? How do you think it compares to the relationships within other big families?
11. Your older brother was this almost mythic character to you when you were growing up as an only child. Did he live up to your expectations when you finally met him?
12. You've met all but one of your six siblings. What's up with the missing one?
13. What about your adoptive parents? How did they handle your discovering your birth family?
14. You know the debate about "nature versus nurture." Your story sounds like a sociology experiment, with seven siblings being raised by four different sets of parents. Do you see similarities in personality among your siblings? Differences?
15. Your adoption, in the mid-1950's, was a "closed" adoption: the identity of your birth parents was kept confidential by the state government. What do you think about the movement toward "open" adoptions, where the identifies of the birth and adoptive parents are known to both sides?

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16. You began looking for your birth family before the Internet age, eventually resorting to a private investigator for help with the search. Do you think it would have been a lot easier today?

17. How do other adoptees and adoptive parents react to your story?

18. Your story will obviously be of interest to adoptees and adoptive parents, but it seems to have a more universal appeal. Why do so many people relate to your story?

## Story Ideas

Pros and cons of open adoption

The stigma of adoption and how that has affected adoptees and their birth families

Long-lost siblings who have found each other

When, and how, adoption became fashionable (and the international adoption trend, with celebrities including Madonna and Angelina Jolie adopting children from overseas)

Aristotle, Art Linkletter, Eleanor Roosevelt, Malcolm X, and Edgar Allan Poe, President Gerald Ford, and Leo Tolstoy were all adopted. What traits do adoptees share, and why?

Nature vs. nurture: are adopted siblings as much alike as siblings who grew up together, and why? An adoptee tells his story of connecting with five of his siblings and offers his perspective.

What impact do Mother's Day, Father's Day, and holidays that traditionally involve family get-togethers have on adoptees?

Why would middle-class American parents create two classes of children: "keepers" and "throwaways?"

Many people who grew up with their siblings would give one, or more, of them away in a heartbeat. Why would adoptees go looking for siblings? Don't they have enough problems? Would you seek out your siblings if you didn't know them?