

The natural father



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

08331480 June Crane Assignment 2The natural fatherHe was a young man when I first learned of him, the father of my daughter, just 18 years old. Although I have never met him, there he has been, on the outskirts of our family for 33 years. There he has been, at the shoulder of my motherhood, distant yet constant. The now lurid photo reflects the time that was the mid-seventies: my kohl eyes and my husband??™s floral shirt, pictured holding our new baby, surrounded by beaming family. In my toddler son, even then, I see my own face looking back.

The newcomer??™s features are unclear, eyes squeezed tight against bright sunlight, her infant shape swaddled in checked acrylic. We had met her a week earlier. She had cried with fury, hungry yet held out for our inspection.

She was our girl from the moment we heard of her existence and we wanted only to bring her home. ??? You need to know,??™ they said, referring to her natural father, ???...anything could happen.??™ In a photograph, a woman in green hospital garb carries the bundled infant to the car.

I remember, across the toddler in the backseat, my daughter and I held eyes hard and long, for the first time. The exchange was a challenge, startling and absolute: here we are then, you and me. Time unfolded for our nuclear family of four, for many years, blessed with the relatively privileged trappings of its time, loving and secure. And against the predictable wallpaper of family life ??“ and through the joy and pain and delight and grief – Sam, the natural father of our daughter, travelled with us. He was there in the stories that told how our family jigsaw worked. We saw him in the face of our girl, Ana, whose black eyes and long limbs and curls were at

odds with others in the family. We felt him in the primal, wrenching gulf that could unexpectedly divide us at times when we most needed one another. We recognised the absence of our biological connection to her talents as she ran and leapt and balanced.

We saw her stoic and accepting of things about which she might rightfully have cried and complained. We spoke of her natural father with gratitude for the very existence of our girl and wondered about him and the circumstances of his life. A typed, government paper, held inside a cardboard cover by a frayed orange ribbon, is titled, ??? My Story??™. On one side, it has the name of our daughter and information about her birth. The other side is headed, natural mother and father. It is a strange story in that it gives no identifying information. About the natural father, it says: Age - 18 years Height - 6??™ 1??? Build - slim Hair - dark brown Eyes - green Complexion - medium ??“ olive skin Schooling - educated in UK, left school at 15 Occupation - deckhand Race/tribe - one half American Negro, one half European Hobbies - dancing, plays drums, football, reading, travel Health, own - good Health, family - half brother has mild asthma, good It goes on to say, ??? Your birth father was single and had lived in New Zealand from December 1974 to April 1975.

He was nominally Church of England and had been educated in the United Kingdom. After leaving school he went to sea and spent three years with the Shaw Savill Line. His parents had been divorced 12 years previous and he had lived with his mother who remarried. His stepfather was a carpenter and he had one half-brother who was 12 years old. He enjoyed socialising, and regarded himself as being a handyman. He was described as being a

reasonably intelligent, mature person for his age with a happy-go-lucky, fairly outgoing nature.

??™ I look at this and am struck by it being written in the past tense, as though the natural father had died: as though our Ana no longer had a natural father. And, too, how it is a document of its time: the term American Negro was then acceptable in a government document. I remember two social workers handing this to me when Ana was six years old. Until then, we had known only Sam??™'s age, occupation and ethnicity. Handed over when it was, it felt contrived and likely upsetting when read to an excited child, particularly when one comment in the document signalled rejection on the part of her natural mother. Perhaps we chose to overlook that in our shared delight at finding how well details of her natural father sat alongside the way we imagined him from the scant information we had. Drums and dancing; intelligence; tall and sporty and a family connection with asthma all resonated.

I remember Ana took ??? My Story??™ to school the following day and at a school parents??™ meeting later that week, with a certain suppressed hysteria, a mother asked about my daughters 18 year old drum playing American Negro [sic] deckhand father. I remember Ana the child, all fly-away hair and movement, indignant at not being believed when teachers recorded the ethnicity of students. I hear her song and clarinet, early morning, in a house where only she understood music.

I see her climb rooves and ropes and trees while my toes curled. I remember how smart, alert and watchful she was, the youngest family member, often

organising the rest of us. I wondered at the innate sense of fairness and caring I saw in her and at how stoic and single-minded she could be. As time passed, amidst life's predictable ebb and flow of contentment and discontent, Sam's presence remained, heightened at those times of disagreement when parents are resented and challenged and, themselves, work uncertainly through the treacherous territory of parenthood.

Unexpectedly, a series of connected events, traumatic and brutal, cast our little family on the rocks. It was in the context of this upheaval that Sam's presence came closer when we made our first contact with Ana's birth mother. And therein lies another story, but it is not Sam's. However, from her, we learned Sam's name and an old and incomplete address.

When our daughter became a young woman, I saw more clearly the difference she would sometimes talk about as a child when considering herself alongside her family. She certainly looked nothing like the rest of her family. And beyond that, she is fair-skinned to the extent that when she did talk about her natural father's ethnicity outside her immediate family, it was invariably met with disbelief and laughed at as his mistaken identity.

We saw him in her long legs, the shape of her head, her beautiful hair and we imagined him in her pragmatic approach to life, her flare of temper, her sense of humour and her obstinance. We saw Sam in our daughter. Our daughter – the daughter we share with Sam – has three children. How surprised I was to recognise a grief in me when I held the first of those children and realised she was not of my blood. I never had that consciousness in relation to Ana, knowing absolutely that she was no less loved or valued than the son born to me.

Indeed, I have thought that the intensity of my feelings for my girl, somehow laid down at our first hard look at one another, might well have been less but for the circumstance of us being mother and daughter by adoption. It was as a new grandmother I recognised that while love through nurture is no less than love through nature, the blood connection belongs with the latter. I called my daughter's birth mother when my first grandchild was born and thought about Sam, wondering where he was. Six months ago, late, that same grandchild, Kate, gossiped away on her pillow alongside mine. Then the phone rang and Ana told me how just three hours earlier, Sam's wife had made contact with Ana's birthmother. Sam's wife had then emailed Ana, writing: So so glad I found you, called Sam at work and he is stunned.

Told him to call you tonight when he gets home!! Do you have any pics you can send... . In bed, listening, the grandchild with sharp elbows and black eyes was trying to follow the excitement and understand what was happening. Kate knows her birth grandmother and with a seven year old's fascination for detail, was now attempting to place this newcomer, Sam, on her already complex family tree. When the phone call ended, I found, My Story and we read, again, about Sam, the 18 year old.

Then Kate slept as I lay waiting for the ping of the new email. I opened the pictures of Sam. There he was, grown.

In his face, there she was, so clearly, our daughter. Ana called Sam in the United Kingdom the following morning. Not one to dance around any issue and in the face of him being almost speechless, Ana worked through a

prepared list of questions for the stunned Sam. Over the next several days, Sam's story unfolded further. When he had to rejoin his ship and return to Britain, he knew his girlfriend was pregnant. Some months later, she wrote saying that she was ending their relationship and that her new partner was willing to parent their yet to be born child. Communication became complicated and a letter not handed to him until some time after our daughter was born told him of her birth and that her natural mother had chosen adoption rather than keeping their baby.

Just turned 19, Sam's situation was that when he was an infant, his parents had separated and he had remained feeling abandoned by his father and angry at him. Learning that his daughter in New Zealand had been or was about to be adopted, he and his mother agreed that he would return to look for his daughter, wanting to parent her with his mother's support. His efforts to contact our daughter's birth mother were frustrated and when he could not make contact, he approached Red Cross. For whatever reason, he could get no information about his daughter and returned to the United Kingdom. How strange life is. I remember a letter Anas father and I wrote at the time of our daughter's adoption in 1975, to be placed on the social welfare file. We wrote that if any approach was received from anyone regarding Ana, we would be responsive to that and asked that we be contacted. Our daughter learned that Sam has a 13 year old son whose name is the same as Ana's older brother.

Sam lives two streets from where he and his mother lived 33 years ago. He is 51 and what he does in his life in work and play, reflects those same interests the social worker wrote about, all those years ago. On 13 October

2008, I emailed Sam: ???...I am very glad that you and Ana have made contact.

? ? Your name has been? alive in our family history for many years.? Ana is? a? much loved daughter and sister and very precious to us.? I have always been conscious of the gratitude we owe her birth parents – thank you for our girl....

? I will call you when I am in the UK in December/January – but not meet you because Ana wants to do that first!..??™.

How stilted that sounds when I read it now. And Sam replied: ??? Just to say? hello and a huge thank you, youve brought Ana up to be a beautiful caring person??; these days they seem to be few and far between. So any gratitude should be heaped upon [you and your husband].... feel free to phone when you get to England. Once again thank for caring for and nurturing my beautiful daughter.

??™ As the days unfolded, I heard a new lightness in Ana??™s voice and saw a shift in the way she moves. She told Sam that she has always felt the odd one out in our family and how important it was to her that they had now found one another. She also told him that she has had a good life and that she is clear who her parents are, distinct from her birth mother and father. Over the next few months, Sam and Ana grew to be relaxed and comfortable in their frequent telephone and online communication. They laughed about how he imagined himself forever young and not only had he just married for the first time but now, overnight, found himself a grandfather three times over. They mocked one another??™s manner of speaking and sorted out the <https://assignbuster.com/the-natural-father/>

history around his relationship with our daughter??™s birthmother. They talked football and families and our daughters friends sent him a video, telling him about his girl and her husband and children.

Emailed pictures of Sam taken over the last 15 years or so show glimpses of his life. There he is: in the snow, at the Louvre, on the beach, at the bar, with his son, at his wedding. He is a big man, hair close-cropped, a wide smile, dark-skinned, looking full-on, into the camera. He holds his skis, poses, raises a toast, pulls a silly face, signs the register. Ana, too, sent Sam pictures and he displayed them all around his house, printing replacements when he took them to show his mother and she refused to relinquish them.

Ana in her crib, at Disneyland, starting school, the school ball, getting married, as a new mother. In the same way we stared hard at the images of Sam, he and his family similarly inspected those of Ana. Nine weeks ago, Ana flew to London to meet Sam, taking his youngest, infant granddaughter with her.

On 10 March 2009, Sam emailed: ??? Hours to go, the excitement now building? to volcanic proportions. Terminal 3 will be a breeze compared? to the craziness? going on here at home, everything must be just right!! The first words I speak must not be a complete babble,? must not hug too tightly and crush Lani. Oh Ive forgotten to fill car with petrol, no did that weekend. Need to take deep breath and compose, and yes actually all prepared and ready to go. We intend to come over maybe the? year after next, would be great to meet you all. Well not long before I head off, Ill make sure Ana lets everyone know shes here safe.??™ Ana found Sam at terminal 3, on time. He

was overwhelmed and didn't speak much on the three hour drive to Essex.

Within a day or so, he and our daughter talked all the time. Quite soon, she very naturally referred to him as Dad. The boisterous infant grandchild attached herself to Sam, beguiling him and sharing his numerous cups of tea. His family talked of how he had looked for our daughter; how he had always remembered her and how, as a family, they would regularly wonder what was happening for her in life.

His friends knew immediately that she was his daughter, having known for years of her existence and his search for her. In telephone calls, Ana would tell me what they were doing and saying and wearing and eating. She talked about Sam's habits and behaviours and sense of style. She laughed and cried with Sam and his family and they teased one another and talked about difficult things and the past and the future. Ana missed her husband and children and at the end of two weeks, was caught between wanting to stay and wanting to come home.

And before she left, his mother and his wife told Ana that Sam had changed since he had found her. He used to be sad...

now he smiles all the time, his family told our daughter. Sam took Ana to Heathrow and she laughed saying how he drove away, crying, leaving her to deal with his grandchild and their luggage; that he, doesn't do crying in public. Sam has been in our family for 33 years. His presence has been bittersweet: absent yet intrusive; familiar yet mysterious; reassuring yet

threatening. As we were told so long ago, in relation to Sam, ??!anything could happen. And happen, it has.

Now, he is just that – our daughters natural father.