



# A STUDY OF A FRIEND

By David I. Grunfeld



I'd like to tell you about my good friend, Sammy. We grew up across town from each other but went to the same high school and law school. We hit it off immediately when we met. We were both in private practice, liked participating in sports and were both fans of the Eagles, Phillies and 76ers.

As often happens when two people are litigators, there is a chance that they may oppose each other in cases from time to time. That happened to us, and sometimes the cases got heated and quite argumentative, but after they were over, we remained close.

In our 30s, we played a lot of tennis against each other, and we spoke often about our lives, careers and families.

The only significant way in which we differed was that my wife and I had two sons, and Sammy and his wife had no children. I got the feeling, however, that Sammy would have liked to have had children, but I never pried. I didn't know if it was their choice or not and felt it was a private matter.

During those years, because of friendships with several local doctors, especially several OB/GYNs, and activity in some nonprofit social service agencies, I became experienced in private adoptions. At that time, the law in Pennsylvania in the area of adoptions was like the "Old Wild West." There were few laws and, therefore, few rules to follow.

My doctor and agency friends often asked for legal help when they encountered a patient, usually a young unmarried girl, who found herself pregnant and had no idea what to do. She was interested in giving the child up for adoption but did not know where to turn. The doctor would ask me to talk to the young lady and help her through the legal process.

In most cases, the young mother-to-be knew of no one who would like to adopt the baby. These young women were involved with the most emotional problem a parent could ever face. I sometimes had the duty, or the privilege, of choosing someone who I knew would be anxious to adopt. This had occurred on several prior occasions, and now it was happening again. I got a call from an OB/GYN who had a pregnant patient wanting to give up her baby for adoption. I spoke to the young lady, and she asked me to find a good family for her baby.

Sammy and I had never discussed his thoughts on adoption. He may have known of my prior involvement in private adoptions, but we never spoke of them. So, after one of our tennis matches, I asked him if he was interested in pursuing this. He spoke to his wife, an elementary school teacher, and they said, "yes."

We proceeded with the adoption. The birth mother wisely hired her own attorney. I represented Sammy and his wife. Awaiting the child's birth, we asked the birth mother for her medical records. She complied and we learned that her IQ

was borderline (what was called in those days, "mental retardation"). I, of course, told Sammy and told him that he had no obligation to go through with the adoption.

He talked with his wife, called me back, and said they had discussed it thoroughly and felt that if there was

to be a problem with the child, there was not a better-equipped couple to deal with it than them, a lawyer and an elementary school teacher. So, we moved forward. A beautiful baby boy, named Henry, was born, and the adoption was completed smoothly.

As lawyers, we are involved with contentious, emotional and sometimes downright nasty entanglements. But every now and then, the matter at hand is joyous for everyone involved, and everyone walks away smiling. This was one of those cases. Even the birth mother, though quite emotional, knew that this was for the best and that her child would have a good home. A result, as wonderful as the birth, itself.

Fast forward several decades. I'm still working, but Sammy retired a few years ago and moved to Florida; he and his wife liked the warmer weather. During those years, I never saw or spoke to Sammy. Off and on, I would tell myself, I should call him. I often even put it on my to-do list but never quite got around to doing it. Then, one day last week, I told myself for the zillionth time, "Call Sammy today!!"

I got his contact information from a mutual friend and called. He picked up the phone and I said "Sammy!!"

He answered "Oh my God, ---Oh my God, ----David!! --- -- Oh my God."

"Sammy, what's wrong?" I asked. "Is everything OK?"

He said, "You are NOT going to believe this. Joan and I were driving to our son's house today, and Joan said 'You've been talking about calling David for years. You call him today as soon as we get to our son's house.' And I said to her, 'You're right. I'm going to do it as soon as we get there.' We walked in the door, and I got my phone and as I was getting ready to dial, you called. Amazing!!"

How about that for ESP? Or even ESPN? We talked for a long time and plan to meet when he comes back to Philly in a few months.

Oh, and by the way, Sammy's son, Henry, whose birth mother was diagnosed with a learning disability? Last year he was awarded his Ph.D. in aeronautical engineering. ■

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