

Cynthia Gordon Burns's eulogy for Rick, 9/14/12:

I wanted to speak about the Jonathan or "Ricky, that I knew. I wanted to share my memories and thoughts about how we developed a lifelong and special friendship. It is a unique perspective because we shared a bond that few others can know; the perspective of a Korean adoptee. Ricky and I met when we were four years old. My parents had adopted me at almost two years old. Irwin and Barbara adopted Ricky at four, almost five. The adoption agency provided Barbara with our phone number, being that we were the only other local family with a child from South Korea. They thought my mother could share her experiences regarding raising a Korean child.

Korea has a long and traumatic history of being occupied by other groups. As we all know, North Korean insulates itself from outsiders in the most severe ways. While South Korea is distinctly more open, the culture is fiercely protected. The reason Ricky and I were available for international adoption was purely a matter of cultural purity. The American military presence in South Korea had created an unexpected and unacceptable population of mixed race children. Korean-born mothers and American G.I. fathers had inadvertently provided a big problem for Korean culture and society. The social values stressed filial piety, or respect of one's parents, more than anything else. South Korea found themselves with thousands of un-wed mothers and mixed race children that were the antithesis of their strong ideology. They did not wish for their society and culture to be diluted by these new Amerasian babies. Observing the Korean society's refusal to accept the mixed race children in allowing those single mothers to raise these children and shame their families, several adoption agencies quickly initiated programs to

place children for international adoption. Welcome House, the agency that Ricky and I were adopted through, had been started by the author Pearl S. Buck, after she spent time in China and saw the plight of children in many of the Asian countries. Preserving family honor and fearing the shame heaped upon them, many young women were compelled to release their babies for adoption in hopes of a better life for themselves and the children. The social stigmas drove them to make choices that no mother should ever have to make. Society would never accept us and they hoped that other families would love and raise their child.

Luckily for us, there were two loving families waiting for us to join them. So, in 1969, Ricky and I became friends. While I cannot remember much about those early years, I imagine that in some way we might have been relieved to see and know someone else who looked similar. There weren't many Asian kids around in those days unless you went to New York City or other large metropolitan areas. Although we understood that our adoptive parents loved and cared about us, we obviously bore no resemblance to our new families. This must have been hugely confusing and scary in our young minds. At two and four years old, we had most certainly formed bonds with our birth mothers, only to be separated with little or no explanation. From very early on, Ricky and I shared this common trauma that we did not truly speak about until several years ago.

Our families became great friends. We spent a great deal of time together. Our lives soon melded in other ways. Barbara was working here, at Hamden Hall, and suggested that my mother apply for a teaching job as well. Soon, my mother was also working at Hamden Hall. In fact, she was Ricky's third grade teacher. I was enrolled in the school for fourth grade. Ricky and

I were in the same grade and as small as the school was at the time, we were in many of the same classes. I was friends with Ricky's sister Debbie and my brother Glenn was like their big brother. Our families continued to be especially close. We went skiing together, spent holidays together. We were truly an extended family. Ricky and I always got along even though we didn't specifically spend a lot of time together through our high school years. We had different groups of friends, but our class was so small that we were all very friendly and congenial. It became more difficult in the teen years because of the natural desire to define ourselves, our identities, and figure out how we fit in. The school was beginning to see more diversity, but I believe that Ricky and I still felt somehow disconnected...different. It wasn't the school community to blame. It was the natural progression in the life of an adopted child. The usual identity issues of adolescence were exacerbated by the fact that we didn't even know truly, where we came from. Feelings of abandonment and loss are typical in adopted children and very often cause people like us to exhibit behavior that challenges those who loved us most. Ultimately, our early trauma made us fear future abandonment and test the limits of our parent's commitment and love. This was not a conscious choice, but I think we sometimes pushed the boundaries to test that we were worthy. In some way we might have been still dealing with the early issue of our adoption. Will these parents abandon me as well?? While most people can say, I have my mother's nose, or my father's hair, we were confused and in many ways, felt a sense of isolation. "You don't know your mother or father?" was a question I was frequently asked. Well, of course we knew who our adoptive parents were, but it became a question both Ricky and I had to ask ourselves. Who were we? As a teenager, to come to the

realization that, genetically, you are not related to anyone you know, is quite emotional. The normal fears of fitting in were magnified.

Although Ricky and I both had loving, generous adoptive parents and siblings who gave us every opportunity they could, there was something missing. Still the thought “Who am I”. I discussed this with Ricky several years ago. We did not realize it when we were going through it, nor did we share our feelings back then, but our experiences and feeling had been the same. Our conversation was validation to each of us that what we had been feeling was somehow okay.

We both experienced our own rebellion against what people wanted us to do or what we thought we were supposed to do. It was merely our journey of self-discovery. I am positive that the issue of “Who am I?” failed to matter anymore when Ricky became a father. On one occasion, we had talked about how the birth of our children had brought us a sense of connection never before felt. He knew how much Barbara and Irwin loved him as his parents, but I think that he truly understood and became the man he was meant to be when he met his wife Chani and when his beautiful daughter Miranda was born. His life came in to focus and the lifelong feeling or need of fitting in fell away. His passion and love for his family changed his perspective on life and brought him to a more peaceful place with regard to the course and meaning of his life.

The fact that he was able to reconnect with his birthmother before she passed away provided some answers. She was looking for him, but in my opinion, he no longer needed that to feel complete. He had already figured out who he was and it no longer mattered where he had

come from or how he come. He was, more than anything, Miranda's father. His love and dedication to his family was a beautiful testament to the power of love, hope, and healing.

I saw him at Barbara and Richard's wedding, proudly walking down the aisle to give his beloved mother away. He finally understood what all his parents had done for him and how much they all loved him. Seeing him was always a treat; the conversation was easy and familiar. We chatted for a short time; he was eagerly anticipating the birth of his grandson. I only wish I had been able to tell him how proud I was of him. I took several hikes at Sleeping Giant in recent weeks. I wanted to be in a place where I thought I could feel his spirit; to communicate my feelings. We take life's moments for granted, that we will have the chance to say what we really feel to those who matter most in our lives. Those moments are never guaranteed. So, I share with all of you how proud I am of my friend, my brother, Ricky. Let this not be a day of sadness, but a day of celebration and admiration for his contributions to our lives.