

Biography - Alexander Sister's search turns up long-lost brother

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By LINDA BAKER

Of the Herald-Republic

GRANGER — Dorothy Alexander said she always knew she had a brother, but the secret of what happened to her only blood sibling was sealed in state adoption records.

During the Depression, after her mother had died, the rural Granger resident explained, the young children were split up and adopted out.

They grow up on different sides of the state, and might have lived out their adult lives without sharing kinship if not for a quirk of curiosity.

After some 56 years, Alexander decided it was time to find her brother.

"Everytime I'd hear about families that were united after so many years, I'd think, 'Gee, why can't it be me?'" Alexander said. "I knew I had a brother, but I didn't have any idea where he was."

Prompting from a friend finally launched Alexander on the road to discovery. She started in 1986 with only a handful of information — the original family name, birth dates and an adoption agency — and in 16 months amassed a file more than an inch thick.

The fragmented paper trail led her to Sid Swearingen.

Swearingen, 60, was only 15 months old the last time the 61-year-old Alexander had seen him. He had never been told about his older sister.

Alexander popped the news during an excited telephone call in August.

"I guess it was like the saying — you could have knocked me over

with a feather," Swearingen said. "It was a surprise, but a nice one."

Brother and sister met briefly last fall in Georgia, while the Alexanders were traveling through on vacation. Swearingen was in Washington this week to meet other long-lost relatives and get to know his sister a little better.

"I just felt like that's the way it should be," Alexander said of that initial reunion. "It was a strange situation, but I didn't feel strange."

Swearingen agrees there is a comfortable aura between them, even though they didn't grow up together and have few common interests.

Swearingen's adoption went through the Washington Children's Home and he was raised in Bellingham, while Alexander was adopted privately by a Spokane couple.

Both showed some musical talent, and pursued early careers in education, though Alexander was the only one who actually taught. Each married, had children and are now grandparents.

They also have outlived all members of their respective adopted families. Alexander believes state officials loosened the rules on Swearingen's adoption records because the brother and sister were once again alone.

After the adoption, the siblings' father faded quietly away, and Alexander said she has been unable to trace him or any of his relatives.

Like many adoptees, Alexander said she became obsessed with a search that took her literally across the state. She sorted



(Staff photo by Linda Baker)

Curiosity led Dorothy Alexander of Granger on a search that reunited her with her brother, Sid Swearingen. After their mother's death in the 1930s, the siblings were adopted and raised in different parts of the state.

through sheaves of records, made countless telephone calls and ran into frustrating dead ends.

Ultimately, it was a vacant cemetery plot that pointed Alexander in the right direction — south.

Going through death records, Alexander had been led to a west

side cemetery where Swearingen's relatives were buried. She was able to locate a relative owning a vacant plot who knew Swearingen's whereabouts.

She found him in Eastaboga, Ala., where the retired military man is now employed as a civil service electronics technician. Swear-

ingen had just returned a few days before that call from an extended stay in Europe.

"Timing is everything. If I had called a few days earlier, he wouldn't have been there," Alexander said, flashing a smile at her brother. "I think someone was watching over us."

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