

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

On being a thread between two lives

Once upon a time I met a sharp, handsome man at Knox College — named Charlie — who was a good friend and married an equally lovely friend of mine. After we graduated from college, we two couples lived in the Chicago area, played bridge together and visited each other often. Eight years later we moved to Rockford but we still kept in touch. Later they became the Godparents of our third child.

In 1971, we moved to Galesburg. The transition of couples meeting and marrying in the 1950s, through the turbulent and changing times of the 60s and 70s was too much for both couples and we were both divorced by 1975. However, when we moved to Galesburg we met another couple, mainly through playing tennis.

For years I would say to my Knox friend Charlie, "You know, we have a friend in Galesburg who looks and acts so much like you, it's almost creepy." We would just laugh it off, and at the same time I would say to our Galesburg friend, Craig, "Our friend in Oak Park is so like you, it's amazing."

So both men heard about each other for about five years. Then in 1976 Craig called me and asked, "Caroline, are you sitting down?" I sat. He went on, "You know how my sister has been digging around to find my birth parents — and you know that guy you have been talking about all these

years? Well, I think he's my brother."

I just shrieked. Here are two of my dearest friends and it never occurred to me they were related. I remembered then that Charlie had been brought up by his aunt. "I've got brothers and sisters and I'm calling them tonight, would you like to come over?" Craig asked. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

My oldest daughter, who is adopted, and I went over to Craig's house that night and went on the wild ride of his calling his siblings and finding out they all knew the whereabouts of each other, except for Craig, whom they had not seen since he was two years old, when he was adopted.

Craig's wife, Marcia, and I listened on another phone while Craig and Charlie talked to each other, and their mannerisms and voice inflections were almost identical. No, they were identical. Of course, the brothers, unknown to each other, had both lived in Galesburg for four years while Charlie was a student at Knox College.

Some months later Charlie visited Craig and Marcia in Galesburg and we all went to Harbor Lights for dinner and dancing; it was an unreal experience. I have kept in touch with Charlie and his ex-wife all these years and my husband of 20 years and I have gone to their children's weddings.

Fast forward to September, 2000, when my son was married and Charlie, the



Charlie Ramis and Craig Johnson, September 2000.

Godfather, and Craig and Marcia sat together in a little church in North Henderson, Ill. At one point at the reception I found myself standing with Charlie, Craig, Charlie's ex-wife and her husband and my ex-husband, father of the bridegroom. It was a wonderful collection of old friends.

But what a miracle it is to have such dear

friends, Craig and Charlie, whom I happened to meet in totally different places and times in my life's travels, turn out to be brothers. It still gives me the chills.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net.