THE 5 STAGES OF REUNION

From the book "Birthright: A Guide to Search and Reunion"
by Jean A. Strauss, published by Penguin USA

1.) FANTASY: This begins at a very young age for the adoptee. Fantasies are hard to avoid when there's so little info to go on; some are positive, some negative. Fantasies are not limited to the adoptee; bmoms have them. Conscious awareness of fantasies are limited and may not surface until long after reunion is underway. Key: Fantasies are forever changed and altered by the realities of stage #2....First Encounters.

2.) FIRST ENCOUNTERS: Every encounter is different; most are civil; it's a highly charged time of massive amounts of shared information; questions are finally answered; people ride on a euphoric high for days or weeks or months; but after all the questions are answered, then what? Who are we to each other? Where do we go from here? How do I incorporate you into my life? The third phase of the reunion begins with these questions.

3.) THE MORNING AFTER: First encounters can be super intimate, but when everything settles down, bfamily members can find themselves feeling as if they've just slept with a total stranger. In the roller coaster ride analogy, this is the *big drop down* and is unexpected. Bfamily members are blood relations, but socially and experientially strangers to each other. Differences are discovered and magnified (backgrounds, memories, values, religions, beliefs, etc.). This stage can have varying lengths depending on the individuals involved. It's a time of examining expectations and struggling with defining the new relationships being formed. Feelings are confusing, complicated and surprising. These emotions can escalate and become overwhelming and paralyzing. When this happens, people often put up walls and back away. This begins stage four: Limbo.

4.) LIMBO: It's one side who pulls away, leaving the other side to "tread on eggs" wondering what's happening; adoptee or bmom can step back, but it's rare for both to want distance; many, many issues are at the forefront. Key: When a person chooses limbo, what is really going on? Processing. Person needs time to sort out new emotions, work through the past, decide what he/she wants to have happen, set boundaries and define the relationship. Making demands on the person choosing limbo for a greater, closer relationship may only serve to widen the gap between adoptee and bmom.

5.) RECONCILIATION: Final stage without a definitive starting point; can start years after the first encounter; this is a solitary experience. Bmom and adoptee confront issues, deal with losses, and move on. Decisions are made about how the new person will be assimilated; choice may be made to have an ongoing relationship or continue on alone. Problems arise when the two sides choose different paths. This phase is continual and includes setting goals.

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