



## The Goodbye Baby: Adoptee Diaries

*Elaine Pinkerton*

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Anyone who was adopted or who has adopted a child will find The Goodbye Baby a comforting and inspiring read. It takes one on a journey through the thorny issues of adoption, a search for healing, and an inspiring finale.

## **The Goodbye Baby: Adoptee Diaries Details**

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Author : Elaine Pinkerton

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### **Christy says**

I thought this was an interesting look at history, both the personal story of an individual and the occasional references to public events.

I wrote a blog post about it, trying to look at the messages it holds.

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### **Luanne Castle says**

After I finished reading this marvelous book, I had an opportunity to interview the author for my blog dontwlookalike.com.

I found it difficult to put down Elaine Pinkerton's published diary The Goodbye Baby once I began reading. At first, I was caught up in the mind of an adolescent girl who is both intelligent and a little clueless about herself. Ultimately, I was drawn into the struggles of the woman the girl had become.

The book's subtitle is A Diary about Adoption, and while only a tiny proportion of the entries actually mention adoption issues, clearly Elaine's life had been greatly shaped by the events of her adoption which occurred at the age of five. Eventually, Elaine re-read her diary, and by doing so was able to begin a healing process from the "bruises of adoption."

Today Elaine is a very self-aware, spiritual, and quite "centered" woman. Sharing her diaries with the world is a generous and courageous act. As an adoptive mother, I found them to be eye-opening.

Like any good reading, Elaine's book left me with a few questions, so I asked the author herself and she was kind enough to respond.

**Q:** When you were writing your diary as a teen, did you have any fantasies about the purpose of your diary or what would happen to it? I noticed that years after you began your diary, you bought yourself a copy of Anne Frank's diary. After you read it, did you feel it altered your own diary writing in any way?

**A:** Never in my wildest imaginings did I think that my diaries would be re-visited. They were written just for my own release and comfort, not for posterity. It never occurred to me that anything would happen to the little books in which I faithfully recorded daily thoughts and activities. When I read Anne Frank's diary, I entered into her world. As I recall, after reading The Diary of Anne Frank, I regarded my own diary-writing as a more important activity.

**Q:** You call a negative state you have experienced "Edgar." Is it depression or is it something else? If so, how is it different? If it's depression, why do you call it by a name and not by the clinical term?

**A:** The reason I've labeled my depression "Edgar" and not just "depression" ...one of my literary heroes and spiritual leaders, the late Hugh Prather, called his own sadness and doubt "Edgar." In lectures, of which I attended many, Prather would describe waking up each morning and finding that his nemesis, a depression he referred to as "Edgar," was right there on the pillow, teeth bared and ready to gnaw away at heart and soul. Prather spoke of beating "Edgar" back into his cage and locking him up.

**Q:** You seem to have been quite "boy crazy" as a teen. On March 6, 1962, you recorded that you were dating 16 boys. Do you feel your adoption played into that in any way?

**A:** It was hard, as I reviewed the old diaries, to read about that period of my life. I absolutely cringe at how boy crazy I was. The obsessiveness came from my hunger for love and acceptance. Despite the evidence that my adoptive parents loved me, I felt that I was a disappointment to them. And of course I knew that my birthmother didn't love me, so I was "looking for love in all the wrong places." I was trying in vain to prove

that I was worthy of love. Instead of love, I went for popularity. And it was never enough.

Q: Later in the book, I was saddened to watch the old Elaine hanging on for Jack and then hanging on for Sam (even when she very articulately conveyed why Sam was bad for her). I have been studying Pia Mellody's work on "love addiction" and have become convinced that therapists who work with people who were adopted should have much knowledge about this subject in their "therapy toolboxes." I also noticed that you read Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much*. Do you feel that love addiction was a component in your relationships with men and if so, from today's perspective, how did you break free from its grip?

A: *Women Who Love Too Much*: I felt that book could have been written by me, or even about me. The paradigm in my dating life was that the nice suitors, and there were some, had to be losers. Otherwise, why would they be interested in me? As Groucho Marx commented, "I wouldn't want to belong to a club that would have me for a member!" I went for the men who did NOT place me on a pedestal or who ultimately did not treat me at all well. It was yet another manifestation of adoption-induced low self-esteem. Breaking free from this form of love addiction took years of therapy and a lot of spiritual development. I studied and practiced Buddhism for a period, joined an Episcopalian church and attended faithfully. I prayed to overcome my self-punishing thought patterns. Slowly, imperceptibly, in small increments, I became more mentally healthy.

Q: Did you revise the diary (other than eliminating passages) or change names? If so, why?

A: The diary is not revised other than changing names. I chose passages carefully, taking several years to prune out day entries that shed little light on my adoption perceptions. The everyday material is sometimes shortened (leaving out the entire account of a day) but not rewritten. A few names were changed to protect the privacy of my ex-husband and my children. The "bad boyfriends" (long-term adult relationships) names have been changed. The ex-husband's and deceased second husband's names are changed. Names from the distant past, e.g. adolescent friends, were kept the same.

Q: Was your high school drinking typical of the era? Was it related to your adoption?

A: I was not alone in my excessive drinking, as my girlfriends were equally over the top. I was not even the worst. We lived in a university town and UVA was known as a "party college." The college social life, which we took part in, was definitely an influence. In the style of "Mad Men," everybody seemed to consume large amounts of liquor. Not my adoptive parents, however. I knew that they did not approve of my drinking and this made me even more convinced that I was a disappointment to them.

Q: Did it help you (as an adoptee) to have a bio brother growing up with you? Did it make it more difficult in any way?

A: My brother was the favorite of our adoptive parents, or so I thought. We were four years apart and I had very little to do with him. If anything, having my bio brother as part of the "new" family made it more difficult.

Q: I want to know more about the meeting with your birth father. Is there anything else you can add about this experience?

A: I've written about a much-later meeting in my recent blog post "The Dad I Scarcely Knew," though this was after the reunion described in my book. As far as the trip to California in my diary, I was very conflicted. On the one hand, it was remarkably generous and "progressive" (for the times) of my adoptive parents to authorize such a trip. It was my first time in an airplane, going from Virginia to California. On the other hand, I felt that Giovanni was beneath me socially. From his Navy days, he had a tattoo on his forearm and that seemed like a label for "low class." Virginia was a very snobbish place, after all. My feeling about "the birthparents" all along had been that they were beneath my adoptive parents economically, culturally and socially. Whether this was conveyed from my adoptive mom and dad or was just something I invented is hard to say. At any rate, I felt awkward and out of place during my entire California visit.

Q: You mention at one point after meeting with Velma, your birthmother, that you believed that she didn't approve of you. I was surprised to hear this because even with your personal problems you sounded like a person a mother would take great pride in. Why did you feel that way? After I learned that your long view backwards was that Velma suffered from mostly untreated mental illness, I wondered if it was difficult to

read her because of her own instability.

A: Strange as it may sound, my birthmother seemed resentful of my apparent success. The first time she came to my home to visit me, I had just published Santa Fe on Foot. I took her along as I arranged book signings and celebrated the book's debut. She felt left out and complained that I was "too busy" to meet my half sister. She completely did not understand my joy at the book's publication, instead feeling that the spotlight should have been on her, not my literary success. I believe that Velma's instability was indeed the obstacle to my understanding her or her accepting me.

Q: At the end you mention that you will be meeting your half sister. Did you meet her? Have you written about this meeting? Are you still in contact with her?

A: Meeting my half sister is still on my "to do" list. I want to make sure that she wants to meet me, as if might be as unsettling as my interactions with Velma. I'm awaiting some kind of sign from her that she would like to meet. Right now there is a lot going on with my own family, and I am focussing on trying to help with some domestic situations. I've decided to help bring about a meeting with my half sister if she shows any signs of wanting that. My half sister said, about our mother, that I "was the lucky one," as she was sent to a detention home as a teenager. She also told me that Velma tried to give her (my half sister) up for adoption. I gather that she did not have an easy growing up. If and when the time is right, I would be very open to meeting. The situation is still a work-in-progress.

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### **SALLY WHITE says**

Thank you Goodreads for sending me this book. This is a heartfelt book based on true facts. Although sad and difficult to read at times, the author really gets over what an awful childhood she had. I'm sure that people who have been adopted will be able to relate to the journey the book takes you through

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### **Darlene Otet says**

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. This book was mostly excerpts from a lifetime of diaries, and was quite enjoyable to read. A lifetime of thoughts and memories. It felt at times that I was missing something, as the excerpts would skip periods of time. At other times it felt quite repetitive. This is due to the repetitiveness of her life, and she wanted to show that she continued to do the same things over and over again during her childhood and adult life. I think everyone would benefit from being able to read memories of their entire life, and this is what this book was like. It was a different style of book to read, and quite enjoyable.

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