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Ruling opens up doors to past

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LITTLETON - It's something many of us may take for granted, knowing your medical history or being able to go and get a copy of your birth certificate.

But many adopted Coloradans whose adoption records are sealed don't have access to this information that could be life changing, even life-saving.

A Colorado Court of Appeals decision made in April will change this reality for thousands.

According to the decision, people whose adoptions were finalized between July 1951 and July 1967 can find out the names of their birth parents and have access to all court records and papers regarding their adoption.

Littleton's Deborah Bort is among those who will benefit from this ruling.

At 6 weeks old, Bort was adopted. During the 47 years since, she's known nothing about her birth

parents.

"I have a little blurb on my records that just said that both my parents were healthy, no known anything," Bort said.

Bort has spent a lot of time trying to get more than just the handful of adoption papers her parents saved. It's more than just curiosity. She and her youngest son Cody have osteogenesis imperfecta, which is caused by an error called a mutation on a gene that affects the body's production of the collagen found in bones, and other tissues. It is not caused by too little calcium or poor nutrition. Bort wonders whether her adoption documents would reveal anything else.

"This is huge for me because now I know that I have access to my records and I can find out if there is any medical history there for me and for my children and for their children," she said.

In recent years, some of this information has been available through court-appointed third parties, but adoptees like Bort had to pay for the service.

This ruling, supporters say, makes the process a lot easier.

"We're the product of two streams of love, one from adoptive families and one from birth families. We need to know both," said Richard Uhrlaub, co-director of Adoptee in Search/Colorado's Triad Connection. "For people during that time period, it was a different age, adoptions weren't open like they are now. Some people weren't told they were adopted, some people were given records that had a birth parent name but they were lost or perhaps their adoptive parents didn't give that to them. This is very significant both in terms of family connection and in terms of recognition of adoptees as adults."

In Colorado, some have made legal arguments that adoption records should not be unsealed because that violates the privacy of the birth parents and siblings.

The courts have historically rejected those arguments. Uhrlaub said people affected by the appeals court decision can go to the county where their adoptions were finalized to get those records.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment keeps the birth certificates. A spokeswoman tells 9NEWS they're working on a specific procedure for adoptees to apply for their birth certificates.

Since 1999, adoption records in Colorado have been open. State law says adoptions that happened between 1967 and 1999 remain sealed unless the adoptee works with a court-appointed third party or gets a court order to have them opened.

Bort said she was excited to learn about her past.

"I have wanted to know for so long and it's not that I want to know who my parents are, I just want the medical history," she said.

To learn more, go to <http://www.geocities.com/aisdenve/> or call the Adoptees in Search/Triad Connection Help Line at 303-232-6302.

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