

# Reunited after a separation of 27 years

by Helen Chase  
for the Tundra Times

After 27 years, two siblings who were separated by a forced adoption and who had lost touch with each other were reunited in Anchorage.

In January, the *Tundra Times* ran the story of Athabascan Cliff Gray who, along with five siblings, was taken unexpectedly from his home by people Gray believed were from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Only a 4-year-old at the time, Gray and his younger sister Alberta, more fondly known as "Bertie," were adopted by a non-Native couple who moved out of Alaska soon after the adoption proceedings.

After a life filled with child abuse, institutions, drug abuse and alcoholism, Gray finally made his way back to Alaska and a large family who never gave up hope of finding him. In his younger years after he was adopted, Gray not only did not know anything about his family, he was unaware he was an Alaska Native.

Gray was institutionalized in a reform school when he was 12 years old and was released five years later at the age of 17. During this time he lost contact with his sister.

Now, after a search that lasted 27 years, Gray finally found his sister Alberta Hammond.

The night Hammond was to arrive at Anchorage International Airport recently, Gray anxiously waited for the plane with his family at his side.

Although Gray said he felt a great sense of relief, accompanied by a sense of completion now that the search for his sister has ended, he admitted he had some fears.

"This is kind of scary. I've been worried we won't recognize each other."

As the wait grew longer — the flight was delayed — Gray reflected on the changes his life has undergone since his story was first published almost a



*Alberta Hammond of Cardington, Ohio, said she never gave up hope that her brother Cliff Gray would find her someday*

year ago.

After working at Cook Inlet Housing Authority for a year and a half as a maintenance supervisor, Gray and his wife started their own construction company in July.

"We're self-employed carpenters," said Gray, "and it's going great. We have a better understanding of each other after working together. I can say our relationship has really blossomed."

Although the Grays are between foster children right now, they are leaving the option for future placements open. Their baby boy, Aaron, just 10 months old, has brought them a lot of joy.

"I have reached a point in my life where I feel a real contentment," said

Gray. "A family destroyed 30 years ago is now healing and coming back together again."

Besides the pure joy of finding a lost sister after 27 years, Gray explained that the timing of the reunion holds special importance for his family. An older sister has recently been hospitalized and diagnosed as having a serious illness.

"The two sisters will have the chance to see each other and talk. My family is very happy," said Gray.

After a 45-minute delay, the plane lands. Gray and his family wait nervously as one passenger after another disembarks. Gray worries Hammond

is not on the flight. Finally she emerges, and the recognition is immediate.

When Gray first contacted Hammond a month ago at her home in Cardington, Ohio, she cried.

"Don't ever leave me again, Cliff," she told him. And she said she had never given up hope that eventually he would find her.

"We were so young and innocent as children," said Gray. "We were all we had. So much has happened since then."

*Editor's note: Helen Chase is the public relations specialist for the Cook Inlet Tribal Council.*