

Quest for truth

Search for birth mother drives one-woman show

THE BICKFORD THEATRE



JENNIFER BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Alison Larkin bases her one-woman show, "The English American," on her search for her birth mother.

NEW JERSEY STAGE

The English American

Where: Bickford Theatre, Morris Museum, 6 Normandy Heights Road, Morris Township

When: Saturday at 8 p.m.

How much: \$25 (\$20 seniors, \$15 students). Call (973) 971-3706 or visit www.morrismuseum.edu

BY PETER FILICHA
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

People hate it when their luggage takes forever to arrive on the airport carousel.

For Alison Larkin, the wait that day in 1994 was particularly unnerving. She wasn't worried that the airline had lost her suitcases. She just wanted to get through JFK's baggage claim to see what she'd been hungering for almost all of her 25 years.

Her mother.

Larkin's difficulties in finding her birth mother is one of the subjects of her one-woman show, "The English American." She'll perform it at the Bickford Theatre in Morris Township on Saturday night.

The oxymoron in the title comes from Larkin's birth in Washington, D.C., and adoption by a family who took her to their English home when she was 6 weeks old. "They told me early on I'd been adopted," she says, in an upper-crust British accent.

The trim blonde claims she was never upset by the news. "I was ecstatic and delighted that I had been chosen," she says. "Nevertheless, as I got older, I wanted to know more."

Larkin could have called the show "The English American African" because she and her adopted family lived in Kenya from the time she was 2 until she was 10.

"Dad worked in international aid, making sure money went to the right people," she says. Still, he took time out to take his daughter to many movie musicals, so by the time 10-year-old Alison was sent to boarding school in England, she had an appreciation for performers and performing. "I played Professor Higgins in 'My Fair Lady,'" she says proudly, "in a production in my bathroom."

Did she get these qualities from her birth mother? Her biological father? What else did she need to know about herself?

Learning the truth wasn't easily accomplished. She began searching in 1991.

"I contacted the agency I came from, which would only give me 'non-identifying information,'" she says. "They actually told me my mother was 5-foot-2,

weighed 100 pounds and liked to write poetry. About my father, all they'd say is that he was 5-foot-10, an American, an excellent speaker and politically ambitious.

"Now I knew the truth," she says with a gleam in her eye. "I'm a Kennedy!"

Larkin tried other avenues, calling the results "maddening and hilarious. When I spoke at the American Adoption Congress last year, I entitled my talk, 'Why My Adoption Was a Laughing Matter.'"

She abandoned the quest, but the questions wouldn't go away. Three years later, she again contacted the adoption agency. "What's amazing," she says, "is that the woman who answered the phone remembered me — and said that she'd once heard from my mother, who was open to contact."

But legalities prevented Larkin from getting the phone number. Her mother, after all, could have changed her mind in the time that had passed.

Rather than wait for her birth mother to make a second call, Larkin did more research, and discovered that Nevada laws were more lenient, and would facilitate contact.

That brings us to the day when Larkin flew from London to New York to meet her mother. How did it go?

"Well, that's what the show's about, too," she says pleasantly. "I'll tell you this, though: She told me some medical information that was vital to my having a baby. I now have two, but my doctors told me if I didn't discover what I'd learned, I wouldn't have two children. It's just another reason why adopted children just have to know the truth about themselves."

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