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Continued: Emily Saunders finds the missing piece of her puzzle

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Feeling rejected and numb, Emily went home to her apartment she shares with her two cats in St. Paul, accompanied by her mother. Two weeks later, she was starting to come to terms with the news.

As a little girl, she loved to work on jigsaw puzzles with her father.

"She said, 'Mom, it's like I'm doing a jigsaw and there's this one missing piece and I've been shoving all kinds of crud into that missing hole and it never fit. Now, my sister is like the missing piece that does fit,'" Jackie Saunders said.

They started searching for Eunjin and her mother.

In South Korea, Eunjin was getting the same stunning news -- that she had a twin sister somewhere. Her mother had become seriously ill and, based on what Jackie Saunders has learned so far, that prompted her to reveal the secret.

Eunjin and her mother contacted the adoption agency in September and gave the workers their contact information in the hope of finding Emily.

Soon, Emily had two phone numbers in hand -- one for Eunjin's college dorm, the other for her birth mother's home.

Emily sat on the edge of her bed inside her apartment, banging the phone on her knee a few times before dialing the long string of numbers for Eunjin.

"It rang about three times," Emily recalled. Then a voice, deeper than her own, answered. "She said, 'yobo sayo,'" which Koreans greet each other with on the phone.

"Then, I said something like: 'Hi, I'm your twin sister. I wanted to meet you, talk to you, see what you sounded like. I can't believe it's you.' Then I just started to bawl!"

Eunjin, who speaks only a few English words, gasped loudly. "Are you OK? Are you OK?" she asked Emily over and over again.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," Emily told her.

They hung up and she called her birth mom. The conversation was equally brief because they couldn't understand one another.

But later, they found a translator to help. "She told me she's never stopped thinking of me for 22 years," Emily said, noting that in South Korean custom, newborns are considered 1 year old. The

twins' birth mom also told Emily: "Sarang hamnida." It means, "I love you."

Exchanging photos

Since Emily and Eunjin found each other, they've been e-mailing each other and calling. They've also exchanged photos, current and baby ones.

A look at the pictures reveals strikingly different personalities. Emily says they don't know, without doing a blood test, whether they're fraternal or identical twins.

"The first thing I wanted to do when I saw her picture was give her contacts and put makeup on her," she said. And when Emily, who swears a lot, told Eunjin she was learning Korean swear words, her sister gasped and told her those weren't nice words.

While Eunjin is in college studying to be a dental hygienist, Emily said she was laid off from a job and is considering applying to Metropolitan State University or St. Paul College to study law enforcement.

Despite their differences, the language barrier and thousands of miles, they share a bond.

"No person can get closer to a person than someone they were in the womb with for nine months," Emily explained. In her wallet, she carries a copy of the only page of her birth papers that mentions Eunjin.

On Thursday, she and her mother will fly to South Korea. They haven't planned everything they will do, but the main thing both sisters want is to be together again.

Jackie Saunders says she is excited, too, but also cautious about building up expectations.


"I've tried to develop a future version of 'it is what it is,'" she said. "I get up in the morning and I almost chant it: 'It will be what it will be.'"

Both mother and daughter are hoping that the missing piece will help Emily put her past struggles behind her. "It won't fix her life but it will lay a foundation to close out the hardest chapters," Jackie Saunders said.

Added Emily: "I believe it will fill some of the emptiness that I've felt. Always like something was missing. We didn't get the chance to grow up together. There were 21 years we missed out on. I am looking forward to having contact with her. She said maybe someday she might want to live here."

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