

Susan Bennett
Secretary & Editor of The Beacon

Brian Stanton and "BLANK"

We are very pleased to present Brian's responses from a recent interview in which he shared about himself and how "BLANK" made it to the stage. Enjoy!

I've always been fascinated with one-person shows. While I was at CalArts for grad school, I had a conversation with a director friend about my interest in doing a one-person show. She asked me what my story was, and I quickly said that I didn't have a story. She bounced back with, "Well, maybe that's your story." Since then, I've been obsessed with identity. Why do I think I don't have a story? Who are we? How do we define ourselves? Why do we define ourselves? What does it all mean?

Well, a few months after that conversation, my mother gave me my original birth certificate and ultimately helped me get in touch with my birth mother. Over the span of 3 short months I was flooded with information about my birth mother and the truth of my birth. I began keeping a journal during that time to help me through the process, as it was an emotional roller coaster to say the least.

Less than a year after I reunited with my birth mother, one of my CalArts professors, who knew I was adopted, invited me to see a one-woman show that he was directing. The play was called *The English American* by Alison Larkin. I was immediately inspired by Alison. Here is a talented woman creating her own work, exploring an issue that touches so many people, and doing what she loves. I felt she was entertaining as well as doing something important. I wanted to do what she was doing, but with my own spin of course!

A few years later, I realized that my obsession with identity was linked with the fact that I'm an adoptee. ***Do genes have anything to do with who I am? Is it only my environment that defines me? I have 2 birth certificates! The slot by the "Name" space on my OBC is blank! Who is that person that fills in the blank? I'm not who I thought I was!!*** I finally whipped out that journal I kept and began writing what would soon be "BLANK."

The show opened in Hollywood at The Lounge Theatre on Friday, April 16, 2010 and ran for 8 weeks performing twice a week. Since then, I performed BLANK in Dallas for a couple weekends at the Dallas Hub Theatre for the Dallas/Ft. Worth Fringe Festival and in Burbank, CA for the Missing Piece Theatre's "A Celebration of the Solo Artist." I'm excited to have the opportunity to perform at the upcoming CUB Retreat in Carlsbad, CA on Friday, October 15th and in New York City on Thursday, November 11th at Theatre ROW for the United Solo Theatre Festival.

I portray 12 characters including myself. I basically go on a non-linear journey of self-discovery speaking to family members, former teachers, and a priest. All are based on real people who mean a lot to me and have had a lasting effect on my life. My mother plays a big role as she was the one who gave me my original birth certificate and encouraged me to get in touch with my birth mother. Even though some liberties were taken, believe me that the most absurd sounding lines were actually said!

Honestly, the most difficult character I portray is myself. I had a lot of fun playing all the other characters because they mean a lot to me, and I know them so well. It's actually easier to put on a mask and play a character than to play yourself. And you can't really play yourself. You have to be yourself. And we all know how difficult that can be! Especially in a play where I'm trying to discover who I really am, being myself is a daunting task.

My adoptive parents have seen the play along with my brother, sister, and two aunts. It was a very fun night to do the show! Not only do they know the majority of the characters, my father and mother are two of the characters.

My birth mother and her husband saw the show. Very nerve-wracking, for both of us!! She was even frightened by the play's graphic image.

She said to her husband, ***"Oh my God, he doesn't have a face! What have I done to him?!"***

Thankfully, it turned out that she loved it! After wards, she actually introduced herself to everyone in the lobby as my birth mother. Those who have seen the play understand how brave that was of her. Her husband really enjoyed it as well. They were both so relieved that the show was funny. They were expecting a very deep, dark play, so they were thrilled that I balanced the serious moments with some humor. I really think the play helped us become even closer.

All of the birth moms who have seen the show have been very supportive and enthusiastic. They have been very kind to me personally as well, and I'm very grateful to them. I have confided in a few. Sarah Burns and Karen Vedder have helped me a lot with the show and introduced me to the world of adoption organizations and support groups. Sarah had actually given me a couple editions of The Decree. One birth mother who saw the show mentioned that the shame a lot of birth mothers feel is rarely ever discussed and is often suppressed. She said somehow I was able to alleviate her shame.

It's been great talking with adoptees as well because a whole new world of adoption support and political groups has been revealed to me. Last year at this time, I didn't know anything about AAC, nor did I know that original birth certificates were so controversial. I've met some adoptees who said that they have thought and said exactly the same things that I say in my play. And I have met other adoptees who said they have no interest at all in getting in touch with their birth mother. I've learned that there are so many stories, experiences, emotions, and beliefs out there; and that my story is a tiny sliver in the vast world of adoption.

My wife has been my rock through this entire process. She was there for me as my girlfriend when I received the letter from my birth mom, and I cried on her shoulder for 24 straight hours. I'm sure that she relives those moments with me as she watches the show. Now she's here for me as my wife every day of my life. I couldn't have done any of this without her. My daughters have not seen the show, they are 8 and 6 years old. ***((Mini Spoiler Alert!!))*** They are so young, and I'd rather not explain the horrific circumstance of my birth yet.

I've been given a loving family, I've had opportunities, and I've had a positive reunion with my birth mother. Please allow me to get a little sappy: the lotus flower grows beautifully out of swampy, ugly mud stretching above any water. I feel my life is like that lotus.

I look forward to seeing you at a show!
-Brian Stanton