

Noreen's phone calls, 1999

They told me everything the day I left the hospital; they spread the papers out in front of me and I signed, but I never read them. I pretty much knew what they said. They explained the rules, about how I would never see her again, how I would never know who got her. Just like when it happened, I did what I was told. See, I was never a complainer; I was the kind that even if I fell down and hurt myself, I'd get right back up and keep walking. He lived on my block, we went out a few times; he seemed ok. We went to a movie and had ice cream after, but when we cut through the alley on the way home, he pushed me up against the back of a building. I saw him a lot on the street after that but I never talked to him. And I never told what happened, even when I knew I was pregnant. I dropped out of school and moved into the Home when it started to show. We sang hymns after supper every night, played cards every afternoon; we did a lot of laundry. They advised us to give them away; there wasn't much talk about taking care of babies. They always said the babies would be better off with their new parents; their new parents would give them good homes, send them to college. Once I was out of there, I hardly ever thought about it. That's the truth. I didn't cry when I saw babies, or wonder what she looked like; it was gone from me, like she was gone from me. It was erased, wiped out of my mind for years. Then one day I saw in the newspaper about some people who were adopted searching for their birth mothers. I'd never heard the expression before – *birth mother*. I started to cry. Picture this, I'm on the train, I don't have any Kleenex or anything, and I can't stop crying. I mean, *sobbing*. I got off before my stop, I was so embarrassed. Two days later, like I was hypnotized, I picked up the phone book, found the agency that handled the adoption, and called. While I was picking out the numbers on the phone pad, my head started buzzing – literally buzzing; I could hear this buzz behind my eyes. It stopped the second they answered. The second they picked up the phone, there was a clear silence, like a sheet of window glass, clear silence hanging in my head where the buzzing had been. Then the person on the other end said *Hello. Hello?* and I started to talk. I told them if she ever came looking, I wanted to be found. I gave them my home number and address, my number and address at the gallery, my email and cell phone – I would have given driving directions, the buses and trains that stop near me, or my social security number and my blood type – but they

already had that. I didn't search on my own, hire a detective like some do. I only wanted to make myself available; in case she ever wanted to know, she could find me. And what they did was, they sent her a letter, saying if she wanted to meet her birth mother, they had the information. I didn't know it could work that way, but that's what happened. After a long time (she thought about it nearly a year) she called me. And when the phone rang – I swear to god this is true – when the phone rang, I knew before I picked it up that it was her.