Roots Music
Violinist Ann Ourada Strubler didn’t know where her talent came from, until she met her birth parents

When Ann Ourada Strubler took up the violin at age five, her parents knew she was a born musician. The Ouradas had adopted Ann at ten days old, and they encouraged their daughter, now a violinist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, to attend the Interlochen Arts Academy and later the New England Conservatory of Music. They often wondered about the source of her natural talent.

The answer emerged during Strubler’s search for her birth parents. When she met her birth father at age fifty-four, she learned he was a jazz musician — and that he had lived just five blocks away while Strubler (CFA’78) was studying for a master’s degree in violin performance at BU.

Strubler’s adoptive parents had always been open with her about being adopted, and when her mother died in 1981, she felt called to become an adoption advocate. After speaking at a fundraiser for a local crisis pregnancy center, she says, she had an encounter that eventually spurred her to do more.

“A young woman came up after and said, ‘I gave up a baby daughter at seventeen, and while I always feel I did the right thing, I still worry that she would resent what I did,’” Strubler recalls. “I was taken aback. I thought, boy, would my own mother, if she’s still alive, think that I hate or resent her?”

In 1986, Strubler contacted the agency that had managed her adoption. She was shocked, she says, when she learned that her birth mother, Suzanne Fisch, who was living in California, was eager to hear from her as well. Fisch sent along her family history, including one tidbit of particular interest: Strubler’s grandfather had been a professional musician and had even played violin with the Chicago Symphony for a year.

Despite her developing relationship with her mother, Strubler vacillated about contacting her birth father. Fisch had told her his name, Joseph DiCarlo, and his last known location — Boston, his hometown. Over the following two decades, Strubler made halfhearted attempts to track him down, to no avail.

In September 2006, as she and her husband were packing the family car to drive their oldest son, Mark, to school in Boston, she decided to try again. She grabbed a few pictures of DiCarlo that her mother had saved, and when the family arrived in town, she found his telephone number online. Strubler nervously made the call, and he agreed to meet at her hotel.

“As we walked into the lobby, I saw this massive man with his back to us, tinkering on the piano,” Strubler says. “I came up and said, ‘Joseph DiCarlo, I’m Ann.’ He just threw his arms around me and started weeping. He kept saying, ‘My daughtah, I found my daughtah,’ in his Boston accent.”

DiCarlo told her that he was also a professional musician, an upright bassist who had played in jazz ensembles over the years and composed big-band pieces. His brother had studied bass at Berklee College of Music — just like Strubler’s son. This May, Mark will graduate from Berklee, the family’s third generation of musicians. DiCarlo will be there to watch.

“It’s an amazing thing to consider, this whole argument of nature versus nurture,” Strubler says. “They’re both true, but nature has also given us a great legacy of music.”

Katie Koch (CAS’09, COM’09)

DOUG HUMES (LAW’80) of Bryn Mawr, Pa., has a solo law practice in an old mansion. He writes that he commutes by bike, works with clients he likes, runs in the neighborhood at lunch, writes articles for a community newspaper, is president of the Newtown Square Historical Preservation Society, is renovating the 18th-century Quaker meetinghouse that he attends, married the woman of his dreams last year, and sang the national an-