

## Dear LOIS... OUR ADOPTION JOURNEY

By Jeremy Behnke  
Journal Sports Editor

A woman with New Ulm ties is a co-author of the book "Dear Lois," which is a series of letters sent from her mother who adopted her to the woman who gave birth to her.

Amalie Bowling co-authored the book with Karen Schindwein, who adopted Bowling in January 1991 — one day after her birth. Bowling's birth mother, Lois Roiger, was from New Ulm and died from cancer in 2012.

Roiger was reunited with Bowling and Schindwein in 2012, and the book talks about Bowling's life in Wisconsin with her adoptive family. The book contains the letters written and pictures sent from Schindwein to Roiger about Bowling's life growing up. The book is available on amazon.com, Westbow-press.com or www.dearlois.org.

### An answer to their prayers

While the frustration of infertility certainly was a tough situation for Schindwein and her husband Tom that resulted in miscarriage, her journey soon forever changed thanks to a complete stranger who eventually led them to adopt Bowling.

Schindwein, who currently resides in Waukesha, Wisconsin, was introduced to Lois Roiger of New Ulm in 1991. Lois gave birth to Amalie and Schindwein adopted Amalie shortly after the birth.

While most adoptions tend to phase out the birth parents, the Schindweins wanted to share their experiences with Roiger, so every year they gathered pictures from the year that passed and Karen wrote a letter to Lois each year. That series of letters later turned into what is "Dear Lois."

The perspectives of the birth family, adoptive family, and adopted children take the reader on an emotional journey from the heartbreak of a couple facing infertility to the joy of family woven together.

Schindwein said that the concept of the book came together after her family met Roiger in 2012, shortly before cancer took her life.

"Over the years from the time she [Amalie] was born until she was 18, we had agreed to send her letters and pictures every year on her birthday," Schindwein said. "Then, three years ago, just before Lois died from cancer, we received a phone call from their family asking if [Amalie] could meet Lois before Lois had passed. When we did that, her family had brought out an album of the letters and pictures that we had sent over the years and they were very tattered and torn, some of them had tear stains on them and they were obviously read many times over."

"Her son and daughter told us that they had been a lifetime for her and they had been a very important family tradition every year,"

Schindwein said. "They sat around and read together and they were a part of the reason that Lois had felt she made a good decision to place Amalie for adoption."

After the meeting, Schindwein said that she and Bowling talked about the idea of putting together a book as a tribute to Lois and also to Schindwein's son Joe, who was also adopted. The mission of the book was to tell a positive story from all sides of the adoption.

"Many times in adoption publications, you hear one or two sides, but never all three sides; and if you do, they're not always positive," Schindwein said. "We wanted to tell a positive adoption story, because we've got a passion for adoption in our family."

Schindwein and Bowling also are releasing the book for a future non-profit organization called "Chosen," which will be an adoption educational ministry. The goal is to inform parents who choose to adopt and foster parents. Schindwein also hopes that there will someday be a large foster home that will service many foster children.

### The connection between the families

Amalie and Karen didn't spend a lot of time with Lois, but there was always a strong connection because of the letters. Karen has always appreciated her brief time with Lois, and she wanted to make sure that Amalie was still a part of Lois' life after the adoption.

"My husband and I were very blessed to be in the delivery room with her when she gave birth to [Amalie], so while we didn't know her for many hours, it was a very strong connection that she had with her," Schindwein said.

"While our letters were very one-sided, they were sent with a lot of emotion, and it was a connection that I always felt that I had with her. I always wanted her to know that Amalie was doing well, and I did the same with my son and his birth mom. Time-wise, we didn't spend a lot of time together, but there was always a real strong connection."

Although she sent many letters to Roiger over the years after the adoption, Schindwein said she met with Roiger only a couple of times. The letters were a way of telling Roiger how Amalie was doing and it allowed her to see her throughout the years so she wasn't completely missing from her life.

When Karen and Amalie reunited with Lois in November of 2012, it was a very emotional time for all. Amalie had recently married Jason in August of that



Submitted photos  
Amalie Bowling (left) co-authored the book, Dear Lois, with Karen Schindwein, who adopted Bowling in January 1991 one day after her birth.

year, yet the re-unionification was probably more emotional for Schindwein.

"It was very interesting. I'd say it was more emotional than her [Amalie's] wedding that she had just a couple of months before that," Schindwein said.

"Amalie and [her husband] Jason got married just a couple of months before that in August of 2012, and we re-united with Lois in November. For me, it was very emotional because when we left Lois in 1991, she handed Amalie to me and told us to have a good life with her and to love Amalie. We got to bring Amalie back to her and tell her that we had a wonderful life with her because of the choice that she made for our family."

As for Bowling, she didn't read the letters until prior to writing the book. But she said that it's neat to be able to look back at her life after reading the letters.

"It wasn't so much emotional for me looking back at the letters as it was a

realization how much of my first 18 years of my life was documented," Bowling said. "I had not read the letters prior to using them to write the book, so it was very interesting to see what my parents highlighted each year."

When other people read the letters and the book they get a snap shot of who I am as a person and many milestones I reached each year, like the time I got braces. It is neat because when I get to speak with someone after they have read the book, it is though they have known me my whole life. I get to connect on a different level with some people, which is very neat."

Bowling said she was initially shocked to hear about Lois wanting to meet and that she soon would be dying from cancer.

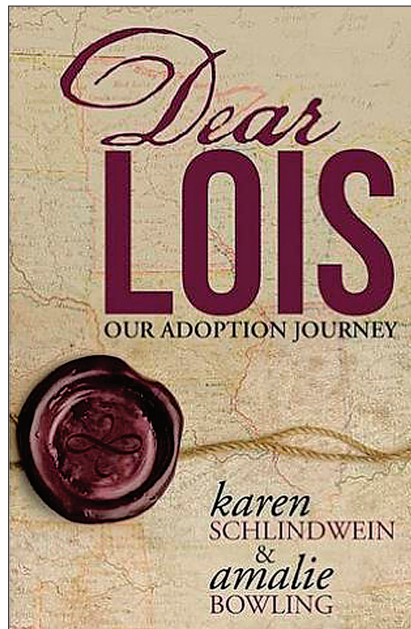
"When I met Lois, I was a newlywed 21-year old. I had gotten a call from my mom and dad one day letting me know that Lois was sick," Bowling said. "My birth brother, Bryan, had gotten a hold of a distant cousin of my dad's, a mutual friend, and he let us know that Lois was wanting to meet me. At first I was a little taken aback because one I had just got shocking news that the woman that birthed me into this world is passing away, and two, she requested to meet me. I did struggle with choosing

to meet Lois at first. I struggled because I had always viewed Lois as a heroine. I placed her on a shelf in my heart and mind as though to give her the respect she deserved. I was nervous to shatter that shelf and view I held of her, but the overwhelming desire to tell her "thank you" took over. I decided to meet her, and my birth siblings because I wanted to show her and express to her how grateful I was for the life she chose for me. Which is just what I did. I wrote her a letter that explained all of my feelings and gratitude (which is part of the book), and I read it to her while we were there. I am so glad I did choose to meet Lois, Bryan and Jenaya that day because my family and heart grew a little larger."

The two hope their new book will show readers that through Christ, all things are possible.

Karen and Amalie are planning on attending a book signing in New Ulm in February 2016 at the Public Library.

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Above: Bowling and Schindwein at a recent book signing.  
Left: An image of the cover of the book Dear Lois.