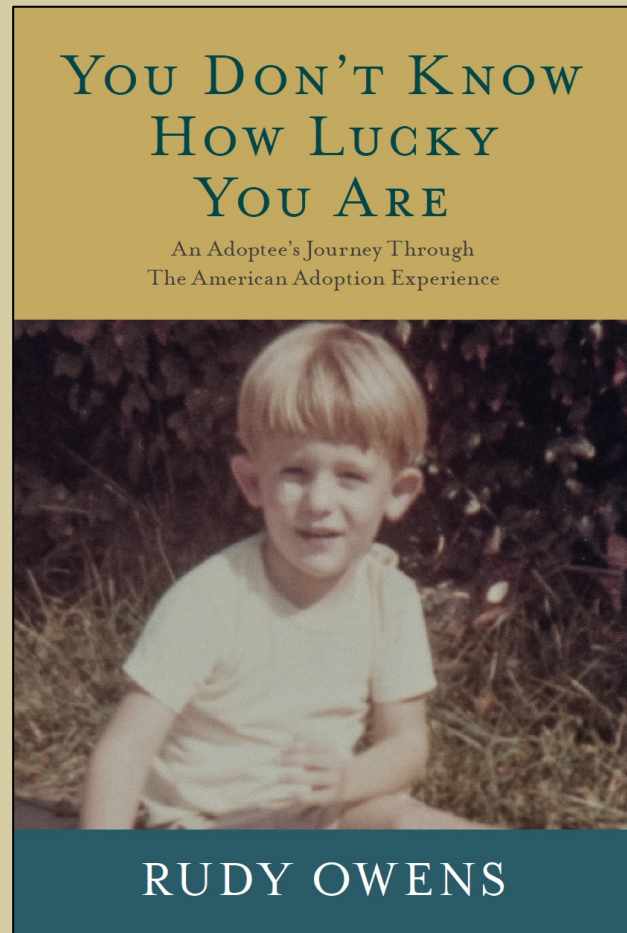


# Petitioning the Courts in Michigan for an Adult Adoptee's Original Birth Certificate



**By: Rudy Owens, MA, MPH**

Original Name:

**Scott Douglas Owens**

April/May 1965

Adopted Name:

**Martin Rudolf Brueggemann**

May 1965/August 2009

Legally changed name:

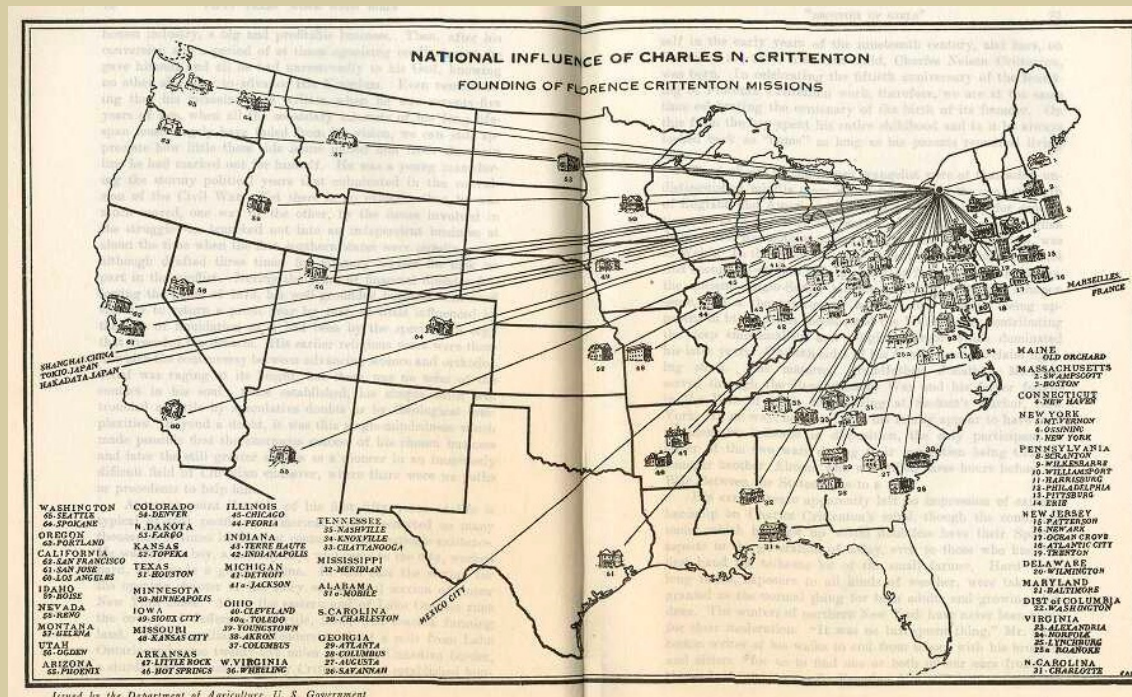
**Rudolf Scott-Douglas Owens**

August 2009/Present

# Rudy Owens: Product of a National System



Crittenton General Hospital, Detroit, Michigan (my birth place)





# One Person, Two Identities and Two Birth Certificates

**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH**

STATE FILE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

1. CHILD — NAME FIRST MIDDLE LAST  
Martin Rudolf Brueggemann

2. DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)  
2a \_\_\_\_\_ 2b n/a

3. SEX  
Male

4. THIS BIRTH — SINGLE, TWIN, TRIPLET, ETC. (SPECIFY)  
Single

5. IF NOT SINGLE BIRTH — BORN FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, ETC. (SPECIFY)  
4a \_\_\_\_\_

6. COUNTY OF BIRTH  
Wayne

7. CITY, VILLAGE OR TOWNSHIP OF BIRTH  
Detroit

8. INSIDE CITY LIMITS (SPECIFY YES OR NO)  
8c \_\_\_\_\_

9. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER  
9a \_\_\_\_\_

10. AGE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH  
10a 28

11. STATE OF BIRTH (IF NOT IN U.S.A. NAME COUNTRY)  
11a New Jersey

12. MOTHER — MAIDEN NAME FIRST MIDDLE LAST  
Massachusetts Suffolk Boston

13. RESIDENCE — STATE COUNTY CITY, VILLAGE OR TOWNSHIP  
Massachusetts Suffolk Boston

14. INSIDE CITY LIMITS (SPECIFY YES OR NO)  
14a \_\_\_\_\_

15. STREET AND NUMBER  
15a \_\_\_\_\_

16. FATHER — NAME FIRST MIDDLE LAST  
n/a

17. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER  
17a n/a

18. AGE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH  
18a 40

19. STATE OF BIRTH (IF NOT IN U.S.A. NAME COUNTRY)  
19a Ohio

20. RELATION TO CHILD  
Mother

21. DATE RECEIVED BY LOCAL REGISTRAR  
MONTH DAY YEAR

22. REGISTRAR — SIGNATURE  
Lucile Jones

I hereby certify that the above is a true and correct reproduction of the certificate on file in the Michigan Department of Public Health, Lansing, Michigan.

CERTIFIED BY:  
*George Van Amburg*  
MAY 29 1965  
George Van Amburg  
State Registrar

Notice the hospital name is missing in my amended birth certificate (left); the original certificate reveals facts hidden from the adoptee intentionally, including key facts about their place of birth (in my case Crittenton General Hospital).

**CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH**

BIRTH No. 121- \_\_\_\_\_

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Vital Records Section

Local File No. \_\_\_\_\_

1. PLACE OF BIRTH  
a. COUNTY WAYNE  
b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) DETROIT  
c. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION CRITTENTON HOSPITAL

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF MOTHER (Where does mother live?)  
a. STATE MICHIGAN  
b. COUNTY \_\_\_\_\_  
c. CITY OR VILLAGE \_\_\_\_\_  
d. Is birthplace within limits of a city or incorporated village? Yes ☐ No ☐

3. CHILD'S NAME  
a. (First) SCOTT  
b. (Middle) DOUGLASS  
c. (Last) OWENS

4. SEX MALE  
5a. THIS BIRTH Single ☒ Twin ☐ Triplet ☐  
5b. IF TWIN OR TRIPLET (State child born) 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd ☐  
6. DATE OF BIRTH (Month) (Day) (Year) 1965

7. FULL NAME  
a. (First) \_\_\_\_\_ b. (Middle) \_\_\_\_\_ c. (Last) \_\_\_\_\_  
8. COLOR OR RACE WHITE

9. AGE (At time of this birth) YEARS  
10. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country)  
11a. USUAL OCCUPATION  
11b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY

12. FULL MAIDEN NAME  
a. (First) \_\_\_\_\_ b. (Middle) \_\_\_\_\_ c. (Last) \_\_\_\_\_  
13. COLOR OR RACE WHITE

14. AGE (At time of this birth) YEARS  
15. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) MICHIGAN  
16. CHILDREN PREVIOUSLY BORN TO THIS MOTHER (Do NOT include this child)  
a. How many OTHER children were born alive but are now dead? 0  
b. How many OTHER children were born alive but are now living? 0  
c. How many children were stillborn (Born dead after 20 weeks pregnancy)? 0

17. INFORMANT'S NAME  
18a. SIGNATURE  
18b. ADDRESS Crittenton Gen Hospital 1555 Livestock Detroit 6, Michigan  
18c. DATE SIGNED  
19. DATE RECEIVED BY LOCAL REGISTRAR 5-13-65  
20. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE Lucile Jones

I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child who was born alive on the date stated above.

21. ATTENDANT AT BIRTH  
M.D. ☒ D.O. ☐ Midwife ☐ Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
22. DATE SIGNED

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct representation of the birth facts on file with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Vital Records. I further certify that this is a **SEALED RECORD** and can only be issued by court order.

Certified by: *Glenn Copeland*  
Glenn Copeland  
State Registrar

Date Issued: July 11, 2016  
AFS: \_\_\_\_\_

Original birth certificate issued upon my birth, and later adulterated when a court order forced its release

# In 2009 I Changed My Name and Received a Third Birth Certificate

**STATE OF MICHIGAN  
CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH**

Added

State File Number: [REDACTED] Date Filed: [REDACTED]

Child's Name: **Martin Rudolf Brueggemann**

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

Gender: **Male**

Child's Birthplace: **Detroit, Wayne County**

Mother's Name Before First Married: [REDACTED]

Mother's Birthplace: **New Jersey** Mother's Age: **28**

Father's Name: [REDACTED]

Father's Birthplace: **Ohio** Father's Age: **40**

New Name: Rudolf Scott-Douglas Owens, Established By: District of Anchorage, Alaska Superior Court, October 5, 2009.

I hereby certify that the above is a true and correct representation of the birth facts on file with the Division for Vital Records, Michigan Department of Community Health.

Certified by: *Glenn Copeland*  
Glenn Copeland  
State Registrar

Date Issued: [REDACTED]  
AFS: [REDACTED]

DO NOT ACCEPT IF THERE APPEARS TO BE ANY ALTERATIONS OR ERASURES OF THE FACTS LISTED ABOVE. IF THE THREE HEAT SENSITIVE IMAGES ON THE BACK DO NOT DISAPPEAR WHEN RUBBED OR PRESSED, OR IF YOU CANNOT VERIFY THE PRESENCE OF WATERMARKS IN THE PAPER BY HOLDING TO LIGHT.

This document provides false information concerning the “birth facts on file with the Division of Vital Records.” It contains lies.



# I Self-Identify as a Bastard

- Bastard is precise term defining a class of people, including in law; extensive public health/historical/sociological research documents this global experience (field of study is called “bastardy”).
- My experience in the court is a manifestation of my sociological and legal status as a bastard, and this fully informed my work and thinking in petitioning the court.

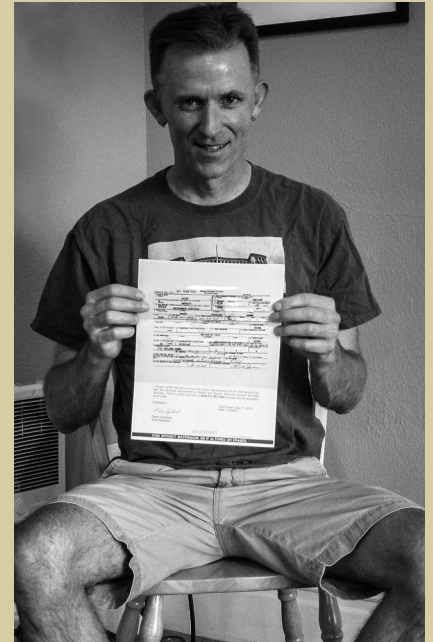


“Let me give you some advice, bastard: Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not.”

**Tyrion Lannister to the  
Bastard Jon Snow**  
*Game of Thrones, Season 1*

# Court Petitions Highlight Discrimination

- A court petition reflects the larger US adoption experience and its inherent injustices for millions of adoptees denied basic human and legal rights.
- The laws in Michigan requiring a court petition, and the way its laws and vital records systems function today, are intended to prevent most Michigan adoptees from getting their original birth documents—forever. The entire court process can only be seen through this lens.
- The entire process before arriving at the court and during a petition will not be rooted in equity or fairness for the adoptee; that inequity will likely never be acknowledged.



Rudy Owens, July 2016,  
holding a copy of his  
original birth certificate—  
this is the holy grail for  
adoptees who seek legal  
justice from states and  
institutions that hold their  
identity records.



# For Some Adoptees, Court Petitions Are Rooted in Decades of Justice Work

“It also comes down to a question of blatant discrimination — of civil and human rights being violated, Rosemary [Doud] says: ‘Your birth certificate is the bottom line in defining who you are ... everybody has a birth certificate, so why can't we get ours? It is inhuman.’”

Rosemary Doud, Adoptees in Search  
Chapin Wright, “Who Am I.”  
Washington Post, Feb. 26, 1978



Adoptee rights activists from 1978

# Why Did I Succeed?

I never accepted “no” for an answer, not once.

The document is and always has been mine as a birthright, and I always kept my focus on this in all of my work.

I adopted multiple strategies to wear down my adversaries, embarrass public officials, publicize the story, and force those in the systems to bend and also just give up.



I became the equivalent of the dreaded tsetse fly, one of the most fearsome and feared creatures in Africa. I become so unbearable, the system relented.



# Lessons Learned

**Few in Michigan's courts and no one in state government will help you.** Because neither the state's public health system/vital records office or the courts provide adoptees with basic assistance, I later created an FAQ to do the job both should be doing for adoptees, by law.

**The media may not be sympathetic to you if you contact them about your plight.** Always try and always contact them, however.

**This takes time.** You are running a marathon, not an 800-meter race. Stay focused on the end goal, always.

**Rely on yourself.** This is a personal journey. Most of us will do it alone.

# Why My Process Took Almost 30 Years

**Fall 1987:** After graduating college, I began a full-time search for records while working full-time (two jobs at once often). That search was successful, despite having my requests for my OBC and all records about my birth held by the state of Michigan and my successor to my adoption agency.

**April 1989:** After two years of searching, I met my birth mother and kin in Michigan. My maternal grandparents and kin accepted me as their kin. My birth mother signed consent form to release my birth records, and the state gave me most records, not my original birth certificate.

**1989-2014:** Life required attention. During this time I met my paternal kin and continued to navigate life with my adoptive family and maternal kin. In 2009 I also legally changed my name from Martin Rudolf Brueggemann to Rudolf Scott-Douglas Owens, combining my two family identities and names.

**September 2014:** In San Diego, I met my biological half-sister who acknowledged me as kin. I decided to write my memoir and complete my “hero’s journey” toward justice, including getting my OBC.

**March 2016:** I petitioned the director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) for my OBC, twice. After being rejected, I filed a petition with the Michigan Third Circuit Court, Juvenile Division and simultaneously file records request with MDHHS to keep pressure on the agency holding my record.

**June/July 2016:** I won a court petition to receive my original birth certificate a month later. The state refused to be interviewed and refused to answer questions about data on OBCs, adoptee petitions, and its management of vital records for adoptees.



# The Courts: An Adoptee's Last Chance

- For decades I have been treated as a hostile adversary by a system that operates behind an impenetrable bunker
- My birth state, Michigan, provides no assistance for navigating the state's maze of regressive laws. It never has.
- I petitioned the court only after decades of work and relentless opposition.



# State of Michigan: Mostly Closed



- Michigan, a donut hole state.
- **Adoptees born on or after May 28, 1945, but before September 12, 1980:** not entitled to the original birth certificate except by court order. (These were the boom years of adoption nationally and in Michigan.)
- **Adoptees born before May 28, 1945:** entitled to the original birth certificate but only if a birth parent does not veto disclosure.
- **Adoptees born on or after September 12, 1980:** entitled to the original birth certificate but only if a birth parent does not veto disclosure.

# Fill out the Damn Forms

As of 2016, the Third Circuit Court of Michigan required the following; this may vary depending on the court of jurisdiction in Michigan:

- A \$20 filing fee (as of 2016)
- A copy of your photo identification
- A copy of your adoptive birth certificate.
- A completed Release of Information Authorization Adult Adoptee (**Form FIA 1920**). Include in the comments area on this form that you are requesting your original birth certificate (it's a short box that says "additional comments"—make your pitch about your rights to your record).
- A completed Request by Adult Adoptee for Identifying Information (**Form FIA 1925**).
- A **Form PCA 327** Petition For Adoption Information and Order (note, this is not listed in required forms, and this was added as a last-minute requirement before my court date).
- If the birth certificate you are requesting is for a deceased, direct descendant, proof of the relationship and death are required (example: death certificate, birth certificate, etc.).
- Also, the above forms should be completed with the information regarding the adoptee.
- Provide a written statement, no longer than a page, making your case why you deserve your birth record. This is your story, so only you can write it. Note, this is not required, but **STRONGLY** encouraged.



# I Fought the Law, and Barely Won

- Wrote the Department Director of MDHHS twice, March 2016.
- MDHHS said “the law is the law” and refused to be interviewed or speak with me.
- Records request showed problems in the agency (the ones who oversaw the Flint water debacle).
- No media in Michigan, nationally, or in Oregon took an interest in my story.
- I petitioned a court and the judge ruled in my favor in June 2016, as a last resort.



Michigan State Registrar Glenn Copeland denied my request for my original birth certificate and later had his name embossed on it after I won the court case.

**From:** Copeland, Glenn (DHHS)  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 24, 2016 5:10 PM  
**To:** Minicuci, Angela (DHHS) <MinicuciA@michigan.gov>; Grijalva, Nancy (DHHS) <GrijalvaN@michigan.gov>  
**Cc:** Robinson, Mikelle (DHHS) <RobinsonM18@michigan.gov>; Weaver, Tamara (DHHS) <WeaverT@michigan.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: Story of Interest: Michigan Not Releasing Original Birth Certificate to Adult Adoptee

Tami did reach out to this gentleman and explained the circumstances.

In a nutshell, when we are notified of an adoption, the law requires (unless indicated otherwise by the court, that the original birth certificate shall be sealed and a new record of birth established that reflects the information following the adoption.

Michigan law does have processes in place that would permit us to release this sealed record to an individual, but those criteria do not apply to this applicant. Tami confirmed this with staff in the Adoption Central Registry, Connie Stevens.

In order for us to release a copy of this sealed original, a court would need to order the release.

As an aside, birth certificates are used to establish identity, among other things, so releasing only one active version of an individual's birth record is a prudent policy.

I am sure there are reasons that are behind the urgency placed on getting a copy of the record, but there is no information on the record he doesn't know.

I can agree that restricting the release when he already knows may not seem like common sense, but there are established processes in law that govern such releases and it does not make common sense that we should break the law.

# Data on Court Petitions Not Available

- MDHHS reported to Rudy Owens that 549 original records of birth had been released by MDHHS between released between the fall of 2009 through 2016. This includes any release of a sealed original birth record due to court order or a Central Adoption Registry Release.
- This figure includes requests from adult adoptees, confidential intermediaries, or relatives of the adoptee.
- The MDHHS provides no web portal where this information is available to the public.
- It is not clear what records if any MDHHS has for any request prior to 2009; the agency would not disclose any additional information nor make any staff member available for an interview.
- Michigan courts may compile records on requests, but they do not overtly publicize how many adoptee birth certificates are released.



The Third Circuit Court Courthouse Building in Detroit, which Rudy Owens visited in person in June 2018 to meet with staff who were involved in his court petition to release his OBC two years earlier in June 2016.

# Why Spend 51 Years Fighting for a Piece of Paper?



**Mercedes Mejia**

Producer, *Stateside*

**Rudy Owens**

Author, *You Don't Know How Lucky You Are*

Interview with Michigan Radio (NPR affiliate), June 2018; find it at [www.howluckyuare.com](http://www.howluckyuare.com).



# Resources

- **Rudy Owens' Memoir and Website Highlighting his Quest for his OBC and Original Birth Records:** [www.howluckyuare.com](http://www.howluckyuare.com)
- **Rudy Owens' Article on Receiving his OBC after 27 Years of Waiting:** [rudyowensblog.com/2016/07/29/birthcertificatevictory/](http://rudyowensblog.com/2016/07/29/birthcertificatevictory/)
- **An OBC Court Hearing Dissected:** [www.howluckyuare.com/bittersweet-one-year-anniversary-winning-court-order-original-birth-certificate/](http://www.howluckyuare.com/bittersweet-one-year-anniversary-winning-court-order-original-birth-certificate/)
- **Guide to Understanding Court Petitions in Michigan for Adoptees:** [www.howluckyuare.com/guide-michigan-adoptees-seeking-court-orders-original-birth-certificates/](http://www.howluckyuare.com/guide-michigan-adoptees-seeking-court-orders-original-birth-certificates/)
- **FAQs for Court Order Requests for a Birth Certificate in Michigan:** [www.howluckyuare.com/faqs-court-order-requests-michigan-original-birth-certificates/](http://www.howluckyuare.com/faqs-court-order-requests-michigan-original-birth-certificates/)
- **Documents on Rudy Owens' Petition for his OBC from Michigan:** [www.howluckyuare.com/advocacy-and-writings-on-adoption/](http://www.howluckyuare.com/advocacy-and-writings-on-adoption/)
- **State of Michigan's Responses to Questions about Michigan Adoptees' Access to their Birth Records:** [www.howluckyuare.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Questions-on-Adoption-Practices-and-Discrimination-7-2016.pdf](http://www.howluckyuare.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Questions-on-Adoption-Practices-and-Discrimination-7-2016.pdf)
- **Shea Grimm Search and Petition Tips:** A bit dated, but an excellent overview by a committed advocate for justice for adoptees: <http://www.plumsite.com/shea/petition.html>
- **Adoptee Rights Law Michigan Adoption Law Page:** <https://adopteerightslaw.com/michigan-obc/>