

## **The Memory Keeper's Daughter Case Synopsis**

Dr. Henry, a 34 year-old orthopedic surgeon, has to deliver his own twins during a blizzard, because the obstetrician cannot make it to the clinic. His son, born first, is a healthy boy. He recognizes right away that his daughter has Down syndrome.

When he saw her, his thoughts turned immediately to his sister, June, who had been ill with "heart trouble" all of her short life. It had been his responsibility to look after her. As a boy he couldn't figure out whether he loved her or resented her. His mother had never returned to her usual self after his sister was born. June died when she was 12 and he was sixteen. He was living in town during the week to attend high school. He learned about her death when he was home for the weekend. Dr. Henry looked at his daughter and imagined what her life would be like and the likely toll caring for her would have on the family.

Almost immediately after his daughter was born, Dr. Henry decided that she was to be taken to an institution that provided care for infants such as his, and that his wife, Norah, was not to know. He wanted to spare his family and himself from a terrible grief. When his wife awoke, he told her that they had had twins, one of each, whom she named Phoebe and Paul. Phoebe, he told her, had died as she was being born. His wife was able to hold Paul, feed him, and care for him. She never saw Phoebe, never held her, and could not imagine what she was like.

Caroline, the nurse who worked with Dr. Henry, took Phoebe to the institution but didn't like what she saw there. Caroline was thirty-one and unmarried; she made a split-second decision to keep Phoebe and raise her as her own daughter. She never went back to the clinic. Instead, she went to her apartment, packed her things, and headed out of town to begin a new life as a mother.

She kept in contact with Dr. Henry, sending him updates and photographs regularly but never using a home address or sending any contact information. He, in turn, sent her money to help care for Phoebe. They both kept their secret from his wife, who never knew that Phoebe was alive until Dr. Henry died, and Caroline got in touch with her.

Mrs. Henry and Phoebe's twin Paul finally got to see and meet Phoebe. By this time Phoebe was 24 years old and living a joyful life, employed, living semi-independently in a home-like setting and looking forward to getting married to another developmentally delayed individual.

Dr. Henry = Father/husband  
Caroline = Nurse

Norah = Mother/wife  
Phoebe & Paul = twins

## **The Memory Keeper's Daughter Ethical Decision Questions**

1. When Dr. Henry hands his daughter over to Caroline and tells his wife that she died, what is your immediate reaction?

2. When Dr. Henry instructs Caroline to take Phoebe to the institution, Caroline could have refused, or she could have reported him to the authorities.

- Was she right to do what she did and raise Phoebe as her own?
  - Yes
  - No
- Did she have an obligation to tell Norah the truth from the beginning?
  - Yes
  - No
- In what ways was she doing the right thing and the wrong thing at the same time?

3. Dr. Henry made his decision to send Phoebe to an institution based on his judgments about her future quality of life.

- What principle does this reflect?

4. What do you think about the nurse deciding what was in the best interest of the child?

- Who should make the decision about what is in the best interest of the child?
  - Health Professional
  - Family

5. Would you support a parent's decision to institutionalize their child?

- Yes
- No

6. What should the role of parents be in making decision about their children?

- Should one parent withhold information from a spouse about their child?

**WATCH THE MOVIE "THE MEMORY KEEPER'S DAUGHTER ON LIFETIME ON APRIL 12<sup>TH</sup> AT 9:00 PM**