Jonnie Kocurek is in the business of locating things lost. If you ask her what she does, she'll tell you she is like a private detective. "You might say I help track down people who don't even know they are missing," Kocurek says.

Kocurek helps people who have either been adopted or have given a child up for adoption. Her goal is to help them find that missing person in their lives. It all started 12 years ago when she was approached by the 18-year-old son of a close friend. He told her he was adopted and wanted to find his birth mother. Kocurek said she had some experience reviewing court records and set out to help the young man find what he described as a missing part of his life.

In the end, the man and his birth mother were reunited and formed a close friendship, she says. Kocurek has helped hundreds of people from all over the United States do the same thing, and describes the search procedure as one of the most rewarding things she has done. The reasons vary as to why adoptees search for birth parents, or birth parents search for children they have given up. Kocurek says the most common reason is curiosity. Also, many adoptees feel that it is important to know about family history. Often vital medical data can only be obtained by looking to relatives.

Kocurek is a past president of the Adoption Triad Network, which is a search and support group for parents and adoptees that offers assistance and information for anyone facing the challenges related to adoption. The group met recently in Lafayette to discuss the role of the adoption triangle. The meeting included birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees. A frequent group speaker is former City Public Works Director Jerry Trumps. Trumps was adopted, and started his search to find his birth mother around 1980.

He was the father of newborn twins and had medical questions relating to his sons. His adoptive mother urged him to do the search. "I was hesitant at first," says Trumps, "but then I got involved emotionally. The search took two years, but in 1982 I found my birth mom. She was living near Baltimore, Md."

Trumps' birth mother was 23 when he was born and not married. She told him she knew she could not care for him and that giving him up was the most difficult decision that she ever made in her life. Trumps says he understands that in some cases, one of the parties may not want to reunite, and the issue of privacy is a valid one. In his case, the story has a happy ending, but for some it might not end so well. Trumps says anyone considering a search should be prepared for what they might find. But he says he believes an adoptee has the right to know about his or her heritage. "No matter what you believe about adoption-related searches, one thing is certain," he says. "My parents are my parents. That will never change. My birth mother is simply a good friend."

For others, there is simply no substitute for the bond created between adoptive parents and birth parents. Four-year-old Daniel Hebert sees his birth mom about twice a year. His mother, Claire Hebert, tells Daniel that he is visiting a special friend.

"We are very appreciative that we get to see her," says Hebert. "My son will never have to wonder where his roots are." Hebert says it's vital to know her son's birth mother for medical history, as well. She believes strongly in open adoption. "With closed adoption you never know what the negatives are.....", she says.

Kocurek admits searching for birth parents or adopters is not for everyone. Some people just don't want to be found. But she says, in 16 years, she has never had one case where the two parties did not want to reunite. "The reunions are the most joyous occasions I have ever witnessed," she says.

Kocurek stresses she only helps adults. Adoptees must be 18 or older to do a search or, in the case of a birth parent, the object of the search must be at least 18 years old. "That way, we only have adults who can make their own decisions," she says. "For example, Kocurek says she will not search for a child who is 18 and still in high school. She says she waits until the adoptee is more independent."

Also, she says everything discussed during the search is strictly confidential.

The Adoption Triad Network meets on the first Saturday of every month at 2 p.m. For more information call 232-HELP.