Ellen and Jim Steck moved into Independence Hill in February, just in time to enjoy San Antonio’s beautiful spring weather. Originally from St. Louis, they decided to make San Antonio their home after six visits to their daughter, Mary Ellen Steck Jablonski, who runs a successful State Farm Insurance agency nearby.

Family connections are paramount to the Stecks, and especially because of Ellen’s background. She had been placed for adoption as an infant and was raised an only child of older parents in St. Louis. 55 years later, her husband Jim decided to make it his mission to find Ellen’s parents of origin. He had been an investigator with State Farm for many years and put his skills into use.

“I told her, ‘we’re going to find out where you came from,’” Jim said. The trail started in Chicago. Jim had noticed the state of Illinois had opened its adoption records to affected parties. Ellen’s birth certificate with her adopted name listed her birth in a Chicago hospital. Through those records, the help of a friendly circuit court judge and the Mormon-run History Center in St. Louis, the Stecks were able to track down Ellen’s family roots in Wisconsin. Ellen’s real birth certificate showed her name as Beverly Clements. Ellen called her birth mother, Julia, and said, “Julia, this is Ellen Steck of St. Louis, Mo. Do you remember December 9, 1937, in the Jefferson Park Hospital?” Julia then said, “Beverly?” Ellen replied, “Yes mom, this is Beverly.”

In just a few short weeks, Ellen travelled to Waunekee, Wisconsin, not only to reunite with her birth mother, Julia Clements, but also to meet her three younger brothers and four younger sisters, who embraced the surprise of a new oldest sister wholeheartedly. She heard the story of her mother’s difficult situation, when at 22, unmarried and with no support, she felt the best option for her daughter was to place her for adoption. She visited the grave of her birthfather, she learned about the Clements family, her grandparents, and she heard the name her mother had given her before letting her go: Beverly Clements.

“It was quite a strange feeling to realize I’d had another birth name,” Ellen said.

Later that year, on Dec. 9, 1992, her youngest birth sister, her family, and their mother travelled to St. Louis to celebrate Ellen’s 55th birthday together with the Stecks. (Ellen’s adoptive parents had passed by that time.)

“Many happy tears were shed as Mom met all her grandchildren for the first time,” Ellen said. “What a warm and wonderful family I’ve had the opportunity of meeting in Wisconsin, and what a warm and wonderful family that Mom had the opportunity of meeting. This is the best gift I could ever receive,” she added.

The family stays close: pictures of large family gatherings grace the walls and shelves of the Stecks’ apartment in Independence Hill. Ellen sang in one of her birth nieces’ weddings. In addition to Ellen’s large birth family, the Stecks have three children in addition to Jablonski: Jim Jr., Cathy and David. Ellen laughs remembering her children were each born a year apart. They all have thriving families with children and grandchildren, and when the family suffered the tragedy of losing Cathy to cancer, four of Ellen’s siblings attended the funeral.

Jim retired as a senior claims specialist, investigating injury, death and fraud claims. He met Ellen in 1957 on a blind date after serving in Korea with the U.S. Army. He was smitten, he said, when he first heard her sing Ave Maria.

He was elected to the board of trustees and served as town marshall of Pasedena Hills, a suburb of in St. Louis. After his retirement from State Farm, the couple travelled the United States in a motor home, visiting their many friends and relatives.