

# Switched at birth, but it took 60 years to discover mistake

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He grew up with the woman he believed was his mother, in a tiny, one-room apartment where the sole “luxury” was a radio. He studied at night school while toiling in a factory, and finally became a truck driver.

He never married. And all the while, his real brothers were being raised with private tutors to guide them through good universities and into successful, white-collar careers.

It’s the stuff of fairy tale, yet this week it emerged that two 60-year-old Japanese men – one born poor, one rich – had been switched at birth. The man who grew up underprivileged should have been the eldest of four wealthy brothers, but instead was raised by a woman on welfare who was already struggling to support her older children following her husband’s death.

Now, the unnamed man has successfully sued the hospital that made the mix-up in March 1953, when he was mistakenly swapped with the other baby, born 13 minutes later. A Tokyo district court has ordered the social welfare corporation San-Ikukai, which runs the hospital, to pay ¥38m (£227,000) in damages. ¥32m will go to compensate the man for his financial and emotional hardship, while the remainder will be paid to his biological brothers, who were the first to suspect and investigate the mistake.

The three younger siblings from the wealthy family had long noted that their eldest brother, who runs a real estate company, looked nothing like them. They also recalled their mother saying that when he returned from his first bath in hospital, he had been dressed in the wrong clothes. After their parents died, they conducted a DNA test which confirmed their suspicions. They then set about studying hospital records to track down their real brother.

The truck driver told reporters this week that when he first heard the truth, “I could not believe it. To be honest, I did not want to accept it... I might have had a different life. I want [the hospital] to roll back the clock to the day I was born.” For several months afterwards, he wept daily, he said. “As I saw pictures of my [biological] parents, I wanted to see them alive. I couldn’t hold back tears for months every time I saw their pictures.”

The woman who raised him as her son was “born to experience hardship,” he said. In her absence, he bears much of the responsibility of caring for his elderly non-biological brothers, one of whom recently suffered a stroke. All four of the wealthy brothers – including the man who was raised in his place – have reportedly bonded with their lost sibling.

