



*Many families know what joy adoption can bring as they welcome a new son or daughter. But what about those on the other side of adoption—the giving side? Here, four people (none of them connected) share their stories.*

# The Gift of ADOPTION

## BIRTH MOTHER NAME WITHHELD

When I was 16, I spent a lot of time seeking the attention and affection of boys, and of one in particular. By my 17th birthday, I was pregnant.

I had been raised by righteous parents who were steadfast in the gospel. They taught my siblings and me to make correct choices, but I wanted to try something new and different. I consciously made several decisions I knew weren't right because I wanted to do things my own way.

When my parents learned that I was pregnant, they were shocked and disappointed by my behavior and broken-hearted at the result. I was scared and confused, but I wasn't as worried as my parents seemed to be. After all, I loved babies and had always wanted children. I decided I would just marry my boyfriend and have a little family.

My parents wanted me to talk to counselors at LDS Family Services. I didn't want to go—I was certain that they would just tell me to place my baby for adoption, which was the last thing I wanted to do. But my parents insisted I attend a counseling session, and there was no room for argument.

When I first met my caseworker, Sherri, I laid out my plan to her. I told her up front that I wouldn't give up my baby and that she couldn't make me. She won my affection quickly when she said she just wanted to talk to me and help me make a good life for my baby and myself. Sherri

offered education about teen parenting and more. I learned I could trust her.

I started attending weekly classes with other girls in my situation and their parents. We met to talk about our fears, expectations, and hopes. Some of the girls were going to raise their babies, some were placing them for adoption, and some were still undecided.

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Part of the class was spent with our parents present, but part of the session included just us girls. We needed each other more than we realized. Those times of confiding in each other were invaluable—even our best friends didn't know what it was like to be unmarried and pregnant. These group meetings helped me to not feel so alone.

I continued to meet privately with Sherri, as did my boyfriend. She encouraged both of us to pray about *all* of our options. Had she asked me to do this earlier, I might have refused, but by this point, I had learned that I could trust her. I was also realizing how inadequately prepared I was for parenthood. My boyfriend and I agreed to pray about what to do.

At that point, my life changed. I received such a direct answer to my prayer that there was no doubt in my mind about what we were supposed to do. When I talked with my boyfriend, I found out that his heart had also been touched. We knew that this baby was supposed to go to another family. That confirmation helped us stick to our decision when we felt caught between seemingly endless advice from family and friends and our own feelings and desires.

To say that I cried would be to put it mildly. My heart was full and broken at the same time. How could I feel such peace in a decision that brought so much pain? I later realized that I had brought much heartache and pain into my life and the lives of those intertwined with mine because I had let selfish desires override my long-term goals. But here, I had been given an opportunity to put aside what I wanted most—to keep this child—and to give her something better.

My boyfriend and I shared with our parents our decision about adoption. His parents struggled with the idea of not knowing their flesh and blood and accused us of being heartless. My parents, who had just started to adjust to the idea that they would be grandparents, urged us not to rush into any kind of a decision. In the end, although they felt disappointment at not being able to watch their grandchild grow up, they were supportive.

Giving birth to a beautiful little girl was miraculous. I loved holding her and rocking her. She was so beautiful, and I cried many times her first night on earth. I knew that the next day would bring heartache when it was time to say good-bye.

What made that pain bearable was knowing that placing her for adoption was right. It was the hardest—but most right—thing I have ever done. I signed the papers through sheets of tears and then leaned on family and friends for support. My tears weren't the only ones shed that day or in the days to come.

I thought and worried about my baby constantly at first. How was she doing? What was she doing? Was she healthy? Was she happy? I wrote many letters that first year, and when I received a letter or photos in return, I carried them with me. My pain was eased in seeing a beautiful, happy baby in the pictures. Reading of the love this family felt for her and for me lifted my heart and was essential in my healing. Over

time, I began to realize I wasn't thinking about her every minute of every day—and that was OK. She had a good life, and I needed to move forward with mine too.

I finished high school and enrolled in college, opportunities I might not have had if I had chosen to raise my baby. I stayed busy with working, attending counseling sessions, going to church, and meeting with Church leaders as I sought repentance. Slowly, I began to feel a real sense of healing and of direction in my life. I met and married a wonderful man, and we were sealed in the temple a year after our wedding. Today, my husband and I are happily raising our children. I am grateful that they have been born in the covenant and that we can be together for eternity. Each of them is a blessing.

Someone once asked me if I would change anything if I could go back. I wanted to respond that I would do better, that I wouldn't have brought a child into the world outside of marriage. But I was afraid to answer that way because I had tender feelings for a family who had been blessed by the adoption. Years of soul-searching eventually helped me realize that I still *would* want to go back and do better, to not make the mistake in the first place. Admitting this does not mean that I would take away the delight of this family with their daughter. I am confident that this family would have been blessed another way had I chosen to make righteous decisions initially.

I marvel at a loving Heavenly Father who gave His Son that we might have a way back to Him. I testify that the Atonement is real. I know that through it, our Savior redeems us from our sins and that He also succors us in our pain. I came to more fully appreciate the gifts of both the Father and Son as I felt Their love throughout this experience. ■

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## BIRTH FATHER

NAME WITHHELD

Nobody ever expects to be in the midst of an unplanned, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, but that's exactly where Andrea (names have been changed) and I found ourselves. I was in my last year of my undergraduate studies, and she was in her first. We had dated for only a short time but had allowed our physical relationship to go too far.

We began counseling with our bishop in seeking repentance and in the process decided it was best that we not see each other anymore, so we broke up. Several weeks later, Andrea came to my home and told me that she was pregnant.

Coupled with fear were feelings of denial, disbelief, confusion, and loneliness. I can't imagine what she must have felt. Andrea had a difficult burden to bear, physically and emotionally, and I felt a sense of responsibility and loyalty to her. I also felt that responsibility—perhaps even more so—to the baby. I wanted to make sure that everything turned out all right for his or her future.

Neither of us knew where to start, so we decided to go back to our bishop. He recommended that we make an appointment at LDS Family Services, which, he explained,

was a lot more than an adoption agency. He told us that we would be able to get counseling and to explore *all* of our options as parents. That turned out to be the best advice he could have given us.

Andrea and I were nervous that first visit, but our caseworker put us at ease immediately. Over the next several weeks, she was helpful and supportive as we looked into several options. Andrea and I considered marriage and keeping our baby. We considered not getting married and sharing custody of the baby. And we considered adoption, although it certainly wasn't our first choice.

In addition to meeting with our caseworker, we also met in group sessions, where we could talk with other people in our situation. Our families were supportive too. Andrea and I counseled with both sets of parents, and they offered suggestions about what we ought to do. In the end, though, Andrea and I felt that this was a decision *we* needed to make ourselves. We were grateful that our families respected that and weren't overly pushy.

We prayed about the decision over the course of several weeks. For me as the father, and perhaps even a little bit for Andrea as the mother, the pregnancy was still somewhat abstract. We knew that there was life growing inside her,

but somehow, it didn't quite seem real. That changed when we went for the first ultrasound. As we saw the baby (and later learned that the baby was a girl) this child's life became more of an actuality for us. We started talking about names. And we realized we loved this baby very, very much.

The more real to us the baby became, the less our decision was about us and the more it was about our daughter. Andrea and I both acknowledged that many adoptive parents could provide our daughter with things that we couldn't: a stable marriage, a permanent home, and a temple sealing. We wanted these things for our child, and before long, through LDS Family Services, we found a family we thought might be a good fit.

We felt strongly that our child was to go to these parents, a decision we felt confirmed in prayer and again later when Andrea and I met the family.

The day Jenna was born was more incredible and miraculous than we could ever have imagined. We kept her with us the first few days, and when the day came to take Jenna to her new family, we felt we couldn't do it. Three hours after we were supposed to have been at the LDS Family Services office, we still hadn't left my parents' house. I asked my father to give each of us a priesthood blessing. Among the things he blessed us with was the ability to do the right thing.

We finally left for LDS Family Services. Again, we felt a strong Spirit confirming that this was the right thing, yet when Andrea and I stepped out of the office to return home, I felt the saddest I have ever felt. Neither of us said a word as we drove away. We just cried. That was the most difficult day of my life.

The next week—and the next month—were also hard. But Andrea and I kept moving forward as much as we could. Attending group sessions was helpful because parents who had been through what we were going through

were there to talk about their experience, to encourage us, and to remind us not to give up hope in the future—for Jenna or for ourselves.

One of the other great blessings for us during this time was the adoptive family. They maintained close contact with us in the first weeks after the placement, allowing us to see Jenna often and sending letters and pictures. It was therapeutic for Andrea and me to see how well they took care of Jenna, how happy she was, and what a great life she had. As time went by, our hard days became less frequent.

Andrea soon transferred to a university across the country. I stayed and finished my last year of school. We kept in touch. Eventually Andrea married, and it relieved me to see that she was going to be OK. It was at that point that I finally felt that things were resolved and that I was now capable of moving forward in my own life. That realization—and the passage of time—were both tremendously healing.

I later met Julie, the woman who would become my wife. When I saw long-term potential with our relationship, I told her about Andrea and Jenna. She has been very supportive and has even met Jenna and her family a couple of times. Her understanding has been a tremendous blessing to me.

Julie and I later married, and today we have a one-year-old daughter. Despite the busyness of our lives, we decided early on to make family a priority. We are blessed to be able to spend time with our daughter and with each other. It is exciting to watch our child grow and develop and change. I am grateful and glad to be her father.

I am also grateful for the hope that the gospel provided throughout my experience. My testimony of a loving Heavenly Father increased. It is miraculous to me that He could take a mistake that Andrea and I had made and turn it into something positive for another family. It is equally miraculous to have been given a new start. ■

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## GRANDPARENT

NAME WITHHELD

Our family was a fairly average Latter-day Saint family. We had family home evening, family prayer, family scripture study. We went to church together, took vacations together, had fun together. Of course we weren't perfect, but overall we loved each other and centered our lives on the gospel.

So when our oldest daughter, Katie (names have been changed), then 19 years old and not married, told my wife and me that she was pregnant, it broke our hearts. I blamed myself, wondering where I had gone wrong as a father. Katie had been so stalwart during her early teenage years, but as she got a bit older, she began to give way to negative peer pressure.

Of course, it was natural for my wife and me as grandparents to want to watch this grandchild grow up. But we knew that neither we as grandparents nor Katie as a single mother could give this child the love, time, and direction that he needed. This was not about us or our feelings. It was about what was best for the baby.

Although Katie hoped that her relationship with her boyfriend would work out and lead to marriage, it became evident that it wasn't going to happen. My wife and I suggested adoption, but Katie refused to even consider it. She had always loved children and wanted to raise this one. She insisted on keeping her child.

We encouraged her to at least *talk to* the representative from LDS Family Services. We pointed out that she did not have to make a decision right away and that she could probably make a better decision if she were educated about all

her options. We also told her that whatever she decided, we would support her. Katie later told us that our assurance and support—without pressure—gave her great comfort as she made important choices.

Our daughter remained uninterested in adoption for several weeks, so when one day she suddenly admitted that it wouldn't hurt "just to talk" to the caseworker, we were quite surprised. We later learned that my sister, Katie's aunt, had also encouraged her to consider adoption. It was her influence that made the difference.

It took just one visit to LDS Family Services. Katie told us that when she walked into the office, a warm feeling came over her. She said she felt a sense of love for her son and of adoption being the right choice for her and her baby.

As she reviewed profiles of potential parents, Katie felt the Spirit confirm to her which couple should be the parents of her child. As the adoption process moved forward, the time came for Katie, my wife, and me to meet the adoptive parents. I remember the anxiety, anticipation, and excitement we felt as we waited. When they entered the room, all of us stood with tears in our eyes. We hugged them and cried for a long time. The Spirit was strong, and we all felt a heightened awareness of the importance of what would take place between our families. We talked for more than three hours.

The husband shared with us that he and his wife had been waiting for some time for the opportunity to adopt. He told us that one night as he was praying and acknowledging to the Lord that he and his wife had done everything they could and were turning their wills over to Him, he had a calm, peaceful feeling. As we shared our own story, we all realized that the day this man had said that prayer was the same day Katie had chosen him and his wife to be the parents of her child.

The day our grandson was born was a bittersweet one.

What a beautiful baby! It would have been easy to change our minds—after all, children are raised by single mothers and grandparents all of the time. Surely we could do it too. But we knew the Lord's will, and we knew that it was in this child's best interest for the adoption to proceed. After spending two days with our daughter and grandson in the hospital, my wife and I watched with tears streaming down our faces as Katie handed her son to the caseworker. She

exclaimed, "I can't believe I just did that!" and ran back to her hospital room to cry. My wife later commented that she had never seen greater love than she did as she watched Katie that day. Adoption, she said, truly is about love.

Shortly after the baby was born, Katie enrolled in nursing school. She also came back to Church activity with a renewed and deepened testimony of the Savior and of His Atonement.

Although Katie didn't realize it at the time, this experience was also difficult for my wife and me. (We still get emotional talking about it.) We think of this child often and love him very much. But by relying on each other and moving forward, we have

been able to find peace. We are confident that the Lord had a hand in this adoption.

We know of grandparents who are angry about their grandchild being placed for adoption or who go to great lengths to stop an adoption because they want to know their grandchildren and watch them grow up. We understand those feelings. But we also attest to the peace that comes from doing what is best for the baby.

This period became one of the most sacred and spiritual of our lives. Even now, more than a decade later, we continue to learn from our experience. Our love and appreciation for each other and for the family unit has grown. We can also testify of the love of our Heavenly Father. We know that He will guide us in our earthly experience, however difficult, as we willingly follow Him in trust and faith. ■

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## CHILD

BY STACIE LLOYD DUCE

One of my earliest memories is looking up at my mother after she had tucked me in and asking her if she would tell me a different bedtime story. After all, she had been telling me the same story every night for as long I could remember.

It always started with these words: “Once upon a time, there was a mommy and daddy who wanted very much to have a baby of their own.” It wasn’t a fable or a fairy tale but the story of our family and how I came to be a part of it. Because I had heard the story repeated so often, adoption was never a mysterious or uncomfortable

topic. I learned from the beginning that I was meant to be with my family—I had just come a different way.

The bedtime story included details of my parents’ life as newlyweds. Doctors had advised them that adoption would be the only way they would have a family. The tale also included their progress through adoption paperwork and interviews and a surprise phone call that came much earlier than they expected. The woman on the line told Mom, “We have a baby girl waiting for you to take home for Christmas.”

At that point, the story always got exciting and included the pandemonium of Dad leaving work and racing to the store to buy diapers, pink clothes, and a 1970s movie camera that would blind our family with its bright light for years to come.

Mom's story always ended—never without a few tears—with the day she and Dad arrived at the adoption office. A woman brought the “most beautiful baby” they had ever seen, and my parents knew immediately that they would love me forever. All of their once-distant dreams were coming true.

I slept soundly through that first night in my new home. Mom told me she kept checking on me and kissing me throughout the night, just as she continued to do as I grew. Because of this story, I never doubted my beauty inside or out, and I never doubted my parents' love for me.

Our family moved from that home before my first birthday. Then, some 35 years later, I had the chance to return to that city with my parents. They drove me to the hospital where I was born, to the church on the hill where I was blessed, and to the little brick apartment building where they brought me home to be a part of their family. The details of my bedtime story swirled around me during this visit with all-new realism.

I watched my parents kiss on the sidewalk outside that apartment—just as they had done as newlyweds—with a different kind of appreciation. I imagined them bringing me home with humility and gratitude and a strengthened resolve to be an eternal family. Suddenly their emotion wasn't something to roll my eyes at, as I had sometimes done growing up. It was something to be cherished and emulated.

My appreciation for lessons taught at bedtime increased as I realized they made the plan of salvation a part of my everyday thoughts. I knew I lived in heaven before I was born.

I knew Heavenly Father gave agency to all. I knew redemption was possible for the people whose choices not only affected them but created a child as well. I knew Heavenly Father had a plan for me, and that His plan mercifully provides second chances for everyone involved in an adoption.

I feel gratitude to the woman who carried me and made a decision that may have been unpopular with some. I imagine my birth mother as a pillar of strength, and I pray she has been blessed for her sacrifice and hope for the future for all of us.

The story of miracles for our family continued when Mom discovered that she was pregnant with my brother, who came to be my best friend. More siblings arrived, defying the logic of doctors and specialists.

My parents are all I—or birth parents—could have hoped for. They provided the necessities of life as well as family fun. They taught me to work, to learn, and to discover my talents. They taught the gospel through their words and example. I learned to overcome disappointments and obstacles, just as they have done. And most important, they gave me a glimpse of how Heavenly Father loves me as His daughter.

My bedtime story has a happy ending that isn't really an ending. New chapters have given our extended family more opportunities for adoption and an appreciation of God's guiding hand during this short tale of mortality. ■

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For more information about adoption, including resources for expectant and adoptive parents, please visit [www.itsaboutlove.org](http://www.itsaboutlove.org), or call the LDS Family Services hotline at 800-537-2229.