



Before I thoroughly researched domestic adoption, I didn't give a lot of thought to the Birthmothers who placed their children for adoption. I just knew that I wanted a baby and they had one to be adopted. Honestly, I pictured them as part of a baby factory. They came to the hospital, popped out a baby and left. I would swoop in and adopt the baby they left behind. How could the Birthmothers be upset about the baby as it was a problem for them and I fixed it? It was simple as that. Win ? win for everyone.

Researching Birthmothers? Stories

Between my research of the state adoption laws and how to pick an agency, I picked up a few books that had personal stories of adoption. At first I didn't want to waste my time on these stories as I was so focused on the fastest way to get a baby. I wanted to learn facts on adoption and not read from non-professionals. Little did I know that those personal stories from those ?non-professionals? could make such a huge impact on me.

I have since attended adoption seminars which included panels of Birthmothers. I highly recommend this for anyone who adopts, domestically or internationally, as it gives a wonderful insight into the side of adoption that is rarely discussed. There seems to be plenty of focus on the feelings of the child who was adopted as they grow up. There is focus on the adoptive parents receiving their new child because it has a happy ending. People do not tend to focus on the stories of the Birthmothers as it's believed their choice to place a baby for adoption is made out of selfishness. Like I first thought, they pop out their baby and move on without a second thought, right? All it takes to hear personal story from one Birthmother and you'll know

instantly that all of your thoughts were completely inaccurate.

Recently when I helped organize an adoption panel for Infertility and Adoption Support, Inc. I made sure to include Birthmothers. Combined, they shared stories of three babies being placed for adoption. Even though each circumstance was very different, the feelings were almost identical each time. The Birthmothers wished they could have kept their babies but knew it was not the best decision. They loved their babies and wanted the most desirable life for them. Their love for their babies is what drove them to choose adoption.

Never before had I realized all the complex emotions that were involved with adoption, especially those of the Birthmother. The factual books on adoption didn't go into detail how the Birthmother deeply loves her baby and chooses adoption because she wants the best for them. She experiences great pain by not being the baby's primary parent and grieves this loss with all of her heart. Yet she'll have great joy by providing the best for her baby and making the new adoptive parents very happy. Recently, a Birthmother I met called these conflicting feelings of adoption a "double-edged sword".

Pregnancy

There were other options, including parenting, that most Birthmothers considered. Yet they usually always seemed to come back to adoption because it just made the most sense for their situation. Most did not know much about the adoption process but were pleased by the social workers from the agencies who treated them so well. Rarely have I heard of a Birthmother feeling ashamed of their decision by anyone in the adoption community. The pressure of not pursuing adoption usually came from family or friends.

Realizing that the birthmothers had been on a journey of their own before I was brought into their lives, made me better appreciate the Birthmother. I wasn't the only one who had been struggling with stressors of life. Before I thought that the potential Birthmothers were happily enjoying their pregnancy before they decided on adoption. Since then I have heard Birthmothers describe their pregnancy as a sad time. They may have loved feeling life grow within them but they knew that their time with that life was limited. I have heard some Birthmothers say that they felt as if it was never really their baby in their belly. They just knew that the baby was meant for the adoptive couple the entire time.

Since I educated myself that the Birthmothers were not baby factories and had real emotions that they struggled with, especially during the pregnancy, I wanted to make sure that I used an agency that provided adequate counseling for them. These Birthmothers were going to end up being a part of my family and therefore they needed to be taken well care of. I sought out an agency that provided counseling prior and post placement. Some agencies will even provide this counseling for a lifetime for them. So if five years later the Birthmother is happily married and pregnant, she can still receive counseling if emotions surrounding the adoption arise.

Selecting Adoptive Couples

The exciting part of the process that most Birthmothers discuss is when they got to select a family to adopt their child. They knew that most of the couples had been waiting a long time for a baby and were anxious to parent. Birthmothers tell of how they fretted over who to choose because they only wanted the absolute best for their baby. Then for some reason there is a connection between the Birthmother and a potential adoptive couple's profile and she knows who to choose. One Birthmother at the recent panel described this moment as a "lightning bolt to her heart".

Of all the Birthmothers I have met or read about each one had a different reason why they chose the couple they did to adopt their baby. For some there was no concrete reason but just a gut feeling. For others was something they believed was a sign from above?. An example of this is that the potential adoptive mother?s name was the same as the Birthmother?s current daughter. Some Birthmothers chose couples who lived a life similar to their own while others chose couples who lived a life that the Birthmother always wanted.

One topic I have heard discussed by Birthmothers is how scared they were that the adoptive couple they selected would back out. Never did this thought cross my mind because I thought the potential Birthmother held all the cards. She?s the one with the baby that I wanted so what did she have to fear?

I?ve come to understand that the Birthmothers feared that the adoptive couple that they chose to parent their baby would abandon them for one reason or another. The Birthmother took a long time to choose this couple and had fallen in love with them. It would have broken her heart if the couple rejected her and her baby. I took this into consideration whenever I met a potential Birthmother. I had to tell myself that she was probably just as nervous as we were. Both of us were scared of not being up to the other?s standards.

After selecting an adoptive couple, the Birthmother now had someone to be excited with about the pregnancy. Some Birthmothers felt alone up to this point but now there was someone in their lives that wanted to hear every detail about the baby. Knowing this I made sure to ask our children?s Birthmothers many questions about their pregnancy. I wanted to know the specifics about each food craving, back pain and kick from the baby. I would have thought this would make the Birthmother feel uncomfortable but in reality it made her feel more at ease.

At the Hospital

In most stories I have heard or read about, the most difficult time for the Birthmothers was immediately after the child's birth. This is because the Birthmothers knew that their time with their baby was coming to a close. They were overcome with grief as they were making the difficult decision to hand over their baby for someone else to raise. It would have been easy during this delicate time for the Birthmothers to choose to parent in order to stop the pain in their hearts. But they remained strong with their decision of placing the baby for adoption. Only someone in that position can ever know how they were able to do this. I have read that some Birthmothers had to keep reminding themselves how happy the new parents would be and how much they would love and adore this baby. The trust the Birthmothers had in the adoptive parents is what helped them place the baby in their arms.

I am grateful that I was familiar with what emotions the Birthmothers could be experiencing during the hospital stay after the birth. I did have doubts as to whether the adoption would happen when I saw the Birthparents hugging and kissing the baby that I hoped would be mine. Yet I had to keep reminding myself that they are grieving about not taking that precious baby home with them. Of course they'd want to enjoy their last moments with him. It didn't mean they had changed their minds. How could I deny them these few last minutes with the baby they had cared for the previous nine months?

Of all the stories I have heard by Birthmothers, there are many different ways they wanted to say good-bye to their child at the hospital. Some requested an Entrustment Ceremony which is when the Birthmother formally places the baby into the arms of the adoptive parents. Some Birthmothers didn't want to see the baby being taken away by the adoptive parents or social worker. Others discharged themselves from the hospital before the baby but left a letter behind for them.

Knowing that it was a personal choice, we allowed each of our children's Birthmothers to make their own decision on how they wanted to hand over their baby to us. This decision, along with most other ones in the hospital, we did not attempt to control but left it in the hands of the Birthmother.

Openness

Since I had originally thought the Birthmothers popped out their babies and left the hospital immediately, I didn't understand all the hype around open adoptions. Once I began to read Birthmother stories and hear them speak, I realized how important the contact afterwards was for them. A majority of Birthmothers loved getting information from the adoptive parents about how their child is doing. This helped them realize that their decision to place their baby was the best one. It gave them great joy to see pictures of the child growing and to read letters about how happy everyone is.

Realizing that the Birthmothers continue to think about their child led my husband and me to consider a more open adoption than we originally planned. We knew that openness would be very important to us, as adoptive parents, as well. I knew in my heart that I wanted to be adamant about writing letters and sending pictures to the Birthparents after placement. Plus, if we were in the area where the Birthmother lived, we'd see if she was available to see us. We visited with my oldest son's Birthparents when he was six months old and it was a wonderful experience. I knew that they wanted to see how big and healthy he was. They loved him very much and I wasn't going to deny them from oohing and aahing over him.

By understanding the Birthparent's desire to know about their child I knew that I had to be very honest with them concerning our ongoing contact. Before learning about Birthmother's emotions I may not have thought much about her feelings after placement. But by the time we adopted our first child I knew I could not promise things that I could not deliver on as an adoptive parent. I have promised letters and photos to my children's Birthparents on a regular basis and will follow through. My children's Birthparents promised to place their baby with me and followed through so how could I renege on sending them letters and pictures of that baby?

Obviously, I am not a Birthmother and can never understand everything they go through. I am just relaying some of the important information I have learned over

the years by reading about and listening to personal stories by Birthmothers. When you enter the adoption process it's so easy to get engrossed in the concrete facts of state laws, paperwork needed for your homestudy, the amount of money needed for your agency and other things you can find in any book on adoption. But once you take the time to educate yourself on the emotions involved in this complicated process you'll realize that there are many facets you may not have even thought about.

Specifically by learning about the Birthmothers' point of view of the adoption process you'll know more about how to treat these strangers who will soon become some of the most important people in your life. They will appreciate that you respect them and took the time to try to understand what they are feeling during this emotional process.

Danielle I. Pennel

Three Yellow Roses

www.threeyellowroses.com