

## All the Blessings of a Lifetime

We are Jill and Bob, and would like to tell you about the path we took to the adoption of our daughter, Melissa. I have a particularly insightful story to tell, for I have been both a birthmother AND an adoptive mother.

I was 19 when I became pregnant with my son. I did a lot of thinking about my situation — was this what I wanted for the rest of my life? I did not believe in abortion, but also could not see my boyfriend and I parenting the child. I was in an emotional quandary — I was not ready to parent this baby, and yet I loved the baby. It was a time filled with despair, confusion, and extreme contradiction of emotions.

Fortunately, I had the loving support of my parents — they were caring and non-judgmental of my situation. After speaking with them, I realized that what I wanted for my unborn child was two parents like them! My boyfriend and I were not mature enough, nor were we in a place in our lives where parenting was a realistic role we could assume. The only option I began to consider was adoption.

In 1985, closed adoption was still the tradition, and my parents and I believed in the need for secrecy and silence shrouding the entire process. I carried through with the closed adoption ... not ever meeting my baby's adoptive parents, not giving in to my need to see and hold my baby after his birth. I believed this was for my own sake as well as my baby's. I loved him, and so I let them take him from the delivery room and from my life.

Three months later I met with a county social worker to sign the final papers. It was not a pleasant experience — the social worker showed no empathy or caring demeanor, and I signed the papers and was out of her office in record time. Just like that, it was over. I was no longer a mother. Or was I? I wrestled with my conflicting emotions. I never stopped loving and missing my son, and did not know where to turn to alleviate my grief and guilt.

Bob and I met in 1992, and were married in 1994. Our life together has been very full and happy; we spent the first 2 years of our marriage enjoying life with our children (Bob's from a previous marriage), and planned on having children of our own one day.

Unfortunately, Bob's vasectomy reversal operation in 1996 was unsuccessful. We learned that we would be unable to have biological children together. I again found myself facing adoption as my only option as a solution to my problems. The circles we make in life can be many things ... tragically, ironically, and

gracefully.

I had spent 5 years as a counselor for pregnant and parenting teenagers. I feel my job was a form of therapy, but also a fulfilling, productive profession. I was introduced to the Independent Adoption Center at a conference for county social services — but I never would have guessed that this resource for my clients would prove to be so important to me in the near future!

It took me many months to come to terms with the reality that Bob and I faced, and accept the fact that we could not have children. Bob was immediately ready to consider adoption, but he was also sympathetic to my ambivalence and confusion. I needed to face my grief and guilt, and accept the loss of my future (and now forever) unborn children. Bob and my family stood by me during this difficult time.

Several months later, Bob and I attended an information session at the IAC, which I called upon from my client file resources. I could not imagine what it would be like to be the adoptive mother, after being the biological mother of my son. Bob and I both knew that an open adoption was the only way to go — we could not imagine adopting a child and never knowing his or her biological parents. I knew that in a closed adoption, there would be a man and woman out there somewhere, wondering, worrying, and missing their biological child. I knew there had to be a better way.

We spent nearly a year completing the necessary paperwork. In this time I resigned from my job and sought counseling for the emotions that I was experiencing. The circle I was making, from giving a child to loving parents in an adoption to loving a child given to us through adoption, allowed me to finally come to terms with my past and with my present.

We received the first phone call from our daughter's biological mother, Jane, in May 1999. She was 5 months pregnant. I spoke with Jane for nearly an hour, and we "clicked" immediately. We were close in age and shared similar tastes in music and sporting activities, and it was easy for us to openly share and sympathize with each other regarding our current circumstance. Jane said that my having given a child up through adoption was the primary reason she felt drawn to our letter. She and her husband John both felt that her pregnancy had happened for a reason — and that reason was to give Bob and me the child we were meant to have.

The four of us met the next week and, after an awkward beginning, were soon getting to know one another. Bob and I left that meeting hopeful and excited.

Over the next three months, we came to believe that this adoption was actually going to happen.

Near the end of her pregnancy, Jane began questioning her decision and her ability to follow through with the adoption. She received counseling from her counselor at the IAC, and spent much time on the phone with me sharing her concerns. I think she shared so much of what she felt with me because she knew I could completely understand and relate to her — which I did. I knew what she was going through; I had lived through it too. I felt her pain as if it were my own.

At this time, she and John were also having problems, and had separated. They were only together to support each other through the birth and placement of the child. Jane was having a very hard time, and she ended up going away for a week to be with her family.

Jane returned from her visit refreshed and strengthened by her family's support, and appeared more committed than ever to the adoption. She had passed through her emotional quandary and was feeling happy for us; she appeared ready to give birth and move on with her life.

Jane asked that I be in the delivery room with her and John, and Bob came in after the birth. The birth of our daughter Melissa was a joyful, emotional, happy and sad experience all at once. The four of us did our best to be sensitive and respectful of each other. Jane asked us to visit whenever we desired, and included us in all aspects of the baby's care. She referred to us as "Mommy" and "Daddy"!

There are no words to express our joy and thankfulness to God and to Jane and John for the gift of our daughter Melissa. Upon our arrival home from the hospital with her, we were so overwhelmed with joy we were in a state of shock! Our sweet baby girl is all the blessings of a lifetime rolled into one tiny package, and we shed tears that first night just watching her sleep!

In closing, I'd like to ask us all to pray for the children of this world, that they may be loved and safe and warm. After all, that is what all of this has been about — a wonderful, healthy 14 year old boy, and a beautiful, precious 5 month old baby girl ... my children whom I love with all my ability, strength and soul, and all of my heart.

**Jill and Bob Sprenkel**