

To My Daughter,

I have wanted to write you for so long to try to tell you what you mean to me and how we came to be in each other's life. You are almost three years old now- where did it go? Those thousands of moments with you as an infant seem so far away now. I thought I could hold those exquisite times in my mind forever but like the sands of life, they slipped through my fingers as the new you continued to emerge and transform. In that nether world of new baby, still part of the oneness of the cosmos and not quite fully of the earthly realm, I was transfixed by your being. Being in your still and deep presence felt as close to God as I have ever been. Holding you at night in the rocking chair, I could feel the connection between your newly earthbound body and the vast open spaciousness from which you came. It was as though a well leading to a force much larger than either of us had opened, and your being in a body allowed me to experience its depth.

It brought me to tears when I opened up to the bliss of that connection to you, to the earth, to the totality of new life and to something else unnameable but very powerful. They were soft tears, sweet tears, warm tears that streamed down my cheeks, opening up my heart as they descended. I want so much for you to know that your very beginning brought such peace to me, such an opening in my heart, such a boundless possibility of loving. I had longed to experience this kind of love for many lifetimes. Is it about the primal bond inside the ocean of the womb to my own mother? Is it the longing and desire to be unified with God? Is it the desire of my unresting soul for peace? For the exquisite moment of total acceptance of just being? For nothing more than just this breath? All of it and more.

At the same time, I was never confused about my love for you, and my loving of the experience of loving. It always seemed important for me as a mother to know the difference and the interplay between the loving of the love and the loving of the child. For if we forget, we run into dangerous waters expecting our children to give us these experiences instead of just being gratefully blessed when they happen to occur. I think my own mother's deep love for me obscured her vision. She had willed me to live when I was only a two pound premature infant in the incubator. I am convinced that her love was like a torch that went through the glass of the nursery window and entered my vulnerable and fragile being to help me hang onto life.

As I grew older and became more separate, and less like her, I brought great disappointment and hurt to her. She could not accept that the infant that she had willed to live with the ferocious strength of a mother's love could now be different and needing space and distance from her. I hope that I will remember this when you are older and need to be separate. I hope that the experience of those bliss filled moments of your infancy strengthen my heart's capacity to be loving towards you in the midst of anger, in the midst of whining, in the midst of impatience and frustration. When you are a teenager who looks at me as though I am an enemy, may I remember that you are not a stranger but the same person who has given me such joy and intimacy.

And oh, the intimacy! There was something about the touching, flesh to flesh, your fingers in my mouth, hands smoothing the head, rubbing your belly, caressing the back of your neck. There were so many sensually filled hours when you were a baby that were food to my soul. It's even a little hard to admit - most mothers don't talk about the deep satisfying sensuality of that first year. I could lie with you and make wonderful sounds together while looking into the open reflecting pools of your eyes. Those eyes! They seemed to take the world in like food in ways that our adult eyes had long forgotten. It seemed that they were able to both take in the world while reflecting another less formed, less harsh and infinitely vast world.

I can hardly describe the bittersweet longing and wonder I felt when I was in the presence of your not yet ego-bound consciousness. Bittersweet because my soul longs for the freedom of the unbound self. It is hard to admit to this depth of loving you and the experience of bonding with a new being. Some would say that is simply the thousands of years of evolution that form the attachment readiness between mother and child. Of course it is that, but it was so much more - it was magic, a touch of the sublime.

The wonder and vulnerability that your eyes expressed brought forth such a sweet love from my heart that had been kept hidden for so long. I had never known a love with so much permission to be tender. Tenderness is not very much a part of who I am with other adult humans but loving you opened doors to a wellspring of tenderness in me. Where else but with babies can we have such permission to squeel and coo with delight? I loved to accompany your exquisite sounds with vocalizations that felt like they were waiting to be sung. We made such magical songs together while you were on that changing table.

Lying with you as you discovered that those hands were not just things moving in front of you but that they were your hands and you could move them. What joy! What power! What delight! But don't get me wrong, there was a lot more than delight. Of course you drove me crazy some days. You were small in body but ferocious in spirit!. After using distraction, cajoling or bargaining to get you in your car seat, you would put up such a fight that I felt like a child abuser just to apply enough pressure to buckle your seat belt. I don't believe in hitting, but there were moments when I certainly felt like it. In the beginning stages of those toddler antics, I felt terrible for having such feelings of anger, but I gradually learned to not take it so personally. I hope I can learn to value your spirit of independence as much as your needs for closeness and intimacy.

Holding both these things at the same time seems to be one of the quintessential tasks of my mothering: to celebrate, support and facilitate your growth and movement towards greater independence while cherishing and nourishing the closeness and intimacy we have together. I remember when you passed from babyhood into toddlerdom, I felt a bittersweet sadness. It was a bittersweet confusion really, as I loved you where you were, in the present, while also feeling the gentle tugs to my heart that "my baby" was gone. My heart wants to learn to embrace this mantra: love close and let go, love close and let go. I cannot hold onto you. I cannot keep change from happening, nor would I really want to. But still, I feel those gentle tugs as my heart says a little goodbye to each stage while saying hello to the next.

So many times I thought if we adults could hold this in our hearts, that we all started out like this - whole, peaceful, connected to the world and infinity, ready to love and be loved, that maybe there would be less war, less killing, less demonizing the "other". But these are just idealistic and grandiose musings of a mother in love with her child, a mother who wants a different world for her to grow up in, a mother who is still struck by the contrast between the wonder of us beings and the horror of which we are capable. I hope for you and for me that I can take this desire for a better world into the larger community, not being content to make just our own family's life better.

So how did it come to be, that we found each other? All my life I wanted to have children. When I was ten I had a fantasy in which I married a brain surgeon and had ten children, later living in a big house with columns and driving a Lincoln Continental. (Hard to admit to these ten year old fantasies). Life has taken me in different directions, but I have always been driven to sobbing whenever I saw a movie of a woman giving birth. The desire was so powerful: I wanted a child to play with, to run at the beach, to submerge myself in un(adult)erated loving.

Even now as I write this, tears flow down my cheeks as I feel how hard it has been for me to love easily, clearly, without obstacles, without conflict, without hindrances of all shapes and sizes. Looking back, I can see that the deep desire was for a love that transcended, a love that could float free, a love that had no boundaries, not boxed in or contained - a love that could soar. This kind of love is not solely of the earth -it is towards heaven, a love reaching upward from my soul. Loving like this is only glimpsed a moment at a time. We are meant to come back to earth again and again and deal with the mud, the stickiness of it, the imperfect loving of real people with real imperfections.

For so many years I had wanted a child to fulfill some of this desire. But many other things took me away from a direct path towards mothering: the late 60's and 70's and those years of great cultural, political and social upheaval. Challenging roles of women and men, challenging the "nuclear family", questioning even the desire to have children led to changes in many of us, including with whom we chose to become partners. For years I was with women and the relationships had their fair share of confusion and pain, not because they were women, but because the hurts from our past clouded our ability to see each other clearly and kept us from being able to make a family strong enough for a child.

I never stopped wanting a child, but always thought it would happen eventually. They even made a T-shirt for those of us in that generation. It said: "oops, I forgot to have children!" I never really forgot, I just thought it would happen later. By the time later arrived, when I was 40 years old and met your father, I had already begun that slippery slide into early menopause. We tried to get pregnant for a few years before I got a firm diagnosis of menopause. This was followed by over three years of an adoption search that led us to you. I want to tell you some about the adoption story so you understand what a miracle you are to me.

After almost two years of what seemed like a fruitless search, we worked with a Birthmother for five months and discovered mid-way that she had used some drugs. After turning our home into a perinatal drug research center, we decided to go ahead with this Birthmom. But in the process of realizing that she might actually have put her unborn child at risk, something opened inside of her that had been closed and she grew to care about the baby.

Two and a half weeks before delivery, the room was painted, the crib and clothes were in their place and we had just returned from what we hoped would be our last vacation for awhile. We met with the Birthmom to finalize plans and I knew something was amiss. Later that night, our adoption agency called and told us that she felt terrible but had changed her mind. We were grief stricken at the loss and after several other leads that went nowhere, I had few spiritual or psychological reserves to start all over again. I could not for the life of me establish any equanimity in this process. I found myself screaming and crying in the kitchen that I couldn't take it anymore and that if God, (in the broadest sense) wanted me to have a child, it better happen soon.

Thanksgiving week, 1994, we got a call from our adoption agency about a woman who had used some drugs but it was unclear how much. We agreed to meet her at our house on Thanksgiving morning before we left for a trip to Mendocino. In the meantime, the agency called with another woman who also had some drug history who we decided to see on the way home from our trip. In the midst of all this, we got a call from our attorney saying a woman from Southern California had called who was due soon, were we interested? So after almost nothing for years, we had three possible situations in one weekend. I was crazy while away, stewing over every possible pro and con of each situation.

Since we had these two possibilities in the Bay Area and because the woman in Southern California seemed unsure and disinterested on the phone, we called to attorney's office and left a message that we wouldn't pursue that lead. Since it was a holiday weekend, the answering service asked if we wanted a conference call. I said no, but just said to make sure they got the message since I knew they would want to contact the Birthmom immediately for another client.

We met the first Birthmom at our home but it seemed as though drugs were still a part of her life. We liked the second Birthmom but it became clear while talking with her that there had been a great deal of drug use and that the Birthfather was a monster. After having three leads, we now had none and I was filled with panic, especially after having let go of the other lead. I frantically asked your Dad if he would call the attorney on the remote chance that they had not done anything about the Birthmom in Southern California. He got off the phone and said that the message that we had left almost two days before had not been picked up yet! A small miracle because of the holiday. We returned home and after only five minutes in the door, your Birthmom called saying she had gotten our letter, was very interested and wanted to meet us as soon as possible.

We made a reservation for the next night and waited at the airport with a sign that said Sara but she never appeared. I had to go to a client's memorial so we drove home and I left. Your sister and Dad went back to the airport and stood there again with a sign. The plane arrived - no Sara. Dad came home again, dropped your sister off and returned for the third time. The last plane of the evening from LA arrived and so did Sara!

It was late by the time I came home and your sister greeted me at the back door with a broad smile on her face and two thumbs up. I went into the living room and met a beautiful, charming, sweet, intelligent and good humored woman: your Birthmom. Within three minutes in her presence, I knew that she was a wonderful person and I would be honored and blessed to give a life of love to to her Birthdaughter. She didn't realize she was pregnant until very late in the pregnancy and she was no longer in a relationship with the Birthfather. She wanted very much for you to have a family with two parents so she was making this very difficult and painful decision to find a loving home for you.

The next day we hustled to make a medical appointment since she had had no prenatal care. We managed to find a wonderful doctor who pulled me aside after the exam and said that she was two centimeters dilated: she could give birth in two weeks or two days. Later that night, we were sleeping and I heard what I thought must be Sara coming upstairs. I jumped up, startled your Dad awake as Sara came through the door literally on her knees, saying "I have much pain!" I never saw your Dad get out of bed so quickly! He got the watch and we soon discovered that she was having contractions 3-5 minutes apart.

Our excitement was unbelievable. After all we had been through, after all the despair and dashed hopes, after the difficult and scary drug related situations, we met this wonderful woman who was having a baby! Things progressed rapidly and by the time we drove to the hospital at around 8:30 am, your Birthmom was bending over from contractions. Things moved even more rapidly in the hospital and a few short hours later, with a scramble by the hospital team because you were coming so fast, you started to enter this world. As you were coming out, your back was towards me so I couldn't see whether you were a girl or a boy. I had wanted a daughter all my life but now, in anticipation of you possibly being a boy, I found myself saying aloud, "it's a boy!" The nurse kept helping you out and said "I don't know, it looks like a girl to me!" I still get goosebumps when I think of this.

I'm telling you all this in hope that you will understand my deep belief that you were the child we were meant to have. After all we had been through, after so much despair and pain, it felt like your Birthmom came out of the heavens and landed with us because we were meant to be connected with your soul. Someone reading this might think it sounds crazy, romantic, and ridiculously metaphysical. But my heart of hearts knows that a prayer was answered when I told the universe that I couldn't do this much longer and I needed a child to love. But not just any child - you came to me. The attorney didn't get the phone message I had left about your Birthmom, just a little miracle. But all in service of the larger miracle: the heavens were moving quickly because you were ready to enter the world and be in our arms.

Adoption is strange in some ways. I look at you and cannot imagine that you didn't come out of my body because you are so much a part of me now. But I do know that you did not come from my body. I see your Birthmother in your face frequently. Sometimes there is a certain look and I can see her eyes, her lips, her smile, and even feel her laughter. I want very much to continue to keep the channels open so you can know her and she can know you. It is one of the hardest things a woman can do in her life: to give up the child that has been growing inside her. Your Birthmom had a tremendous desire for a better life for you and that is the only reason she could do what she did.

I feel loving feelings towards her in many ways. She is my daughter's mother - my daughter is her daughter. Her flesh is now of my flesh. Her creation is my joy. We are bound together through the most powerful love of a mother for her child. She will always be part of me as you are part of her. How could I not love her? She has given me the greatest gift anyone can give. Maybe that is why I feel you are a gift. All children are miracles and all children are gifts, but there is a way that the miracle of your adoption has opened my heart to feeling truly blessed.

I have a prayer, my daughter. May I hold this blessing and let it spread beyond the love of you and heal some of my painful relationship to myself. May this love guide me through the times ahead when you have difficulties about adoption or when you want to find your Birthfather or spend more time with your Birthmother. May this love not hinder me from letting you move on into your own path in life, separate and different from me. May this love help me take a breath every time I am angry or impatient with you. May I remember that you came to me from a prayer, that the universe blessed me, that it found me deserving of this profound love.

I haven't forgotten those moments of your early life. The capacity for this kind of loving has always been within me but it took my daughter to bring it forth. And for this, I want you to know that no matter what ever comes between us, no matter what happens in our lives that might put a veil between our hearts, I loved you with a love so pure and you returned it with a presence so wonderful and joyous that I will be eternally blessed by the gift of your life. Please know this in the deepest part of you: that even if I am gone from this earth when you are able to understand what I am saying, know that it will always be true - beyond death, beyond the confines of the body, loving you has been the most wonderful part of my life and it has brought healing to my soul. Thank you for being alive.

Love, Mom
August, 1997