

Payton

Adoption has always been a prominent part of my life. I can remember my adoptive mother sitting me down and trying to explain my past. I didn't fully understand the extent of my biological mother's sacrifice until much later in my life. I just remembered being confused, as well as ostracized and very much alone. My adoptive mother revealed that there were no known whereabouts of my father, she couldn't even give me a name. She could, in fact, tell me my mother's name; however, I can still picture the moment she revealed that my biological mother preferred not to see me. Her voice caught in her throat and I stared intently at the green carpet that was so popular in the 90's. The room spins and the memory ends, but I can't help but to be thankful for that painful experience. It is the fire behind wanting the best for my own child. As I have gone through the process of adopting out my daughter, Payton, I know she will never feel the way I did. She will never know the pain of growing up and not knowing where she came from. She will know that being her mother, even for the short time I was, will forever be my greatest accomplishment.

I held the pregnancy test with both hands leaning against the wall of the grubby chevron gas station in Salmon, Idaho. My friends chatted nonchalantly outside the stall. I began to try and discredit the two lines that appeared on the test. Sometimes they can give false positives, right? I sighed and ripped into the packaging of the three other tests I had bought. When the allotted time was up I fanned the tests out in my hands. All of them, every single one indicated that I was indeed pregnant.

I had never imagined myself as a mother, as curious as that sounds. I really had never thought of it. People always ask if you want kids one day, and a generic 'maybe one day' response was given. I can remember just not knowing what to do with myself. I was only 19 at

the time, still very much a young adult with emphasis on young. I didn't receive any support from my family and the father wanted nothing to do with me. I was profoundly alone.

To make matters worse, I had just taken a job in Salmon, Idaho as a horse wrangler for a Girl Scout Camp. Two other women and I were in charge of 24 horses. That meant saddling, feeding, and taking care of all 24 of them. It was also our job to teach the girls how to ride. After some instruction in the arena, we would take the girls on a ride through the mountainous valley that we worked in. It was an extremely unforgiving terrain as wolves, mountain lions and rattle snakes could be spotted quite frequently. We had the valley to ourselves, but that also meant that there was limited electricity, no cell service, and little running water. This was no place for a newly pregnant and bewildered young woman to be. As beautiful as the mountains were I decided to pack up my things and trek back to Boise to figure out what my next step was.

After I had gotten back to Boise, I learned that I was already 2 months pregnant. I quickly started getting the prenatal care I needed; however, I was out of a job and definitively needed to find another one. I called the director and found myself working in McCall at another Girl Scout Camp, this time slaving away in the kitchen. This wasted away some time, and I found solace sitting on the docks watching the sun sparkle across the water. I can recall the smell of pine and the rustle of the wind through the trees. Moments like these gave me time to come to terms with being a single parent. It was within these days that I fell in love with the idea of being a mother. My belly had begun to protrude past my t-shirts and shorts. I had to take naps in between working on my feet all day in the kitchen. If I sat close enough to the wall of the cabin I was staying in, I could get the wifi from the main cabin in the camp. I found children's stories online to read to my growing belly. The little kicks that felt like popcorn popping had begun and I would revel in their meaning. With each kick bloomed a ferocious protector; I

would do anything for this baby. I would do anything to see this child happy. In the back of my mind I knew choosing adoption was imminent, but on the same token, I knew I had to try.

Months went by, and the summer was replaced with the golden brilliance of fall that turned into the slumber that winter brings to the world. The weather turned harsh, and the kiss of the cold breeze will always be etched in my mind. The dreary days ticked by, and I was finally diagnosed with Preeclampsia; my blood pressure was through the roof. I could no longer move from the confines of my bed. Curled up in blankets, I remember watching parenting videos and catching up on the Disney movies I had so fondly watched as a kid. At this point, I was as prepared as I ever would be. I was just waiting around, enjoying my last few days of absolutely nothing.

I watched my belly jolt from her kicks. Vaguely alien like, I never could prepare for the feeling of her jostling around. I smiled. I wouldn't trade these moment for the world. I could push my hand onto the side of my belly, and a few seconds later a sharp kick would reply. I would play like this for hours until we were both too tired. We would then nap together; my daughter falling asleep to the sound of my heart and my arms encasing my belly. In the midst of this bliss, I was scared, more scared then I had ever been in my life. While she was still in the womb, she was safe. I was her protector. However, the world is a cruel and unforgiving place. I kept asking myself what would happen if one day I couldn't protect her. I suppose that is what a mother endures. She lets her heart walk the earth.

The memory of the first moment I laid eyes on Payton remains crystal clear. The doctor laid her on my chest. Payton kept lifting her head to see her new surroundings, two brilliantly blue eyes fixated on my face. A fuzz of blonde hair accompanied her small head, which I nuzzled, as all mothers do. The bond was instant. Even in the recovery room, I would not put

her down. Numerous nurses asked if they could take her to the nursery so I could get some sleep. I refused all of their offers because I knew in the back of my mind, one day I would have to let her go.

Payton and I were inseparable. Her infectious smile and enthusiastic laughs brought together with blue eyes full of life quickly became my world. Nothing had ever pushed me to better myself. I skated through high school never having to study or put much effort in. Payton, however lit a fire within me. I went to college and worked to bring us a better future. With the motivation for my future came the downside of having to leave Payton at daycare for hours. I would only see her for a few minutes before she went to sleep at night and in the morning when I got ready. I began to notice that I couldn't fully be there for her as parent. I spent many nights curled up next to her tiny body staying awake as long as I could to revel in the moment. I can remember tracing her cheek with my fingers and her tiny sighs of bliss.

The day came where I knew I had to make a decision. She was just shy of eight months. Still an impressionable being but young enough to not remember too much, especially an exchange of parents. The adoption agency welcomed me with open arms. I stayed almost eight hours going over my options. I was given four profiles to look over, and I was told I could take them home. However, after looking through the first profile, I knew I had found Payton's true family. They were a Catholic family, I wanted some amount of religion in my daughter's life, as I felt like it provided a certain amount of stability for young children. They had a biological son who was seven at the time. They couldn't have subsequent children, which is why they had chosen to adopt. Their pictures of hiking adventured and smiling faces lit up the pages. I asked the adoption agency to call immediately so I could meet them.

They had been waiting on the adoption list for two years. Waiting two years for a phone call. Two years of wondering why they hadn't been chosen. They tell me all the time that they were just waiting for Payton to be born. This will always cause tears to prick at the edges of my eyes, because it's true. Payton was meant to be part of their family. She fit right in immediately. The first time she met her brother, she sat still, for once in her life, and cuddled her cheek next to his. I can recall him just beaming that she had done this as if to cherish the moment that she had met her forever family. Since that moment he has always been the doting big brother he was meant to be. I can remember him walking into the living room with tears in his eyes saying his sister had hit him hard over the head with a hairbrush. He just let her do it with no malice back in her direction. I could not have chosen a better big brother.

I placed the car seat gently on the floor, Payton all bundled up inside. She gazed up at me with her sleepy blue eyes. I had cried so much the night before that I didn't have any tears left. If sorrow could take the shape of tears, I surely would have more to cry. I lingered a moment longer as she smiled up at me. Her smiles were the most whimsical, inspiring little gestures. This pure innocent little being knowing nothing of this world's blunders can only give so much, but what she gave, I would cherish forever. I reached down, and her tiny fingers grasped mine. She smiled and let out a small squeak of delight. I began to shake; this was the last moment that she would be mine. I gently kissed her forehead, and with that last goodbye, I left the room.

The decision to adopt my daughter was the most heart -wrenching decision I have ever had to make. It wasn't until the moment that I sat back and watched how happy she was with her new family that I understood the sacrifice my own mother had made. She had chosen to give me life and to give me the best chances of succeeding in the world. I will be forever grateful that I

was given the life I now live and for the family that took Payton in with loving arms. I knew how hard it was not knowing where I came from when I was growing up. I have vowed to always be in Payton's life so she will never have to question her past. I get to see her all the time, and she will always run up to me with a huge smile, her face lit up in anticipation. I have become so close with Payton's family that they have almost adopted me, as well. I spend the holidays with them and their extended families. I finally feel accepted in this world, because of the wonderful family I chose to parent my daughter. They have never judged me, even with my tattoos. They have never turned me away when I needed advice about life. I would not be the person I am today if I hadn't met them. The world can be an unforgiving place; however the people around us make the biggest impact.



