



pact's

point of view

The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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Loosing Lauren by Rachel Angeline

It has been nearly a month since Lauren left our family. I feel I am now at a point where my thoughts are pretty clear; the clouds have lifted, so to speak. I would like to share my current thoughts and feelings.

We met Lauren's birth mother, Janice, and Janice's parents in April, 1992. This situation sounded perfect in so many respects. The initial meeting was mutually successful. We all decided to move forward together with the adoption plan. This was an exciting, albeit nerve-racking time for all. Throughout the summer, David and I focused on getting to know Janice. As a birth mother myself (I placed my daughter for adoption 13 years ago in a closed adoption), it was very important to me to give this young girl what was not given to me: respect and involvement in the adoption process. We had many discussions with Janice about her willingness to continue with the plan and she assured us that she was committed to this choice. We visited almost every weekend. We became very close over the seven months we knew one another.

As Janice was only 13 at the time, her parents played a large role in this process. We made our best efforts to involve them in decisions, and spoke with them frequently about their own commitment to the plan. There was always the understanding that this was not Janice's first choice, but adoption had not been our first choice either. Her parents, although separated, presented themselves as being committed to the adoption and to their desire to give both their daughter and granddaughter the opportunity for a childhood and a good future.

Lauren was born in August. David and I were invited to the hospital and spent a very exciting day with Janice's immediate family. Her birth was smooth. Janice did a great job and was assisted by the birth father, whom we met for the first time that day. We held Lauren moments after her birth. She was beautiful, very alert and perfect in every way. We brought her home from the hospital the following evening.

After Lauren's birth, we began the process of becoming new parents and working on defining a relationship with Janice and her family. Both tasks brought stresses. Caring for Lauren was a pleasure - trying at times, but rich with the rewards of her smiles and ongoing unfolding and development. We learned that Janice had some very hard days accepting her decision but she continued to go for counseling and we stayed in close phone contact. We allowed her and her parents to see Lauren when they wanted to. The visits seem to be helpful for them, which made them OK for us.

Around Lauren's sixth week, my immediate family convened here to meet the baby. It was love at first sight for all. We asked them to participate in an entrustment ceremony with Janice and her family. Their participation made it a huge success. It was very moving to bring both families together, both committed to the adoption plan and acknowledging the important roles we all played in this process. There were many tears, laughter and a mutual sense that this adoption was going to work well.

Shortly after this, Janice hit another low. She felt she did not want to go through with the adoption plan. Her second thoughts filled us with terror and dread. Lauren had been with us for eight weeks. It seemed unthinkable to lose her. Janice's parents held firm in their belief that it would not be right for Janice to parent her child at 14 years of age. The situation gradually improved and Janice assured us she planned to sign the consent forms.

But now, something had changed inside of me. The trust that had evolved between us was shaken. I felt in my soul that we would lose this baby. I refused to believe it. I couldn't happen to me twice, could it?

When we got the dreaded call, Janice was hysterical and abusive, a side of her we had never seen before. Her mother had succumbed to Janice's pressure and agreed to parent the baby. I felt this awful sense of "Well, it has finally happened." In a way, it was almost a relief to be released from the uncertainty of the situation. On the other hand, it was too horrible to be true. We prolonged the inevitable for three days. The realization of each "last" was too difficult to bear - the last bath, feeding, smile - and the pain was breaking us up. We decided to take Lauren to the home of one of the adoption facilitators whom we had been working with. She handed Lauren back to Janice and her mother.

The first few days after losing Lauren were spent in a fog of numbness, sadness, tears, rage and more rage. The indignity of the situation was completely infuriating. Messages like "treat people the way you would like to be treated" or "you reap what you sow" came to mind. How could this have happened to us? Much of the anger stemmed from the injustice of losing a baby we had parented and loved for four months. Much was fueled by the lack of sensitivity we felt from Janice and her family. We have yet to hear a word from them offering any kind of explanation or apology for the total disruption of our lives.

Then there was the sadness. Every time I closed my eyes, I could see her. I had her little body memorized. I know exactly how she felt to touch, what her warm weight felt like on my shoulder. I envisioned bathing with her, clearly remembering how freely she moved in the bathtub. These images and others were ingrained in my mind; their recollection brought tears to my eyes.

Time, the great healer, is proving its effectiveness. Each day becomes more manageable. There are even times where it feels like it was all a dream. But it really did happen and, miraculously, we have survived. I know we would not be as sane as we are today without the invaluable support of friends and family.

We are as committed as ever to having a family. Adoption is our best choice. We remain committed to having an open adoption. I cannot deny basic information to another birth mother. Time and circumstances will determine how much contact is good for each of us. I want our child to have answers to questions about identity. We are incredibly scared. While I would not recommend this as a way to learn lessons in life, I have certainly gained a lot through this experience. The bond between a mother and child is incredibly strong. While adoption has many benefits, it also coincides with the loss and suffering of others. I believe open adoption has resulted in humanizing the adoption experience for all parties, but the

decision to allow someone else to parent your child is still tremendously painful. Despite the extraordinary stress David and I have faced, we know that our experience is not the norm.

David and I are both more sure than ever that we want to be parents. We have faith that, when the time is right, it will happen again. We have often asked why Lauren came into our lives and left so suddenly. While we will probably never know for sure, we do believe that God has a better plan for us. Lauren's presence was an incredible gift and we are grateful for the time she spent with us.

Postscript:

Three months have passed since we lost Lauren. I am amazed by our ability to survive. It has been especially helpful to meet with others who have shared similar experiences. Our small group met regularly for a few weeks and we were able to share an incredibly personal, painful journey together. It was very healing to know that we were not alone, that this kind of disruption can happen to other sensitive, intelligent and caring people. We understood each others' tears, anger and occasional laughter as we reflected on our situations. We were able to support each other and inspire each other to move forward and let go of the past. Of course, there are still days when the pain is very present, but they are less frequent now and we know we will get through to the other side.

Rachel Angeline is birth mother to a daughter she placed for adoption in 1977, adoptive mother to Elliot and birth mother to Naomi, both of whom she is now parenting.