

The Dance of Trust by Becca Martinson

Last night, I sat on the couch where my six month-old daughter was conceived – at least where she was conceived to me. And beside me, my angel slept, completely innocent of the intense and varied emotions her mommy had experienced at that very location.

The first time I sat on that couch, I almost didn't. I had an appointment to discuss open adoption with the adoption coordinators at Pact, and I very nearly canceled the appointment. I had read enough about open adoption to know its benefits for the child, but virtually everyone I knew had a story to tell about birth mothers taking their children back, and I wasn't about to expose myself to that possibility.

For whatever reason, I didn't cancel that appointment, and sometime during the hour and a half I sat on that couch, I came to think about open adoption in terms of risk. I realized that no matter how one approaches parenthood, one has to be prepared to accept risk. I learned that the percentage of disrupted open adoptions is approximately the same as the percentage of miscarriages in pregnancy. But the risk of miscarriage hadn't stopped me from trying to get pregnant. And the myriad other risks – crib death, accidents, kidnapping, the terrible twos, juvenile delinquency – hadn't stopped me from wanting to be a parent. So why was I willing to let the risks inherent in open adoption stop me?

I also realized that, to some extent, this risk would be tempered by my participation, since it would be half my responsibility to develop a positive relationship with the birth mother.

The next time I sat on that couch was the day I first met my soon-to-be-born daughter's birth mother. What an incredible juxtaposition of emotions there were that day – nerves, elation, wanting to please, wanting to protect myself. Here was someone who had something I wanted so desperately, but who also held the power to hurt me more than I'd ever been hurt before. In retrospect, I can see that the seeds of our relationship were an odd little dance – both of us feeling powerless and powerful, and both of us really wanting the relationship to work.

A mere 10 days later, I was in the delivery room watching the birth of my daughter. I was there at the very generous urging of her birth mother, so I could tell my child the story of the birth. She kept apologizing for how long the delivery was

taking, as though she were inconveniencing me by not being able to pop the baby out on demand. As soon as the baby was born and everyone said, "It's a girl!" the exhausted birth mother looked at me and said only, "Bryn," using the name I had chosen to give a daughter.

The next day she wanted to be the one to put the baby in my arms for the journey home. In a ridiculous example of hospital bureaucracy, she walked beside us as Bryn and I rode in the required wheelchair to the front door. I can't begin to imagine the bravery it must have taken for her to say good bye to us at that point. Or how she arrived at the unbelievable trust she was placing in me.

Over the next few months, my daughter flourished and dug her way very deeply into my heart. Her birth mother would call every now and then, just to make sure everything was all right, just to make sure there really was a baby, and I really was taking care of her. I was so new to parenthood then, and so new to my relationship with the birth mother, I felt somewhat tentative about her inquiries. I needed to understand her emotions and couldn't. What did she need? What did she want from me? If I gave her the space to be sad, would she change her mind and want the baby back? There was a big piece of me that wanted to make it okay for her, that NEEDED everything to be okay for her.

I sometimes wish I could take back the fear I felt in those days. Yet I realize it could have been no other way. You can't get to the top of a mountain without climbing it, and you can't build trust without building the foundations of a relationship. There will never be another relationship in my life that will occur so quickly and require so much immediate trust. Now, six months later, I think my daughter's birth mother trusts that I will take good care of the little girl whom she gave life, and I know I trust her not to take the baby back.

Sometimes, especially at night when I look at my precious little girl asleep in her crib, I yearn for more connection with her birth mother – for more understanding. How is she now? How does she feel about this baby? I want to be able to share some of the overwhelming love I'm feeling. But mostly, I think, I wish I could repay her for the incredible gift she's given me, and I feel frustrated that there are no words, no objects, no anything to equate the enormity of it. The best I can offer is to take the best care possible of the daughter she's allowing me to raise. But it's not enough.