

## **... and many a tear will fall**

**By Sharon Kelly**

### **October...**

I was a college student, beginning my senior year as a music major. I was sitting in a small examining room at the campus clinic, waiting for the doctor. When he finally walked in, he said, "It's positive." It was 2:02 p.m., and I thought that if I could jump back into 2:01 p.m. and return to class, I could deny this visit to the clinic, refusing ever to acknowledge that I was pregnant.

Although my body was in shock, a surge of joy was emerging. I was actually carrying life. I began to smile and laugh as I walked aimlessly. I felt like I was flying.

I ended up at my friend Amy's house. She smiled and said, "Sharon, being pregnant is the most beautiful feeling in the world. Whatever you do, enjoy it." I am so grateful she said that, because no one else did.

Telling my friends and family was difficult. Some showed their support by listening. Others had definite opinions of their own. It was hard for me to tell my pastor, because I went to a fundamentalist church. But he responded by telling me he loved me. The next Sunday, he announced I was pregnant and that I had received forgiveness and was loved. He reminded the congregation of the scripture that says, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7). Everyone came up to the front where I was standing and hugged me. I felt secure and loved.

### **November...**

I dropped all my classes. I couldn't even get out of bed. I threw up when I ate and even when I didn't eat. I was losing weight. I had to quit my job and I was forced to apply for welfare.

### **December...**

I was so weak and sick that I didn't care what happened anymore. I was admitted to the hospital and hooked up to an IV. My hospital chart read, "Young girl, pregnant, confused." The word "confused" scared me. It mirrored the reality that I was confused and that everyone else knew it. I felt helpless. I had had enough advice to last a lifetime.

### **January...**

I contacted Denise, a girl whose number a nurse had given me. She told me she had gone through a Christian adoption agency in Chicago. She got to choose the parents for her baby. They even wrote her a thank-you letter.

I struggled with what I should do. I wanted my baby to have a family, especially a father, since I had not had one. I didn't want my baby to grow up on welfare. I had already applied for low-income housing and that atmosphere was not my idea of a healthy family environment. Everything I wanted for my baby I wouldn't be able to give her. It just didn't add up. I thought hard about what Denise had told me.

One night I woke up and saw an angel at the corner of my closet. Maybe I was crazy, maybe I was dreaming. Maybe I did see an angel. I don't know. I said, "God, this is your baby; take care of her."

### **February...**

I decided to visit the agency where Denise had placed her baby. The interview was pleasant. I decided to proceed with them. I made plans to live in Chicago. They arranged for me to live with a couple named Bruce and Kerry. They assigned an OB/Gyn who donated his services to the agency. I would relinquish my baby to the agency and they would then screen for prospective parents.

### **May...**

It was a hot, muggy Chicago night, about 11:00 p.m.. Outside, it was dark and very still. The light from the living room looked warm and inviting, but as I approached the house, inside me a voice was screaming. "What are you doing here? These people are strangers!" I felt an overwhelming urge to drop my suitcases and run. I was so scared. Slowly, a step at a time, I made it up to the front door. The door opened and I entered. There was no turning back.

Bruce and Kerry showed us into the living room. They had a beautifully refurbished Victorian house. We chatted for a few moments before Karen, my social

worker, left. They showed me up the hardwood stairs to the small bedroom they said was mine. It was a quaint little room, newly decorated. The room was waiting for me and I immediately fell in love with it. The sheets on the bed were antique white with a matching quilted comforter trimmed in eyelet lace. There was a round mirror over a desk and a tall dresser. I put my few possessions into the drawers, slipped into bed and fell asleep.

Bruce and Kerry were warm and wonderful. We'd go shopping or eat out. Bruce would cook gourmet dinners. I met their friends, as they had frequent parties. Kerry and I were like sisters. They had a little Maltese dog named Sheba. Sheba and I liked to go for walks around the block. At night, she slept with Bruce and Kerry, but sometimes she would sneak out of their room after they had gone to sleep and hop up on my bed until right before morning when she'd dash back to their room before they woke up. She was a loving, un-opinionated little buddy of mine.

There is a certain magic about being pregnant. The world twinkles at you. Everyone is eager to smile at you, open doors for you, and get you whatever you need. I felt like a light was radiating from me and everyone wanted to be near it. I did not carry on with normal work or school functions. I just existed one day at a time. I saw the simplest works of nature in their most magnificent form. I would sit on the back porch and watch the flowers in the garden. In the early morning, they lifted their petals to the sun and opened their arms to bloom by noon. They were so alive and radiant.

In the solitude of my room lived the many nights of tears and confusion. I was fighting to understand myself, my feelings and "the right thing to do." I logically planned out the steps of my pregnancy with many people helping. If I entertained thoughts of changing my mind, I felt guilty. Mostly, I wanted the best for my baby. Logically, it all made sense but emotionally, it was tearing me apart.

### **June...**

I was about eight and a half months' pregnant when I caught a glimpse of myself in the window of a store. I stood looking at my stomach in full-length profile. I was thrilled at the way my stomach popped out so big. I had never realized how I looked. I could have stood there all day, admiring my changed body.

I went to a childbirth movie. At the end they showed a baby having just been born. Tears began to flow uncontrollably from my eyes when the nurses put a little T-shirt on him. I couldn't stop. I was embarrassed. I ran out of the room. I realized I didn't have any little T-shirts for my baby. What mother wouldn't have thought to get shirts for her baby, born naked into this world? If I could overlook something so obvious, I must surely be a terrible mother.

My estimated delivery date came and went. I began to feel like I was going to be pregnant forever. Then on the afternoon of June 30th, I felt light cramps.

### **July...**

"No, no," I kept yelling. I can't remember everything. I kept pushing and pushing and the doctor kept saying, "More, more." I pushed with all my might. At 3:10 a.m. on July 1, I heard the doctor say, "It's a girl."

I awoke very early the next day and the nurses brought my baby to me. She was perfect. I was sure there was not a baby quite as beautiful in the whole world. I held her on my chest all day long, looking at every little part of her body. She was so tiny and peaceful. I wondered if there could be a stronger love than that of a mother for her child. I wrapped her in the blanket that I had crocheted. Karen took pictures. I felt at peace.

I named her Marah, for the water Moses and his people had come across in the wilderness. The people were thirsty and Moses prayed to God about what they should do. God answered by telling Moses to place a branch in the water and He would make it sweet. The nurses said they never would have brought her to me, had they known I was placing her for adoption.

On my last day in the hospital I awoke frantic that the nurses hadn't brought in the baby yet. I felt guilty asking for my baby that day because I was deserting her. I felt like a horrible mother. I kissed her for the final time and whispered to her how much I loved her. I walked out of the hospital, tears streaming down my face. It hurt so much. I wanted to run back to her and take her away forever. I walked quickly, leaving my baby in the arms of a stranger.

I felt so empty and lifeless. The life that had been in my body had left and I felt like an empty shell. I was angry, sad, still trying to hold on to my logical reasons. When it was time to sign the final adoption papers, the insides of my body crushed my breath and a sickness filled my stomach. I didn't know if I could sign my name. All I could think of was my love for Marah and how God loved his Son and sacrificed Him. I was sacrificing. I hurt. I wrote two letters.

*My dearest Marah,*

*For me, pregnancy was the most precious experience a woman could have. I'll never forget the day you were born; even the pain was sweet, for you were my reward and I loved you so much. I truly wanted a little girl.*

*I didn't have a father as a child, so I felt it very important that you have a father. I was a college student. I barely had more than my clothes and books, just renting an apartment with a girlfriend. You and I would start out living in low-income housing on food stamps and*

*receiving welfare. Not that I wouldn't work, but I would then be forced to leave you with a baby-sitter while I worked.*

*I just couldn't do that to you. When you were born, I held you in my arms. I looked at you, so beautiful, and I knew I had to give you more. I wanted you to have two Christian parents to help you grow up, knowing and loving the Lord, a stable home in a good safe neighborhood and enough money to meet all your needs. I had to give you what you deserved. It doesn't mean I loved you any less but that I loved you so much—to let you go. Someday again, I hope to hold you in my arms when you are grown up.*

*I love you.*

*Dear Parents,*

*I love Marah and I hope you'll always let her know that. I also hope that someday she will want to know about me and who I am. But I want you to know that I don't want to hurt you or be a threat to you. I don't know how you feel about me. I don't ever want to take your place. You will have earned the title "Mother" in all respects. I hope to be a part of her life someday.*

*I wish that I could know about you as parents also. I wish that things were more open in adoptions. I wonder, what do you look like and what do you think about? I will understand if you refuse any contact, but hope you would consider letting me know occasionally how Marah and her family are.*

### **California...**

By the end of the summer I was living in California. I had a job but I felt alone. I called the agency, collect. The receptionist told me not to call collect anymore. I was stunned. I felt they didn't care about me anymore. I swore I would never call there again. I got desperate and contacted an attorney who contacted the agency. Karen then phoned and told me they had chosen a couple to adopt Marah. He was in insurance, she was a nurse. They owned their home and had three boys of their own. Recently, they'd had a baby girl who died in the hospital. Much as I wanted Marah back, I couldn't take her away from this family. I knew my decision was right. I didn't really want to change my mind.

I don't know that each day after I left Marah it got any easier. I wanted to sit still and quit living. But as reluctant as I felt, time rolled by and forced me to comply. I didn't know where I fit in. Karen wrote that Marah's adoption would be final soon. She said she had read parts of the letters to Marah and to the adoptive parents. I never understood why she didn't read all of the letters. I had written them for the adoptive parents to read.

I questioned the whole process of the agency. I felt cheated and became angry at myself for not knowing all the creative alternatives that adoption had to offer. In California, adoptions were being done in much healthier, open ways. After a year I asked them if they would contact the family and find out if Marah was OK. The agency said it was not their policy. Even if the parents had refused, I would have felt at peace, but for the agency to stand in the middle and play God was wrong. They have been by greatest disappointment.

I found some notes I wrote in anger:

*My decisions, my gestures, were all a symbol of my love. The plan, each step I took, was a journey carefully planned to give of myself to a child in a loving way. In turn, I feel backed into some corner, by others' insecurities. I have a voice, I feel, I talk but I am not paid attention to. I carried this baby for you with love. I gave her to you, with love. I wanted the best for you. Do you think it was easy? Do you think it was fun? No, but I loved you before I met you. We share something so intimate. This was my greatest gift. I feel like the adoptive parents took my gift of love and ran. Why are they afraid of me? I'm the one who made the decision to give them this gift. I need some communication. Someone has locked me out. I am angry. I don't know what to do. I am hurt that you could take my child and not respond, no "thank you," no "how do you feel?" no "are you OK?" and no "Yes, we love Marah."*

Although my process was not ideal, I believe in adoptions as long as they are a humane process. It only begins at the placing of the child. Each party involved must be well-adjusted and happy to ensure the continued success of the adoption. We must not be afraid, and we must know that each adoption can be as creative as the parties involved. A birth mother must know all of her alternatives.