Love Enough for Two

Open adoption allows BR girl to maintain contact with birth mother

Editor’s note: Rachel Touchet is both mother and grandmother. Her real names are not used. Andrea and Mary are not her real names. The photos or this story were also featured in an article in Magazine 10 years ago.

BY LISA TRAMONTANA

Rachel Touchet is twice blessed. On this special day, 14-year-old Rachel celebrates the birthday of the woman who brought her into this world and the one who moved to Denver years later to help her find her birth mother.

For many adoptees, it is a story ending with mother and child searching for each other to ease a heartache that never goes away. But for Rachel, adoption has made her life fuller, given her an extended family and made it easier to understand love, loss, sacrifice and forgiveness.

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The story begins with Andrea, who in 1980 found herself pregnant with her first child, a little girl she named Rachel. Mary remembers it as a time of crisis, full of doubt, fear and panic. "Oh, it was a hole in your heart ... I just can't imagine," Mary said. "There were so many emotions for all of us.

Mary declined to discuss the father except to say that Andrea was not married at the time. After attending high school, Andrea lived at home until her fifth month, then went to a maternity home in Denver to give birth.

"That's when Andrea gave Rachel away," Mary said. "She had decided to place the baby for adoption."

"It was very hard," Andrea said. "I was in a really sad time of my life. It was my grandson, after all."

"Even though Andrea was able to select the adoptive parents, it was traumatic for her to let go of that baby girl. But she did it and I know that she didn't want to ever look back."

"It is nice to know that Andrea is happy with the Touchets," Rachel said. "I probably would have done the same thing Andrea did."

In the 16 years since the adoption, Andrea and the Touchets have exchanged pictures, letters and gifts for the little girl now named Rachel. The meetings were always held at the offices of Catholic Community Services and Rachel was never present.

"I think the reason the open adoption has worked so well is because of Andrea and her family," said Kathy. "They have never once overstepped the bounds. They have never pushed. They have always been thoughtful and considerate of our feelings and what was best for Rachel"

But Rachel says her decision and as much a part of Rachel's life as she could be. "I think the reason the open adoption has worked so well is because of Andrea and her family," said Kathy. "They have never once overstepped the bounds. They have never pushed. They have always been thoughtful and considerate of our feelings and what was best for Rachel."

"For every year or two, the two families exchanged pictures, letters and gifts for the little girl named Rachel. The meetings were always held at the offices of Catholic Community Services and Rachel was never present."

"It is important to know that Andrea is happy with the Touchets," Rachel said. "I probably would have done the same thing Andrea did."

For the first four years, Andrea and Mary were not part of Rachel's life. Andrea did not even meet Rachel. "I could see that Andrea was crying," Kathy said. "It was a bittersweet moment, but as time passed, Andrea and Mary were beginning to understand what is was."

In 1991, Andrea and Kathy first met Rachel. "As a younger woman, I would have never done it," Andrea said. "But this is my mom."}

Advocate staff photo by Ann Snyder

Adoption in Washington, D.C.

Four-year-old Rachel hugs her birth mother, Andrea, in this 1991 photo, as the Touchet family looks on.

"On Mother's Day, we always pray for both birth mothers," said Don. "We want them to feel the love and joy and we wish them happiness." In her heart, Andrea knows she made the right choice.

"I love Rachel," she said. "I never knew that or my mother. I wish I could have been a part of her life, but there's never been any conflict." Andrea is making peace with her birth mother, Rachel Touchet. "She's my newborn," she says, smiling at Kathy. "This is my mom."
from the birth parents (even if there is minimal contact) and can more easily understand that the decision to place him (for adoption) was made out of love."

By the same token, the adoptive parents have less to fear. "When a birth mother knows that her child is being loved and nurtured ... when she doesn’t have to wonder ... it puts her at ease," White said. "The adoptive parents don’t have to worry that she will snatch the child or change her mind."

Lillie Gallagher, executive director of St. Elizabeth Foundation, agrees. "Think of what the birth mother goes through," Gallagher said. "There is fear, guilt and sometimes a feeling that she will have to pay heavy consequences for irresponsible actions. Even if she decides to place the baby for adoption, now she has to go through the pain and trauma of separation ... it will take a lot to make her proud of her decision ... but that’s exactly what open adoption often does."

Duffy warns adoptive and birth parents not to automatically expect an “Oprah-like” ending, however. "It’s not for everyone," she said. "Like any relationship, it will have its ups and downs and everyone should be prepared for that."

Families like the Touchets have gotten pretty good at walking that fine line. But even with love on both sides, it’s a balancing act that never ends.

For more information on adoption, call St. Elizabeth Foundation at 769-8888, Catholic Community Services at 336-8708 or the state Department of Social Services at 342-4663. If you are experiencing a crisis pregnancy, call (collect) the National Council for Adoption at (202) 328-1200.