



chosen
the flesh, of my flesh

chosen

Jana Zuniga



She walked into the room with sunken cheeks, ripped jeans, and a weary demeanor. Her frail arms were crossed over her stomach as she sat in the chair across from me hunched over. This girl was nervous, confused, and afraid. She came into our office on that July afternoon to confirm her positive pregnancy test. I had been interning at that particular pregnancy help center since the beginning of the summer, but never saw someone as scared as this young girl was. When she came out of the bathroom with a positive pregnancy test, and I didn't quite know the appropriate words to say. After she shared her plans to carry her child to term, I realized that she was accepting an unknown future. I realized in that moment that it is through complete faith that mothers allow a new life to grow and dwell within them. In a single moment of time, their heart begins to beat for someone else's and their flesh miraculously becomes the fruit of new life.

Chosen is a project that honors the role that women play in our society as mothers, and recognizes the different challenges that each mother encounters. It does not seek to have all the answers, but rather offers to share truth through the honest lens of women who have been there. Women who have faced unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, death, disability, poverty, medical complications, singlehood, and adoption. Women who have each arrived at motherhood in their own way.

This project rests on the conviction that we are each here in this world for a unique and irreplaceable purpose. It is a mission to spread hope where it is lost, to shed light into darkness, and to bring comfort where there is pain. These stories cannot represent *all* mothers of our world, but aims to encompass the grace, fortitude, and bravery of women as mothers in our society. A mother has the distinct power to influence our society through nurturing and molding the lives that were entrusted to her care. Motherhood is therefore not merely a biological term, but rather a representation of the specific role that women assume in another person's life by way of various circumstances. This role offers unconditional love and commitment to another person at a given point in their life. It is the highest form of love; to lay down your life for another. A mother lives so that others may live first. A mother was chosen for this kind of love, and she chooses to say "yes" every single day in response. It is not a submission, but a courageous acceptance. Motherhood is a gift.

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The women in this magazine have given their full consent to disclose this information to this publication.

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Surrendering your FEARS



SHADEÉ LANGUAGE

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Shadee grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and attended Living Stone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where she received her psychology degree. She is married with two daughters , Nyla (6) and Nia (16 mos.), and one on the way. She had her first daughter when she was a sophomore in college at Living Stone and had her second daughter five years later. Her family lives in the south side of Chicago, and she is currently a student at Northwestern for a counseling degree.

"I WAS 20 YEARS OLD AND FAR AWAY FROM HOME, AND I WAS SCARED."

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY LIKE?

My first pregnancy was almost 7 years ago, and I remember feeling like I could be, but I hadn't ever been before. So I called Ashton who's now my husband, and I said "I think we have a situation". So we took the test together and I broke down and cried. I was a sophomore in college. I was terrified, I was nervous, I felt unprepared, I was confused as far as if I wanted to keep it or if I wanted to move on with it. I was unsure how that was going to look as far as me being a mom. Do I want to finishing college? Do I wanna just stay at home with her? Thankfully Ashton kind of reassured me that everything was going to be ok. I remember maybe about a week had passed and I just decided to embrace that I was going to be a Mommy. So I started watching all the blogs and DVDs and doing all this research about young moms. I wasn't a teenager but I was young, I was 20 years old and far away from home and I was scared. Very scared.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR?

My first fear was "Is he really going to stick around?" He says everything is going to be alright, but I was scared to be alone raising this little kid. I had never been a mommy before, So I didn't know what that looks like from day to day. The

second thing that kept ringing out to me was that I was a college student, you know. College students, we still call our parents for money, we're trying to just eat whatever we can eat throughout the day. So how can I provide for this little baby? But not just provide where we get by but so that she thrives as a child, you know? So those were my fears. I did not want to raise the baby alone.

WHAT HELPED YOU THROUGH THIS FEAR?

To be honest, my faith in God. I remember during that time I just got really really close to God and I was always praying and always seeking God. More so surrendering my own fears and thoughts about what I think it's going to be like, to more *God's got this and he loves me enough to keep me through this*. So it was my own personal spirit coming to calmness. But then I was very vocal with where I was at with my own Mother, who shared her story of having my older brother at age 17. So hearing the reality of *I'm not the only one to feel this way, to feel terrified of messing this babies life up just because I had a fun night*.

WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE IN RAISING A CHILD DURING COLLEGE?

Well Ashton's family went crazy at first. They were like "who's this chick that's pregnant who's trying to ruin your life?" So that was a hurdle we had to get over just to get support from the family because he wanted to take a semester off. So we both took a semester off and got back and we didn't have a babysitter or daycare. So imagine two college students full time juggling classes. He would have an 8am and I would have a 9am, and we were switching this baby off between classes. It was really tough to balance that. And then none of our friends had

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- Shadeé



children. It wasn't like a plague but it was definitely different. We came back and people were ready to party and hangout. So we came back and it was very hard to balance being in college and having college responsibilities, not even just parties but having a social life. It was very different. We were very nervous. Just being out there on our own and so young and having to provide and having to go to school and still be parents. It's a real balancing act.

HOW DID YOU FIND SUPPORT?

A number of ways. We started getting closer to our professors. Nyla's godfather is actually the vice president of advancement for the college, so he would call us and offer to take our daughter for the weekend and babysit so we could go on dates. Then we made another friend, an english professor, who had a daughter two weeks after we had Nyla, so they would be playmates. So we made connections with the professors, and looking back I guess that was kinda weird but we needed it and it helped us get through. It helped Nyla too because she didn't have to stay with us every day. It turned out to be really good for us.

HOW DID YOU FIND HOPE WHEN IT GOT TOUGH?

My faith. I don't think I would have had hope if I didn't have God to call out to and cry to every night, and him kinda maneuvering things to help us out...like his hand was just so much over our life at that time. I ended up working two jobs by the time I was done with college, graduated with honors, and I wasn't working nearly as much as I was at the beginning of Nila. So just trusting in God, that was just so eye opening to know that I didn't have to do this alone. I wasn't goin' to be strong enough to manage all of that alone.

I needed to know that God got us, and he showed us in every single way. My baby never went hungry, and that was a big fear of mine, we ended up moving out and having our own apartment, and I bought a car. You could just see God's hand in our life, and I know that my faith just went through the roof because I completely trusted in God at that time. And we got blessed with the best kid in the world.

"WHEN WE ARE THAT YOUNG OR WHEN IT'S AN UNPLANNED PREGNANCY YOU FEEL ALONE, AND SCARED, AND YOU FEEL LIKE PEOPLE WON'T UNDERSTAND, BUT PEOPLE WILL. AND IT WILL BE OK."

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN FACING AN UNPLANNED PREGNANCY IN COLLEGE?

So many things I could say. Going through my struggles in college was a dark time in the beginning and it could have stayed dark, but one of the biggest things I learned was that I'm not in this alone. A lot of times when we are that young or when it's an unplanned pregnancy you feel alone, and scared, and you feel like people won't understand, but people will. And it will be ok. The reason it will be ok is that this beautiful baby will grow, and we grow with them. I'm not 20 anymore; I'm not a kid anymore. We grow too. It really will be alright. I think the biggest thing is to surround yourself with

positive energy, whatever that looks like for you. And don't try to do this alone. Don't believe the lie that you have to fight it by yourself. There are places out there that support women through that, and there are groups of women with single moms. There are things out there that say "you don't have to do it alone." Motherhood is more about community than singleness.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE WISHED YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE YOU BECAME A MOTHER?

I wish I would have known that everything is not perfect, and that's ok. I wish I had had more of that realization because it would have saved me a lot of heartache. Everybody is different.

"THEY HAVE THE ABILITY AND POWER TO MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE, AND I'M HELPING SHAPE AND MOLD AND RAISE THEM UP FOR THAT."

GREATEST JOY OF MOTHERHOOD?

Knowing that the children I am birthing and raising, and spending all this time with, they are going to be in the world, impacting it in one way or another. For me that's the great thing about being a mother, is knowing that I'm raising beautiful beings in this world. They have the ability and power to make this world a better place and I'm helping shape and mold and raise them up for that. It's a big responsibility. You're going to be in society, and I've gotta not only help you have the skills for it but empower you to be your complete self throughout all of it. Just knowing that these are my seeds out in the world.

WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST IN HOW TO BE A GOOD MOTHER?

My mommy. My mommy is like literally my super hero. She's even challenging me now. She's the world's greatest. She has the special ability to discipline without ostracizing us and making us feel unloved. She loves each of us equally, where we never feel like she loves someone else more. She supports us in a way where we can go to mom, but we are strong enough and empowered enough to do it on our own. She has a knack for knowing what we need without saying it. It's just an angelic thing she has. I aspire to be a mom like her. It's an art, the way she does it.

MOST REWARDING PART OF MOTHERHOOD?

Seeing them grow. When I see the things that we've been working on, you can tell that we pour love, and that they are growing in love. They show it when they are out and when they are with friends. It's a really rewarding thing for me to see all of this love that we pour out on both of them, and they pour it out so much more. I can't tell you how many times people tell me that I have really great kids. That's a rewarding feeling, because in the background of motherhood you have to put so much work in.

There are so many lessons you have to go through throughout the day. They seem mundane, and they seem like everyday procedures, but then you see them in the world and they are being awesome kids...it's indescribable.



DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

NO. Can you put all caps and make it red? NO NO NO. Society either sees motherhood as a woman who is completely overwhelmed by parenting, (ex. Sit coms, cartoons, TV shows) or it shows mothering as an unacceptable option in life: "This baby might ruin your life." "Your not ready." "Pregnant and scared? Abort."

I don't think that society really celebrates the wonders and joys of being a mother. The other day I was watching TV and a commercial came on six times. And in the beginning, it's this woman, she takes her pregnancy test, she looks, she cries, she rubs her stomach, a gloomy scene, and then the caption comes on. "Pregnant and don't know what to do? Text ABORT to this number, and we'll give you option, but the option that you make me text is abort? That's the only image that mothers are seeing right now, you know, potential mommies. If I would have seen that six years ago, that commercial would have freaked me out.

And then the other thing is, all these mom's are either super aggressive or stressed out to the max. I don't ever see shows where they are balanced. On the urban TV shows, they try to keep moms like a nanny image, but that's not who I am, that's not how I see myself. They don't do well with encompassing the grace of mothers.

"EVERYTHING IS NOT PERFECT, BUT THAT'S OK."

SCARS
OF PAIN,

imprints
of LOVE



MARIA DUNLAP

.....

Maria Leese was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. After a few years at St. Louis University, she left to complete cosmetology school back at home. She married her husband Rod in 2011 and has since had 4 children. Her first daughter, Vivian, was born with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS) and lived for 59 impactful days. Maria and Rod currently live in Cincinnati with their three living children. Maria is the Founder and President of **Vivian's Victory***.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD SHAPE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD?

My Mom is a stay at home mom and she is an amazing, *amazing* mother. Each of us kids are so different and have so many different interests, and my mom did such a great job cultivating who we were and supporting us in what we did. And now being a mom myself, I really realize how much work that took on her part, to really learn who each of us was specifically as a person, individually and uniquely as a person and helping us become who Christ created us to be. Uniquely. Not a cookie cutter, "This is how I'm going to be a mom for each of my kids," and I think that's what I take the most from my childhood.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY?

Rod and I got married in May of 2011 and we found out we were pregnant in November of 2011, the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. I called Rod on the way home and told him "I think I'm pregnant", and I told him to go get a pregnancy test. So we found out that we were pregnant and it was the happiest, most exciting moment ever. Because my whole life, that's what I had wanted, I wanted to be a mom so I was just so excited to finally be pregnant and have this baby.

So for the next 4 or 5 months I just built up all these dreams and got so excited about finding out if it was a boy or a girl. On March 7th of 2012 we had our 20 week ultrasound. We went in and as they are doing the ultrasound they said, "It's a girl," and I was SO excited because I wanted a girl so badly, and as that joy was escalating she

"...AND AS THAT JOY WAS ESCALATING SHE TURNED TO US AND SAID, 'THERE'S SOMETHING SIGNIFICANTLY WRONG WITH HER HEART'."

turned to us and said, "...and there's something significantly wrong with her heart." And it was like then I was totally deflated. My heart, my stomach, everything just sunk to my feet. "What do you mean there's something wrong with her heart? How does that even happen?" You know there were so many questions.

So that day we went into the doctor's office and the doctor spoke with us a little bit more about what was going on and he said "We think your daughter has what's called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS). It's where the left side is smaller than the right side." So after getting a more in depth ultrasound done they confirmed that she in fact did have HLHS. So we began our journey at that point of feeling really such a deep sorrow that this was what was "wrong" with our child but also learning more about what the diagnosis was. We learned in the next few months that HSLS is not a death sentence. There's a 3-part surgery that kids go through and they can live a pretty normal life. So there was a lot of hope that this was not the end, that it wasn't this terrible

awful thing, that it was just going to be an obstacle that would really define her character. So the rest of my pregnancy was totally fine but there was just more of that emotional piece to it, feeling the feelings of what this meant and preparing ourselves for what our life was going to look like bringing this life into the world.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER SHE WAS BORN?

Viv was born on July 24th of 2012, and she just burst into this world. She was pink and beautiful and screaming like a crazy mad woman and I was able to hold her for a few minutes and kiss her and love on her before they took her away. They took her to the NICU and got her prepped to be transferred to the Cincinnati Children's Hospital. We have a really close priest friend who was able to baptize her and then they took her to Children's Hospital, where they immediately started doing testing on her to correctly identify what the formal diagnosis would be and confirm if they needed to do surgery. [...] So I went later in the day and I was able to see her. We were there for a few days and we found out that Viv's diagnosis was not just HLHS, she actually had a chromosomal defect called Turner Syndrome. It only happens in females, and it's the absence of one X chromosome. Vivian fell in the moderate to severe end of Turner Syndrome, and should not have lived past the first trimester.

She had a liver abnormality and she was missing her portal vein, which connects the intestine to your liver. Her veins were very narrow in her circulatory system. All of these findings changed the plan of action for how they were going to help Viv. It took about a week to figure out what they would do because they had never seen all of these things inflicted on one person at one time. She ended up having her heart surgery on August 1st of 2012.

Everything went great and the doctor did an awesome job. Viv did great and started recovering really well. We were able to extubate her a few days later and once we did she started having a lot of stress because she couldn't eat and breath at the same time. That was pretty normal so we had to re-intubate her and this happened a few times and by the third time we realized that there was something significantly wrong and we needed to investigate to figure out what to do to move forward.

So at that point we were going to be put on a transplant list and then we did a few different procedures that helped us realize that it wasn't a heart problem but more a circulatory problem. [...] It was really hard because it was like, "Ok, you don't wanna give up on your child," you know...you don't wanna give up. The doctors would always say to us, "You get to the point where you have to evaluate if you are doing things *for* your child or if you are you doing things *to* her, because there's a very significant difference." I had gotten to the point where I knew in my heart that we were doing things *to* her, but my husband really wasn't there yet. So we just kept praying and hoping that something was going to work out, that she was going to be able to do this. That they would have an answer. That they would have a suggestion of what we could do.

"...I WAS JUST SO THANKFUL FOR WHAT SHE DID IN THE 59 DAYS OF HER LIFE, TO MY HEART AND TO MY HUSBAND'S HEART, TO OUR FAMILY, AND REALLY TO SO MANY PEOPLE."

"I LOOKED AT HIM AND TOLD HIM I KNEW WHAT WE HAD TO DO BUT IT WAS A REALLY HARD DECISION TO MAKE."

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT VIVIAN'S DEATH?

On September 20th of 2012, we had been in the hospital for 58 days, and it was around 3:00pm. My mom and her friend had just left the hospital room and I looked over at Viv and she started just throwing up blood, a TON of blood. It was evident to me in that moment that something was really really wrong. I was sitting on the couch just bawling because it was so unnatural to see something like that especially to a baby. One of the doctors knelt down and put his hand on my knee and said,

"Honey, we have to make a decision and its time to really decide, are you doing things for Viv or are you doing things to her?"

I looked at him and told him I knew what we had to do but it was a really hard decision to make.

"I know, but you are doing the best thing *for her* by choosing not to do things *to her*," he said.

That afternoon we had to make the decision of what to do and we chose to take her off all the vents. We chose to extubate her and that was all really scary because we didn't know how she was going to die. She was kind of a drama queen because she stayed alive *forever*. It was really beautiful because our whole family could come and see her and she was very peaceful and once we extubated her and we were able to look at her face for hours for the first time without tubes all over her face and we were able to just hold her through the night and love on her and tell her how beautiful and special she was. She died at 5:00am the next morning.

Her death was the most beautiful and peaceful and real hopeful moment in my life. Her soul just *jumped* out of her body. I mean it *leapt* out of her body, like you could feel it in the room. She was so happy to just be free really. You know it's a real bittersweet thing to lose a child, but for me it was a really beautiful moment because I knew where she was and where she was going and I was just so thankful for what she did in the 59 days of her life, to my heart and to my husband's heart, to our family and really to so many people and how all of those imprints she made for those 59 days, have made such an impact to our world, more than most people could do in hundreds of years of living.

All of those imprints she made

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59
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- Maria



WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCE DID HER LIFE MAKE IN HER LIFETIME?

While I was pregnant with Viv I started a blog, and it was an easy way to give updates to people for what was going on, and we developed quite a following during the rest of the pregnancy and we kept it up while she was alive as well. It was crazy because when she was born, and we were in the hospital, we had all of these people, some we knew some we didn't know, started reaching out to us and just sending us cards, messages, all kind of random stuff and just bringing out so much good out of humanity. I had so many people tell me she changed the way they looked at their life, because if she could go through all of this then there's things in their life that they would be able to go through. Things like that, which was really humbling to hear as her mom.

I think the biggest things is that because of all the love and support that Rod and I received during our stay in the hospital, our eyes were opened to what the majority of families experience, which was nowhere near what we had experienced.

"THE GREATEST WAY TO HONOR HER LIFE WAS TO CONTINUE SHARING HOPE AND LOVE AND SUPPORT..."

So not only did Viv touch peoples hearts herself but she also opened Rod and I's eyes to how so many other families were coping in these kinds of situations. (*sic*) [...] So after Viv had died, we knew that she started something in us and the greatest way to honor her life was continue sharing hope and love and support with the families that perhaps don't receive it. We didn't really know what that meant or how it was going to happen, but we had a few families come out of the wood work, whose children had a very significant health issue with long hospital stays and so we were able to assist those families with different things, and it just made sense to continue doing that on a broader scale so we started a non-profit called **Vivian's Victory***.

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN FROM YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY AND NOW?

I am a totally different person. I would be nowhere close to the person that I am if I didn't have Viv. Sometimes it's really crazy to think that each of us have a different vocation to get closer to Heaven, and our goal as a parent is to help our children get to Heaven. Well Vivian's vocation was to get to heaven on her own and I believe that when she said yes to being my daughter, that she knew she was signing up for. And the fact that she chose the life that she chose, for me to me more of who I'm supposed to be, is really... it's crazy. It's very selfless. I would be nowhere close to the person I am - and I'm very far from the person that God needs me to be - but I would be nowhere close to where I am if she didn't choose me to be her mom, if she didn't choose the life that she chose. Even if Viv was still alive I still wouldn't be who I am, which I know is closer to who God wants me to be.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN WHO FOUND HERSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION AS YOU?

Right now in this moment it seems like it's the end of the world, it seems like there's nothing worse that could happen, but your child

has such a significant purpose and so much dignity and so much life to live, and that they chose you to be their mom and they knew you would be able to love them exactly how they needed to be loved even with this diagnosis, so don't give up. Feel your feelings and allow yourself to feel how you feel, but don't give up that there's not hope or you don't have love for this child because there is hope and you do have love and regardless of the outcome of your child's life, there's so much grace and so much hope. It's just one day at a time, one moment at a time. Just enjoy that moment and enjoy that day and take the next step as it comes. Take the next step as it comes, one moment at a time and one day at a time. Take the next step as it comes.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

How much I love my kids. And I'll be honest about this, how the love is always there but how it takes time. For me it takes time. I'll let you in on a little secret – I don't like babies – they are so needy. They just cry and poop and eat all day long. [...] There's something about being a mom and wanting to protect your kids and love your kids that's a force to be reckoned with, so *don't mess*. It kind of takes on a life of its own and I didn't know that it was possible.

DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

No. I think society portrays it as a choice, even after your pregnant. Which, you made the choice when you had sex, so that's the choice you need to evaluate, but also because they make it seem like it's secondary, and it's definitely primary. We need good moms who are committed to that vocation so that our society is not what it is now. That doesn't mean you can't work and that doesn't mean you can't be successful on your own, but you need to check your priorities realize that your kids are number one and their the greatest gift you've been given.

You need to know them and love them in the way they need to be loved, and really embrace that. I don't say that as a judgment, I say that because I struggle with it sometimes too. I can very easily push the kids off to the side and get so engrossed in my work, that I have to check myself and say "I have to turn off the computer and not answer emails when their hom, because these moments are so much more important than what I'm doing.

"THEY KNEW YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO LOVE THEM EXACTLY HOW THEY NEEDED TO BE LOVED EVEN WITH THIS DIAGNOSIS, SO DON'T GIVE UP."

Finding PEACE After GUILT



ADRIANNE ESQUABEL

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Adrianne was born and raised in New Carlisle, Indiana, with her parents and older brother. During her freshman year at the University of Notre Dame, she found out she was pregnant. After deciding to place her daughter in adoption, she continued to pursue her undergraduate degree in finance and graduated in 2006. She met her husband a year later, and they are now married with two children.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY?

Well it was unplanned. I was very scared. I was a freshman at Notre Dame, and I was just not in a good place I guess. Starting my junior year in high school I got into the wrong crowd. I was nice to other people but I wasn't respecting myself at all. So yeah it was unplanned, he was 17 and I was 18 and he was not a model citizen at all. He was someone I shouldn't have been associated with at all,

"I THINK JUST THE OVERALL FEELING WAS FEAR IN BOTH OF US BECAUSE OBVIOUSLY THAT JUST WASN'T IN OUR PLAN."

but I was. I remember being scared to death to tell my dad. When I told my mom she cried. We both cried a lot, and I think she was probably as scared as I was and worried for me. Worried just about, if I had decided to keep the pregnancy, what the future then would look like for our family. I think just the overall feeling was fear in both of us because obviously that just wasn't in our plan.

I told her that I wanted an abortion. It was in December and I had just started college and I was like *oh my gosh what am I doing!* So I told my mom that I wanted to terminate the pregnancy and forget all about it. So my mom took me to the abortion clinic. I remember walking in and just feeling really numb, like I just wanted it to all be over. And before the procedure happens there's a counselor who explains the process to you. You know what's going to happen, just in detail, you know the whole process. And I remember breaking down in tears thinking *there is no way I can go through* that. I was just absolutely numb. So then a whole new set of fears came over me like, *well now what? Now what am I going to do?*

WHAT EXACTLY MADE YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND?

Well I remember that I went to speak with a nun from a dorm, I think it was Pasquerilla, and even after that, I still wanted to terminate the pregnancy. I was just in a really bad place. I had no love for her dad and so a lot of it was just being scared for the procedure. Then as time went a long I was obviously like, *this is the right thing, I'm giving a life to a family that really wants children that couldn't have children.*

HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE THROUGH THE NEXT STEPS?

My parents helped a lot. I don't want to say they made the decision for me, because now looking back I know it was absolutely the right decision to make, but they were definitely the ones who suggested adoption. I agreed because I wasn't ready to raise a child.

"I FELT TOTALLY TOUCHED BY GOD AND HIS PLAN...."

WHAT DID THE ADOPTION PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

First we contacted **catholic charities*** and then went into look at families to place the baby with. So I was looking through profiles and maybe the 3rd or 4th one I looked at was my freshman high school English teacher. I knew from when I was her student that they were having trouble getting pregnant. I felt like it was divine intervention and I said, "*ok, this is who I want to place her with*". I guess a part of me couldn't just have a stranger raising her, so I think this was really part of God's plan because looking back now I couldn't imagine not knowing the people that would adopt her. I wanted an open adoption from the beginning and I wanted her to be able to contact me as well as giving myself the option of contacting her parents and to let her know who I was. So I felt totally touched by God and his plan to have Ashley, my English teacher, and Dave adopt her.

"I KNEW MY LIFE WOULD MOVE ON BUT I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT THE FEELINGS THAT WOULD COME AFTER."

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT MARIA'S BIRTH?

After I had Maria, my daughter, I remember the lady from **Catholic Charities*** came in and had me sign paper work. I honestly don't remember having any thoughts about changing my mind or anything like that. I knew I had committed at that point. I had a fleeting thought of *what if I didn't sign these papers? What if I did decide to keep her?* That was just a very fleeting thought in my mind though. So then I signed the paperwork and then Ashley came to see Maria and I in the hospital every day for a week and a half until they could take her home. So I guess overall, I was sad and kind of numb. For the last 9 months I had spent pregnant and preparing for that moment but I never considered after the fact. I knew my life would move on but I never really thought about the feelings that would come after. It was rough at first. I kinda blocked it out and never really thought about it because I think if I did I would have been in real trouble.

HOW HAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP CHANGED THROUGH THE YEARS WITH MARIA?

It changed just recently. She's old enough now that she has her own ways of communicating so she can text me directly, and she's getting to that age where she wants to know more about the whole situation. So over the past year, things have changed as far as us growing closer and knowing each other better. Up to this point I saw her maybe once a year. I remember Ashley at one point saying that Maria had really embraced the fact that she had a biological family, and started being very vocal about that with her teachers and

friends at school. She was very in tune with the fact she was adopted.

HOW DID THE REST OF THE PREGNANCY FEEL, KNOWING YOU WERE GOING TO PLACE YOUR CHILD IN ADOPTION?

I think knowing that I was going to place her helped me not attach. I guess my mind didn't let me wonder that way, what my life would be like with a newborn baby, I just never thought about it. And then once I went to **Catholic Charities*** and met with Ashley and Dave, I was in contact with Ashley the rest of my pregnancy. When I went to the ultrasound and found out it was a girl, I remember that phone call and she started crying and she said "Dave, Dave it's a girl!" And that made it easier. I could just feel the joy in her, so that then brought me a sense of joy as well, that their lives would be changed forever in the best way.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THROUGH THIS FIRST PREGNANCY?

There were a lot of little challenges. Finishing school and going back and getting into the routine of going to class and participating in class and doing my work, which I never got back into 100%. I just did the bare minimum to graduate, so that was a challenge. And then just facing everybody again, which I think that was just in my head. I had very supportive friends in my dorm. They all came to see me in the hospital when I had her, but just personally facing them again and thinking what they thought about me and the challenge of putting everything behind me and moving on. As I mentioned before, when I got pregnant I wasn't in a good place and afterwards I just spiraled down even further into a cycle of destroying myself and trying to go through school.

WHAT WERE YOU TRYING TO BLOCK OUT?

I think feelings of loss and guilt and sadness. You know I felt guilty that I gave her up, that I didn't step up and take responsibility for getting pregnant and I guess being able to raise her myself. I felt selfish I guess at first, but you know everyone would tell me, "Oh you made the best decision, it's the most selfless decision ever." And even still today I struggle a little bit with that. You know, *did I do it for Maria? Did I do it for Ashley and Dave? Or did I do it for me?*

DO YOU NOW FEEL LIKE THAT GUILT WAS JUSTIFIED?

Well for the most part I am at peace with it. I know that Ashley and Dave are very good parents and that Maria is a really good kid. She gets good grades and she's really sweet and loving. Of course my mind wonders, *what would life look like had I kept her?* I think she would have been more like my little sister, and my parents would have been more like her parents. So I think I am definitely more at peace with my decision now than when I was at the beginning.

"MOTHERHOOD REALLY JUST CHANGES YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANOTHER LIFE."

Just knowing that
their lives would be changed



forever
in the best way

- Adrienne

"IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT KIND OF LOVE
THAT YOU FEEL AS A MOM."

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN FROM YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY AND NOW?

Just like, light years. Motherhood really just changes you because you are responsible for another life, so you have to make sacrifices and ensure that they are loved and well taken care of. To be able to give that to them, you have to be in a good place. I am happy now and I was not back then. I think being in contact with Maria adds to that feeling of peace and happiness, knowing that she feels comfortable coming to be and knowing that we will always have a relationship.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN WHO FOUND HERSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION AS YOU?

Just to find a good support system, people that will love and support her decision whatever that may be: adoption or to raise the baby. I think that adoption is not a huge avenue that girls look into, who find themselves in that situation, and I think it should be. But to go along with that I think it's very important to stay in that support system and get that counseling or whatever they need because there will be challenges after the fact. Feelings much like I felt, feeling of loss and things like that. Pray a lot because that really helps too. Honestly just recently I have come to start practicing my faith and I think had I embraced that after I had Maria, I probably wouldn't have sought comfort in drugs and alcohol and all that stuff.

GREATEST JOY OF MOTHERHOOD?

I think just watching them grow into the person that they are going to be. I have different joys from each of them. The little things when my sons says to his sister "you're my best friend," and it makes me feel like we are doing something right. He notices our love for one another, and he translates that to others.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

I guess just that I could feel so much love and so much joy for another person. I mean you know I absolutely love my husband but it's completely different kind of love that you feel as a mom,

DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

I wish our culture as a whole would put more emphasis on the family. I just wish there was more emphasis on the family and how important it is. Especially in their younger years from at least birth to 3-4 years, forming that bond with their mom and knowing that love and that support from them is so important to their development, and I don't think that's the norm in our society today.

DOVE
is patient



ARCELIA SOLIS

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Arcelia is originally from Jalisco, Mexico, but moved to California with her dad and brother when she was eighteen. She began working to help support her family after she graduated from high school. She moved to South Bend three years later, where she met and married her husband. They have been together for fourteen years and have three children. Sebastian (9), Alessandro (7), Valentina (9 mo.). Arcelia has worked as a clinic assistant for the **WIC*** (**Women, Infant, and Children**) program for the last three years.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY?

All of my pregnancies have been planned pregnancies to the point where I know what month and day they would be born. We had Sebastian when I was 26. I think before that I was not ready to have a baby. I think having a baby is knowing that you do want your baby, having that on your heart and on your mind, that you'll make the time and have the patience for a baby to be in your life. I think I had gotten myself ready all of those years for that. Sebastian was very wanted and he was our first son. My family was very excited.

"I THINK ONE OF THE BIG WORDS FOR A MOM IS PATIENCE. PATIENCE AND LOVE."

DID YOU HAVE ANY FEARS BEFORE BECOMING A MOM?

No I don't think I had any fears, I was just very excited. I am very protective over my kids, and I knew that if I had a baby, I wouldn't leave my kids with anybody, so I stayed home for 4 years with them. I think it's just that kids are very vulnerable and you have to take

care of your babies. So before having kids, I wasn't ready to commit to that, to take care of a baby 24/7. So that's why I had to get myself ready for that and to accumulate patience for them. I think one of the big words for a mom is patience. Patience and love.

WHAT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE HARDEST PREGNANCIES YOU HAVE EVER HAD?

Valentina. It isn't the same to be pregnant when you are in your 30's, you know they consider you high risk after you turn 35. So it's not the same. It's not like I was having pain, but Valentina decided she would sit on the side of me and it would make my whole leg numb. She was posterior, so we went to the hospital early to flip her and they ended up inducing me. So Valentina was born the next day, and that's been the longest time I've been in the hospital. [...] I couldn't breastfeed her and she wasn't gaining weight, so they ended up clipping her tongue after 10 days. [...] So it was a struggle in the beginning but I love my pregnancies. So it wasn't like it was hard, it was just complicated. But I love to be pregnant. Your belly is the safest place for your baby. You know where they are, you know they are eating, you know they are growing. As long as you take care of yourself your baby is going to be ok.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS A MOTHER?

Not having enough patience for my kids. I feel like a bad mom. You know when I had Sebastian and we had planned on having another baby, and thank God we had Alessandro. But Sebastian was our baby for 2 years, and I felt like once we had another one, I

God already has
a plan for you,
he has

chosen

you

- Arcelia

felt like I was replacing my baby with another baby. I felt so bad. I think that's why I decided not to have another baby soon after we had my second one because I did not want the second one to go through the same things that my oldest went through. When Sebastian was two, I expected him to behave good because he's the example of the little brother and that has been a challenge because I think we ask of him a lot that we aren't supposed to (*sic*). He's still a child and usually he doesn't behave how we expect and we go hard on him I guess because he is the oldest but it's been a challenge to get that out of our mindand to have the patience.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT MOTHERHOOD?

Just to have them. I tell Sebastian that one of my happiest days was when I had him. I think usually you have your kids to make them happy, but I think it's the other way around. Just having them makes me happy. They light up my life, and I don't know what I would do without them. God already has a path for you. He has already chosen you. I tell my kids, "I was chosen to be your mom."

**"I TELL MY KIDS,
'I WAS CHOSEN TO BE YOUR
MOM'."**

DESCRIBE ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THROUGH MOTHERHOOD.

The birth of my kids. All of them have been a joy, but you know to have Sebastian, he was the first baby, and when you become a Mom, even when you feel the feeling of being a Mom when you are pregnant. Like my pregnancies have been such a joy just to have your babies and just to feel your baby there, but just to see your baby. You forget everything. After you have your baby you know they said it's very painful to go through labor but when you see your baby your forget everything that you went through when you see the face of your baby.

HOW CAN YOU DESCRIBE IT?

I don't think I can describe it. Oh my gosh, it's just — it's the moment you meet the person you've been in love with for nine months. Just imagine being in love with someone that you don't know, and this person is the perfect person. It's the person that you can talk to, there's nothing that makes you more happy than having this little person in your life, so when you finally see him or her, its just a joy that overjoys that you just can't describe.

"IT'S THE MOMENT YOU MEET THE PERSON YOU'VE BEEN IN LOVE WITH FOR NINE MONTHS."

FAVORITE PARTS ABOUT BEING A MOM?

Knowing that your kids love you back. So when they do say or show their love, I feel like I am doing my job as a mom. My job is to show

them love so they understand that they are loved. That's what you aim for; knowing you are doing what you are supposed to do as a mom.

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN FROM YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY AND NOW?

I am becoming a grandma. I guess you become more patient with your kids. I remember with Sebastian, not having all this patience that I have with Valentina. Grandparents are more patient and they know life goes too fast if you don't enjoy your kids when they are this age or when they are little and when you can. You'll lose them one day and you won't have back those years that you could enjoy them. So now with Valentina I try to be more patient and show her that I'll be there for her. I guess also just to read them, their actions, just to understand why they do these things.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW MOM?

I would tell a new mom to listen to her heart, listen to other people's advice, but if you feel in your heart that it's not what you want for your baby, don't do it. Be patient, I would say. Those phases that kids go through are just phases. You aren't going to be without sleep for 20 years, babies do end up sleeping through the night. Those moments will pass and one day your baby isn't going to be with you.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

That your kids are the best thing that happened to you and the people that you love the most. It surprised me that when they don't behave or do not do what you want them to do, how can a mom be mean? I know I love my kids but when I lose my patience, I yell at them and I think it surprised me how easily you lose patience with them. Their your love, like without them you have nothing. How can we jump to that phase of being mad with them? Why do we get mad at them? Why do we expect so much out of them? So when I go to church I ask God to give me patience to teach my kids different than hitting or hurting. To know how to handle those situations [...].

"I ASK GOD TO GIVE ME PATIENCE."

DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

I think sometimes they make it look like you have to live by the rules. I am a big fan of carrying my babies. And we have a lot of people telling you that spoiling your kids isn't good [...] Me as a Mexican mom, I slept with my mom until I was 11, so for me, carrying your baby and sleeping with your baby is very good. Here especially in this country, you have rules. You baby has to have a crib and formula feed, and your kids don't need to be running around in the supermarket. I love my kids to do the things that I did when I was a child.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

When we have our babies, our thought is to have a baby to make us happy, and when I see my kids, I know they aren't here to make us happy, but rather that they are here for *us* to make *them* happy.

The
unEXPECTED



AALIYAH TAYLOR

Aaliyah found out she was pregnant the summer before her freshman year at Saint Mary's College. She grew up in South Bend, Indiana and attended Washington high school. She gave birth to her first daughter, Arielle Grace, on February 13th, 2016. She hopes to someday open her own cupcake boutique and is a current full-time student at Saint Mary's College.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD SHAPE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD?

My mother always took care of her children and fulfilled our every need. My journey showed me how to be a great mother to my child just by setting an example. From watching my mother, I always thought motherhood would be a long, hard process that was well worth it. I always wanted to wait until I was married to have a child though, since I saw how much harder it was for my mother being a single parent.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY?

I was *shocked*. I did not think me of all people would get pregnant. Once I saw the word pregnant on my clear blue pregnancy test I just knew my life would change and I had no idea what to do. I worked the whole time, up until I was 41 weeks, and I stayed a full-time student at Saint Mary's the whole time.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO CARRY YOUR CHILD TO FULL TERM?

Seeing my baby's first ultrasound at the Women's Care Center* made me completely change my mind about getting an abortion. I had the abortion date set and the money ready for it, although I could not bring myself to go through with the procedure after seeing the body of my newly forming child. I was exactly 11 weeks and the embryo looked like an actual baby at that point, before then I tried to convince myself that I wasn't killing a baby (if I had gone through with the abortion) but in reality that was a lie. Once I saw my baby on that screen, I cried and knew I could never hurt her or him.

"I NEVER PICTURED MYSELF HAVING A BABY AS A FRESHMAN IN COLLEGE SO I WAS SCARED."

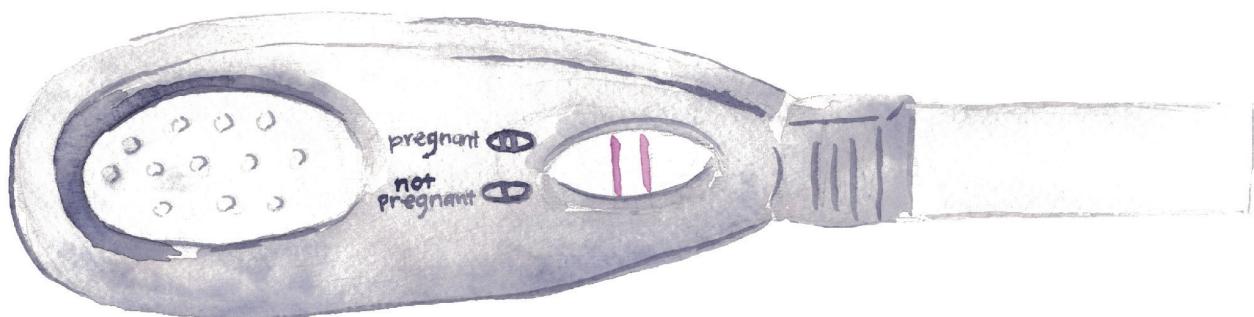
WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR THROUGHOUT THIS PREGNANCY?

My biggest fear was not being able to complete school as I wanted and having to give up my freedom. Caring for another human being was a scary thought for me and I honestly didn't know how I would do. I never pictured myself having a baby as a freshman in college so I was scared. I was also mostly scared of what my mother would say and what people would think of me.

WHAT HELPED YOU THROUGH THIS FEAR?

Jesus himself. I had to pray a lot and call on the Lord many times. I was taking a summer class at Notre Dame and staying on campus when I had to break the news. Believe me it was hard. Even though I knew I was technically "old enough" I still felt so young. If it wasn't for prayer and God convincing me, I probably would have went through with the abortion and would have not went to the **Women's Care Center*** for an ultrasound that I could see. I'm pretty sure the abortion clinic would have not shown me my baby or the heartbeat.

I just knew
my life would
change,



and I had no idea
what to do

- Aaliyah

HARDEST PART ABOUT BEING A MOTHER AND A STUDENT SO FAR?

Time management and being tired! I seriously fall asleep at any given moment. All of my energy goes to this baby and breastfeeding, literally! I have a newborn so I have to get up every 2 hours to feed her, change her, and rock her back to sleep.

DID YOU EVER FEEL HOPELESS IN THIS PROCESS?

All the time! I feel like I don't know what I am doing at times. It's hard feeling that way since I usually have a plan. I can't control the baby and work around my schedule. Instead, I have to work around hers. This is also my first time, so I do not know how to be a parent. I have to ask so many questions. I'm usually scared I'm doing something wrong.

WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST IN HOW TO BE A GOOD MOM?

My mother is all the inspiration I need. She has sacrificed so much for her three children and I appreciate that. She put us first before her own wants and I believe that is real love.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE WISHED YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE YOU BECAME A MOTHER?

I seriously wish someone could have warned me about how the healing process works and how hard it is. The physical healing process after was the hardest for me.

GREATEST JOY OF MOTHERHOOD?

Seeing my healthy baby and knowing that she will always have someone to love her - *me*.

DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS?

Not at all! I mean we all wish we would have done some things differently in our lives and that's normal, but I love my daughter. I wouldn't change a thing.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

Being able to carry a child, form it inside of myself, and push it out is mind-blowing.

DID YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF YOUR PREGNANCY OR STATUS AS A MOTHER?

Yes, people have given me rude looks and asked rude questions like, "Oh, so what are you doing? Did you drop out?" I just brush it off and pray for them.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

That mothers sit around all day and do nothing.

"WE ALL WISH WE WOULD HAVE DONE SOME THINGS DIFFERENTLY IN OUR LIVES & THAT'S NORMAL, BUT I LOVE MY DAUGHTER AND I WOULDN'T CHANGE A THING."



A PIECE OF
HEAVEN
ON EARTH



MARY LOU SLONKOSKY

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Mary Lou is the mother of eleven children. Her youngest child, Magdalena, was born with Down Syndrome and is now seven years old. Mary Lou co-founded a non-profit organization called **1 Heart 2 Souls***, which raises funds to assist parents that are given a poor prognosis for their expected or newborn child. Mary Lou has held youth triathlons in her hometown, Minter, Ohio, to raise money for 1 Heart 2 Souls for the past five years.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD SHAPE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD?

My mother was always there to care for me every moment of the day every day. I watched her give herself selflessly to all the family with a loving heart.

WHEN DID YOU FIND OUT THAT MAGDALENA HAD DOWN SYNDROME?

When the nurses laid her on my stomach after delivery, I had suspicion. I wanted to make sure, put my heart and mind at ease, observing Magdalena. In my investigation, I could detect that her eyes looked a little almond shaped. I mentioned this to Eddie, my husband, and he said it was just the Slonkosky slant! But after they took Magdalena to the nursery to clean her up, the midwife came in to tell us her suspicions that she also thought Magdalena had Down Syndrome. She asked to pray with us after telling us which was so thoughtful of her but it didn't help take away the numb feeling we both had.

HOW DID YOU FIND STRENGTH AND HOPE?

First through the love shown by my daughter to her new little sister without any hesitation upon hearing the news of her diagnosis. And then through giving myself totally to Christ and trusting that this would all be okay. Talking with my husband and allowing each other to express our fears and our hurts and to rely on each other to get through those first tough moments.

BEST PART ABOUT HAVING A CHILD WITH DOWN SYNDROME?

I was once told that God asks children with disabilities if they would like to have who He has chosen for their parents. So, I like to think that we have been chosen by God! We celebrate life more. Even though we have been through some of the same events with the other 10 kids they are more celebrated because of her disability and knowing how much more effort it takes for her to accomplish them.

MOST CHALLENGING PART ABOUT HAVING A CHILD WITH DOWN SYNDROME?

I would have to say the most challenging part for now is the physical aspect of it. Children with Downs are delayed in many areas. So, Magdalena is not yet potty trained, nor can she button her clothes or care for herself like a 7 year old should. Homework, even though she is only in Kindergarten is a must for her to progress. Eddie and I take each day as it comes and try to accomplish with her the best we can.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM PARENTING SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY?

It takes a lot of patience and sacrifice and the love you get back in return is priceless!!

HOW HAS HER LIFE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR WORLD?

Every day is a blessing with her. She has caused us to celebrate the little things in life, and what used to be little stepping stones for our other kids are giant stepping stones for her. She is the strong link in our family chain and has made us all more aware and loving to those with disabilities.

Time will change the emotions you feel,

and all of the sudden

those tears of sadness

turn to smiles and laughter



"TO HAVE SOMEONE LOVE YOU ALL THE TIME UNCONDITIONALLY IS HEAVEN ON EARTH."

MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT HAVING A CHILD WITH DOWN SYNDROME?

It's a built-in means of helping me to keep the right perspective of humility before God.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN WHO FOUND HERSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION AS YOU?

Learning that you have a child with a disability is going to be one of the most difficult words you will hear someone say to you outside of the moment of being told that you have lost a child. Your world feels as if it has crumbled. But that's just it. It is their world too and they are waiting for your love just as you showed the older children before them. Time will change the emotions you feel and all of a sudden those tears of sadness turn to smiles and laughs and then you can't imagine your life any other way. To have someone love you all the time unconditionally is heaven on earth. Though this is what we all should strive for, these children have it down pat from the get go and they don't see it any other way. It will just take time and to be prayerful through the process.(si)

MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT MOTHERHOOD?

Seeing my kids grow with a strong conviction of their faith and the importance they put in living their faith in their daily lives. Seeing my children lift each other up in praise for their uniqueness.

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN FROM YOUR FIRST PREGNANCY AND NOW?

I have learned to be more accepting of changes. Love for my husband has grown with each child but more so since Magdalena. A renewed respect for my mother in realizing more all the work she did for our family but with much less.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

I can't say there was ever a "surprise". Maybe the biggest realization was the work it takes physically and spiritually to accomplish everything a day calls for.

HOW HAS MAGDALENA PARTICULARLY INFLUENCED YOUR FAMILY?

She has caused everyone to be more selfless , more giving and she challenges us to be more understanding and patient.

WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES YOU HAVE SHARED WITH MAGDALENA?

When the family was together talking about what they were going to do when they all get older or leave the home and my son Joseph said, "When I grow up I want to marry Magdalena." I knew then that she is going to be looked after.

HAS YOUR LARGE FAMILY SIZE AFFECTED YOUR SITUATION OF RAISING SOMEONE WITH DOWN SYNDROME?

I know that I have that many more persons to pray and watch for her when needed. Also, it has been a blessing to have so many siblings before her because interacting with 10 siblings has to assist her in her progression in speech, sign language and reading abilities.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE MOST HELPFUL IN RAISING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

Having an incredibly devoted and loving husband who gives our daughter so much of his undivided attention. It takes two!

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

That we know it all. One week after Magdalena was born she was admitted to Children's Hospital due to intestinal problems. Our stay lasted 97 days and during that stay I became good friends with many of the nurses. One nurse opened up to me weeks later and said that when she heard that I had ten kids, she was intimidated in helping me because she figured I knew what to do. Having a child with a disability is very similar feeling of learning to be a mom for the first time, everything is new. Eventually, the nurse made her way to assist me more often after my constant questioning and seeing my prayer card above the bassinet that read "Jesus, I trust in You".



BIOLOGY
COUNTS
BUT NURTURE
WINS



YVONNE CUMMINS

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Yvonne grew up in a small town near Lexington, Kentucky and graduated from the University of Kentucky with a Fine Arts degree. She married her husband Joe in 1992, and as her diabetes prevented her from having any biological children, they have since adopted two children from Peru and Guatemala. Yvonne and Joe adopted their first daughter from Peru through **World Child*** in 1999 and adopted their son Jonathan in 2006. They are currently in the process of adopting another girl from Peru, who has Spina Bifida.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD SHAPE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD?

Because my parents divorced when I was young, my mom really raised us on her own. I didn't grow up witnessing how to be a good spouse, but by making my brothers and I the center of her life (second only to God), my mom was a great example of what a mother should be. Her self-sacrifice is what has shaped me most. My mom somehow managed to work a full-time job while she raised three kids. She was all at once disciplinarian, nurse, cheerleading coach, baseball coach, youth group director, homework helper, housekeeper, cook and chauffeur. She never missed a sporting event, and made sure each of us felt important, and assured that religion was central in our lives. I can't live up to what she did and even still does today in caring for her own mother, but I strive to.

WHAT WAS ONE OF YOUR BIGGEST FEARS ABOUT ADOPTING?

My biggest adoption fear was that my children wouldn't love me in the same way a biological child would. It was a ridiculous fear.

WHAT HELPED YOU OVERCOME THIS FEAR?

As I jumped into the responsibilities of motherhood, I realized that in nurturing my children's needs I was building the love and trust which I was fearful I would never have. The biology had nothing to do with the love-bond, it was the nurturing,

"I THINK GOD HAD ALWAYS HAD IT IN HIS PLAN FOR ME."

WHEN DID YOU REALIZE THAT YOU WANTED TO ADOPT?

Believe it or not, I was always fascinated with adoption, even in childhood! I used to pretend my dolls were adopted. My mom told me I wrote an essay about this in middle school. It has always been in the back of my mind, so I think God had always had it in His plan for me.

WHAT DID THIS PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

The international adoption process differs for every country, and even every family. In our case, it was a very long and difficult process. It took us four years to adopt our first child, and even a little longer for our second. To us, the process felt intrusive – as if every aspect of our lives was scrutinized including income, religion, personal relationships, personality traits, mental health, home safety, and even our pets. We often joke that if everyone who wants to have children would be required to go through the same scrutiny, no one would ever have children! Looking back on the process, I understand that all involved genuinely want to make sure each child is placed in a safe and loving home. I sometimes think about that long wait as having been my pregnancy and labor. And just as it is with the labor and delivery of a biological child, the "pain" was forgotten the very moment we laid eyes on our children.

"I SOMETIMES THINK ABOUT THAT LONG WAIT AS HAVING BEEN MY PREGNANCY AND LABOR."

WHAT WERE YOUR EXPECTATIONS BEFORE GOING INTO IT?

I'm not entirely sure I fully formed expectations, or maybe the truth is that I tried not to have expectations. I read a lot of books about what I could expect with an adopted child; promised myself I wouldn't label or pigeonhole my children with any preconceived notions and then simply trusted that I'd be able to give them what they needed. There was certainly some useful information in those books, but just as with biological children, no amount of book-knowledge can ever fully prepare you for what will come. My children had very different individual needs, and as a parent you simply love them and do for each of them whatever needs to be done in the best way you can. You don't want to jump into something like adoption being totally ignorant of what to expect, and yet no matter the preparation, adoption turns out to be a learn-and-adapt-as-you-go journey.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS A MOTHER?

My biggest challenge as a mother has been realizing and accepting that my children (and I believe all adopted children) have an empty place in their hearts (a question mark, a hole — call it what you will) which cannot be filled. The real challenge has been teaching my children how to recognize this void, how it affects them and their relationships with others, and how to deal with it. It is a challenge we still struggle with everyday, especially now that they are in their teenage years.

"SAYING 'YES' OUT OF PURE LOVE AND WITHOUT FEAR ASSURES THAT WHATEVER MOTHERHOOD BRINGS, JOY WILL BE ATTACHED."

HOW DO YOU FIND STRENGTH?

I find great strength in my religious faith. I look to Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus, for strength. Her Fiat ("yes" to God) is the model that I try to follow — saying "yes" out of pure love and without fear assures that whatever motherhood brings, joy will be attached.

DESCRIBE ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THROUGH MOTHERHOOD.

I know I'm repeating myself, but seeing my children for the first time after waiting and praying for them for soooooo long is just so monumental — such a gift from God. Nothing else in my life has surpassed those two moments.

HOW DO YOU FIND HOPE?

I don't know if it is hope that I find, but maybe rather peace in the trust I have in God's plan for our family. I am very much like my mother, strong in my Catholic faith, and maybe a bit of a control-freak. The control is a good trait in many circumstances, but when I try to control too many things in my life it causes anxiety which not only affects me, but the whole family. When I trust in God's plan, life seems to run much more smoothly.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT YOUR FIRST ADOPTION?

I most remember the long Friday afternoons as we waited for the phone call confirming or denying our child "assignment," the long cries when we did not receive our assignment; the pure joy on the Friday we finally received our assignment and watched our daughter's photo slowly download to our computer screen; the eye-opening first visit to a third-world country and orphanage; the relief felt when we were finally able to hold our daughter; spending a month in Peru and falling in love with the country and people there.

WAS THE SECOND ONE MUCH DIFFERENT?

Our second adoption was very different. Our son was older, already an almost-5-year-old little person. His personality was already formed. He had memories of his birth family. He had been in foster care for a year with another family whom he loved. He was terrified of my husband and myself, and it was heart-wrenching to see his fear. That poor little kid really went through tremendous upheaval in his first years. It took him a very long time to trust us, and although I know he loves us, it is still hard for him to fully open up and talk about what he has been through.

HOW HAS YOUR IDENTITY AS A MOTHER DEVELOPED OVER TIME?

My identity as a mother has shifted from perhaps a little bit selfish: "these are my children, mine, mine, mine!" to a realization that mothers are privileged to be the nurturers and caretakers of God's creations. I have come to understand that my job is not simply to meet the physical and emotional needs of my kids, but to meet their spiritual needs as well by teaching them to know and love the God who created them.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT MOTHERHOOD?

My husband and I often describe our family as "The Nature vs. Nurture Experiment". The most surprising and rewarding part of motherhood has been confirming that nurture wins. Biology counts and is always there, but nurture wins.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE PARTS ABOUT BEING A MOM

Spending time with my kids. I tell them often that when they were little, I couldn't imagine loving them more, but as they've grown it surprises me that I love them more each day.

HOW HAS THE EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTION CHANGED YOU?

The adoption experience has given me (and my entire family) the opportunity to experience life in third world countries; to see how love and happiness are independent of socio-economic level; to redefine my or our ideas of how "family" is defined; to appreciate how our lives have been richly blessed; to see how God has His hand in everything.

"WHEN I REMIND MYSELF WHAT A GIFT, WHAT A PRIVILEGE MOTHERHOOD IS, THE WORK TRANSFORMS INTO LOVE."

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING ADOPTION?

I would say to pray about it. Adoption is a beautiful, challenging, demanding, joyful way to build a family. If it is what God has planned for you, you are blessed. Who has inspired you most in how to be a good mom? Who have you looked up to? My grandmother and own mother have been my greatest inspirations. Both of them are strong women with fiery spirits who are faithful to God, love unconditionally and do whatever needs to be done without question or hesitation.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE WISHED YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE YOU BECAME A MOTHER?

I wish I had known how quickly the years would pass, and that I should savor each moment.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

That it is a thankless job full of drudgery. Yes, being a mother is a lot of work. When selfishness creeps into my heart, the work of motherhood feels like work. When I remind myself what a gift, what a privilege motherhood is, the work transforms into love.

DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

No. I think society views motherhood as an inconvenient necessity - something to "get through" rather than to relish and cherish. Motherhood should be viewed as one of God's greatest privileges.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST JOY OF MOTHERHOOD?

Watching my kids grow into capable and loving young adults who know, love and live their faith.



The pain
was forgotten
the moment
we laid eyes
on our
children

-yvonne

Miracles of **HOPE**



KATHY COLEMAN

.....

Kathy grew up in South Bend, Indiana with her parents and three siblings. She graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1978 with a B.F.A in photography. She has worked at Ave Maria press for the last 35 years as a graphic designer. She had her first son, Matthew, in 1988. She named him Matthew because it means "gift of the Lord", and later discovered that her son had autism. Matthew is a current resident of **Hannah and Friends*** in South Bend.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE YOUR SON HAD AUTISM?

When Matthew was two years old, he had his measles mumps rubella vaccine, and back in the 80's, it had mercury in it [...]. Matt was a little bit delayed but after that shot he lost the little language he had at that point and he no longer looked at us. He started doing weird things like ripping up books when you tried to read to him and switch the lights on and off endlessly. So I had to let him watch a lot of educational videos and movies because we couldn't read to him and he didn't know how to play with other children. His speech therapist suggested that we take him to see a specialist and once we did, they confirmed that he had autism. So this began my journey of finding my son again. I had him once and I knew I would find him again. I prayed to the Lord, "I'm not going to ask you why, I'm just going to ask you to show me the way." And he did.

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER YOU RECEIVED HIS DIAGNOSIS ?

There was no google or yahoo back then, no computers, I couldn't even research it. So I had to network through Logan and other special needs moms. One of the neurologist said to take him home and love him like a pet. God does not put any child on this earth for no reason, so I never went back to see him again. Another specialist said he will amount to absolutely nothing so at that point I said I'm not seeing specialists anymore. Then I found a book by Anabelle Staley, and it was about an autistic girl who was born barded with sound. And I realized that my son would cover his ears whenever I turned the sweeper on. This mother did something

"THAT WAS THE FIRST MIRACLE THAT I WAS ABLE TO OBSERVE, BECAUSE I KEPT PRAYING FOR GOD TO SHOW ME A SIGN THAT EVERYTHING WOULD BE OK."

called Auditory Integration Therapy and I found someone locally who would administer this. It's where you listen to music a couple times a day for several hours for ten days. By the middle of the therapy he said a couple words. By the tenth day, he spoke his first complete sentence: "Do I have to go to kindergarten?" So we realized he knew what was going on all along.

DID HE SHOW YOU OTHER SIGNS THAT HE KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON?

At age two I had him blessed and anointed for the Sacrament of the Sick at the Basilica of Notre Dame. It took 3 people to hold him down. He was kicking, spitting, screaming, and biting. I kept telling him, "Mom's not doing a bad thing here. I'm trying to help you. Jesus loves you and he's going to make a beautiful life for you.

Jesus is blessing you and someday you'll understand all of this."

So two years later when he was four, I had a series of migraines and was in bed for three days in total darkness. I was having vertigo and I was very ill and Matt was very worried about me. So he walks into the darkened bedroom with a glass of water. He walked up to me and dipped his tiny little finger in the water and blessed me on my forehead and anointed me. He had remembered that day when he was anointed. And that was the first miracle that I was able to observe, because I kept praying for God to show me a sign that everything would be ok. I said "Lord, I'm a visual person and it's best that you give me a sign that I'm doing all the right things and that everything is going to be ok." So that fueled me and I knew I could do this.

So I did more therapies. My parents gave me money to help Matthew. We did another round of auditory therapy because it was so good. He was very verbal at this point. When he turned five after he could talk, he said to me "Mom, (he loved Pinocchio) I'm a real boy, I can talk now." So that fifth year he learned how to ride a tricycle and finally got potty trained. His self confidence at that point was so much better now that he could express himself in our world and it made sense to him. He started looking at people again. He looked at us.

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT HANNAH AND FRIENDS?

When I heard that Charlie Weiss got the job at Notre Dame as head coach, I started reading about him and found out that they had a daughter with special needs and then I was interested because they were very compassionate people and they had an organization called **Hannah and Friends***. Then I found out they were building a place for young adults to live. One of the things I prayed to God for was that there would be a place for him to live and thrive, almost like a kingdom that would help take care of him. I prayed for this every day, that there would be a place like this. And then low and behold, I found out from Maurya Weiss that they were going to build this place in North Carolina. Then when they came here to South Bend, they found out they got a lot of donations from here, and they decided to build it here in South Bend. When I found out I wept. It was my second miracle.

This was what I had been praying for, that there would be a place for my son. I volunteered there a lot because I wanted my son there and low and behold, my son was watching me help others, and now it's what he does. He helps others. He's pretty amazing.

To have someone with autism to be able to help someone else in a wheelchair or someone who can't talk. To me, I felt so proud. He's been at **Hannah and Friends*** for six years now. He DJs the dances and he does the Karaoke parties. He takes it very seriously. He wants everyone's requests to get in. Everyone always misses him when he leaves. He helps make the deserts for the ladies nights. I wish every special needs child had a happy ending like I do. I have been blessed beyond belief. I didn't even think I would ever hear my son say I love you, but God showed me the way.

HOW DID YOU FIND STRENGTH THROUGH THE HARD MOMENTS?

I get strength from Matthew's love. He's my hero, and despite his autism, he has spikes of genius. He imparts simple wisdom on the most stunning events of my life.

"I WILL ALWAYS ADVOCATE FOR MY SON. THAT'S MY JOB, AND BECAUSE OF IT, I HAVE MET SO MANY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE."

HOW DID YOU FIND HOPE THROUGH ALL OF THIS?

I always have hope because I have seen two miracles in my son's life and I believe in miracles. I will always advocate for my son. That's my job, and because of it I have met so many beautiful people. Whenever I have a volunteer I thank them because it means so much to me, because little do they know what a difference they make in this person's life and the smile they put on their face. We all need each other and God puts these angels [special needs people] walking on the earth to make us more God-like. To bring out the unconditional love and compassion and to walk in his shoes and to be able to be more like him. They are such a blessing. They make you a better human being and to look through their eyes is so unique.

"IT'S THE GREATEST SOURCE OF JOY IN YOUR LIFE AND THE GREATEST SOURCE OF PAIN."

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS A MOTHER?

Well, it's frustrating that I can't find employment for Matt, that people won't give my son a chance. When people ask my how many children I have, I say I have three for the price of one, because it was very challenging. Raising a special needs child either brings out the best in you or it brings out the worst in you. I would do it all over again though. It takes every fiber of your being. There were times that were so difficult, but I got through them, loving unconditionally.

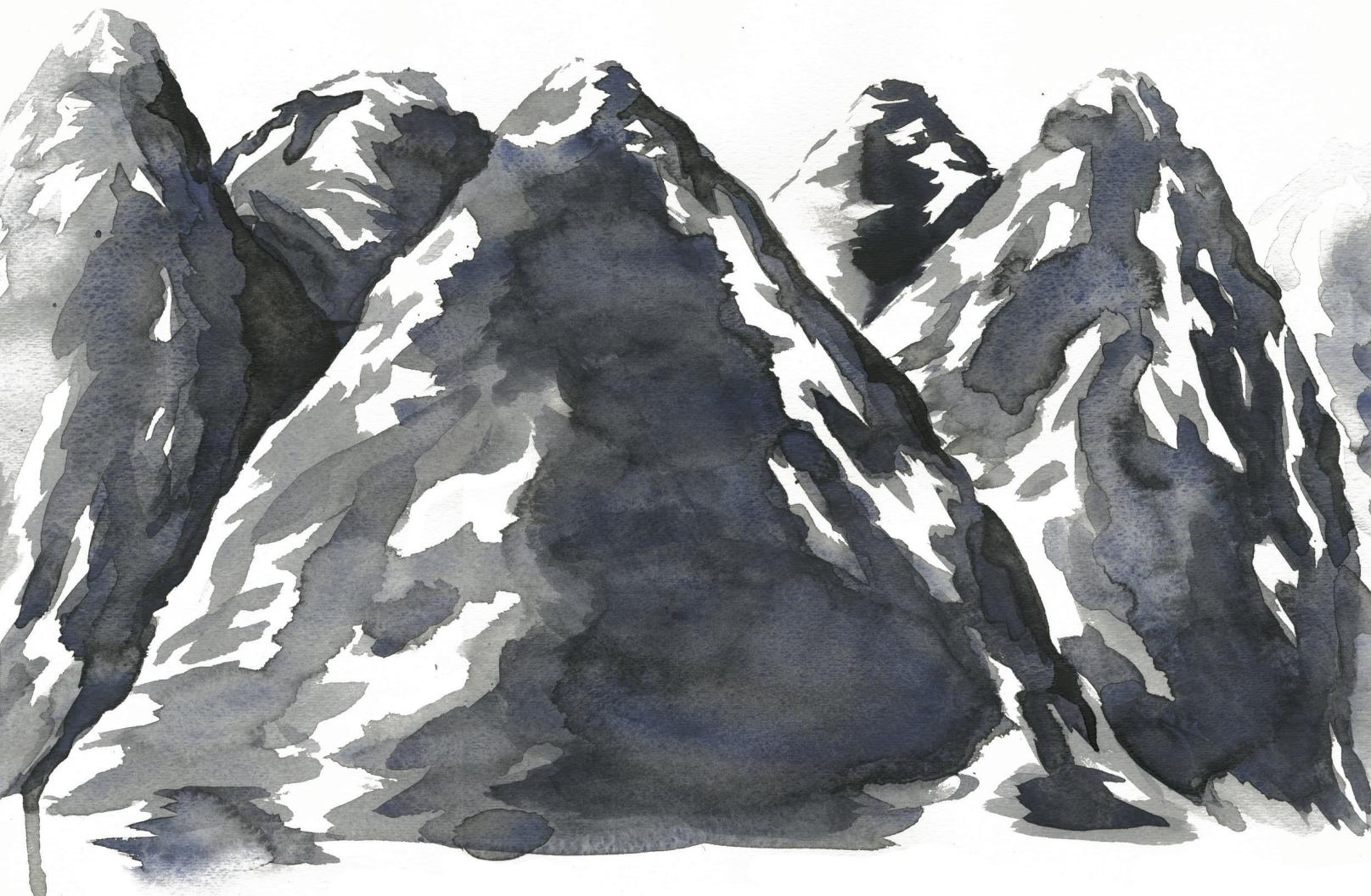
WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING PART ABOUT MOTHERHOOD?

Well it's the greatest source of joy in your life and the greatest source of pain. Seeing my son to be able to be independent of me is the greatest joy because I raised him and told him he could live without me because he could have his own life. To see him independent and making his own decisions, he's really proud to be able to do that too because he knows how hard I worked and it makes him happy. To see him helping others, I am reaping my rewards.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN WHO FOUND HERSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION AS YOU?

I would say you are going to be taking the road less traveled and

So I prayed to the Lord,
I'm not going to ask you why,



I'm just going to ask you to
show me the way
-kathy

"I FEEL PRIVILEGED TO HAVE BEEN HIS MOTHER. I FEEL PRIVILEGED THAT GOD CHOSE ME, I DON'T KNOW WHY HE CHOSE ME BECAUSE I DON'T ALWAYS HAVE IT TOGETHER, BUT HE CHOSE ME."

you are going to have to be creative in reaching your special needs child. Regular things have worked for normal children but you have to try alternative things in order to get them to understand or see or feel. Be creative, make it fun. Always make it fun, not work. And never give up. And pray. My guardian angels are on my side.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE WISHED YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE YOU BECAME A MOTHER?

Always trust your gut instinct. Because there were times that I doubted it and in hindsight, I look back and if something doesn't feel right, that's the truth, and trust in God's word.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU THINK MATT'S LIFE HAS HAD ON THE WORLD?

Huge, huge impact. I've had students change their majors to special education because they enjoyed working with him so much. Matt is such a gift. Matt lights up a room, really. He's got a lot of energy. I feel privileged to have been his mother. I feel privileged that God chose me, I don't know why he chose me because I don't always have it together. But he chose me.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

Well, it's hard work. It's messy. It's gut wrenching, and in order to reap your rewards, you will go through suffering, you will suffer. It's not easy and sometimes maybe your child will take a different path than you want them to, and sometimes you gotta let them. When my son hurts, I hurt. I wanna make his life right and good and I can't always do that and it's frustrating no matter what I do.

Too many people are born to people who don't love them and use them for the wrong reasons. It's a privilege. It's a gift, children are a gift. Sometimes children are not born into the most perfect circumstances, but they have the right to be born, and if you can't take care of that child then someone else will. It's selfless. You have to be selfless.

GOD'S
grace
is sufficient



ANDREA CANE

.....

Andrea was the middle of five children and was born and raised in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1987 with a nursing degree and met her husband later that year. They got married in 1988 and had six children together, later adopting two more children from Russia. Andrea worked in the neuro-surgery ICU for ten years and worked up until her third child was born. They currently live in South Bend, Indiana.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDHOOD SHAPE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD?

Well, having a mom that could be a stay-at-home mom, I didn't know how lucky we were and it was definitely more the norm in the 60's to have a mom who stayed home. Once we were in high school, she also started volunteering at the school we attended so she was around during the day even in our school life. So she really did invest in whatever we were doing.

"IF EVERYONE COULD HAVE ALL THE CHILDREN THEY WANTED, NOBODY WOULD EVER ADOPT."

HOW DID YOU BEGIN TO CONTEMPLATE YOUR DECISION OF ADOPTION?

Well when our sixth child was born, my uterus ruptured while I was still pregnant, so we both got pretty close to dying. We both had to be resuscitated, but in the end we did fine. The doctor said my uterus was very very badly damaged, and he believed it would be very hard for me to carry another pregnancy to term. This was in large part due to the Cesarean section that I had previously, and

my uterus had ruptured along that scar. He said that if I became pregnant before the baby was 18 months old, it would be very life threatening because the uterus itself wouldn't be strong enough yet.

So when my daughter was 18 months old, I got pregnant and had a miscarriage when I was 12 weeks. It was such a shock to me because all of my other pregnancies had gone to term. I just cried out to the Lord. *What are you thinking? We would take as many babies as you want, people destroy their babies, why would you ever take this baby from us?* Then as I was praying, I heard the Lord say to me, "If everyone could have all the children they wanted, nobody would ever adopt."

I was so stunned because I had this house full of kids and the idea of adopting had never really occurred to me. It was amazing though because it almost completely took my grief away from having lost this baby. The Lord totally turned my attention towards how many children there were that needed families and put adoption very strongly on my heart. Then I miscarried three more times and it became very clear that it was very unlikely that I would carry another baby to term. So we started looking into adoption.

DID YOU EVER CONSIDER ADOPTING FROM THE UNITED STATES?

Yes, the first place we went to was Catholic Charities. That was the first stop in my investigation, but they don't work with families who already have this many children, because their heart is with childless couples. She said if we looked elsewhere and keep reaching dead ends, that we could come back.

The Lord never asks anything
of us that he isn't going

to give us the grace

to deal

with

- Andrea



WHAT WAS ONE OF YOUR BIGGEST FEARS ABOUT ADOPTING?

It was the fears of the people around us that would make us hesitant. They would say things like "You are taking too big of a risk, don't ruin your beautiful family. You could have children with a terrible problem that would cause problems for you and your kids". So my husband and I never had any fears, but we were on occasion influenced by the fears of the people around us.

"I BROUGHT YOU HERE BECAUSE YOU ARE WILLING TO HELP ME GIVE A HOME TO THESE CHILDREN."

WHAT HELPED YOU OVERCOME THIS FEAR THAT PEOPLE WERE TRANSFERRING ONTO YOU?

I remember distinctly, I had a friend who adopted children from Russia herself. We hadn't been to Russia yet, and she said to me, "Andrea, the Lord told me when I was in Russia, 'I didn't bring you here for you to be harmed. I brought you here because you are willing to help me give a home to these children'.

Even though I didn't hear the Lord say that to me, I felt him speaking to me through my friend. I thought, "Yeah, she's right." The Lord isn't luring us into trouble. I remember feeling very strongly that the Lord never asks anything of us that He isn't going to give us the grace to deal with. There was never any doubt that God's grace wouldn't be sufficient for us. The same way He has always for our biological children, I couldn't see things being any different for adopted children.

WHAT DID THIS PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

We got a very rare scenario because from the day that the adoption agency sent us a letter agreeing that they could work with us, that letter was dated January 5th, and our boys were in our living room by October 5th, which was exactly nine months to the day, which was just like a pregnancy. I saw that as the Lord being very cheeky with us. For a lot of people who adopt it gets very complicated and there's all kinds of setbacks.

We did not specify that they had to be siblings or a certain age or gender, but we gave our preferences. We preferred that they were under the age three and that they were siblings. We got a referral for them pretty quickly and then we went over to Russia shortly after that to meet them and request a court date. Once you request a court date, you go home and wait for your court date to be assigned. After we got a court date, we went back to Russia in September to receive our boys officially.

HOW HAS THE EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTION CHANGED YOU?

I often look at the boys, and say "What does it say about God?", that he could reach around the globe and reach into this tiny little spot in Russia and pluck the boys out and bring them to us. He knew that they had a need, and the only way he could fulfill their need was to touch our hearts. Even though they

"REALLY TRUST THE LORD,
THAT HE LOVES THESE KIDS
MORE THAN WE DO AND
THAT'S WHY HE CONSIDERED
PLACING THEM INTO YOUR
FAMILY."

have been with us for all of these years, I can't stop being amazed at just what the Lord can accomplish through adoption.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN WHO WAS CONSIDERING ADOPTION?

It really takes a unified decision between you and her husband, because it's a big deal. I would say to them that they could really trust the Lord, that if he is asking them to do it, that he will give them the grace to accept whatever the circumstances are once the adoption happened. Really trust the Lord, that he loves these kids more than we do and that's why he considered placing them into your family. He doesn't fall asleep at the switch; he's got it all in his hands.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE TO YOU AS A MOTHER?

The biggest surprise to me is that parenting adult children has such high stakes associated with it, and that has really caught me off guard [...]. It's very sobering. It's a very serious role as a parent to help your children through these really big decisions that they are starting to make. It's been a huge surprise.

DO YOU THINK SOCIETY JUSTLY PORTRAYS MOTHERHOOD?

I have a huge heart for working moms, so to the degree that society would ever judge a woman for having kids, then deciding to work. I think working moms have a really hard job to be able to balance all the responsibilities at home for caring for a home and a family and then also having to work. I think it would be great if we as a society could have a bigger heart for working moms to whatever degree we could have more ways to support working moms.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION IS OF BEING A MOM?

I think a lot of women forget that motherhood is a vocation, so I think there's a misconception that there isn't a *ton* of value to just motherhood. I think if more women gave themselves the credit of motherhood being their vocation, they wouldn't feel like they have to apologize for being a stay at home mom. It is a misconception that motherhood is tremendously valuable not only for your kids but for society.

RESOURCES

1 HEART 2 SOULS

1heart2souls is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support parents who have been given a poor prenatal prognosis, have suffered the loss of an infant, or received the news that their newborn has a disability. 1heart2souls was founded after the twin daughters of Luci Klare, who were born conjoined at the heart.

Web: 1heart2souls.org
Phone: (859) 496-4149
Email: info@1heart2souls.org
Address:
407 Vine Street
Cincinnati, Ohio

AMERICA WORLD ADOPTION

America World Adoption is an International Christian adoption agency dedicated to building families according to God's design of adoption and providing service that is personal and dependable. America World desires for every adoptable orphan to be placed in a Christian home. We are committed to maintaining integrity throughout the adoption process, and our experienced staff will walk alongside you on your adoption journey with compassion and understanding.

Web: awaa.org
Phone: 703-356-8447

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

Catholic Charities USA is a national organization that offers support to member agencies, provides disaster relief and promotes poverty-reduction through research and legislative reform. Our belief in the sanctity of human life compels us to support women facing an unintended pregnancy in the difficult process of deciding to parent their child or place their child in an adoptive family. This same belief compels us to find loving homes for children already born who are in need of the healing love of an adoptive family. In 2014, Catholic Charities provided adoption services to over 45,000 people.

Web: catholiccharitiesusa.org
Main Switchboard: 703-549-1390
Donations: 1-800-919-9338
Address:
2050 Ballenger Avenue
Suite 400
Alexandria, VA
22314

WIC (WOMEN INFANT & CHILDREN)

WIC's mission is to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care.

Web: fns.usda.gov/wic/

WOMEN'S CARE CENTER

Women's Care Center provides free, confidential counseling, support and education to women facing unplanned pregnancies. Services include pregnancy testing, pregnancy verification, ultrasounds, prenatal care, and ongoing support and resources beyond pregnancy. We serve 25,000 women annually from 23 centers in 7 states, including Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio & Wisconsin.

Web: [Womenscarecenter.org](http://womenscarecenter.org)
Phone: 1-877-908-234

WORLD CHILD

The World Child International Corporation (World Child) is a nonprofit adoption agency founded by Sherrell Goolsby in 1981, and has proudly placed more than 3,000 children into loving homes throughout the US, and with American families living abroad. As of 2012, the agency is under new ownership with Chief Executive Officer Inna Pecar, who also runs KidsFirst Adoption. Pecar attained a Masters in Education in Ukraine and a Masters in Social Work from Indiana University. Her devotion to children is evident to all families who work with her, as she strives tirelessly to assure the success of each adoption. Pecar personally guides our adoptive families through an intensive and complete referral review process that results in great placement success. We also work with birth mothers throughout the State of Indiana and during all different stages in their pregnancy.

Web: [Worldchild.org](http://worldchild.org)
Phone: (317) 843-2300 or 1-877-612-2345
info@kidsfirstadoption.com
Address:
9135 North Meridian Street,
Suite B-4

VIVIAN'S VICTORY

Vivian's Victory is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing support, programs, and resources to parents of children with a poor prenatal diagnosis or a prolonged illness, not only during their hospital stay but during and after their transition home. We believe no child should fight alone and no parent should choose between their child and "life".

Web: Viviansvictory.org
Phone: (513) 532-9360
Email: info@viviansvictory.org
Address:
Vivian's Victory
P.O. Box 53525
Cincinnati, OH

HANNAH & FRIENDS

Hannah and Friends is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for children and adults with special needs. Maura and Charlie Weis founded Hannah & Friends in recognition of their daughter Hannah. We strive to raise awareness and compassion for all those with different abilities. We offer recreational programs for children and adults with special needs as well as residential services for adults at the Hannah & Friends Neighborhood in South Bend. We also operate a grant program, Hannah's Helping Hands, providing quality of life grants for families with individuals with developmental disabilities in Indiana, the Michiana area, New York, Rhode Island, and Florida.

Web: hannahandfriends.org
Phone: (574)-217-7860
Address:
51250 Hollyhock Road,
South Bend, IN
46637

