My Mommy

I always wanted to call you mommy but I never had the chance. You’re a stranger, even though you gave birth to me. Carried me for nine months. Maybe experienced morning sickness or mood swings. Only you know for sure. I met you birth mother just briefly when you brought me into the world. Remember that day when you experienced labor pains? Nearly all expectant mothers do. Instead of holding me, kissing me, and welcoming me into the world, you abandoned me in the big city hospital. That’s what the medical records said. A young social work student stopped by your room the day after you delivered me. Instead of answering her questions, you handed me to the young lady and said please hold my baby. The bewildered young woman didn’t know what to do and you never returned.

What happened that you didn’t want me? Was my daddy around? Were you overwhelmed? Was I the product of a rape? Did you reach out for help? Maybe a relative or a friend would have given me a home since you didn’t. What kind of life did you have? Did you have other children and get married? I have so many questions for you but it seems like they’ll never be answered.

Unwanted infants like me usually are adopted because we’re cute and adorable, like puppies and kittens. Most people love babies. They also love puppies and kittens. The city said I couldn’t be adopted right away because of legal entanglements. Since you walked out of the hospital without signing papers to free me for adoption, I ended up in the hands of Children Services. They sent me to live with Marcy B. who lived in a comfy home in a quiet neighborhood. Her husband had died years ago. Marcy B. seemed nice enough. She fed me a bottle when I cried and changed my dirty diapers. Her family visited often, always fussing about me. Why shouldn’t they? I was so sweet, didn’t cry much and had a nice smile. Marcy B. wanted to adopt me but the agency said no because she was single and a senior citizen. I had bonded with her and enjoyed our routine. On warm sunny days, Marcy B. put me in a stroller and took me for walks in the park. I liked the fresh air. Sometimes, she wheeled my carriage into the grocery store and bought food for us. After her dinner, Marcy B. put me in my baby seat and together, we watched the evening news. I didn’t follow what exactly was happening but Marcy B. did. Once in a while, she called her sister in Ohio and they talked about world events. Other nights, Marcy read me a story before bed time. I slept in a cozy crib with the stuffed animals Marcy B. had bought for me. Would you have bought me stuffed animals? Would you have taken me out for walks in my stroller? If you birth mother had kept me, maybe we could’ve had a good life together. I’ll never know. Maybe one day we’ll meet and you can tell me what happened.

Months slipped by and I wasn’t yet free for adoption. The agency said the legal system was slow. Or maybe the children’s agency waited for you to return. Did you ever think of coming back for me? Or wonder who was taking care of me?

Three years or so slipped by when I lost my piece of paradise. Marcy B. collapsed on the floor after she ate her morning toast and fruit. There was nothing I could do but cry. My savior needed help and I didn’t know what to do. A neighbor heard my wails and called for the police. My little heart broke when the ambulance workers arrived and covered Marcy B. with a sheet then carried her away. They said they couldn’t save her. What would happen to me now? I loved Marcy B. and would miss her, even if she wasn’t my real mommy. A kind police woman stayed with me until a worker from the children’s agency arrived to pick me up. The agency lady put my belongings into a crumpled paper bag. What now? Sometimes I am mad at you for leaving me behind. Then at other times I wondered what made you leave me like that? With strangers?

After Marcy B. died, I then lived with a woman named Helen and her husband. Their home was crowded with foster kids like me. By then, I was almost four years old in case you wondered. You weren’t around when I learned how to walk, feed myself, and go to the bathroom without help. Marcy B. did all that. I missed Marcy B. but tried to make the best of my new situation. Helen, my new caretaker, served us three meals a day but they weren’t always tasty. She wasn’t the best cook. Still, I persevered. Helen seemed to care even if she was in over her head. I heard her once mention that the money she got from caring for us kids helped to pay the mortgage. Her husband was out of work.

Time passed by so quickly. I was now school age, six years old. One day, an agency worker showed up after school to say I would be adopted. They found a couple looking for a child like me. At first, I was scared. I wasn’t particularly attached to Helen but I was used to her. Now I’d have to live with another set of strangers. Everything new all over. More routines to learn. I was just a kid but tired of the changes. I hoped the agency made sure they were good people like Marcy B.

Turns out the new couple, Alice and John, weren’t good people. I think they adopted me because their church leaned on them. The pastor said children like me were languishing in foster care. Do the right thing, the pastor said, and welcome these children into your homes. They have no parents. That wasn’t exactly true. I had a mommy and daddy but I didn’t know who they were or where they lived.

Alice berated me for not cleaning my room. John yelled a lot, especially if I didn’t finish my dinner. Sometimes, I either wasn’t hungry or didn’t like the salty food or canned meat. Alice told me I was stupid because I lagged behind in school. I tried my best but it didn’t seem good enough.

Before you knew it, I was in high school, slogging through years of unhappiness. I often felt like a visitor, a guest, in a stranger’s home. Alice and John weren’t affectionate nor did we do much as a family except attend church on Sunday. There were no vacations, picnics in the park or family movie nights. I stayed in my room a lot, reading books or watching TV. Unlike the other kids in my class, I didn’t have a cell phone. I couldn’t follow along with them on Instagram or Snapchat. John said to get a job if I wanted a phone. I thought he was just being mean. What would you have done?

In high school, I made friends with a classmate named Jodi, who had been through the foster care system like me. She too was unhappy because the foster father beat her with a belt when he got drunk. She rarely had new clothes. The foster parents took away the cat she found. Jodi loved that cat and cuddle with her every day. One day at school, Jodi suggested that we run away. Where would we go? Would you have welcomed us to your home wherever that might be?

On a Saturday morning, I told Alice and John that I was going to volleyball practice. They believed me even though I wasn’t on the team. I knew nothing about the game either. I threw a few things in my backpack, hoping they wouldn’t notice it was bulkier than usual. I met Jodi at the bus station and together we boarded a bus to California. The Golden State sounded like a pleasant place to live. Our plans were to get jobs and to find an apartment. Only it didn’t happen that way.

At the California bus station, a woman wearing stylish clothes approached us. She asked if we were runaways. How did she know? Jodi nodded that we were. The pretty woman said she could help us find jobs. Were we interested? Short on funds, we said yes. A job would be a path to success. This job, however, was a path to hell. The fancy lady took us to a creepy house where a man, unshaven and smelly, waited by the front door. I was shocked that he took away out ID cards and Jodi’s cell phone. He said now you work for me. We tried to run out but the fancy lady stood in front of the door, aiming a gun at us. She said if we didn’t obey orders, we’d be shot.

For the next two years, we didn’t attend school. We didn’t eat well either. In fact, some days we didn’t eat at all. A bath? Not often. In case you’re wondering birth mother, the fancy lady forced us to have sex with strange men sometimes as much as ten times a day. We swallowed pills each morning so we didn’t become pregnant. Gee, how nice of her. The men hurt us sometimes because they were so rough. Others sweated and slobbered all over us. I wonder if they had children. Do you wonder?

The fancy lady and her creepy friend never left us alone. Escape was impossible. We were trapped. Did you ever think this might happen to the infant you left behind? Well, it did and I was miserable, scared, and desperate. I longed for simple things like a hearty meal and a bath every night, maybe even my mommy to hug me goodnight.

How’d we escape? I’ll tell you, assuming you’re interested. Maybe you are, maybe you’re not. Maybe you feel guilty that I endured so much agony since you abandoned me. One day, there was a loud banging on the front door. The fancy lady peaked out the window and saw six policemen with guns aimed at the house. Evidently, a neighbor became suspicious of all the cars coming and going at all hours to the house. The cops demanded the door be opened up. Instead of letting the officers inside, the fancy lady and the creepy man ran to the back of the house and raced out the door into the backyard. As they tried to scale the fence, one of the cops urged them to stop or they’d be shot. Our captors were led away in handcuffs. I don’t know what happened to them nor did I care. You understand, I’m sure.

Jodi and I were sent to a group home. I refused to return to Alice and John, even though they were my legal parents. Just as well. They didn’t want me back anyway. Jodi said she wouldn’t return to her former foster home because of the bad man. What did we do?

We were almost eighteen years old. The child welfare agency helped former foster kids like us find an apartment and jobs. We even adopted a little dog named Sal. For the first time since you left me in the hospital, I finally felt like home. Jodi and I were like sisters. We planned to attend the same college and be roommates. In case you’d like to know, I eventually graduated from high school and college. I married a good man and had a family of my own. It took a while to find family but it happened. I wonder what you did with your life. I am sorry we didn’t get to know each other. Maybe you are too. You are my mommy after all.