

The Roots of her Story

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By Jean Mills

Our daughter is about to celebrate her eighteenth birthday. I could swear it was only a few minutes ago that we brought her home in her baby car seat, wrapped in a pink blanket.

“Eighteen,” she says, nodding at us to make sure we appreciate the significance of that number. “I can vote now,” she adds meaningfully. The politics prize that she won at school last year was a shock to us all, and it probably had more to do with her gift for articulate, reasoned debate than her knowledge of the current political climate.

“So who will you vote for in the next election?” we ask her, amused that this is the first item of business.

“Don’t know,” she shrugs. “But I liked it when Paul Martin was Prime Minister. PM was PM – easy to remember.”

And then, from the sublime to the earth-shaking, she asks, “What do I do if I want to meet my birth parents?”

Our daughter came to us at the age of one month. She had long fingers (“Piano hands!” I exclaimed when I saw them) and alert, startling blue eyes. After seven years of marriage, and four years of wondering if we would ever make it to the top of the Family and Children’s Services list, we were parents. Forget having nine months to get our wits about us. One day we were a childless couple, and the next we were informed our lives would never be the same. We had one week to get the nursery ready.

When the social worker came in with our baby and peeled away the pink blanket so we could see her for the first time, I was suddenly overwhelmed.

“You pick her up,” I said to her dad. I couldn’t do it. Not yet.

Becoming a parent is huge. Becoming the parent of a child who doesn’t share your DNA is not only huge, but daunting too. And the past eighteen years have seen a lot of daunting.

Where does that temper come from? And that obsessive need to be right, to be listened to, to argue? And the restlessness, and the high energy? Not to mention the amazing blue eyes and the beautiful hands and the strong shoulders that can send a field hockey ball arcing down the pitch.

Not from us.

She’s always known she was adopted, and we’ve even been able to tell her a bit about her roots, so it’s not as if she’s starved for some resolution of a life-long mystery. But like anyone, she wants to know what her story is. It’s such an important part of becoming a whole person: knowing where you came from and who made you. She knows our part of the story of course, but she’s such a smart, inquisitive, thoughtful young adult: she wants the big picture. In her shoes, I would too.

So the eighteenth birthday approaches, and with it comes the moment when she can begin the process to reconnect with the people who so selflessly gave her to us to raise. Of course, we did much more than just raise her: we fell in love with her.

And so we come to the crux. Like any other eighteen-year-old, our daughter is about to step over the threshold from childhood to young adulthood, taking with her our values as a basis for her own (we hope), our confidence in her abilities, our trust, our love. Like any other eighteen-year-old's parents, we're watching her progress with a mixture of satisfaction in a job well done, and amazement that this step has arrived so soon, or so it seems.

But while other parents watch their children launch themselves into the world, we are watching ours launch herself towards a completely different gene pool. It's the one that created her, and we don't belong there. After all this time, and difficult as it is, we know it's only right: we have to share. That's something other parents don't have to do. Yes, everyone anticipates future life partners and new family relationships that have to be navigated. But this is significantly, achingly different.

Why couldn't I push back the pink blanket and lift my baby girl into my arms on that very first day eighteen years ago?

Because I think I knew, even then, how much it was going to hurt to let her go.

But she doesn't seem to be in a rush. As always, she'll chart her own course and take her own sweet time (which anyone who shares a bathroom with her can attest to). She'll go in search of the creators of her DNA or she won't.

And if she does choose to find them, I hope they realize how very lucky they are.