

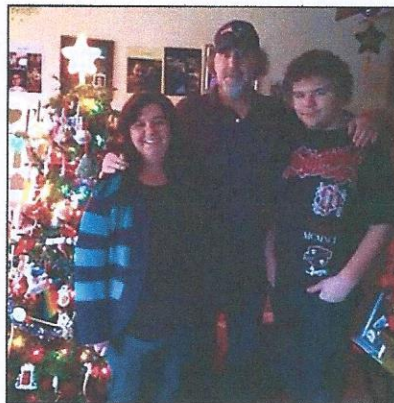
Tracy's Lesson

By Patricia Dischler



Patricia Dischler lives in Wisconsin and is the author of "Because I Loved You: A Birthmother's View of Open Adoption." She speaks nationally at early childhood and adoption trainings and conferences. To see all of her books or to contact her with comments or questions, visit www.patriciadischler.com.

At only 19 years old, Tracy took a leap of faith and moved cross country to begin a new life. It was an exciting time, she was moving back to New Hampshire, where she had lived until she was 12, and starting over with a new job, new apartment, and connecting with friends old and new. Through one of these friends she met the boy she would spend her summer with, that is, until she found herself unexpectedly pregnant.



While her mother, stepfather and little brother were still on the other side of the country with no idea, her father, who lived in a nearby state, had received the medical bill from her first doctor's visit, and soon called. Tracy said, "He thought it was best for me to come home, so I did."

Tracy's father asked her to consider adoption, so Tracy found Child and Family Services and made an appointment. By now her mother was aware of the situation and was urging her to parent her child. But after meeting with the adoption counselor Tracy became convinced that she was too young to parent. She began to believe adoption was the best option for her child. After looking over five other potential adoptive parent profiles with no luck, she looked over the sixth one and felt the connection. She made her choice.

Ironically, Tracy's son Anthony was born the day before Mother's Day, widely known as Birthmother's Day to those in adoption circles. Her family was at her side to experience the joyful event. The day after, her son's adoptive parents arrived with flowers to meet their child.

Four days after her son's birth, Tracy stood in a courtroom to relinquish her parental rights. She was asked to give her permission for Anthony to contact her when he reached 21 years of age. She agreed, and her lawyer questioned her decision. Tracy told him firmly, "I'll never change my mind!"

In the time after, Tracy spent time with family, feeling strange

and unsure of what direction her life was supposed to go. She was confused by the loss she felt, knowing her child was in a loving home, but still hurting that the home was not hers. The faith she had in her initial move was gone, but slowly, she started to build a new life.

However, the question of adoption was to arise again. A year later, in a new relationship, Tracy was once again unexpectedly pregnant. Her family

immediately began the adoption discussion once more. But this time, Tracy and her child's father, Jim, were confident in their relationship and ability to parent and chose to become a family.

Tracy reflected on her experience in choosing adoption, and began to feel that she was too quick to accept that she might not be a good mother at 19 years of age. Tracy said, "If I knew then what I know now I don't think I would have done it. I didn't know I could be a good mom." She saw the new pregnancy as a second chance and this time she was ready for parenting.

Tracy was ecstatic at the idea of seeing through the pregnancy and becoming a mother. Tracy says of her daughter, "She helped heal me." Unfortunately, the marriage wasn't as strong as Tracy's bond with her daughter and soon ended. Tracy said, "It was just never meant to be."

These experiences had her more careful in her next relationship with Brian, dating seven years before finally being ready to commit to marriage again. (Which proved to be only the beginning of their commitment to each other as they have now celebrated nine years of marriage!) As a new family, they continued to grow and they soon welcomed a son. Tracy cherished her role as mother.

In yet again a twist of fate, at the age of 14, Tracy's daughter announced she was pregnant. Tracy did not want her

daughter to go through the pain of loss through adoption like she had and says, "Everybody in my family knew this baby wasn't going anywhere."

Tracy sees her own experience with adoption as a learning experience that prepared her for helping her own daughter. She said, "Maybe I had to go through something to make it successful for her."

Tracy had stayed connected to Anthony and his adoptive parents, exchanging letters and photos twice a year until he was 21 years old, but unfortunately at this time the correspondence stopped. A few years later, Tracy opened her computer to the local news one day to discover the front page photo was of Anthony receiving his college diploma. She says it was a wonderful experience to see him, succeeding at life, happy. She felt blessed that she was able to witness the moment saying, "It could have been anybody's child in that photo, but it was mine. So awesome!" Her daughter has connected with Anthony online, so Tracy is hopeful she will get her reunion some day.

Because of her experiences, Tracy has felt compelled to reach out to other birth mothers, to help them heal, to guide them. She has founded Birthmothers of New Hampshire, a support group that meets at a local hospital, connects birth mothers through online chat rooms, and sponsors a retreat where Tracy gets donations to create baskets for the birth mothers and provide them with a special event. Tracy is committed to sharing the lessons of her experience with others and creating a safe, loving environment for all birth mothers to openly share their experiences and feelings. Tracy is a strong advocate for successful adoptions and her work has had a positive effect on the field.

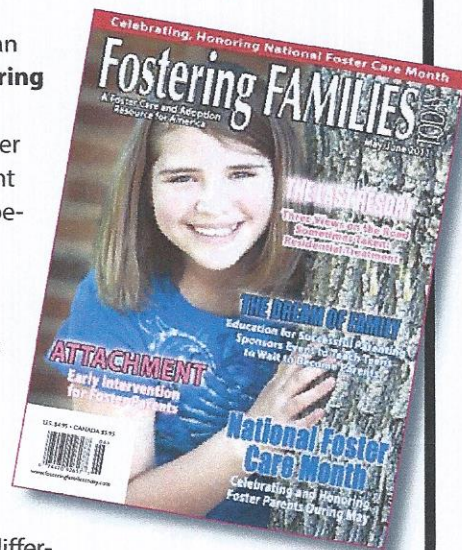
Tracy has let her pain turn into knowledge and strength that she can share with others, and while she may have some lingering doubts regarding her adoption decision, she has no doubts that she will make an impact with others and continue to provide support to those who need it.

Authors note: Tracy is the first birth mother interview I've shared where there were some regrets, but what is positive in her story is her realization of the importance of good support groups and counseling for birth mothers. Her story is important because it highlights an important lesson for adoption counselors and families of birth mothers: pregnancy counseling should explore BOTH parenting and adoption, providing unbiased facts and information and allowing the woman to come to her own conclusion as to what option is best for her and her child. For information on how to provide this type of support, you can request a complimentary copy of my pregnancy counseling booklet, "No Regrets: Making Your Decision In An Unplanned Pregnancy" by signing up at www.patriciadischler.com

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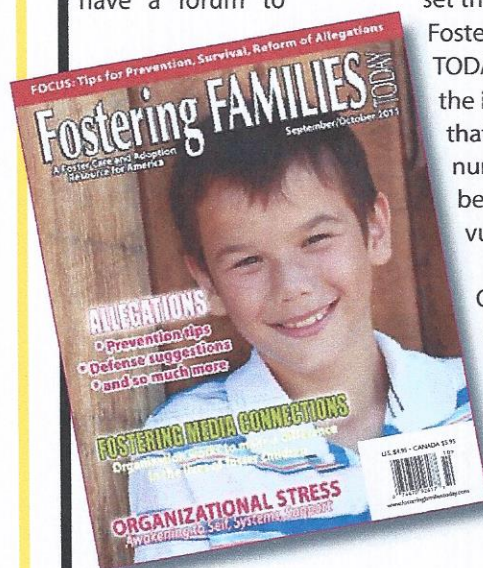


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