

My Story: From Floppy Beginnings to a Family's Love

When I, the baby of the family, finally made my way to my forever home, I was insecure about being put down to sleep alone in a quiet bedroom. I needed to be close to my new mum — to hear her breathing, her sighs, her love for her family. Something that perhaps resembled the noisy hospital ward where I spent the first three months of my life.

So, she placed me in a crib and wheeled me around the house as she did her housework. She even became proficient in performing chores with her right hand only, as she held me on her left hip. Baby backpacks hadn't yet been invented — those might have helped her move at the fast pace she was used to. My adoptive mum, a city girl who dreamed of marrying a farmer, had made that dream come true when she met my father.

I didn't meet my older brother and sister until I was four months old. After spending my early days in Hamilton Hospital, I was placed in a foster home for one month. The day my forever family came to see me for the first time, there was an unspoken knowing — I belonged to them, and they to me. Apparently, I eyeballed each one of them as if to say, "Thank you for coming to take me home. I've been waiting for you."

You see, I spent the first part of my life in a hospital ward in Hamilton, waiting to be strong enough for adoption. I was born with a condition called *Hypotonia* — a muscle disorder that left me with a floppy, unresponsive body, like a little rag doll. Almost as if the process of conception and birth had been too much, the prognosis uncertain from the beginning.

Rewind a little over nine months earlier, to my birth mother — a 20-year-old trainee nurse. Like many young women, her first sexual experience was traumatic, an unwanted encounter with a man. It wasn't a happy beginning. But my joy — and hers — was still to come.

During her pregnancy, she became what society then called a "Preggy Girl" — an unmarried woman carrying a shameful secret. She was sent away to work as a maid, living with a family she'd never met, simply to hide the visible signs of pregnancy. Even her own father was kept in the dark.

Maureen came from a poor, dysfunctional family with nine children. She knew that to give me a chance at life, she'd have to let me go — to send me into the world with a slender hope that I'd be placed in the kind of loving farming family she had always imagined in fairy tales. Far from the overcrowded, abusive home she'd grown up in, in the suburbs of Howick during the 1960s.

Of course, she loved me. But the circumstances made it impossible for her to raise a baby in that unhappy environment. My birth wasn't a joyful event — not the kind people often dream of. She laboured alone. I was taken away straight after delivery. There was no plan for postnatal care in cases like hers. She was held in a room for two days, likely until the bleeding stopped, and then sent on her way.

But despite this challenging beginning, I grew — and I grew — small but strong. There were subtle but noticeable differences between myself and my non-biological siblings. Yet there was love, joy, and strong *whānau* roots. My new family had also known heartbreak — they had lost their first-born son, Mark, at birth. Somehow, that became part of my balance, the spiritual thread that wove me into this new *whakapapa*.

My adoptive mother had a beautiful soul. She blended our family using intuition and always asked: “What would love do?”

She told me I was a special gift — this is how she introduced me to myself and to where I had come from. She held my hand the whole way through. She told me she had been waiting for me to come and ask about my birth family.

I remember the day it happened — I was 14, unhappily attending a religious boarding school. I received a letter in the post with photos of my birth mother on her wedding day, and two gorgeous younger brothers, aged five and seven.

A reunion was arranged in their hometown of Gisborne. Mum, Dad, and I made the journey from Te Awamutu as if it were one of our usual summer holidays. It was a pleasant but awkward meeting. A mixture of familiarity and unfamiliarity. But, just like my parents always were when meeting new people — they were warm, open, understanding, and full of love.

We kept lightly in touch over the years. I always received a birthday card — though my name was always spelled wrong. Still, it was special. That connection lasted a lifetime, until Maureen passed away two and a half years ago.

Of course, she didn't know my name until I was 15 — just as I was about to dive into the chaos of teenagehood. That chaos lasted well into adulthood... but that's another story.

My adoptive mum is still my closest soul here on earth. I've been blessed with three daughters of my own. Now, I'm striving for healing — for them, for me, for the times I failed to show up in the ways they needed. I dream they find forgiveness, acceptance, and love — not just for me, but for themselves.

I hope you can feel the essence of what created my strong family. So many things have shaped my well-being, but I've always felt blessed and grateful for my chosen family.

All of this happened under the closed adoption laws of the time. I sometimes wonder: what would my story have been like if I had known Maureen from day one? I believe her life might have been richer had she known me earlier. I believe she would've been comforted to know that her baby was living the very life she dreamed of — the one she knew she could never give.

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