

*Chicken Soup for the Adopted Soul*, will touch your heart with stories of finding and creating families. From tales of international orphaned babies and children who spent years in the foster-care system to those who were adopted at birth, this very special compilation conveys the true meaning of unconditional love. Authors: Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and LeAnn Thieman. Publisher Health Communications, INC. 2008.

“A Unique Bond of Family” by Belinda Howard Smith is a true story of a grandmother’s love and sacrifice after her daughter gives the newborn to a stranger. *Chicken Soup for the Adopted Soul* autographed by Smith is available at [www.belindahowardsmith.com](http://www.belindahowardsmith.com)

### **A Unique Bond of Family**

“Hello, you don’t know me, but I have your granddaughter. Your daughter gave her to me last night. I asked her in case of an emergency, if I couldn’t find her who I could call, and she gave me your number. My husband and I want to adopt her but we thought family should have the first opportunity to keep her.”

Three hours later, my friend Marge drove with me to meet this stranger at a gasoline station just off the interstate. This petite bundle of energy talked as she rocked Brianna in her arms and relayed to me how she was given my granddaughter. Not understanding why someone who wanted to keep a baby would be motivated to call me I asked her, “Are you an angel?”

She handed me my newborn granddaughter; the hospital issued diaper bag filled with formula, and her birth certificate. Thankfully, a friend accompanied me to this surreal meeting. On our way home we compared mental notes and agreed that many of the stranger’s comments were contradictory. The following day I spoke to her by telephone and again she expressed her interest in adopting and then I never heard from her again. I still wonder if she is of this realm.

Only a few days before, I had been sitting in the neonatal unit cradling my first grandchild, I knowing that she wouldn’t be mine for long. This fragile, innocent three-pound little life was born six-weeks early, by caesarian – “failure to thrive,” in the womb of my reckless teenage daughter, Leah who chose to live life on the streets. She and her boyfriend of two weeks planned to keep the baby, a decision as well thought out as two children wanting to keep a puppy.

I was embarrassed that the nurses working the unit and other visitors to this sterile environment might think I was anything like the two “kids” who only showed up after sleeping in most of the day for their daily visit. My heart was sickened as I observed them treat her like an object of show and tell, their stench from partying the night before. The revealing clothing my daughter wore was far from maternal. Food, diapers, shelter, much less the emotional needs of another life was far from their thoughts, but very close to mine. My heart was broken.

I sat rocking and holding this precious life through an entire hospital shift praying for God’s intervention. “Please don’t let them drag her around like a puppy.” I shuddered at the thought of what her future could be. I prayed that my daughter would relinquish Brianna to a loving home and knew that once Brianna was released from the hospital, I would never see her again. I wanted her to have a good life.

Time was on Brianna's side since it would be several weeks before her release. The hospital social worker and eventually Child Protective Services (CPS) and other agencies became my allies. They witnessed the lack of maturity and desire by my daughter to provide a home for Brianna. CPS urged me to encourage Leah to allow me to take the baby indefinitely. My desire was for what was best for Brianna. I did not think the answer was my home believing it would only become a power struggle between my daughter and me. She would ultimately have all of the legal rights. I could foresee the day she would stop by with her latest boyfriend demanding her child as they headed off into the sunset to start a new life. Taking this baby into my home would only mean heartache and trouble for my family. My husband and well-meaning friends and family advised against it.

I prayed for God's revelation of what was best for Brianna. I prayed for a burning bush (we were having a drought, a burning bush seemed reasonable). I prayed for words flashing on a billboard. I prayed and prayed and still no clear answer except the ones echoing from my family... "don't, don't don't."

I attended a meeting at the hospital among the social workers from various agencies and CPS. Leah was to attend, but she overslept the 1:00 PM meeting. She was too sleepy to get out of bed, though knowing it was to discuss the seriousness of her situation and the possibility of court orders for some parental restrictions.

During the meeting, I was stunned to hear the CPS worker report that Leah would be allowed to take the baby upon her release. A safety plan was established. Once the baby was released, one of the agencies would be checking on my daughter daily offering assistance with formula, transportation needs, and other services as a means of keeping a close watch.

My husband was on a business trip and I relayed the outcome of the meeting. He was gravely concerned, as we all feared the potential harm to Brianna with an impulsive irresponsible mother.

At six weeks, Brianna was released from the hospital and her first day out, Leah had her in an apartment swimming pool; her excuse - she was only getting her feet wet. Three days later, CPS discovered what they needed to take action. It was a criminal record on my daughter's boyfriend who had molested his younger cousin. By court order, he could not be around young children. Leah had to choose between her baby and her boyfriend. She gave her baby to a complete stranger.

It wasn't a burning bush nor a billboard, but a stranger at a gasoline station who was the sign from God that I was to take this baby home. I will always wonder if she was an angel.

The events leading up to that meeting prepared our hearts for her arrival into our home. When my husband returned from his business trip that evening and found a baby in my arms, he was relieved. We knew that we could not keep Brianna as our own. Later, I pondered the odd twist of fate that I would soon be relinquishing parental rights of Brianna, when 17 years earlier, I was the one adopting a baby. Back then, I wanted a baby so badly, and now I would be giving one up.

God led us to a couple several weeks later. They adopted Brianna and changed her name to Sara not knowing it is my mother's name. They live in a city 45-minutes away. I told them that they didn't have to keep in touch, that I would understand. They wanted

Sara to have us in her life with the exception of her birthmother, who is still a prodigal. I often wonder how Sara will feel about the circumstances of her birth and placement. Knowing that she will have many questions, I plan on writing a special little book just for her. She will know how much she is loved and about a God who loves her even more, and who has a plan for her life.

Within nine months Leah was pregnant again. I gained custody of Victoria when she was two weeks old and initially Sara's parents said they wanted her too, but after much prayer they felt it was not God's plan for them to adopt her. Though initially set back by the change in plans, I set out to find another family. After all, I had done it before and this time I proceeded to do it on my own without the continual prayers like I had the first time. I wanted Victoria to live closer to me. My plans failed and through Sara's parents we met a couple who attended their same church. Sara and Victoria would be able to grow up together. Sara's mother told a story at Victoria's baby shower. I was about the time, just a few years before, both couples were in her living room holding hands and praying that God would give them children. He gave them sisters. My heart sank at the thought that had I done it my way, these sisters would not be growing up together.

Leah's third pregnancy resulted in another newborn in our home; eventually adopted by the second couple. Many ask how I have been able to bear such pain, but the alternative would have been worse. I have been blessed with the special opportunity of caring and bonding with each granddaughter during her first weeks of life. Two babies coming after Sara while I still have a child growing up at home has meant that I have been less than a doting grandmother.

In May, I was invited to Sara's school...

"Hi Nana, Hi Nana!" Sara excitedly waved to me as her class of kindergarten graduates passed by the row in which I was sitting. I was between her mom and dad with her other grandparents two seats away. Ironic that I was getting all of the glory and they had done all the work. I didn't deserve her adoration, yet her childlike trust and unconditional love reached out to me in that dimly lit school cafeteria filled with proud parents and families of the graduating kindergarten class of 2006.

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