

HOW MUCH THEY LOVE ME

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[Assignment: Henry Adams, in his autobiography, claims that the most important things he learned in life he learned accidentally. Write a list for yourself of all the things you remember learning accidentally. Choose one interesting and important item from your list; make another list of all the details that flood into your mind as you recount that learning process. Then write a narrative essay about what happened. Your purpose is twofold: to relate that story to your reader as completely as you can, and to comment on what the process meant to you.]

I am adopted. I have known that for years. My parents were always very open and honest about it. When I was twelve years old, my parents took me to Coulee City, Washington, to see the hospital where I was born, and then to Moses Lake, Washington, to see the church where my parents first picked me up and held me. They felt that it was very important for me to have a picture of where I came from.

To go back a ways, I have never met my biological mother. She gave me life and sustained me for nine months, but I have never seen her face. She and my father were immigrants from Czechoslovakia, and dirt poor. They came to this country when my mother was nineteen and my father was twenty-one. They divorced shortly afterward when my mother was still pregnant with me. She had no money and no way to support the two of us. She gave me up saying that she wanted me to have the chance at a normal life with two parents in a Christian home. The papers were signed a week before I was born, and both families sat waiting. I was born on November 13, 1975, at 3:15 in the afternoon. As soon as the birthing process was finished, I was carried away. My mother was not even allowed to see me. The only things that I know about her was that she was nineteen years old, five feet seven inches tall, Czech, with brown hair, and that she cried when I was taken away.

I was always hesitant to ask about my birth mother. I had asked once and my mother I have now looked so hurt that I never brought it up again. I always wanted to know about her but I was always afraid that I would somehow hurt the woman that I call mother now. I think that she was worried that I would find her and then want to be with her. I know that it would never happen, because she took me in and loved me when nobody else would. I was not always sure of that love; it was something that had to be learned over time.

Because of the adoption, I never felt like I was really part of the family. I did not even look like I was part of the family. Both of my parents were rail thin and had dark hair. I was very blonde with pale skin and chubby cheeks. We would go to restaurants and hostesses would ask if they were my aunt and uncle. The fact that our relationship was not obvious hurt me a lot, and when I was younger, it scared me also.

The reason that my parents adopted me was that they really wanted children, but a doctor had told my mother that she could not have them; it would be impossible. They tried to have children for ten years and put their names in at the agency four years before I was born. When

I was three and a half years old my mother found out that she was pregnant. After all that time of having my parents to myself, I was going to have to share them. Not only that, but the person that I would be sharing them with would be their own, not somebody that you sign papers for and bring home like a car. Now at night Mommy was too tired to read to me, and her lap was too small. She used to have a red cardigan sweater that she would hang on the back of her chair at the dinner table. It no longer hung there because Mom was too big to wear it around the house. She would no longer sit on the floor to play games with me or take me to the park. When the time came for my little sister to be born, I stayed at the neighbor's house and my parents left home. When they came back they had a tiny baby. With its dark hair and skin, it looked just like them. They were calling her their miracle baby. Only years later did I learn that my little sister had almost died during birth. Her umbilical cord had gotten wrapped around her neck and was choking her to death. Her heartbeat had slowed down and they were afraid that they were going to lose her.

When she was brought home alive, things in our house changed forever. Christie always had to be watched, to have her signs monitored. Mother became hassled and overtired and Father was overprotective and gruff. There were no more stories at bedtime, kisses and prayers were often forgotten, and I had to tuck my own self in. I missed my family.

After a few months my sister was out of the danger zone and our life could get back to normal. And it did. People still asked my parents if they were my aunt and uncle, and still asked where I got my blonde hair and chubby cheeks. My sister and I did not get along any better. She would tell me that Mom and Dad did not love me as much as they loved her. I began to believe this, and for years I did not want to admit that I loved my parents because I thought the love would go unreturned. This is where my accidental lesson came in.

About a year ago I was in the laundry room folding my clothes and talking to my sister. I had been sucking on a Gobstopper and as I bent over to get more clothes out of the dryer I inhaled my Gobstopper. I started to choke and as I looked up at my sister I saw the look of panic in her eyes. She called to our parents in the living room to come help. They both came running and saw me on the floor. I was the only person in our house with any first aid training, so as my father put his arms around my waist, my mother tried to keep me awake to tell them how to help. I looked into their faces and saw all of the love and concern that I had craved for years. It had been there all the time; I just didn't know it. My father got the Gobstopper out and as the oxygen flooded back into my starved lungs, I reached out to my mother and she held me close.

My family is a lot different now. My sister and I are very good friends. She and I would go to the movies just the two of us, and some nights we would have a slumber party in the basement just the two of us. I talk to my parents on the phone at least twice a week and they are always glad to hear from me. My lesson proved difficult, but very beneficial and I'm glad that I learned it.