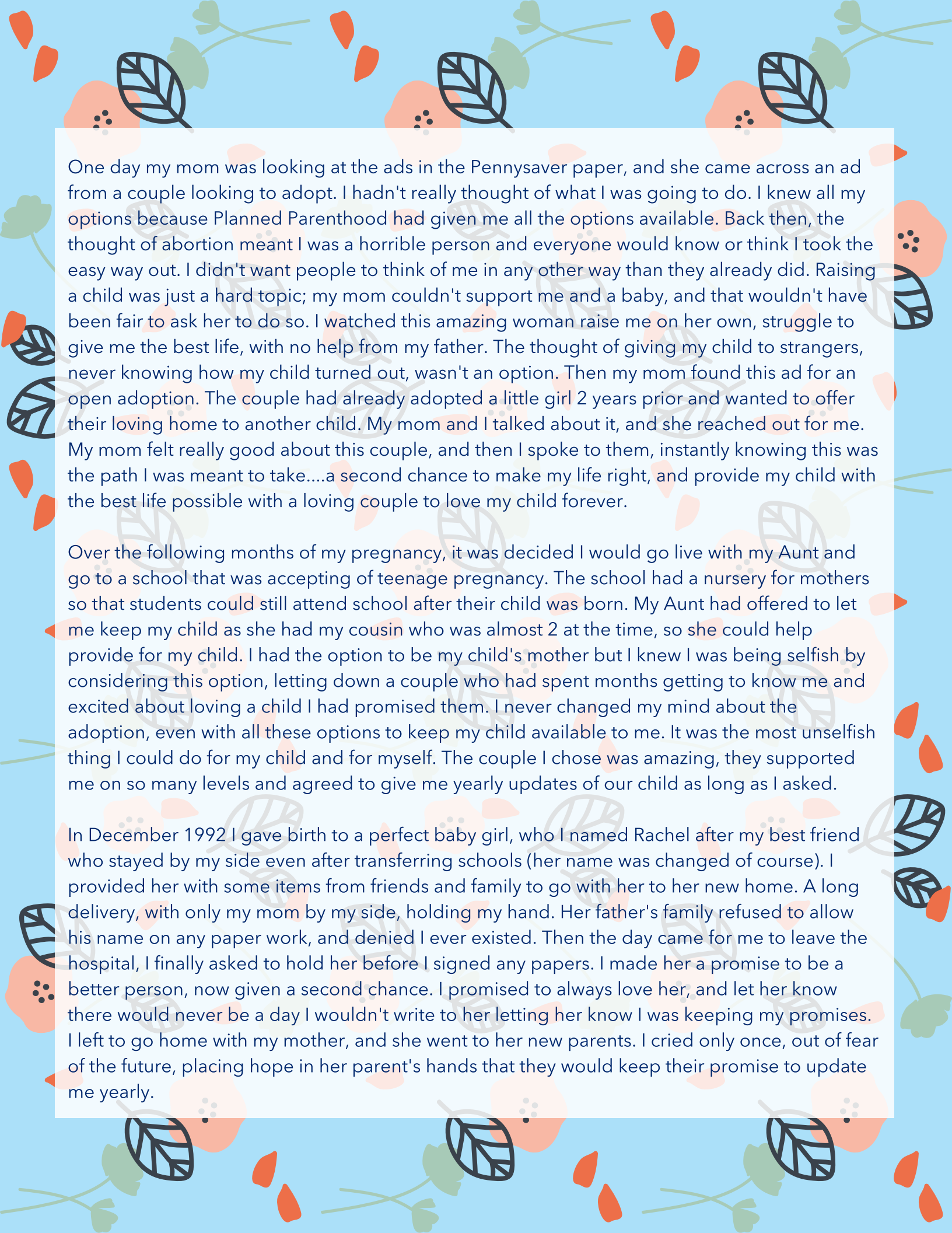


Casey's Story

Let's start from the beginning. I was 14 years old when I met my first real boyfriend. It was the summer of 1991 and I was in love. My best friend introduced us, as he was the son of a family friend. We instantly liked each other and soon spent the entire summer together. Our friends around us were all engaging in sex, it was only expected that we would too. My first time wasn't at all like we expect, it was a pressured situation and we felt we had to go forth and fit in with everyone around us. There was no romance, no taking our time, now rainbows and butterflies. It was real quick on his bed, before his mom came home. At the time I didn't realize the importance of that moment and how if I had waited, it would or could have been a special moment. We spent the rest of the summer together, having sex anywhere we could get a few moments together. This was also the time my mother decided to move into town, just down the road from where he lived, making our time alone together easier. My mother was a single mom and she had to work, so I being a teenager broke her trust and had him over as much as possible after school. I was, of course, one of those young girls who thought "I won't get pregnant, it won't happen to me." We never used protection, even after my mother found out I was having sex. I didn't think I needed birth control.

I will never forget the moment I realized I might be pregnant in April 1992. I had been feeling horrible, sick to my stomach before school. My mother suspected that I may be pregnant, but I was in denial. No this couldn't be, this isn't happening to a girl like me! I am smart, there was no way! When I realized I had missed my February and March periods, it then clicked that it was possible. I had to tell my mom, the one person who counted on me to be better than this. I let her down and I had to face the facts my life was about to change. My mother took me to Planned Parenthood to take a pregnancy test April 14th, 1992, a week after my 15th birthday. I prayed so hard that it was negative during the time we sat in the waiting room, waiting to speak to the doctor. I made promises to be better, to make my future better if it came back negative. Then the doctor told us I was in fact about 7 weeks along. Planned Parenthood was amazing, letting me know I had many options to choose and they would be there for me, even just to talk if I needed to. The drive home was heartbreaking, I had disappointed my mother and I still had to tell my boyfriend, as well as his family. I didn't know how I was going to survive this!

Over the following weeks, my boyfriend was told and so were our friends. Along the way my boyfriend's sister who was a senior had heard I was pregnant and was the one who told his mother. She called me and asked if it was true, and verbally attacked me, blaming me for allowing the "situation" to happen. She blamed me for everything. My boyfriend was made to break up with me, and several friends were no longer allowed to be friends with me. My best friend was all I had aside from my mother. Even the school informed my mother I would not be able to return to that school when the new school year started until I had the baby. During that time I would have a tutor help me with my classes. This was the time my mom and I had to decide what path I would take.



One day my mom was looking at the ads in the Pennysaver paper, and she came across an ad from a couple looking to adopt. I hadn't really thought of what I was going to do. I knew all my options because Planned Parenthood had given me all the options available. Back then, the thought of abortion meant I was a horrible person and everyone would know or think I took the easy way out. I didn't want people to think of me in any other way than they already did. Raising a child was just a hard topic; my mom couldn't support me and a baby, and that wouldn't have been fair to ask her to do so. I watched this amazing woman raise me on her own, struggle to give me the best life, with no help from my father. The thought of giving my child to strangers, never knowing how my child turned out, wasn't an option. Then my mom found this ad for an open adoption. The couple had already adopted a little girl 2 years prior and wanted to offer their loving home to another child. My mom and I talked about it, and she reached out for me. My mom felt really good about this couple, and then I spoke to them, instantly knowing this was the path I was meant to take....a second chance to make my life right, and provide my child with the best life possible with a loving couple to love my child forever.

Over the following months of my pregnancy, it was decided I would go live with my Aunt and go to a school that was accepting of teenage pregnancy. The school had a nursery for mothers so that students could still attend school after their child was born. My Aunt had offered to let me keep my child as she had my cousin who was almost 2 at the time, so she could help provide for my child. I had the option to be my child's mother but I knew I was being selfish by considering this option, letting down a couple who had spent months getting to know me and excited about loving a child I had promised them. I never changed my mind about the adoption, even with all these options to keep my child available to me. It was the most unselfish thing I could do for my child and for myself. The couple I chose was amazing, they supported me on so many levels and agreed to give me yearly updates of our child as long as I asked.

In December 1992 I gave birth to a perfect baby girl, who I named Rachel after my best friend who stayed by my side even after transferring schools (her name was changed of course). I provided her with some items from friends and family to go with her to her new home. A long delivery, with only my mom by my side, holding my hand. Her father's family refused to allow his name on any paper work, and denied I ever existed. Then the day came for me to leave the hospital, I finally asked to hold her before I signed any papers. I made her a promise to be a better person, now given a second chance. I promised to always love her, and let her know there would never be a day I wouldn't write to her letting her know I was keeping my promises. I left to go home with my mother, and she went to her new parents. I cried only once, out of fear of the future, placing hope in her parent's hands that they would keep their promise to update me yearly.

I won't say I made the best choices after this experience, because I didn't, though I tried. It was many years later before I asked to hear how she was doing. Almost every year until she was 18 I received letters and pictures updating me of how she was growing up. She grew up to be an amazing young woman. When she turned 18, I was able to reach out to her and let her know the story. I prayed that the life I had chosen for her had been amazing, and it was. She went to college, and is an outstanding artist, taking after me on many levels. I was so honored her parents let me be a part of her life. I have yet to meet her or her parents in person, but I will be eternally grateful for being part of such a loving family.

In the meantime, while my daughter grew, I made choices that weren't great. I married at the young age of 19, to an abusive man. We were stationed in Germany for 5 years, and the abuse was horrible. When we came back home, I remembered my promise to my daughter. I went to Planned

Parenthood for birth control and to talk about the abuse I was going through. The same doctor who was there for me 10 years prior was still there. She remembered my story, she again helped me in my situation. I was able to leave my abusive husband, went to college and earned 2 degrees. The whole time all I could think of was the promise I made to my daughter so many years before, it helped me keep going. In 2004, at the age of 27, I went back to Planned Parenthood for another pregnancy test. The very same doctor who helped me 12 and 2 years prior was the same doctor who gave me the news I was pregnant again, this time a much happier situation. Since finding out at 14 years old I was pregnant, I have two healthy amazing boys and live my every day for all three children I carried and loved.

My story is to encourage those who feel they have no options. Planned Parenthood played many roles in my life. Without that one person who remembered me every time I utilized their services and encouraged me to make the best choices for myself, I don't know where I would be. Teen pregnancy, abusive relationship at a young age, and then a planned pregnancy, Planned Parenthood was there the whole time. I felt understood and not judged, and because of that I am a better mother & woman in this world. My mother has been my hero through all of this. When you feel lost and like no one is listening, there are many on your side. It may take time for you to see it, but you will and the choices offered will become clear. There are no right or wrong answers, those answers depend solely on you. Knowing you have people in your corner makes all the difference on how your path will turn out! By the way I did in fact survive being pregnant as a teenager!

Thank you for reading my story, I hope it leads you on the path that is right for you!

--Casey, April 2020