

Roses from Heaven

...My Story of Grace and Redemption



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CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning

“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

—Romans 8:28

My story starts with my birth mother, Mary. She had already relinquished her first daughter, my half-sister Kristin, for adoption, and was now the single mother of two other children.

While struggling as a single mom, her parents decided to take her and my half-brother and sister to the mountains for a little getaway. She went out one night to the local college bar in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, where all the college kids hung out. She met a young man, and they ended up dancing the night away and spending the night together. The next day, she was supposed to meet up with him again, but something happened and that fell through.

She went home and eventually learned she was pregnant. She was unsure of who the father was because she had an on-again, off-again boyfriend at the time. She was actually planning to have an abortion, but her sister-in-law was a practicing Catholic and talked her out of that decision. Instead she chose to give me life, knowing the suffering she would now surely endure again for a second time.

I was born on May 3, 1975. My birth mother’s mind wasn’t fully made up (as far as giving me up for adoption) after giving birth to me. Her family had told her they would help her, but she didn’t feel confident that it would be enough since she was already struggling as a single parent of two young children. So, after three days of holding me, breastfeeding me, and bonding

with me, she named me Mary (this will be significant later on) and made the heart-wrenching decision to give me up, thinking that that was the best decision for me.

My birth mother is one of the strongest women I know. She has shared with me the details of the dark depression and suffering she endured, and I'm so thankful she was able to come out on the other end. The kind of sacrificial love she showed made my life possible, which in turn made my children's lives possible. I am forever grateful for her.

My adoptive parents were originally trying to adopt a child from the Philippines. That fell through, but then they got an unexpected call from Catholic Charities stating that a baby girl had just become available. They said they were interested and went to the agency. The way my dad told the story was quite humorous to me. I was adopted through Catholic Charities, and so when they were interviewing my parents, they asked if they were Catholic. (My birth mother had requested that I be adopted into a "non-strict" Catholic home, and they were trying to honor her request). My dad remembered replying, "Yes, we're Catholic, but we don't go to church all the time." So, there it was—my parents were found! I don't believe in coincidences; I believe that everything happens for a reason, and I believe God works all things out for the good for those who love the Lord (see Romans 8:28).

For as long as I can remember, I always felt different because I was adopted. Sometimes I thought it meant I was special, but most of the time, it meant that I was different—and in our world, unfortunately, *different* usually has a negative connotation. As a child, I was fortunate to be adopted into a large family. That made it easier therefore to blend in, and that way I didn't have to talk about being adopted very often, but it was something always in the back of my mind. It was like an annoying fly that just won't let you enjoy your picnic and keeps buzzing around you as a constant reminder of just how annoying a species can be. My parents never made me feel less special or different in any way, so I'm not sure where the negativity stemmed from.

My adoptive mom did an amazing job of making sure we were all baptized, made our First Communions and were confirmed, and I'm very thankful for this. I recently found out that I was baptized at my fraternal grandparents' home when I was two months old. I believe these sacraments

were extremely instrumental in providing me with graces and protection. For anyone reading this who is not Catholic, I want you to know that the Catholic Church does consider most baptisms valid, even if not done in the Catholic Church.

I didn't learn until later in life how important these sacraments are, imparting wisdom, protection, and an inner knowing of God that would become quite instrumental in my survival during my childhood and adolescent years.

Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift...We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1216)

My mom described the priest who performed my Baptism as "a very holy priest, a very kind man." My mom and dad received the following letter from him. I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to share it here because of the wisdom of this priest and how he so eerily seems to foretell the future in some ways. It reads as follows:

July 10, 1975

Dear Anne and Terry,

It was certainly good to see you again at the occasion of the baptism of your daughter Kelli. It was so good to gather with your families and to enjoy your presence. I hope that we will not be strangers as long as you live in Denver. It certainly is good to know that you are not living too far away.

A baptism is always something great, a sign of the future, a sign that the Body of Christ is growing. There is so much criticism in modern times about everything. No one is any longer satisfied with what exists at present. At one time, the experience of the older generation was the guarantee of actual or desirable order. But now it is exactly that order which is attacked,

precisely because it is inherited from the past. It is overturned rather than conserved and renewed, in the blind hope that what is new will be fruitful for human progress.

No further credence is now given to the stable values of faith, culture and institutions. Men look toward the future, not from a chronological viewpoint of coherence with an organic and developing tradition, but from a rebellious, surprising and indefinable viewpoint, with an almost fatalistic and messianic confidence in a radical and general renewal and in a finally free and complete happiness.

Every baptism is futuristic. It is a radical change in the child that has received the personal application of the Paschal mystery. Something new has happened and we wished often on it would be manifested later in a radical and general renewal that is so great that Kelli will live her faith to the fulness of its completement and final goal.

Trusting that you are all fine, I bless you and I remain Yours in the love of Jesus.

Signed, Father Anton Borer

Unfortunately, my parents divorced when I was three years old. This broke my heart in ways that were compounded from my original relinquishment. As Maxine Chalker, founder and executive director of Adoptions from the Heart (a private nonprofit adoption agency, and an adoptee herself), puts it:

We all know that divorce is hard on children. It can be even harder for adopted children since the loss of a cohesive family unit amplifies many of the difficult emotions that adoptees already deal with. Many adopted children, especially as they age, struggle over whether they truly “belong” in a family. Once that family has separated, splitting into two independent households, the question of belonging only becomes more complicated.

Even as a young child, I remember feeling guilty that my parents had chosen to adopt me, because once they were divorced, they probably felt burdened by the fact that I was there. Again, my parents never said anything to make me feel this way; it was a natural by-product of a highly intuitive and ultrasensitive child. I thought, *Wow, I'm just lucky to be here. I don't*

deserve to be here like my siblings. I felt as though I was one extra thing they had to take care of, and the fact of what I thought at the time was just a random event about which family I ended up with was somewhat startling to me. I would picture someone literally handing their baby over to strangers, and I couldn't believe that the person who gave birth to me felt confident doing this. My seven-year-old mind was very perplexed by this. Now, looking back, this is the first time I heard and believed the lie from the enemy. As a little girl, I obviously didn't know it was coming from the enemy, but now over many years the Lord has revealed this to me. Other things that probably didn't help me feel secure and as though I really belonged would occasionally come from my peers who at times asked, "Why did your parents adopt you? Could they not have their own children?" This type of question was a reminder of that dark cloud that I hated to feel or think about.

Research shows that adopted children seem more prone to emotional and mental health issues.¹ I believe the effects of adoption vary from person to person, and there are obviously proven arguments on "nature versus nurture." Both sides are equally important and should be taken into account when raising an adopted child. When we acknowledge a child's wounds and hurt, we allow that child to grieve. And after they grieve, they have more room to grow and heal.

Counseling is a valuable option, as well as exploring open adoptions whenever possible. Whatever the outcome, if an adoptee decides to search for his or her birth parents, they ultimately must come to terms with the fact that God the Father, who gives the most perfect love, a love that does not exist on this earth, is waiting with open arms for his children to come home. It's not always possible to find all the answers we might be searching for here on this earth, but we can all support one another, even in very little ways. I remember meeting a young, adopted boy from another country who was having many emotional and behavioral problems. I shared with him that I too had been adopted. The biggest smile appeared on his face, because, right then, he knew. Our situations were not the same—his was far more traumatic—but he was reminded that he was not alone in the emotions he was experiencing. I pray that anyone who has experienced any trauma caused by their adoption or experience in the foster care system will experience the same great spiritual healing that I have.

I don't blame anyone or hold any resentment over being adopted; I'm merely acknowledging the subsequent injury to my extremely fragile heart and soul that it caused.

Before my parents' divorce, my mom had been a stay-at-home mom and my primary caregiver, and my dad had worked. I have memories of being held by both my mom and dad as an infant; I remember feeling so safe and loved. After their divorce, as is often the case, I went from being with both my parents daily to seeing my dad with my siblings every other weekend. It was so hard. I remember sensing his pain and sadness. I would have done anything to take that pain away from him, but I was just a little girl. I tried to make sure he knew how much I loved him, and I always took advantage of being right by his side as much as possible, just soaking up the safety and love that came from him—even if that meant there was going to be lots and lots of football watching involved!

Soon my mom remarried and eventually began an in-home childcare. My new stepfather was a teacher at a nearby elementary school and had two children of his own. Now my homelife consisted of many new friends and two new brothers. (There would be more, too!) It was a very busy life!

When the divorce was new, my paternal grandmother, Grandma Matthews, could see how much it was all affecting me and would look at me with a sense of sadness and concern. She would tell me how worried she was about me because of how "tenderhearted" I was. I have no doubt that she said many prayers for me. Both she and Papa made sure I felt safe and loved. There was no place that compared to the safety and protection of sleeping in between Grandma and Papa in their big bed. My grandma would always remind Papa, "Don't roll over on her—she's just a little peanut!" and we would all laugh. I knew I was safe there; it was my first taste of Heaven on earth.

I think grandparents are such blessings. They have that opportunity to provide a safe, playful space and love without all the heavy day-to-day burdens. Somehow, when we become grandparents, it's an opportunity to make everything right and perfect what you might have not gotten right with your own kids. After Papa died, I checked in with Grandma often. She was one of my greatest loves on earth, and I truly adored her. I still frequently think of her now, and sometimes I talk to her. Especially since returning to the Catholic Church, I've learned so much about how the body

of Christ is alive, with those who have gone before us interceding at times on our behalf, along with all the angels and saints.

One night at Mass not too long ago, my spirit was very low, and I was struggling with some of my closest relationships. After I received the Eucharist, as I knelt and prayed with my head down and my eyes closed, I saw my Papa in my mind's eye. Just his face, like a little window from Heaven had let him peer through the veil. I heard him say, clear as day, "I see you. WE see you." I knew he meant my grandma, my dad, and others. I was completely shocked and thrilled at the same time. I was overwhelmed with the feeling of safety and by knowing there were people in heaven who knew the exact details of what I was going through—and loved and cared for me enough to make sure I knew it. I will never forget how safe and protected that made me feel on such a personal level, and it still does.

On the night Grandma Matthews passed away, I woke up around midnight with the smell of the most beautiful perfume in the air. When my dad called the next morning to let me know of her passing, I immediately asked him if she had passed around midnight, and he said yes. I told him I had awakened in the middle of the night with a strong smell of a beautiful perfume in the air. He immediately said, "Ah, she came to see you!"

¹ Dr. Toussieng, quoted in Rita Dukette, "Discussion of Thoughts Regarding the Etiology of Psychological Difficulties in Adopted Children," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 41, No. 2, February 1962, pages 66-71. See also Kathleen Kingsbury, "Adoptees More Likely to Be Troubled," *Time*, May 5, 2008, <https://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1737667,00.html>.

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