

# The circle of life

By Maxine Heckbert

How I came to be pregnant at age 16 was a mystery even to me. All I wanted was to be loved.

I knew my parents loved me, but they were so busy with our large family that I went looking for attention elsewhere. When I found a boyfriend who expressed not only love but respect, I wanted more. That's how I learned the hard way that love and lust are two different things.

No matter how I tried to fill the emptiness inside of me with drugs, alcohol or rebellion, those were only distractions from a deep heartache that I didn't comprehend.



Maxine at age 16

Meanwhile, my parents were looking at reform school for me. Therefore, I assumed that the news about my pregnancy would be the deciding factor. I was wrong.

Mom's eyes filled with tears as we sat down for the talk. I couldn't believe what I heard as she quietly said, "We decided we're not going to bother with reform school. Whatever it is you're going through, we're going through it with you."

Suddenly everything felt all right; my parents were on my side. A tangible blanket of peace settled over me—but Mom wasn't finished.

"I've been praying for wisdom about all of this," she said, "and I believe I heard from God that you will stay with us and have your baby. Then the baby will be given up for adoption." And so it would be. I knew there were great challenges ahead, but for then it meant everything to know that my parents loved me and I wasn't alone.



Newborn Michael

I attended high school and studied hard, writing my June exams when I was eight-months pregnant. On a scorching hot summer day, I finally went into labor.

Soon afterwards, I gave birth to a baby boy, almost nine pounds! Our eyes met as he was placed on a bed next to mine, but that was as close we would get for a long time. The nurses cautioned against me going to see him in case I would decide against the adoption. The day came for me to leave and I realized that I needed to say goodbye in person—he had a name and would always be my son.

Many years passed with no word about where Jeremy had been placed. I went back to high school, graduated and moved on with my life. I thought of Jeremy on his birthdays, hoping he was at peace. Sometimes I would sit outside at night and commune with him by looking up at the stars, knowing that at least we shared the same sky.

Years later, I was married and had kids of my own. With the birth of my second son, it all came back to me. The great love flowing through my heart for my children didn't know how to stop flowing for Jeremy. I began to pray for his well-being and hoped that he would find me if he was looking.

Just before his 18th birthday, I got the call. The woman on the phone was the best friend of his adoptive mother and the former fiancé of my cousin. She had known about the connection for years, but didn't think it was right to call until then.

The very next day, he was



Maxine reunited with Michael

standing in my driveway. Renamed Michael, my first son was a handsome young man with dark hair and very sad eyes. He wouldn't look at me right away; then slowly he began to open up until gradually we were left alone to talk. For most of his life, Michael knew he was adopted and it was his dream to find me. Often he just sat outside gazing at the stars in his search for meaning.

I hoped I wasn't a major disappointment to him, but my marriage and family were my highest priority. Over the coming years, Michael and I would slowly get to know one another. While I continued to pray for his emotional healing, I was unaware of how much I needed it for myself.

Over the next 10 years my marriage disintegrated into a painful mess of broken trust, shattered dreams and a custody battle for the two children. I was able to remain their primary caregiver, but it came at a very high price. To keep my children close to their father and remain a stay-at-home mom, I chose to live in a remote rural area

below the poverty line. However, the isolation and loneliness began to take its toll especially when, as teenagers, my children began to spend more time at their father's house and I was left alone. One day, I hugged them goodbye and watched them walk out my door.

Suddenly it was all too much. After giving them my all, I felt like a discarded old dishrag. I collapsed in a heap on the floor and sobbed hysterically. When the tears ran dry, I sat silent in the darkness, certain my life had come to a dead end. I prayed that God would just take my life.

Instead, the phone rang. Piercing the night, it startled me out of my downward spiral of dark thinking.

"Hello," Michael said softly. "Just wondering how you're doing. I was out looking at the stars tonight."

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