

My Little Secret
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That day was like a lot of days in my young life-- where I was left scared, alone, and trying to figure out how I was ever going to move on. At fourteen years old I had already experienced more than most adults; especially the bad. After a series of trips through the foster care system, after dealing with abuse in my family's home. I've read that "In Michigan, there are approximately 10,000 children in foster care" (Foster Care, 2025). I hate knowing this, because I was once a part of that number, and no one unless they're in that 10,000 really understands what it means to bounce around from place to place with no real house to call a home. Their main goal is to reunite families together if possible. So, after I had bounced around a few places, I was eventually placed back home with my mother and stepfather. The last place I wanted to be. I walked out the door and disappeared. Only this time, my mother had given up on me. She was tired of searching and dealing with endless phone calls and visits from the police. And I was left to maneuver through the big world alone. And that is what brought me to that moment; sitting in that room, holding a beautiful baby boy. It was my saddest day, a day that would change my life forever.

Just four months shy of my fifteenth birthday, the pure thought of me being in the hospital having a baby was not a very pleasant thought to anyone around me. I could feel the whispers, the stares, the negative utterance given by anyone who felt they had an opinion or some unsolicited advice. You could see the embarrassment in my mother's face when taking me to appointments- hiding me away in the house for the last few months so that none of her busybody friends would have the chance to spread rumors about "her." None of it was about how I felt; It was a tragedy beyond her capabilities to acknowledge that her social circle would find

out that [another] daughter of hers had a baby so young. My oldest sister was only fifteen when she found out she was pregnant. I could see and feel the shame in her eyes every time she looked my way. I felt that she would try to look anywhere else but towards me if she had the chance.

And here I was lying in a small room alone. A faint light from a lamp sitting in the corner next to an empty bed adjacent to mine- one left empty to give me the space to myself; to say my goodbyes to the baby boy I held sleeping soundly in my arms. Trembling with fear and petrified, really, because I was being told by everyone involved (especially my mother) that I was too young to care for a baby. At any moment, a family was going to walk in that door and stake claims on the life I had brought into this world for their own.

It was Christmas morning when my mother discovered I was pregnant; almost seven months to be exact. I had hidden my “little secret” successfully after returning home (until that morning) from anyone I knew. My mother had always bought my twin sister and myself the same size clothes, and this day was no different than the rest for her. But the secret I had been hiding could not be contained any longer beyond the Christmas nightgown draped over the bulge in my belly. My stepfather had pulled her aside and voiced his concern about the difference in size between us. And he said to her “little girls don't just get fat in their stomach.” So my mother came to my room where I often found solitude to hide from the world, not only myself but my secret. She poked me in my belly and looked at me with pure horror as her finger rested on the firm surface of my very pregnant belly. She knew instantly that her husband was right in his assumption. I started to cry, and at that moment, I also had a sense of deep relief. I was exhausted trying to keep that secret. I had tried to tell those around me several times over the months, but fear took over every time: what was I going to do?

After the stir of the holidays was over, I discovered that the choice was not mine at all. My mother made several appointments for me. One to see a doctor, a baby doctor, an OBGYN. That is a doctor that monitors women's health and babies as they grow in their mothers' womb until they are ready to join us in this big world; an important part of the pregnancy experience. The other place she took me was to Bethany Christian Services, an adoption agency. "Founded in 1944 on the simple but powerful principle that every child is made in the image of God, [they] are the largest Christian child and family organization in the U.S. Motivated by faith, they serve clients through foster care, adoption, refugee and immigrant services, and family strengthening services" (Bethany Christian Services, n.d.). She had made the choice that I was too young to care for a baby myself, and she was also unwilling to help me. The adoption agency would help her to be rid of my problem that I carried snug inside me. Bethany Christian Services helps birth mothers (me) to maneuver the process of giving a baby up for adoption. They provide different options for a closed or open adoption, choosing a family for your unborn baby (if you want to), counseling, and peer support groups. My mother was unwavering on the choice she had made to the point she had convinced herself it was mine. The choice to give my "unexpected surprise" away like he was a gift at Christmas or for a birthday. The choice was taken away from me. I never wanted to give my baby away. I went along with all the appointments my mother made for me, buying time until I could figure out a plan for myself. That time never came. Everything just happened so fast.

So, here I was, lying in this room alone, holding my beautiful baby boy waiting for the door to open and for the family to take him away. I smelled his hair, ran my fingers across his face, his lips, his ears, and the small of his nose. I counted each finger and each toe and memorized each wrinkle and took in the color of blue in his eyes and smell of his breath. I

tucked him sound asleep into his car seat, and they took him away. While my baby boy may no longer be mine, I sit with relief that he will live happily with a permanent family. He won't have to jump through foster care like I did, and that's all I can hope for. He's safe and sound, and won't have to worry about what home he's going to next.

Works Cited

Bethany Christian Services. *About Bethany* bethany.org/about-us. Accessed 2 Nov, 2025.

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. *Foster Care*. Accessed 2 Nov, 2025 www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/foster-care