

# “MUM, DAD – I’M PREGNANT”

## YOUNG MUM’S STORY OF OPEN ADOPTION

**MARY ELLEN WHITTINGTON KNEW WHAT SHE WANTED IN LIFE – A UNIVERSITY DEGREE, TRAVEL TO A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY, MARRIAGE FOLLOWED BY SOME CHILDREN – AND TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER. BUT SHE NEVER DREAMED OF HOW HER LIFE WOULD ACTUALLY UNFOLD...**

**MY LIFE HAD BEEN INCREDIBLY SHELTERED, AND MY OUTLOOK WAS VERY INNOCENT. AFTER FIVE YEARS AT A CATHOLIC BOARDING SCHOOL, I WENT DOWN TO WELLINGTON TO STUDY. I WAS IN A HOSTEL AND THE FREEDOM WAS ALMOST OVERWHELMING.**

I met him at a toga party. He was very cool and bohemian.

He spoke, I was captivated – and before I knew it, I was hanging off his every word.

Kendall was 21, had lived with a previous older girlfriend and had been sexually active since 14. I was 18, a virgin, had never even slept in the same bed as a guy, and I was in love.

Yeah, I felt pressured and I remember him saying to me that it would be better if I just “got it out of the way”... he was referring to my virginity.

So when it finally did happen a few months later, I was shocked at how much it hurt and how messy it all was... But now that I had slept with him – he was it!

### NAUSEOUS...AND LATE

I was on the pill but I was hopeless at taking it.

I was really struggling, not only with my sexuality, but also with the guilt of being sexually active – it often just felt wrong.

But I loved him so desperately – I would have done anything to make him love me.

I remember sitting in the doctor’s surgery, but I didn’t need him to confirm what I already knew... I was already feeling nauseous, tired and I was late.

I was by myself, Kendall wasn’t there and that was how the next nine months continued...

*‘I was 18, a virgin, had never even slept in the same bed as a guy, and I was in love’*

Well, I wasn’t completely alone... I could already sense a life within me that was far stronger than I could picture myself ever being.

### DECISION TIME

When I’d finally come to the conclusion that Kendall was not coping with me being pregnant and that he was not going to marry me and create a fairy tale, I knew then that I had to make some serious decisions.

I had been surrounded by anti-abortion parents and teachers, and it was simply not an option for me.

I had vaguely heard of open adoption and I wanted to find out more.

I rang CYPS (now CYF – Child, Youth and Family) and they put me through to the adoption services.

I arranged a meeting with a social worker and she answered my thousands of questions and clarified so many preconceived ideas I had on open adoption.

I remember being amazed that I could actually choose my child’s parents and that I could be a really big part of my child’s life.

Sue, the social worker, said that it was a

positive option, but that I could feel differently when the child arrived – I needed to be sure and talk things through, with no pressure.

So every two weeks I would meet with her – and I set about finding the most perfect parents possible.

### PAIN AND FORGIVENESS

When I was five months pregnant, I went home to Taranaki to tell my parents.

I will never forget that time, ever. I said “Mum, Dad, I’m pregnant and I’m going to adopt out my child.”

My father looked me in the eye and I know he swallowed all anger and sadness and forgave me straight away.

Out of pure concern for me he said, “No...no, we will help you.” His perception of adoption was very old school and was surrounded in loss, grief and secrets.

My mother could not hide her hurt so well and took my news as a personal failure. She could not look me in the eye and struggled to for a very long time.

Her idea of adoption was also shrouded in secrecy and sadness and she also disagreed with my decision.

They wanted to protect me from any further pain and hurt that I might feel.

So over the next few months, as my knowledge grew of the healthy adoption option, so did theirs. They came around to the idea and now have a lovely relationship with their birth grandchild.

*‘I had this overwhelming sense that he wasn’t mine and that we were there just waiting for his parents’*

### STRUGGLE

I was struggling with study as I had severe morning sickness for the first five months and was incredibly tired.

Kendall was also struggling and conveniently found another girlfriend.

I remember swallowing my pride and encouraging him to come to the meetings at CYPS with me. I had this huge need for my child to know that he was wanted and was conceived out of love.

So Kendall was there when I first met my son’s adoptive parents, and he has continued his own relationship with his birth son.

### CHOOSING MY SON’S PARENTS

I knew straight away when I had found the perfect couple.

There were no photos of them or their home, just this beautiful photo of their two-year-old adopted daughter feeding a lamb and a few words about what was really important to them as a family.

I had this amazing feeling that it would all be OK, so I chose them.



I went home for Christmas and my sister's wedding, but the morning before the wedding I went into labour (four weeks early) and had my son, Nelson.

My dad took me to the hospital, and mum and my sister came up later.

The labour was long and hard and lonely, a real journey in itself.

When he finally came out, I was in shock. I cut my own cord and kept staring at him, wanting him to open his eyes... he was so premature that it took another four days.

### NO GOING BACK

The next 10 days were a rollercoaster of emotions and pain. My body was in turmoil with milk dripping from my nipples, and I was barely able to walk with stitches.

I had this overwhelming sense that he wasn't mine and that we were there just waiting for his parents.

They came, and I remember watching Nelson's adoptive mother look at him and I knew she adored him straight away.

I knew that I couldn't change my mind ever once I had signed the paperwork and that was the truly scary part. But I had drawn on that inner strength to make this decision, one that I knew I could live with.

The knowledge that he was safe and loved and he would always know me, was enough.

### GRIEF AND HEALING

The first year was the hardest. I wasn't sure what to do with all the maternal stuff I was feeling.

My family and friends gave me the support I needed to deal with the grief and sadness I was feeling.

I know that open adoption has been such a healthy option for me, but I was scared of it at first.

Like 'Juno' in the movie, I initially thought I could just hand him over and everything would be back to normal. I would have my life back, and visiting would be far too painful.

But in reality, that's what helps to deal with the grieving. And each time I saw him, especially in the first few years, it helped me heal so much and gave me so much strength to go forward with my life.

I still love going to visit him. He calls me Mary Ellen and refers to me as his birth mother to his friends.

He has never had an issue with being adopted and as I've watched him grow up, our needs have changed. Now as a 14-year-old he often emails

me and says "hi" and just lets me know what he's up to.

### READY? OR NOT...

I know that I could have brought him up myself – I had my family's support to do this.

But I also know that by him having a mum and dad who were totally ready to be parents – who were secure in themselves and in their relationship with each other, and who completely love him – that he has had an amazing opportunity for a wonderful childhood.

I now speak as a birth mother to prospective parents wanting to adopt. I am amazed at the beautiful couples out there with huge hearts who are so ready to love and accept children.

If you become pregnant and you're not ready to become a parent, open adoption can only ever add to your life.

Once you are pregnant – no matter what the outcome or decision that you make – it will affect you for ever. ✿

*'I remember watching Nelson's adoptive mother look at him and I knew she adored him straight away'*



## Who would help Juno in New Zealand?

Check out the Adoption Option Trust's website about adoption.

[www.adoptionoption.org.nz](http://www.adoptionoption.org.nz)

From this site you can order a free DVD which contains information and true stories from women who have chosen to place their children for adoption. The DVD can be posted out in plain packaging anywhere in New Zealand.

