

## Leslie Wagner

I was sixteen when I began dating 'Joe', he was twenty. It was about a month after I turned seventeen, I discovered I was pregnant. I remember feeling quite elated when I left the doctor's office. Joe did not share my enthusiasm. He already had a two year old son with his ex – girlfriend and he was not a part of their lives emotionally or financially. After much debate and to appease Joe's stress over the pregnancy, I agreed to a consultation at an abortion clinic. I was on the examining table when the Doctor excused himself for a moment. At this time an overwhelming sensation came over me and I decided this was not what I wanted. I quickly got dressed and left. I returned home and told Joe an abortion was not going to happen.

My parents were divorced and reacted differently. When I told my father I was pregnant, there was an uncomfortable silence at the other end of the phone and then he asked, "What are you going to do?" I responded, "I'm going to have a baby!" My mother was concerned but I knew I had her support. I found myself a Doctor and routinely went for my appropriate visits. I worked as a cashier in a cafeteria until I started to 'show'. I had morning sickness every day for the first three months I was pregnant. At one of my Doctor's appointments at about six months of being pregnant the Doctor was asking me how I planned to care for my baby and if I had thought of the long – term ramifications of having a baby so young and not being married. He then asked if I had considered adoption as an option. I told him no and I was with my baby's father although we were not considering getting married. The Doctor continued to suggest adoption at all my visits in which I never agreed this was going to happen. At my eighth month of pregnancy, Joe and I shared a two bedroom apartment with one of his friends. He came home drunk late one night and I started to argue with him about his whereabouts and his condition. I returned to bed and Joe stormed into the room and pounced on me. He sat on my chest with his knees on my shoulders and began to spit in my face! I was screaming for him to get off of me when our roommate ran in and tackled Joe off of me. They exchanged words and then Joe left. I called my mother who came to get me and I left. Joe and I did reconcile but I remained living at my mother's home.

On June 8th 1982 I awoke at about 6:00 am to my first contractions! It was not until the next day, June 9th 1982, in the early afternoon that my first born son arrived. It was a grueling and very painful experience. My son was quickly whisked away from me for examination. When I finally got to see him and hold him for the first time I was overwhelmed with new found love! It was an instant love I had never experienced before. He was so small and wrinkly looked just like Joe to me. I was instantly in love with him. One can anticipate the arrival of your first born child from here to eternity but until it physically happens to you it's incomprehensible to imagine the magnitude of this event.

The same afternoon, while I was still heavily sedated and recovering, a social worker from the Children's Aid Society appeared at my bedside. I found out later this was at my Doctor's request! She was quite harsh and intimidating and demanded I sign some forms consenting to have my son adopted. I adamantly refused and she was furious! She stormed out of the room and returned with a nurse. The nurse injected me in my arm with a big needle. When she pulled it out I asked her what that was for and said quite matter of fact it was to stop my milk from coming in!!! Without my consent my milk was stopped from coming in. (I have since retrieved my medical records from this experience where it states that I had planned to breast feed my baby.) Since Joe and I were not living together and did not present a plan of care for our baby – which was never asked for prior to his birth – the Children's Aid Society (CAS) exercised their power to take our son into care until such time that we presented them with a plan of care and were cohabitating again. The exact time line escapes me but it was approximately a month that we met all of the CAS demands and I finally was allowed to take my baby home. I think it's important to mention I did not have any drug addictions, or ever abused or neglected my son. The premise for CAS taking him was in not

presenting them with a 'plan', perhaps my age of seventeen and that we were not married or at that time living together. Some perceive that these issues were only prevalent in the sixties or earlier but sadly this is still in practice today to those who are vulnerable. Joe and I found a little two – bedroom cottage in Wasaga Beach, which is approximately two hours north of Toronto. Joe's parents had their own cottage nearby. My birthday is the end of August and the day I turned eighteen Joe and I had a big fight. He didn't touch me this time but he smashed the glass tables we had in the living room. His parents arrived shortly after for my birthday celebration and I asked his father to take me and my son back to my mother's home the next day. They were very upset with Joe's outburst. I knew I could no longer live in this kind of environment.

So at eighteen I was again living at my mother's home with my three month old son. I enrolled in a program called Futures and began working as a teacher's aid educating new immigrant children English as a second language. My son was enrolled in a local daycare during the day. I had a new family Doctor and on one of the routine check ups I had with my son he gave me a card with a woman's name on it and where she worked, it was called the Children's Resource and Consultation Centre of Toronto. There was no mention of adoption by the Doctor or any reference to this on the card. I called the woman up and arranged to come in for an appointment. In my mind this was going to be a place that would help us out.

This was not the case. The resource centre was actually a private adoption agency. The lady counselor was quite nice and seemed to really care about me and my son. She presented adoption as being in 'the best interests' of my son and wouldn't I want to do what was best for him because I loved him. I was only given the supposed 'benefits' adoption would have for my son, a two parent home financial security and that loving him meant making the right 'choice' for him. This agency didn't do this the same way the CAS did which was abusive and controlling. They did it with positive reinforcement and the focus being on my son's financial future security. To this day I do not know which way is more insidious. After a few more meetings with the counselor I agreed that adoption would be the 'best' option but I was yet to sign anything. On one afternoon, my family Doctor showed up at my mother's house and asked if he could come in and speak to me. I can only assume at this time that he had heard from the counselor that I had consented to adoption. He proceeded to tell me that he knew of a family that wanted to adopt my son and that they were willing to pay me money and set me up in my own apartment should I choose them to adopt my son! I was beside myself that he would proposition anything like this – to sell my baby! I asked him to leave and told him this would not happen. I then called the agency and told the counsellor I had changed my mind and would not be placing my son for adoption. My Aunt stepped in at this time and agreed to help look after my son while I continued to look for full – time work as my teacher's aid work had ended. This lasted for another couple of months until my Aunt could no longer continue looking after my son. I did not know what to do and as a teenager did not yet understand that this was a temporary situation I was in and that things could and inevitably would change. I called the counsellor lady again as she was all I knew and she was never mean or demanding like the CAS workers were. It was exactly one week before my son's first birthday that I signed the consent forms. I was told his first name would be kept as he knew it and that his adoptive parents would support a reunion in the future. I asked if I could have some kind of contact with them/him over the years and I was told that this would be very confusing and troubling for my son and that a 'clean' break would again be 'best'. I was heart – broken but to survive I had to convince myself this was what was 'right' for him. It was as though my feelings did not count and I was told in the kindest of ways that my love for him was selfish and letting him go proved I had his 'best interests' in my mind. Truly tragic and something I will always wish never happened – but it did.

I began my search for my boy when he turned fourteen. It was a long and very painful process. I gathered tidbits of information throughout the years and discovered my son's name was indeed changed. Finally on July 24th 2002 I received a call from my friend Anne Patterson, an adopted adult and private investigator, who had been using the clues I disclosed to her to look for my son but without my knowledge. She did not want me to get my hopes up if she told me she was actively

searching for him. She had found him! I sent him a letter in which it took him a year to respond to but I knew it may take some time. It is now almost two years that we have been reunited in the physical sense and it has changed both of our lives for the better! I know work as a Social Worker as I believe my life experience has led me to this career I love. I also wanted to become a Social Worker that really did work with their clients and listen to what their needs are without imposing my own agenda – except perhaps when it comes to adoption! I believe in family preservation first. An adopted colleague and I also have put together workshops based on adoption – related issues. I have been able to take the most horrifying event in my life and turn it around with the hope in sharing my experience other's will be validated and supported by the workshops we provide.

Anyone interested in Anne Patterson's services can contact her at [searches@sympatico.ca](mailto:searches@sympatico.ca) or visit her website [www.fifthavenue-37.com/7](http://www.fifthavenue-37.com/7)

More information on workshops provided by Leslie can be obtained at [bdowntown@rogers.com](mailto:bdowntown@rogers.com)

I am particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has been touched by adoption in a personal way. Please feel free to share any aspect of your story by emailing me at [stephen@stephenfitzpatrick.com](mailto:stephen@stephenfitzpatrick.com)

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