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### The Place In-Between

I had been walking one evening in March, marveling at the new leaves already starting to blossom on the trees. Life was happening all around me. Spring was just around the corner. I was nineteen and not far away from having a baby. I was no longer a girl, but not yet a woman. This is what I call the place in-between. I was afraid of the unknown. Would I be a good mother? Would I be able to help her grow and learn? The closer I got to finally meeting this little person I created, the more my past came rushing up to overwhelm me. I was abused as a child, and grew into a young woman who lacked confidence and self-love. When I was fifteen I was taken away from my father and step mother. My father's parents pulled me out of the darkness, giving me a chance for a better life. I had married my high school sweetheart a few months after graduation and a year into our relationship found out he had been unfaithful to me. I filed for divorce and resumed to pick up the broken pieces of myself. As I was walking, I thought back to the months before then and how everything had changed so suddenly and drastically.

A few months after my husband and I separated, I started to gain weight rather quickly, which happened to be only in my waist area. Living in a constant state of depression months before had caused me to lose my appetite, and a feeling of dread washed over me as I thought about possible reasons for gaining weight. Being pregnant was the first thought that came to

mind, so I went out and bought a pregnancy test. The test came back almost immediately as positive. The breath was knocked out of my chest. I was living in Saint George, Utah, and had no family whatsoever in the state. I scheduled an appointment with the gynecologist, still feeling shock from the results of the test and hoping for the possibility that the test was inaccurate. I sat in the chair at the doctor's office in one of the examination rooms feeling very alone and scared. Tears spilled from my eyes and down my face.

My body was shaking as I experienced my first panic attack. A nurse walked in my room with a monitor to listen for a heartbeat. She set down the little device when she saw me and wrapped her arms around me. Having her reach out to me was so unexpected but immensely comforting. My breathing stabilized and my body stopped shaking. She pulled away and looked right into my eyes and said, "Honey, you will be okay." I had not known this woman, but somehow I knew she was right. Even though I knew it was going to be hard, I also knew that I was going to be okay.

I lay back in the chair, and the nurse applied some jelly all over the skin on my stomach. It was cold and made me jump a little. My stomach felt like I had swallowed a tiny watermelon and it was now stuck in there. She was able to pick up a heartbeat almost right away. As I listened to the quick rapid beating, I started to get goose bumps all over my skin. The realization that I had created life hit me, and oh how wonderful and scary it was all at the same time! I heard the nurse ask me a question, but I couldn't comprehend what she was saying. I muttered something of a reply, barely audible. I couldn't think, I couldn't vocalize my thoughts into words.

“Heather, you are measuring pretty far along. I’d like to see if we could get you into the ultrasound room to take a look at the baby.” The nurse’s warm hands were pressing and poking on my stomach. “What do you mean measuring pretty far along?” I managed to choke out. She looked at me with warm and motherly eyes, “Well, you are telling me that you have been pretty regular with your period up until this last month, but your uterus already feels high up and you have started to show. I’d like to take a look and make sure everything is okay.” Fifteen minutes later, I was led into the ultrasound room. Still in shock, I lay down once again, and lifted my shirt up. I kept telling myself to take deep breaths and just relax. *I can get through this*, I said to my other stressed-out self in my head. The nurse was talking to me again and I had no idea what she was saying. I shook my thoughts out, took in one deep breath and apologized. “I am sorry, what were you saying?”

“You are about twenty weeks along. The baby is developing nicely. We might be able to get it to move and we can see what you are having.” My heart dropped, and then started beating uncontrollably. “Excuse me, but what I am h-ha-having?” I started to stutter, I couldn’t even talk. The nurse’s eyes lit up, “Yes dear look! You are having a little girl!” My eyes fixated on the screen at the small watermelon I had swallowed. It now resembled a baby. My baby had one arm up to her face and was moving her hand around. She started moving her legs and turning all different ways. The black and white image on the screen shook me to my core. This was really happening. I was going to not only have a baby, but a little girl.

After scheduling my next appointment with the doctor, I left the hospital and made my way out into the parking lot where my car was. I was starting to feel light headed, and I didn’t know if my legs would get me to my car or if they were going to buckle underneath me. By the time I realized I had made it to my car, I was already inside and sitting down with my seatbelt

on. "What am I supposed to do now?" I asked out loud to no one in particular. I had no clue where to begin. I placed a hand on my stomach and felt a peaceful and loving calm come over me. I smiled and started the engine.

I drove home to the apartment I was living in by Dixie College and called my best friend Cody to share the news with her. I could barely get out the words that I was pregnant before I started crying again. I was an emotional mess. I had never cried this much. She was at my front door in less than five minutes with a frozen pizza and tub of ice-cream. We stayed up until three a.m. the next morning, munching on pizza and stuffing our faces with ice cream. Being with her was comforting, that empty and alone feeling was temporarily gone. A few days passed and I knew that eventually I would have to call my estranged husband to let him know that I was pregnant.

I decided I would talk to his mother first as I was still very close with his family. I desperately needed advice and guidance, and I knew she would be a great person to get this from. I was a little surprised that when I shared my news with her that I was expecting, she was thrilled! I felt surprised at her reaction because I was honestly expecting her to act differently towards me, given the circumstances of my relationship with her son at the moment. My depression had sucked me into a fear of caring what other people thought, and possibly having to face disapproval. I sighed with relief. It felt like a small weight had been lifted off my shoulders. She encouraged me to call my husband right away.

A few hours later I worked up the courage to call him. I could feel the anger and resentment building up in my body as I dialed his number. I knew my face was turning red, I could feel the heat spreading up my neck and across my face. At this time in my life, this was

honestly one of the hardest things I had to do. I needed to heal and move on with my life, and now by having a child with him I was being tied to him permanently. I envisioned a life of just me and my daughter living in happiness. I couldn't even swallow the thought of having to share her and be away from her and she hadn't even been born yet.

The first words out of his mouth when I told him we were having a baby were, "Are you F-ing kidding me?! I don't even believe this child is mine, I want you to take a paternity test before I claim her!" Click. He hung up on me. That conversation went well. An overwhelming desire to run away came over me. It was a powerful feeling of hopelessness and fear. I was picturing myself packing up my car, and driving far away from the town of Saint George and out of the state of Utah. I clearly wasn't wanted here and would most likely end up raising this baby alone with no family of my own close by. It was tempting, but I knew that what I needed most right now was to try and stay clear headed without my emotions getting in the way.

A few hours later, my husband called me on the phone and asked if we could meet up and talk. Later that night, I sat in my bedroom and looked at the man who I had once thought I was going to spend the rest of my life with. Every memory and the emotions tied up with it started to build up inside of me. I felt weak, insecure, not good enough, tired, and afraid. He wanted us to try again, and work things out. He said he loved me, and I believed him. The room felt like it was closing in on me and my heart was racing in my chest.

A million questions rattled off in my head. *Is this the right thing to do? Can I trust him?* I never once stood up for myself, and shared my fears or feelings with him. I knew I was being cowardly, but in a selfish way, I wanted to make sure the baby and I were going to be taken care of. We decided to stop the divorce from going through and try to work on our relationship. A

few weeks later, we moved into an apartment together off Sunset Blvd. It was a cute little two bedroom place on the top floor. A huge tree grew up to our front living room window, and we had a lovely view of a park across the street.

My belly grew bigger and bigger as the weeks continued to pass us by. The only family I could call was my grandparents, it was time to share with them that my husband and I were trying to work things out, and that we were expecting a baby soon. My grandparents were very supportive of my decision, and tried the best they could to help out in any way possible. I was working at Target part time and going to school to become a licensed Master Esthetician. My husband was promoted to a supervising position with a construction company. We were doing pretty well financially and had everything ready to welcome our baby into this world and bring her home. We decided to name her Mkinzy Kay.

As I reached thirty six weeks, I was constantly feeling uncomfortable. My size zero pants still fit, only I wasn't able to button them any longer because my belly hung over them. I bought a bunch of stretchy tube tops and wore them over the zipper and button so I wouldn't have to buy maternity jeans. I woke up every morning feeling like I needed to deep clean my house. The counters were spotless, the carpet looked brand new, there wasn't a speck of dust anywhere and my floors were so clean they could be eaten off of. Oh the joys of pregnancy.

At thirty six weeks pregnant, I went for a walk in early March as spring was approaching. So many events had transpired up to that day. I was at that in-between place. I knew that as each day ended, I was growing a little more as a person, woman, and soon-to-be mother. My daughter had not yet arrived but she inspired me to become a better person. All the abuse, pain, hurt and trauma I experienced needed to be let go of for good. I am not who I was in my past. My life was

ever changing, and even though parts of it seemed hard and unbearable, I was still learning and changing for the better. Every kick and movement from her was exciting. I pictured what her face would look like, and daydreamed about how it would feel to hold her for the first time. As I walked along the path, I noticed how colorful the trees and flowers looked to me. I had been so wrapped up in “life” that I forgot to notice the beauty of the world around me. I was motivated that day to go home and start a journal. I wanted to create list of goals for myself too.

I grabbed a blank journal and a pen, and went to sit in her bedroom. Her walls were painted a soft yellow, and I had decorated them with old vintage Winnie the Pooh pictures. I had found a Winnie the Pooh rug that was big and so soft. It was made of Chenille, and was sewn with soft neutral tone colors. Her crib was set up against one wall in the middle, and her changing table was across the room aligned with the crib. My grandparents had bought both as a set, and they were made from very durable cherry wood. They were beautiful pieces of furniture, and I was grateful to have been given them. I bought her a tall four drawer dresser that matched, and found a Winnie the Pooh lamp and stuffed animals to sit on top.

I sat down on her rug, and as I started to write in my journal, the words spilled out about my traumatic childhood. I pictured my father’s face, sad and worn down as he would look at my twelve year old bruised and battered face from the beating my step mother had inflicted on me, and then walk away without a word. I couldn’t imagine what must have gone through his mind when he would look at me. I didn’t understand why he never stood up for me, and continued to allow the abuse, but I endured anyways.

Something felt different that night as I closed my journal. I was finally dealing with things that had happened to me when I was younger, but was continuing to affect me as I grew

older. I refused to live in resentment and anger. My daughter deserved the best of me, and everything I had to offer. Tears had streamed down my face and spilled on to the paper, but I didn't stop writing. I wrote until my fingers hurt and cramped up. My eyes were red and my face felt puffy. I titled my journal, "The Road to Recovery." I talked to my child in my stomach. I told her she was my little angel, and I thanked her for helping me heal. I felt a sharp kick to my ribs and sucked in a breath as the pain seared through my side. In my head I thought, "*She must have heard me*".

At three in the morning, I was so uncomfortable in bed that I woke up out of a deep sleep. I rolled off the side of the bed and waddled my way into the kitchen. My stomach started to tighten up really hard and it felt like the air was being squeezed out of me. I was starting to have contractions. Since I was only thirty six weeks pregnant, and technically still had four more weeks to go until she was due, I wasn't too worried about the contractions. I got out some bread, jelly and peanut butter, thinking maybe some food would comfort me and I could go back to sleep. As I picked up the jar of jelly, another contraction hit me so hard that I dropped the jar and it shattered into pieces on the kitchen floor. I gripped the counter and tried to focus on my breathing until the contraction passed. As soon as I could walk, I made my way into the bedroom to wake my husband up.

He was frantic and excited, rushing me hurriedly into the car so we could go to the hospital. Four a.m. was approaching, and I was in a daze. I might be meeting my baby soon, and the thought was surreal. We made our way into the labor and delivery room. As we approached the nursing station, another contraction started coming and I felt my legs start to give out. I almost fell to the floor but my husband had his arms around my waist and he caught me. The pain was excruciating, and it was hard to remember to breathe. My head was throbbing from lack

of oxygen. The fluorescent lights were harsh on my eyes, and the walls were an ugly beige color. I remember asking the nurse if the delivery rooms were more pleasant to look at, but she just turned her head away, smiling at my comment. The contractions were coming faster and faster, everything around me started to blur, and all I could focus on was the pain. Doctors and nurses were moving hastily around me, getting everything ready for the delivery.

I was living minute to minute in unbearable pain like I had never felt before. Surely, being tortured felt a lot like this. My thought process was at a standstill, and I was slow to respond to anything that was said to me. My mother in law was suddenly in my line of sight. When did she get here? She was telling me that it was now almost five in the morning and the doctors said I was close to being ready to push.

“Push what?” I asked her. I heard her chuckle. “Heather, are you alright? You do realize you are about to have a baby, and last time I checked pushing is how you get your baby out. Unless of course, you have a C-section, which you my dear, are not.” Another contraction hit, and I grabbed the side of the bed. I could hear myself saying out loud to everyone in the room that I wasn’t ready for this, and I didn’t know what I was doing. The fear of delivery gripped at me, and the embarrassment of having six plus strangers watch a baby come out of you-know-where was overwhelming. Because I was scared of the giant needle to receive the epidural, I had refused a medicated delivery.

I was so close to having my baby that I had no other option but to endure the pain and give birth naturally. As a contraction ended, a nurse was telling me that when the next contraction came I was to push. “I don’t know how to push!” I yelled at her. “Think of it like you would push when you go to the bathroom, okay?” I must have looked at her like she was crazy,

because my mother in law was chuckling again and walked away. “Are you serious? That is gross, I can’t do that!” I think I was slightly frantic by then, possibly a little erratic. But before I could spill out any more angry words, or be rude to the nurse trying to help, another contraction hit and she was telling me to push.

Black stars appeared in my eyes. I could hear nothing but the sound of my heart beating. Everything to both sides of me was a blur, including everyone’s faces of the people in the room. I thought I might pass out. The pain was numbing. I pushed a total of three times, and at five forty nine in the morning, on March twenty seventh, my daughter Mkinzy Kay let out her first cry. The doctor that delivered her wrapped her in a blanket, and placed her in my arms. At that moment nothing else mattered. She was so small and yet perfectly beautiful in every way. I smiled at her, and took her tiny hand in mine. Her skin was so soft and she had thick white globs all over, but I still thought she was the prettiest thing I had ever seen. Her eyes were open and she just stared back at me. They were a dark brown color just like her dads, and she had a full head of thick brown hair. She had the chubbiest cheeks, and rolls on her legs that made me think of the Michelin Man mascot.

I will never forget the day she was born. I was no longer stuck in my in-between place. I was here in the now, right where I belonged. Growing more and more into a woman that I could say I was proud of. She saved my life. She gave me hope, and showed me love. She taught me so much in just the eight and a half months I carried her, and from the incredible experience of giving birth. I was meant to have her in my life. I might have only been nineteen, but I was ready for everything god had blessed me with. Because of her, I am a better person, woman, friend- and mother.

