

Dear Birthmom,

We are so grateful to have this opportunity to tell you about ourselves. Our names are Em and Jill. We live in a mid-sized town in the south, the same town where both of us grew up. Our parents live within minutes of us. Our siblings are all about 90 minutes away in cities to the north and south of us. It's wonderful to have so many family members and childhood friends nearby. It's a great place to raise children. We have great



recreational facilities, nearby beaches, lakes, a beautiful river, a wildlife refuge and a bike and running trail. Jill's parents' home is adjacent to the refuge so we are on the trails a whole lot.

Em is in commercial real estate and the auction business. He is the third generation to work in the family business. Jill teaches a 90-minute yoga class a few days each week. But the most important work she could ever do is raise our two children, a boy and a girl, Shine and Annie Rivers ("Rivers" to all who know her). They are four and 2 1/2. Both were conceived after extensive fertility treatments and procedures. We had always wanted to have a large family and so Jill underwent more fertility treatments. But this time, sadly, it ended in a miscarriage. We decided that raising another child was much more important to us than giving birth to one. That is why adoption is such a great choice for us.

With two healthy, happy kids, we know we are very blessed. But we long for one more and hope God has a child for us to adopt in His plan. We are very involved in our church. The kids love it just as much as we do because the church has so many good programs for children. Jill also goes to a weekly Bible study.

Our everyday lives are filled with many fun activities. In the fall, the kids will go to half-day school two days a week. We plan to start Rivers in a preschool gymnastics or dance class and Shine in soccer. We also look forward to taking them and our new baby down to a couple of college football games each season and get together with friends to watch football. We like to make pottery at my friend's "Creativity" shop.

Jill grew up with a sister, and she knows that there's no deeper friendship than the one between siblings. Em grew up as an only child, longing for a sibling to share in his

adventures. We hope that you will choose us to adopt your child. We will welcome him or her into a loving, stable home where God is the center and the foundation of our lives.

Jill: I grew up in just such a home with my sister, Lee. We have such great memories growing up in a household where our parents put us at the center of their lives. We played together in a tree house and a sandbox and rode our bikes everywhere. And we gave thanks for all these blessings at church every Sunday

We had wonderful, active family vacations, waterskiing and snorkeling, snow skiing and bicycling. Some of my best conversations were on the chair lift in the mountains with my dad, Jimmy -- now known as "Pops", or sitting on the beach with my mom, Jan -- "Mops." I was always proud of my parents and never felt embarrassed by them as some teenagers do. Sure, I would have rather had a later curfew. And I really did think

it was outrageous that I couldn't go to the concert that "everyone else" was going to. I didn't appreciate all the rules at the time, but I have come to appreciate how their boundaries and structure made me a better person. I was brought up to respect and honor my father and mother.

My dad never missed one of my cross-country meets or tennis matches. My mom would take me to and from ice-skating lessons, camps and competitions, and she always welcomed my friends into our home. At the time, I'm pretty sure I took it for granted. But now I realize how important it is to have parents who support your interests.

I respect the fact that while I felt like my parents were pretty cool and fun, they didn't cross the line of trying to be a friend. They were my parents first and foremost. They imposed discipline when needed and did it completely out of love. They taught me not to quit, to persevere and to work hard at whatever I attempt. Em and I want to support our children



in the same ways. We want to encourage them to take risks, cheer their successes and to see things through in challenging times.

When I was growing up, I never wanted for anything. But it's the security and sense of belonging my parents gave me that I really loved. My mom and dad have a strong marriage. I know that that comes from hard work and open communication. Their loving relationship and strong Christian values helped me be self-confident and positive about life. I never feared that my parents would separate even as some of my friends were living through that nightmare. A child should be able to count on their parents being together. We assure you that our home will be a place where your child, like Shine and Annie Rivers, will always feel safe and loved.



Em and Shine down on the farm on Poppie's mule.

My sister and I love to get together at my parents' house and go through old family photos. We reminisce about our childhood escapades and laugh at the pictures of our most awkward years. (What on earth were we thinking when we put on those clothes and wore our hair like that? Did everyone wear huge glasses?) I can't imagine growing up without a sibling.

Em and I met through a mutual friend. Though we are both from the South, we actually met at a race in Chicago. Less than a year after we met, he

proposed to me. We were at the end of a long day of snow skiing in Canada. He got off the chairlift, got down on one knee and held out a small box in his very cold and shaking hand. All I could see was his big beautiful smile. It was easy to say yes to a man with his contagious smile, his easy laugh, his consistently positive attitude about life. You know that guy you can't help but love and respect? That's Em.

We love to travel. We've hiked in Switzerland, run races all over the United States, and skied many places out west and in Canada. We love to collect art and travel to different folk art festivals. The kids love to point out all their favorite pieces. We have made a point of finding with Shine and Rivers some sort of special piece of art for their room and look forward to doing the same for our new baby. We go to the beach and the river. We enjoy sports. But most of all, we treasure our time with friends and family.

A few years ago we had four generations running in a local race -- my grandfather, dad, my sister who was pregnant and me. Both of our husbands ran it as well. We all crossed the finish line together. This is the sort of togetherness that means so much to us, and we hope that your baby can become a part of.

We want our children to take advantage of all that life has to offer -- to be able to fish and romp around on the farm, be content at home in the front yard, able to travel to different places, to be comfortable eating in any type of restaurant from one with red/white checked plastic table cloths with plastic utensils to another with nice crystal and white starched linens. At the same time, we want the kids know that they are no better than anyone else God has created, that we are to give to others our time, our resources and love.

Em is an amazing father – Shine gets his kind heart from him. (Rivers gets her inability to sit still from me...) I can't help but love him when I watch him with our kids. He's patient and encouraging. He's so observant to what the kids say and do. He'll pick the tiniest little thing they've done or said that day, and it will have just made his day. He'll laugh about it for the next week. He appreciates the now and is content in his circumstances. I'm guilty of always looking to the next, but he enjoys the present. Everyday when he returns from work, Shine and Rivers tackle him in the front yard – daaaaddddyyyyyyy!!!!!! I don't know who's sillier--the kids or Em – actually, I do know – its Em.



Jill with Shine and Annie Rivers. This is the annual Christmas parade the kids love to ride in.

He's a wonderful role model, too. He loves and excels at his work. It's a family business, but it wasn't handed to him. He had to figure out how to make deals happen on his own without his dad holding his hand or doing it for him. He's great at what he does, and he's earned the respect of the community for his knowledge, talent and leadership. It makes me proud, and I pray our children will acquire that work ethic and commitment to excellence from Em.

Every morning I get up really early for a morning run. I have a babysitter, Wanda, who comes in to watch the kids while I teach yoga. Wanda is like family. I appreciate the couple of hours I get to teach class. But really, the center of my day is my time with my children.

We play in the sprinkler, walk one block to a park (Em and I used to play there as kids) where there's a brand new playground, a water splash pad and gorgeous oak trees. We swim at the pool at the country club and spend time at the lake house and on the beach or river. We go to the library, paint pottery and at a local shop in our neighborhood and work on craft projects at the kitchen table. We visit with neighbors and have play dates with

friends. We go to see the horses at Em's dad's barn. Or, we stop in to visit another grandparent or even one of the two great grandmothers.

Em: I love living in the town in which I spent some of my childhood, a town where I run into people who know my grandparents, my parents and my children. My parents divorced when I was five, and I moved to a nearby city with my mom. As an only child, it was lonely sometimes. But I never doubted either of my parents' love for me.

My dad, now "Poppie", didn't let the miles come between us. He made the drive to my new home to watch me play baseball, and he stayed closely involved with my school work. We'd go fishing and camping and talk about everything and nothing. We still do. I learned from my Dad, as well, the importance of standing up for the underdog and the Christian responsibility to open your heart to those in need. I hope my children will be able to say they learned the same from me.

Mom – the kids now call her "Yackie" -- always put my well-being before everything else. She loves to travel. I'm sure I got the travel bug from her. She instilled in me the importance of getting the best education and working diligently in class and at whatever it was I chose to do.

It's easy to explain why I fell in love with Jill. I was completely captivated by her kind and caring nature. She easily puts others before herself, making time for everyone she loves--and who love her -- never letting anyone down. She makes me laugh. Some times we just start laughing for no apparent reason or about something that when we share it with someone else, it's not at all funny to them – just our silly sense of humor.

Jill is a remarkable mom. I love to come home and see Jill, Shine and Rivers in the front yard. I love it when my kids throw themselves at me, celebrating my return home. She plans picnics and walks on the trails near her parents' home. They play for hours on the Slip and Slide or at the park. They go to swim lessons. Shine has been to horseback riding and soccer camps. Jill is especially concerned that Shine and Rivers eat the right things. She pureed their baby food and continues to do that with vegetables and fruits so she can "sneak" them into their favorite foods.



Em, Shine and Annie Rivers out front of the hotel during our trip to Charleston, S.C.

She makes sure that both Shine and Rivers get some special “daddy time”, and I especially love that. She’s patient. She’s encouraging. She’s loving.

When I married Jill, I married into a wonderful family. I ran with her father for years, until his knee began to protest. Now we bicycle together. Her mom is an incredible grandmother, and the kids can’t get enough of her. All the cousins playfully fight over Mops and Pops.

Jill and Em: Shine and Annie Rivers are excited about having a new baby in the family. Rivers tries to hug, kiss and stroke any baby she sees. And she’s decided that they are all named Annie Rivers, which coincidentally is what she’s named all of her stuffed animals and dolls, too. Shine will be happy with a baby boy or girl. He is eager to share his tractors and trucks – he feels sure the baby will love bulldozers.

Shine has such a kind heart. He loves to be tickled and has the world’s best belly laugh – actually, it’s a very highpitched laugh that makes the rest of us laugh when we hear him. There are many nights before bed that all of our bellies are aching because we’ve been laughing so hard. He also has a beautiful smile – everyone says that he fits his name, Shine,



We live in a historic district in a home that was built in the 1890s.

very well. And he loves anything with wheels. His favorite outing is a trip to Em’s dad’s house, where he can ride a bulldozer or a tractor (or a horse.)

Annie Rivers has never met a stranger. When she talks, her whole body moves: Her hands are flopping, her hips are shaking back and forth, and her eyes are flashing. I have to work really hard not to laugh out loud

when she gets that look in her eyes that suggest that she knows she shouldn’t be doing something, and she’s just waiting to be challenged. She’s a handful, but her smile and funny things that come out of her mouth make her irresistible.

It’s rare to drive down our street and not see neighbors. They are working in their yards, sitting on the front porch, walking their dogs, or riding bikes. We’ve worn out the path from our house to our nearby park. Our kids were the last to swing on the old equipment before its renovation, and they were among the first to use the new swings, since we got on

them before the park was officially re-opened. (Now promise not to tell the construction crew, okay?) We spend a lot of time outside. And during the hot summer months, we spend a lot of time in the water, in pools, at the lake, in the river, or just in the sprinkler back home.

We have a great library down the street from our home, highly-regarded theater and great family events all over town. We love parades in our city, and we make sure to go to all of them: from Christmas to high school homecoming. It doesn't matter, we're on the sidewalks, waving and cheering and collecting the candy that's tossed from the floats. Sports are big here, and most everyone goes to Friday night football games. The stadium is in walking distance from our house. And there's an endless variety of sports to participate in.

We wish you well and pray for you as you look for the right family to parent your child. If we are chosen, we want to assure you that we will love him or her unconditionally with all of our hearts. We will raise him or her to understand and appreciate the deep love that motivated you to give your child a safe, secure and love-filled home. If you wish, we would be happy to share pictures with you and send you updates throughout the years.

This letter has served another purpose for us in that it was such a good reminder of how truly blessed we are with each other, our children, parents, grandparents and most of all the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. We want to share the Good News with everyone, but most of all our children. We look forward to what God has in store.

If you have any questions about us, please feel free to call Steve and Joel Kirsh at 1-800-333-5736. If they are not available, they will be paged and will return your call promptly.

All the best,