

Dear Birthmother,

We are Joe and Marcia. We live in the suburbs of a Midwestern town with lots of family and friends nearby. We have a 7-year-old son, Brady, who we adopted as a baby. We are eager to add to our family.

Children are a gift. We treasure Brady, and we talk of our respect and love for his birth mother. We have committed to raising him to appreciate her unselfish decision to find a family who could give him a safe, stable and loving home. We want you to know that we would honor you in the same way.

We both grew up with siblings. We know that sisters and brothers are forever friends.



Brady can't wait to welcome a brother or a sister.

They are the constants in your life, sharing your childhood and your journey to adulthood. They are touchstones throughout the years, the ones you share holidays with, celebrate with and comfort during difficult times. We want to bring another child into our family. Another baby to rock, another toddler banging on pots and pans, another child to encourage to explore the world. And we know that that new baby and Brady will both be better for having each other in their lives.

Marcia is a high school teacher. She left teaching for a time to be at home with Brady until he was old enough to be in school full-time. She plans the same approach with the new baby. Joe works as a district sales manager for a large manufacturer of industrial and safety supplies. When we adopted Brady, Joe changed jobs so he wouldn't have to travel as much. We both feel that our time with family is the most important part of our lives.

Joe: I grew up living with my mom and my sister, Deb. My parents divorced when I was five. I visited with my dad mostly on the weekends. My mom went to work after the divorce as a secretary at a local hospital. It was tough for her working full time and raising two kids on her own. (Plus, she went back to school to study to earn a college degree.) I don't know how she did it, but she was at all our school functions.



She opened our home to our friends. She coached us through our homework and took us to the park. She was always there. And she still is.

My sister, Deb, and I have always been close. We spent a lot of time together growing up. But I think it was our parents' divorce that really made us close. We always had each other to confide in; we always knew how the other one felt. It was an unspoken bond when we were kids. Deb lives out of town now, but we see each other about every six weeks, and we talk on the phone all the time.

When I was a child growing up money was tight. We always had plenty to eat (not always what we wanted) and decent clothes. But I wanted more. I got a paper route when I was 10 and a job cleaning office buildings when I was 15. I had to take the bus downtown for this job, but it paid a whopping \$5.50 an hour when minimum wage was \$3.35. I saved enough money to buy a 1970 Camaro. It wasn't the best car in the high school parking lot, but it was probably the best one paid for by a student. Looking back, I think this determination to have a nice car helped me build my work ethic.

Marcia and I have a lot better financial situation than either of us did as children. So it is easy for us to say yes to everything Brady wants. But we've learned how to say no as well.



We love the outdoors and our families both have farms. This picture is from our own 18-acre place in the country.

Brady has to help out around the house for things he wants. The first time I told him he had to work for something, he said "We can afford it." I responded, "Yeah 'we' can, but the 'we' that pays for it works everyday. So if you want to be part of the 'we' who can afford it, you need to do a few things around here. You need to help out so you will know how to work. This is important so you can give your kids all the nice things we give you."

I love the outdoors. When I was a child, I would spend hours in the woods, looking for salamanders and crawdads in the creek near our home. I loved going to my grandpa's farm where we'd fish. I take Marcia and Brady there now. The farm has

about fifty wooded acres, and it's still a great place to fish. The last time we were there, Brady caught more than a dozen fish — he counted — and it was a thrill for me to watch him enjoy himself so much. It brought back great childhood memories for me.

My mom and stepdad live in a house that overlooks a river. They have a beach where the water is shallow and calm. Brady likes to visit at Nana Barbara's, play at



A scene from one of our great vacations. We have been fortunate to be able to travel to so many places and create some great memories together.

the beach, collect fossils and skip stones. We love to go tubing there. It's a great place to spend time as a family, enjoying lazy summer days and nights of good food and great conversation.

My father re-married and has three children – Derek, Dan, and Mandy – in his new family. I go to Derek's and Dan's football and basketball games, and as many of their track meets as I can. I cheer for Mandy at her basketball games. We go on vacation together and get together for holidays. It's bittersweet to see my father more involved in their lives than he was in mine. I've learned a lot from my dad. We work on my yard together. He's helped me paint the house. We love each other. Still, some of what I've learned from him is how not to behave as a father. I want to talk more with my children. I want to share my feelings. I want to be present — physically and emotionally — in their lives.

Marcia and I started dating in our teens and got married in our twenties. We've grown a lot over the years, as individuals and as a couple. We have a lot of shared interests: skiing, hiking, music and outdoor recreation. We love to travel. We've seen a lot of the U.S. and we've traveled to Canada, Europe, Mexico and the Caribbean. We've loved taking Brady to Disney World, Sesame Street Place and a number of different beaches in Florida. My parents have a second home on the beach in Alabama, and we all love going there to swim, boat and play on the shore.

Marcia is a remarkable wife and mother. I have never met a more caring, kind person. She is honest. When she makes a promise, she keeps it. She is outgoing. She walks into a room full of strangers and leaves with a room full of friends. Her students loved her. Parents frequently tell me that Marcia was their son or daughter's best teacher. I believe it, because I see her patience, supportiveness and creativity with Brady.



We love to celebrate the holidays.

She teaches him through play. She takes him on wagon rides to the park, plays on the swings with him in the backyard. She gives him cardboard boxes with blankets to make forts. They read together endlessly. She encourages him to try new things, explore the world and take safe risks. She builds his self-confidence and encourages him to understand his responsibilities. She's warm and affectionate. I know that she longs for another baby to hold and to comfort. She has endless love to share.

Marcia: I grew up on a farm. When I was young, my parents farmed full time. Now the family farm is more of a hobby; my father works for a fan company, and my mother works at a deli-bakery. The farm is still one of my favorite places on Earth. My two older brothers live on the property now. Joe, Brady and I hike there and fish. There are horses to ride and dogs and rabbits to play with.

When I was younger, I enjoyed 4-H. I showed animals and worked on food, crafts and sewing projects. I had a collie dog as a child. I remember playing with her in the snow. She'd jump to catch the snowflakes. I'd make snow angels, and she'd roll in the snow next to me.

One of my favorite family traditions is Christmas Eve at my grandma's house. For as long as I can remember, my aunts, uncles and cousins all got together there. My grandma plays the piano and we sing Christmas carols. When we sing "Up on the Housetop", Santa arrives with presents for all the kids. My grandmother is 87 now, and we still celebrate this way. I can't wait to bring another baby into this joyful tradition.



Joe is a stitch. And as anyone can tell you, Marcia can keep up her end of the conversation. This photo is from our 10th anniversary visit to Mexico.

When I was a child, I talked endlessly. My talking was often a bit too much for some people. But not for my dad. He would listen to me for an entire car trip. He would listen to me as we walked across the farm to check on the cows. He taught me, through his example, that conversation leads to friendship. Consequently, I can talk to anybody. I know how to ask questions that encourage people to talk. And if you listen, you learn. No matter who is talking, young or old, there's always something to learn.

My mom helped out in the church nursery. I used to "help" her. I watched her tenderness as she comforted a crying baby. I saw her patience and heard her words

of encouragement. She rocked away their tears. She hugged their hurts. And mine, too. She taught me that the dishes can wait, but babies grow up fast.

I loved teaching. I would find something special in each child and celebrate that gift. I do that with Brady, too. We find the sparks that make him uniquely Brady. We look forward to the same discoveries with another child to love.

Brady and I read all the time. And we tell stories. One of his favorites is hearing about the night that he came into our lives. Joe is the best at telling that one. He loves hearing of the late night phone call and our excitement in driving to the hospital. We never tell that story without talking about his birth mom, Stacey, will never be forgotten.

I Love You Forever is one of my favorite children's books. It reflects the unconditional, lifetime love of a mother. *The Best Father in the World* is another one of my favorites. It's about animal fathers and the different things they teach their children. I look forward to reading these books, and many, many others, to our new baby. I imagine all four us, snuggled on our big bed, reading and talking at the end of a busy day.

Joe makes me laugh. He walks through the house, singing silly songs, acting goofy and absolutely loveable. He can clown, but he's a tower of strength as well. We all count on him — his family, his friends and his clients. He has strongly held values and he lives by

them. He is intelligent, strong and responsible. He is compassionate, gentle and warm. He will do anything for those he loves — and he does. He works hard, but he believes family comes first. He's a hands-on dad. He's always playing with Brady, tossing a ball, going fishing or exploring in the woods. You can often find Brady riding on his shoulders. Everyone loves Joe, but Brady and I are his biggest fans.



Our home. We have a big back yard with a play-gym for Brady and his pals.

Joe and Marcia: We live in a wonderful neighborhood filled with children. There is a pond where the neighborhood kids fish and feed the ducks. The schools are great. We have a two-story house with four bedrooms and lots of room for another child. Our large yard is filled with trees, but there's still plenty of space for wiffle ball or a game of freeze tag. We have a play-gym, swings and a sandbox. We spend a lot of time together on our wrap around porch and deck, relaxing, reading and barbequing.

A couple years ago, we bought an 18-acre wooded lot. We plan to build a new house there, but for now we're enjoying the woods. We often go there for a bonfire and to grill with our friends and neighbors who live nearby. (We almost always end the visit with s'mores.)

We are so fortunate. We have a strong marriage, lots of extended family, great friends and financial security. We live in a great community and we can give our child a strong education and the opportunity to explore the world. We long to add to our joy and share our blessings with another child.

We hope that you will choose us to adopt your baby. We will share pictures and updates through the years if you choose. We will always honor you.

If you have any questions, or would like to learn more about us, please contact Steve and Joel Kirsh, at 1-800-333-5736.

Warmest regards,