

*Dear Expectant Mother,*

*My name is Penny. I live in the Midwest, where I work as the chief financial officer of a manufacturing firm. My mother and sisters, nieces and nephews all live within an hour of my home. Everyone is eager to bring another baby into our extended family.*

*I've always imagined myself with a husband, a couple of kids and a house with a white picket fence. That was the dream. The reality is just as good, though just a bit different. I haven't found my soul mate yet. My house is wonderful (though it lacks the picket fence). And I still have that longing to provide a happy and loving home for a child. Perhaps, it will be the baby you have so courageously decided to bring into this world.*

*What kind of parent will I be? The best way to tell you is to describe how I was raised – in a home surrounded with love.*



*I grew up in a rural area of the Midwest. My three sisters and I spent a lot of our time playing with each other and helping out around the house. My parents were quite traditional. My dad worked—often two jobs. My mom stayed at home with us kids until my youngest sister was in school. We didn't have a lot of extras, but we always had what we needed. We planted a big vegetable garden every year, and we all helped with planting, weeding and harvesting. We had other chores around the house. But there was still time to play.*

*We spent a lot of time outdoors, and a lot of that time was spent "pretending." We'd explore the woods around our house. We made up games and entertained ourselves day after day. I loved the freedom of it. I regret that so many kids today don't have that kind of free time and unstructured play. It builds imagination, creativity and independence.*

*My parents stressed education. When we got home from school, we'd have to finish our homework before we could play. I participated in 4-H and played the piano in grade school. My 4-H activities were primarily cooking and sewing. Today, I like to cook and bake. But I can't sew worth a darn. And don't ask me to play piano. In spite of the lessons and the practice, I can't even play "Chopsticks."*

*Both sets of grandparents lived nearby and were a big part of our lives. My dad's mom made some of the best cookies and cakes imaginable. Each grandchild got to choose a cake of their liking for their birthday. Both Grandma and Grandpa helped in the creation. It would always be a cut-out cake, and Grandpa would handle the most intricate decorations. He was a man of few words, but he showed his love with his actions. He was always very attentive to my grandma, opened car doors, and brought her fresh flowers. What a romantic.*



*My mom's dad passed away when I was young. But I got to spend a lot of time with my mom's mom. She was very even tempered. I remember watching the game show, *The Price is Right*, with her. She thought it was so silly that the contestants would jump up and down with excitement. She told me that if her name was called, she'd walk down to the stage calmly, with dignity. (Not me. I'd be running and shouting!)*

*My parents taught us by example. I learned the importance of hard work from them. My dad never met a stranger. He made a friend of everyone he met. I saw how much people appreciated his warmth and easy friendship.*

*My mom taught me practical skills: cooking, cleaning and gardening. But she also taught me to pursue my dreams: if you want it badly enough, and you work hard enough, you can make it happen.*

*Both of them taught me the importance of a stable family and the security of knowing that you are loved. I want to share that with my child. I won't be quiet about my affection for your child—I'm a hugger. I can't wait to wrap my arms around my child, dry tears of sadness one moment and then laugh until we cry another day. I imagine tucking my child into bed with a story, a kiss and a good night "I love you."*

*The first vacation I remember is when I was six years old. We went to Arizona to visit my grandparents who were spending the winter there. This was a trip for firsts: my first airplane ride, my first Barbie doll, and the first (and only) Christmas day when I could go outside without a heavy coat.*

*During the summer, we often went on family camping trips. I loved the food we cooked on the campfire. I loved meeting other people at the campgrounds. We'd swim, ride bikes, listen to music, play pool and fish. I loved to go fishing with my dad. On one camping trip, while my dad was napping, I got impatient and decided to go fishing alone. I cast my line into the water over and over, not expecting much. Suddenly, I caught a fish. And it was big—I mean really big. I was so excited and it was so heavy, that when I jerked on my line, I got the fish hook caught on the crown of my head. I ran back to our campsite. No one could remove it. I had to go to the ER to have it cut out. Yuck. I learned a little patience that day.*

*My oldest sister, Vickie, has always been my best friend. She's my role model, too. She has six children. Five of them are her stepchildren from her first marriage. Tragedy struck twice for these kids. When Vickie was married to their dad, their mother died of cancer. A few years later, Vickie's husband, their dad, died. The kids were 9-17 years old. No other relatives could care for them. Vickie did. We can't imagine our family without them. We know, first hand, that biology doesn't make a family. Love does. And there's plenty of love to share.*



*When I graduated from high school, I didn't know what I wanted to study in college. No one in my family had ever earned a degree. I understood the value of higher education, and I knew it would be expensive to acquire that knowledge. So, I enrolled in a trade school right out of high school to maximize my earnings while I saved for college. I spent 17 years working toward that college degree.*

*Along the way, I worked a variety of jobs, from McDonald's to a variety of positions at banks, through an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, and ultimately, qualifying as a Certified Public Accountant, or CPA. I now hold the highest financial position in the company. I'm proud of my accomplishments and happy that my longevity with my company allows my work schedule to be flexible, including working from home.*

*I will, of course, need to continue to work once I have a baby. But I will be able to be at those important student assemblies, games, concerts and other activities, cheering from the sidelines.*

*I am outgoing, upbeat, dependable and goal oriented. I am caring and reach out to others who need support.*

*I love to read, garden and bake. I also enjoy power walking. I've participated in about a dozen half-marathons and one full marathon. I never win. That's not my goal. I finish and I finish within the allotted time. I love the feeling of crossing that finish line, knowing I set a goal and achieved it.*

*The races have been a great opportunity to travel. Sometimes Vickie travels with me, and sometimes I go alone. I love exploring new places and meeting new people. I can't wait to travel with my child. I think that traveling encourages imagination and curiosity.*

*My family gathers for the holidays. We always put up the Christmas tree on the Friday after Thanksgiving. My dad hangs the lights; the kids hang the decorations. When we were young, we didn't have a fireplace, so we hung our stockings on a cardboard cutout of one. We made placemats of the Christmas cards we'd receive, and use those placemats for Christmas dinner.*



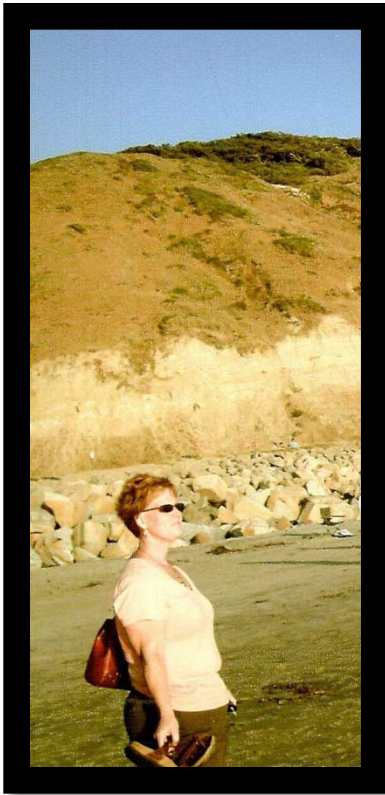
*My family attended a small country church. The kids always performed in a special Christmas program and then went caroling.*

*We always have the same dinner on Christmas. We can add a few dishes, but no one would dare remove one of the staples. We have Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, rolls and my grandma's torte for dessert. There are "required" snacks too. I won't name them all, but I have to say that we seem pretty focused on the food at Christmas time.*

*I want to continue these traditions with my child. We'll decorate the house together, make special candies and craft projects. We'll attend church and maybe even go caroling. We'll include giving to others in need in our annual celebration.*

*In addition to Christmas, my family gathers at all holidays—Easter, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving, birthdays and any other event that provides an excuse to get together. We see each other at least once a month. We talk much more often.*

*I live in a wonderful community. It's been voted an All American City many times over the years. It's urban but feels like a small town. We have an art museum, an interactive science museum, a zoo, baseball and hockey teams, and*



wonderful parks and hiking trails. The schools are highly rated. We have street festivals, parades, firework displays and free movie and band nights.

I have a two bedroom house that I love working on. It has beautiful oak woodwork and wood floors. My backyard has a large, silver maple tree that provides just the right shade for reading. There's plenty of room for a swing set, and other children's toys. The street on which I live has a great diversity of age: retired folks, young families and families with teens.

Laila, my rescue puppy, has been around my nieces and nephews ever since I brought her home. When my nephew was learning to stand, he used Laila to help keep his balance. She patiently sat there until he was up and steady—and then she was outta there. Often on our daily walk, little children will come up to pet her. She patiently sits down and receives the affection. I know she'll be wonderful with a baby.

I am fortunate with all the wonderful people and opportunities in my life. I have family, friends and a stable, stimulating job. I am willing to wait to find a husband, when my soul mate appears in my life. But I don't want to wait any longer to fill my heart and my home with a child. I want to give a child love and stability, security and encouragement. I want to recite nursery rhymes together. Read "Goodnight Moon" as we cuddle on the couch. I want my kitchen table covered with crayons and markers and bits of colored paper and sticky glue. I want to dance through the rooms of the house and eat popcorn in front of a Disney movie. I want to encourage imagination, show a child the world and throw snowballs in the front yard.

I want you to know, too, that I would love to adopt a biracial or African-American child. My parents taught me that color is not a difference maker. It is what inside a person that counts. I have participated for many years in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program and all my little sisters were of other races. Each little sister participated in our family activities and events, and my family welcomed each with open arms.

I live in a wonderfully diverse community and it is not unusual to see blended families. I worship at a church with a congregation that is diverse as well. Our pastor encourages people of all races and cultures to participate.

I hope you will choose me as your child's family. I will honor you and your unselfish gift. I will send you photos and updates, if you wish.

If you have any questions, please contact Steve or Joel Kirsh at 800-333-5736.

