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## Reconnecting with Family After Foster Care

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Rhonda Smith

Basically, my whole life I always used to wonder what my birth family was like. I wondered if I looked like them, if they knew I existed, or if they were even thinking about me like I was thinking about them. I wondered if I had any siblings, if they were younger or older. I wondered if they were with my mom and dad or if they got taken and were adopted somewhere. I always wished they would just show up one day and come and rescue me from the hurt and pain I was going through, but nothing like that ever happened.

When I was about sixteen years old, I started getting on my social worker about finding my biological family. It took awhile but it happened. When I first met my mom it was at a Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) office with my oldest sister. My mom was not supposed to be there, but she came because I planned it out like that. Seeing my mom and my sister in the lobby was just amazing, I wanted so bad to go with them, but I could not. I did not know my mom, but just from how she looked and stuck up for me, I just knew she was a great mom. I knew she loved me, and she never wanted to lose me.

As time went on, that perception of my mom was proven wrong. I would call her every day because she is my mom, and I was just so happy to have her in my life. What was happening was she would pick up the phone and say to call her back in a couple hours. So I would hang up and call back later. Each time my sister would tell me that my mom was asleep and to call back another time. This went on for months. I was so depressed. I felt like my mom did not want anything to do with me, and it hurt my heart. I used to blame myself for her not wanting to talk with me. I thought that maybe me being in her life was just too much to handle. Maybe she did not love

me. Maybe all those things I heard about her and drugs were true. I just did not know what to do or how to handle what was going on. I could not talk to anybody about it because I was not supposed to have any contact with my mom. So I started acting out by fighting because I could not hold back the pain I was feeling.

What I want people to know is that the grass is not always greener on the other side. I know this from experience. I used to think that when I met my mom she would be perfect and that all the bad things I'd heard about her were not true or if they were true, that she'd changed.

Really, I gave up all the good things I had to find out my mom is nothing like I expected her to be. I gave away stable placement, schooling, and my friends to be with someone who I thought would love me and be grateful to have me with her because the first eighteen years of my life I didn't get to spend with her for whatever reason.

Some things never change, and it hurts. But that's life. I have two little sisters we were adopted. They're still with my adopted parents in Louisiana. They're almost to the age where they can find their birth parents. I tell them all the time, "Just wait."

Not because I don't want them to know, I just don't want them to get hurt like I was. I hear from them all the time that they can't wait to come back to Washington so they can be with their real parents. I wish they would wait just a little longer. We all got adopted because our parents were into drugs. If our parents wouldn't stop doing drugs for their own flesh and blood then they won't do it for themselves, nothing, or anything.

I wish I had waited until I had a support system to help me go through it. I went into it too fast. It takes time to get to know someone and trust someone and even love them, even when they are your parents. Now I just keep my distance from my mom because of the things that have happened. I love my mom and always will, but I've just learned to do it from a distance.

I'm going through this process again with my dad. I have been taking my time getting to know him. I am not going to rush into a relationship and get

hurt again. I'm more mature and able to deal with whatever might happen in the future.

Growing up in foster care, I had a lot of trust issues. It was hard for me to trust people, but when I got in touch with my family, I trusted them with my life. That was a big mistake, though. I learned that family will stab you in the back faster than your friends will; it's just life. It is hard, but it happens.

When kids are taken away from their parents, there is always a reason why. I am pretty sure that the state does not just take a family and make up lies just to get a kid. I know they don't like going in and separating families. Just remember, if you are not with your family, there is a reason why: it was unsafe at some point and time. Maybe things got better over the years, but in my situation, they got worse.

Just remember things happen for a reason.