

Fresh Paint

A Memoir of
Adoption

Lori Adams

MY RITUAL OF LONGING

April 1998

Hey, how about this news?

Daniel and Mitch and I had just gotten out of the pool at the hotel in Arizona. It had been a warm day at the AOA convention. Our room phone was blinking...it was a message to call Sarah. I let the boys jump on the beds before I got them dressed. "Go ahead, you can jump, just be quiet okay?" I asked. Jeff and I held the phone up between our ears. My heart started to pound as I heard Sarah's voice.

"We just got the call this morning. How do you feel about twins?" she said. I gasped and looked at Jeff. "Twins?" I gulped as I watched his jaw drop. We both stared at each other with our eyes open wide. "Yes, there were twin boys born on February twentieth in Yaroslavl. They think they're identical. I can get a medical and a video to you within a week." As I fathomed the news, it felt as if I could feel my blood pumping up through the core of my stomach and into my head, kind of like how one feels on the first hill of a rollercoaster ride. Of course, we arranged to meet with her the second we get home. After we hung up, we just couldn't help ourselves...we were so excited that we joined our boys so that all four of us could jump on the beds!

Its twins. Wow. How unbelievably amazing. I've always been thinking one. Now, there are two. I wish we could leave the conference early. I'm dying to see them. Jeff is trying to stay calm, but he's excited too, I can tell. Sarah will give us more information when we get home. Then, we will make the decision. I'm already thinking that this is it, I can't help it. It feels like I just looked at a plus sign on a pregnancy test. Breathe, Lori, breathe.

April 1998

Hi,

For so long, I've wondered about who my child is. Today, it was confirmed for my heart. *These babies really do exist. We live on the same planet.*

The video is less than 2 minutes long and is poor quality. It begins with a freeze frame of what looks like two Russian names and dates of birth, hand-written on a piece of paper. Then, it skips to a naked and crying baby lying on several blankets. The baby is moving his little arms and legs and crying heartily. The women in the room are speaking in Russian so we don't understand what they are saying. I hold my breath as I allow myself to become completely absorbed in his pint size image on the TV screen. I am entranced by this child immediately. I study his little bald head and tiny hands and feet. He has fair skin, like me. "Little Misha" is what they have named him. The paperwork says that the film was taken at one month of age, but he looks like a newborn to me. There is barely any fat on his body. He's not round like Dan and Mitch were at this age...I remind myself that he was born early...6 pounds at birth, which is pretty good for 36 weeks gestation.

As a woman begins to dress him, I notice that he has no diaper, just a blanket wrapped in between and then around his little legs. Sarah tells us that this "cocoon-wrapping" is common practice in European hospitals; they feel it helps the babies to feel warm and secure, as in the womb. I notice that his legs are very skinny. Suddenly, he tilts his tiny head to the side frantically. He is rooting...looking to nurse. He must be hungry. His crying dwindles as the woman dresses him in a white shirt that opens in the back. She quickly wraps more blankets around his legs, then wraps thicker blankets around the rest of him, and scoops him away.

Soon another woman wearing an apron and a tall white hat enters the room bringing in a smaller bundle of blankets. As she lays the bundle down, she unravels each layer until we see that there is a tiny, pink baby inside. "Etta Yaroslav", says the woman filming. I admire yet another beautiful bald head and tiny face on the screen. This one looks very preemie-like to me. There is no fat on him at all. It's clear that he has been asleep, and now that the woman is undressing him, he can barely muster a whimper. The paper says that this baby was four pounds at birth. She only takes off his little shirt, but leaves his legs wrapped in the blankets. "Why don't we see his legs?" says Jeff, with concern. The woman clicks her tongue and taps his tiny arm to get him to wake up. He then whimpers a little and turns his face towards the camera. His delicate

features form into a smile. It melts me instantly. The tiny one's arms begin to shake until he cries hard. He must be getting cold. The woman hurriedly dresses him and bundles him back up into the tiny cocoon of blankets. Poof...the tape ends.

I feel cheated. I wanted more. I only got a few minutes to see each of them. It seemed like the women were in such a hurry. That's all there is of their introduction, a couple of names scratched on a piece of paper and less than 2 minutes of unclear footage, none of which has a close up. It seems so impersonal. Don't the women realize that we want to see as much as possible? I am exasperated. Still, I am intrigued beyond measure. I want more.

Both of them look no more than a week old to me, so I double check the paperwork. "One month old", it reads. Neither of the babies has that cushy layer of fat that develops after a few weeks. I wonder if they are being fed or stimulated adequately. They are still beautiful to me. I hit rewind as Jeff and Sarah talk about the medical reports. There does not appear to be any serious ailments listed, but there are some typing errors that could go either way. As Jeff and Sarah discuss how we could have the reports checked out, I shush them both. I'm infatuated by the images. My eyes open wide as I watch again with complete concentration. I can feel my excitement building from deep within. *This is it.*

May 1998

Dear babies,

Hasn't it been fun breaking the news to everyone in the family? Most of them have the same reaction... "What-- twins? Are you kidding? Wow! Awesome!"

My mom (your Nana) is very excited about this news and is already planning a twin baby shower. Now that we have accepted you as our referrals, we will need to wait until all the documents are approved by the Russian authorities. This could take many months, we are told. Your lives are now in their hands. It makes me uneasy to know that there could be delays. We

have completed all that we can at our end and are just praying every day that we can get to you quickly. In the meantime, I watch your video every morning over coffee. Throughout the day, I share you with as many people who enter this house as possible. I wish I could somehow freeze frame the video into a photo or two that I could carry around. For some reason, the adoption agency never got your photographs with the medical report. So, I just keep a copy of the report in the side pocket of my purse. Only I know it's there. It sounds weird, but it's where I'm at right now. I need to feel closer to you. At night, your video is the last thing I watch before I go to bed. I've probably watched it at least a hundred times in the last two weeks. I've been closing my eyes and studying what your little voices sound like. It is becoming a secret obsession. We've decided to name you Craig Mikhail and Kevin Yaroslav. This way, your Russian names will be preserved. I think the names Craig and Kevin fit you perfectly.

May 1998

Hi babies,

I'm still waiting to hear word about when we can travel. You are now over 2 months old. I've painted your room in bright colors, yellow walls with plaid wallpaper and a children-of-the-world border. I want it as bright and busy as possible so it will stimulate you. I constantly wonder about you, what your day is like in the hospital, if you are being held regularly, and if there is enough for you to eat. There have been no new pictures or updates from the adoption agency. Sarah says "no news is good news". It's making me nuts. I want to get there to you NOW. Every day that goes by is another day that you don't have the best care possible...me.

Daniel and Mitchell know all about you. We talk about you every day, and the boys know that you did not grow in my tummy like they did and that we will have to take a long trip to get you. They seem to be really excited about being big brothers. I sense that they will be open to you. Now, every time they see a plane in the sky, they say "look, Mommy, somebody's going to Russia".

June 1998

Hello my babies...I've resorted to carrying this letter with me daily, so I can look at it and think of you...

Dear Kevin and Craig,

Your room has fresh paint, and it's almost ready for you. I steal away every chance I get to close the door for a little quiet time to think and plan. Then, I dust the rocking chair and fiddle with your crib blankets before I finally sit. It's what I call my ritual of longing.

Here is my place to be alone in the lull and dream of you. I close my eyes, and imagine that my mind can drift across the ocean to be with you. I wonder what you're feeling at this very moment, across the world. Are you sleeping? Are you crying? Are your arms stretched out? Are you waiting too?

Waiting is what they tell us we have to do. It doesn't seem fair that you're there and I'm here when we need each other so much. I find myself crying all the time, just missing you. I try not to show it, because I haven't even met you yet, but I yearn to be with you. I ache inside. All I can do is pray that God will keep you safe.

Here in this room with fresh paint, I think of her, the young woman who gave you life. She is your birth mother. She endured pain and tremendous sacrifice in choosing to let you live. Her heartbreak in letting you go has allowed you to be free. Boys, you must always respect her for this ultimate gift. Even though the two of us are strangers, I still feel an unusual sort of bond with her just in knowing that we have both shed tears over you. Maybe she's also found a place to go off and dream of you both.

I'm so excited for you to meet your brothers and your Daddy. Our whole family celebrates in even the promise of you. They can't wait to surround you with love. What a beautiful blessing it will be for me to share them all with you. You will grow up knowing that YOU WERE WANTED.

There is so much uncertainty in life, for me, making decisions has been a little scary at times. However, my faith consoles me. After all, God has led me on this path to you and He will lead

you to me. Our souls were meant to meet--its part of His plan for us. God will give me what He knows I can manage and so I know whatever comes, we'll handle it--together. The important thing is that like your older brothers, your lives will be full and you will be loved--and it is my life's work to make that happen for you.

Someday if you have questions, I will help you understand how you came to be. I promise to tell you everything I know about your birth family and to not hold anything back. Never doubt your special place in this family. You will always be in the deepest sense, my sons...each unique and beautiful in his own way.

So when you're finally here in this room with fresh paint, we'll share a little quiet time together. I look forward to singing you to sleep in the rocking chair and looking down into your sweet faces. At last, you'll be home with us, my ritual of longing will be over, and your new lives will begin.

I love you,

Mom