

# From Foster Child to a Forever Family

Monika Reynoso shares how being placed in foster care at a young age led to her discovering a sense of belonging and purpose

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Monika Reynoso was removed from the home of her biological mother at the age of 4, and placed in the foster care system before being adopted by the Colbert family



Monika and her brother Dillon were never separated while in foster care



Often times I wonder what would have happened had my life followed a different path. If my brother Dillon and I hadn't been placed into foster care at a young age after our biological mother made some reckless decisions that put us in danger. Our journeys are filled with many twists and turns, but they shape who we become - and I wouldn't change a minute of it because it led me to the loving family I have today.

## Feeling Unloved

My biological mother had certain men around us who abused drugs, abused her, and were in and out of jail. Men seemed to be her top priority, and she struggled to balance her social life with being a young mother. She even spent some time in jail herself after committing credit card fraud and theft.

She had multiple chances to fix her life and start putting her children before herself, but she continued not to. We were constantly living with relatives, and then we were finally placed in the state system. When we were placed into foster

care, I don't remember feeling anything. It already felt normal to not see our mother every day since we had been living with family members off and on. As I got older, I thought about it more and couldn't understand why she gave us up and didn't try harder. I felt unloved and unwanted by her.

While we were in foster care, she had two more children who were also removed and placed in the system.

### A New Chance at Life

Dillon and I began what would be almost nine months in foster care. We were placed in about six different homes but were fortunate to never be separated. I remember living with an Asian family and only eating hot tea and cheese. It could have been a snack, but I remember it differently.

We were also in one home with a very mean foster mom. She had about five kids around a big table, including me and my brother, and Dillon didn't want to eat his peas. She got a garden hose and sprayed him every time until he ate them. Shortly afterward we were removed from that home.

I do remember receiving gifts from my mother while I wasn't living with her. It felt like Christmas every time Dillon and I would get something from her - which wasn't very often. I also remember a few of our visits with her, I didn't realize at the time that they were supervised, but she would always try to make it fun, and to a 4-year-old, McDonald's was a blast.

After months of bouncing from home to home, at the age of 4 and 2, my brother and I arrived at a new family's home. Right away, I noticed how funny the man was, and what a comforting feeling the woman gave to me. We had no idea they too, instantly fell in love with us.

When we first arrived at the Colbert's house, it automatically felt like home. They were so loving and caring, and I felt a warmth that I had never known before. I started calling them mom and dad right away. I was never forced or told to; I just did it - because it felt normal. We also had our very own rooms, which was amazing.

Four long years later, my biological mother finally signed over her parental rights, and gave us the chance to become a permanent part of this new family. October 14, 1998 was

the day our lives changed forever. We were finally adopted, and officially became members of the Colbert family. Our new journey began. After our big adoption day, we flew to Pennsylvania, and my grandparents threw us a huge adoption party officially welcoming us into the family. Our entire family was there, and it is a very special memory for all of us.

### Pulling Away

Even though I was now part of a stable family, I had a very rough time as a teenager. Rebelling against my parents and a lack of interest in my education became the norm. School was my social time, and I would do just enough to get by, but it was never my best - which I never would have admitted at the time.

We regularly attended church, but I would use that hour to sneak away with my friends. I was constantly involved in drama and thrived on the attention it created, even if it hurt others. Eventually, my selfishness and resentment reached its peak and at 17 years old I ran away from home and the family that had given so much to me. I lived with my boyfriend and continued to hurt and disappoint those around me, without a single ounce of remorse.

### Testing My Parents' Love

I called my parents many months later, and much to my surprise they forgave me and their love for me had not changed. After all those years of testing and pushing the limits to find out if I was really loved by them, I

found out I was. My biggest fear was always that I wasn't really loved. We had a very strained relationship, but by the grace of God, it was quickly restored. At the age of 18, my boyfriend and I had already been living together for a year, and I became pregnant. I called my parents to share the news, and they still reached out in love.

### Using the Past to Build a Future

Of course there were many struggles and triumphs, but if I shared them all, I would have an entire book. My past is a part of who I am. Honestly, it has shaped me into who I am today. My life began with feelings of being unwanted, alone, and betrayed by my birth parents; to the unconditional love of family; to finally building a family of my own.



Monika and her husband John now have three children: Adalynn, Avery, and Aiden.

Adoption is a beautiful thing. Not only do you get to save a child from pain, but that child is forever a blessing. I started feeling hopeless and unwanted at such a young age, rebelling as a teenager and pushing every possible limit, but with love and guidance all around me, I finally let myself see the love of my parents through prayer and restoration. I'm now 24 years old and happily married to my husband John Reynoso. We have three beautiful children: Adalynn, 11, Avery, 4, and Aiden, 3. Not only do I know what not to do, but also know how to love my kids unconditionally because of my amazing parents who loved me even when I was pushing them away. My adoption story has not only strengthened me as a person, but also as a parent.

### My Biological Family

My brother and I met with our biological mother a few years ago. I eventually decided it was best for me to not have a close relationship with her. I have forgiven her and instead of remaining angry, I have peace because I know it was all God's plan. Adoption was the best thing to ever happen to us because

of the mother she couldn't be for us. Bad choices, jail time, choices in men, and who knows what else. Recently, I found out that we have three older half-sisters from my biological father's side, making us the youngest. My older sister found me on a social networking site, and we connected immediately. Her and my other sisters were also in foster care and eventually adopted.



### Longing to be Loved

It's been an amazing journey putting all the pieces of where I come from together, and finally getting a sense of belonging. There are so many children lying awake at night longing to be loved. Maybe you adopted, and you have a teenager who was like me. Can I be the one to tell you that it truly does get better? Let me be the example of that. The advantages of adoption are endless. **KM**

*Editor's Note: We would like to thank Monika Reynoso for sharing her story of courage, survival, and love. If you have an inspirational story you would like to share, email [editor@katymagazine.com](mailto:editor@katymagazine.com).*

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