

GROWING NEW ROOTS

Since time immemorial I've known that I am adopted. When I'm 17, I plan to go back to Guatemala to find my birth mother.

"Do you want to meet or find your birth mom?"

"Someday I might, maybe when I'm older."

I have had this short conversation my whole life with my friends and family because I'm adopted from Guatemala. It's risky to go back to Guatemala which is full of crime and drugs. So maybe someday I might go back and try to find my birth mother but it will be difficult.

According to *osac.gov*, in 2013 there was an average of 101 murders per week in Guatemala. There's also a high rate of theft, assault, armed robbery, carjacking and kidnapping.

I have never been the kid to lash out at my parents and say I want to go back to my "real" mom. I was never lied to about my adoption or how I might not get to meet my birth mother.

In my family, we don't sugar-coat things to feel better.

As a seven year old I didn't fully understand what was being said to me about my adoption, but I knew that it wasn't something to worry about.

I have the opportunity of having parents who are knowledgeable about Latin America, and who have the ability to travel with me to multiple Latin American countries. With them, I've been to Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico.

But, for me these were always bitter-sweet vacations.

I would feel a bit of freedom as one of the people in Costa Rica or any other Latin American country; on the beaches nobody knew that anything my upbringing was atypical. But bitterness came from people who assumed I spoke

Spanish natively. I understood the basics, but the words I couldn't understand and the rapid speech scared me and made me more shy than I already was.

Typically, I am a laid-back person, so I never considered my adoption to be something I should dwell on. I accepted the possibility of being rejected by such a special person—my biological mother—long ago.

I plan on going back to Guatemala when I am 17. Of course, the primary goal would be to find my birth mother, but the main person I want to find is my foster mother, Norma. Norma cared for me until I was 4 months old, so I don't directly remember her. But from pictures I've seen, she always wore bright red lipstick and had curly black hair.

I have started part of my journey by contacting my foster brother. My parents met his adoptive parents in the airport while traveling back to the United States from Guatemala and, coincidentally, found out both he and I were fostered in the same home.

I met him when I was seven and then again a year later, when I was eight.

I don't know if Norma will be able to tell me where my birth mother is, but I can accept that.

While I don't think I

will ever have complete closure without finding her, I have to accept that it's a very real possibility. I'll come up with different goals that I want and strive to fulfill.

But, if I do find her, it will be a big part of my life that I will cherish. Hopefully, there is a happy ending and I will keep in contact with her.

Until then, all I can do is wait.

Pamela Affolter,
freshman

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