



May 2015



## Long Lost Sisters



**By Latoya Lennard**

I can remember clearly when Jaylin was born. I was 8 years old. I was at a babysitter's house, and when my grandmother came to pick me up, she told me that I had a little sister. I already had two younger brothers, so I was ecstatic. My grandmother adopted me, and had custody of my two younger brothers. Our parents had serious drug problems and were in and out of jail. My grandmother was starting to have health problems and couldn't care for a newborn baby, so Jaylin was put into foster care.

Twice a week we would see her at Little Flowers agency for several hours. All through 4th and 5th grade, I would come after school to play with her. I watched Jaylin learn to walk and to babble a few words. I was always so excited to see her. One day when I was 11, my grandmother explained that Jaylin's foster mother had adopted her. There weren't going to be any more visits at the agency.

Hearing this news, I felt distraught. Nobody had asked me my opinion. I never met with any lawyer or caseworker before this change happened. I worried that maybe I wasn't going to see my sister again. And shortly after Jaylin was adopted, the excuses started. Jaylin was asleep, she was sick, or she was visiting their family in another state. Oftentimes, her mom wouldn't answer the phone.

All through middle school and high school, I would call her house (from different numbers so she wouldn't know it was me). As she got older, Jaylin would sometimes answer. I tried to use these short calls to get to know my sister. I learned that she liked vanilla ice cream and Hannah Montana. I would record our conversations using my phone. If I lost my cell it was like I was losing my only connection with my sister. But I never forgot Jaylin's number. I never stopped trying to reach her.

I had so many emotions during these years. I wanted to ask, "What did I do to deserve this? What did we ever do to you?" I knew Jaylin's mom might be afraid of my parents, but I had a very different life. I was resilient and kept a positive attitude, but not being able to see my sister hurt me deeply.

It was my grandmother who suggested that we go to court. At the time I was too young to file on my own, and my grandmother was too sick to make it. After she passed away, I could hear her voice in my head, telling me "don't forget about your sister."

So I filed for visitation. I had never known their address, and I needed one to serve Jaylin's mom with the court papers. Luckily, I had memorized her home phone number. Using Google, I was able to do a reverse address look up. The first time I saw the judge, she shouted at me like I was a deadbeat dad. She said "where have you been all these years? Why are you here now?" I wanted to yell back, "What do you mean where have I been? I was eleven years old! I did everything I knew how to do!" The judge assigned me a lawyer, who thought I was a victim of the system, and that I was being punished because my parents had lost their rights.

One day, many months after I filed the case, her adoptive mom walked into

court with a twelve-year-old girl. She asked, "Do you know who this is?" I knew right away that it was Jaylin, that I was finally seeing her. Later her mom explained that she was scared that Jaylin would resent her, that she didn't want her to feel different from other kids in the family. She planned to tell Jaylin at 16 that she had been adopted. But she realized that I might be a role model and help Jaylin succeed in school. She also had started having health problems, and wanted Jaylin to know her other family.

Since that day I've been seeing Jaylin whenever I can. I am grateful that I can mentor her and guide her. If I could question the judges and attorneys on Jaylin's case, I would ask, "Were you thinking of me? Were you thinking of how your decisions might impact my life for the next decade?" I would ask them to think ahead, and imagine what would be best for Jaylin. Not just when she was 3 years old, but for the rest of her life.

This issue affects many adopted children-but in a sense I was very lucky, because I was able to bond with Jaylin when she was still in foster care. Often this is not the case. Roughly two-thirds of children in foster care also have at least one sibling in care, and a significant number of them are split into different homes. So, so many have to fight just to get occasional visits with each other.

It's traumatic enough to be in the system without losing your only ties to everything you once knew. The law should be changed to help kids like me. Children should have a voice about whether or not they want connections with biological family. When parents lose their rights, grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles shouldn't lose their rights along with them. Why should we be victimized for actions that aren't ours?

*Published on May 11, 2015 as part of Children's Rights' ["Fostering the Future"](#) campaign. The opinions expressed herein are those of the blog author and do not necessarily represent the views of Children's Rights or its employees. Children's Rights has not verified the author's account.*

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Recently, AFFEC expanded our Family Finding Efforts nationwide and the results are very promising so far!

Our Family Finding program relies heavily on our many, many dedicated volunteers who



selflessly devote hours to helping youth re-connect with people in their lives that have cared about them in the past. Part of the Family Finding process relies heavily on internet searches and calling and engagement. These are tasks that can be done from home in your spare time.

We have many stay at home foster parents that conduct searches for us during their "downtime" while younger children are sleeping, or older children are doing homework or other activities. This is a tremendous opportunity to help foster youth while remaining in the comfort of your own home. If this is something that you feel would be a good fit, or if you have been wanting to give back but haven't figured out how to fit it into your schedule, we would love to hear from you! Please visit our [volunteer page](#).



Wow, what a wonderful turn out for this event! 340 children arrived for the event... and 340 Princesses left the event glowing and laughing. The children received spa treatments: hair, nails, and makeup. Then moved into the dress room where they picked out their beautiful dresses and accessories. After transforming into princesses they got their pictures taken and for the first time this year we had face-painting by some really talented artists! Once the children are ready they were announced one by one into the ballroom for

dancing, singing, and a charming tea party. The food was truly beautiful: cupcakes, tea sandwiches, tea cookies, and Umpqua Ice Cream.



Mark your calendars for August 22nd, 2015 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM!

A Family for Every Child is teaming up with your local Meriwether Winery for our THIRD Annual Summer Event!

88324 Vineyard Lane, Veneta OR 97487

Cost of Ticket \$50

[\*\*Click here to buy your ticket!\*\*](#)

We are improving the lives of foster children nationwide and purchasing a ticket will ensure that we are able to carry out our mission finding a loving, forever family for every waiting foster child.

Your ticket will include:

- *A savory summer dinner, provided by Texas Roadhouse Grill*
- *Wine & Beer*
- *Live Music & Dancing*

Help us find a home for thousands of waiting foster children,  
by joining us for this fun-filled night!

**Can't make it out that night, but want to donate? [Click here!](#)**

Tickets will be sold at the door but supplies are limited. - See more [here](#).

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