

Dear Ms. Kearney,

My mother's pale Irish skin and my father's curly red-brown hair have always looked different from my tanned Korean skin and straight dark hair. I am different. I am not like them. And yet, we are still a family. Adoption is part of my family and a part of who I am. At age four months, my twin sister Lillian and I were adopted from Seoul, South Korea. When we were little kids, I remember my mom and dad reading books to us about other young adoptees and always know in my heart that there was nothing wrong with it. Our adoption is not a secret, but rather a piece of all of our lives that has been embraced with warm acceptance.

Lizzie's pure and honest words in *The Secret of Me* spoke to me in a way no other book has before. Although her family's attitude towards her and her siblings' adoptions is entirely different from that of my own family, there are still countless ways I relate to her struggle to understand them. Like Lizzie, I often think about searching for my birthmother when I decide I'm ready to go down that road. Also like Lizzie, "I'm not looking for a mother – I already have a great one, you see. I'm just hoping to meet a woman, *the* woman who looks like me."

Despite how much her family loves and cares about her, their perpetual reluctance to fully acknowledge her adoption is frustrating to me. My heart broke for her as she longed to reach out to her parents—to be open with them about her birthmother, but who were not ready to be open with her. I wanted to scream when her brother Bob tells her not to talk about her adoption because it's a "matter of loyalty." However, the pride I felt for Lizzie when she finally tells Peter her secret is indescribable and on instinct, it was all I could do not to jump into the story and give her a hug. My smile grew even wider when, not only does he not turn away in disgust, but he tells her she's beautiful. He could not have been more right. Lizzie is beautiful.

Although I'm only fifteen years old and nowhere near ready to begin searching for my birthmother, my family and I have already gathered a bit of information about her. When I was ten, my family went to Korea with an adoption-related tour group and visiting the agency we were adopted through was part of the itinerary. We met with a social worker who had a file with information about my birthmother that he was allowed to share with us. It didn't give us any way to contact or even search for her, but it was still exciting to find out what little we did learn about her. It's funny to think that I probably know more about her than she knows about me.

I may never meet my birthmother. It's quite possible I'll never even know her name or what she looks like or her favorite color. I might live my entire life without knowing where she was born, who her parents are, what foods she likes to eat, or exactly why she gave me up. But if I were ever to meet her and could only say one thing, I would tell her, "Thank you." Thank you for knowing you had to put me and Lillian up for adoption. Thank you for realizing you could never give us the life you wanted us to have. Thank you for making that decision. I know it wasn't easy. Thank you for loving us enough to let us go.

Of all the things I've learned from reading and rereading *The Secret of Me*, the most important and valuable lesson, I feel, is to never, ever be ashamed of who you are. Your novel taught me it's natural to have questions about my adoption and to wonder about my birthmother. It's *okay* to want to learn more. As I watched Lizzie grow and become more comfortable with her adoption, I grew with her and saw my own adoption in a new light. In some way, I think it makes me unique. Being adopted is part of my identity – it's part of *me*. It's a piece of me I cannot change, so why not accept what I can learn from it? After finishing the novel, I thought a lot about my birthmother and I decided I might like to meet her one day. I'd like finally to come face-to-face with the woman who not only gave me life but made me the person I am today. Today, I am strong. Today, I am proud.

Ms. Kearney, you taught me the beauty of love, acceptance, and family. I love my birthmother for the choices she made no matter how difficult they may have been, and I love my parents for turning those choices she made into our family.

Thank you for letting me see how beautiful adoption truly is.

Sincerely,

*Nora Hexter*