

## The Moment My Life Changed Forever

Like Ashley, I learned who I am kind of early in my life and had to grow up faster than I should have or wanted to. When I was fifteen years old, I began to feel dizzy, spend more hours asleep than awake during the day, and actually turn ink blue. My mom began driving me to a Batson's Children's Hospital an hour away up to three times a week throughout the entire second semester of my freshman year in high school. I felt like an experiment being paraded through every wing of the hospital with a multitude of nurses, interns, and doctors seeing it as an opportunity. After six months, I was diagnosed with methemoglobin anemia. Combined with a strong family history of Endometriosis, I was told I would probably never have my own biological children. That revelation caused a sinking point of depression in my life. While other kids wanted to be doctors, bakers, accountants, astronauts, etc., I wanted to be a mom first before thinking about a career. It was the one thing in my life I knew I always wanted and it was taken away from me. I went to a public school in a high poverty area, and it honestly made me upset when I saw other girls pregnant and instead of feeling bad for them I was angry that they had the opportunity to be moms and they took it for granted. I was depressed and unhappy about it for about a year.

A year later, my boss for my high school job asked me to help collect suitcases for Cases 4 Kids that gave children in the foster care system something to put their belongings in besides trash bags. I became involved in that and helped collect over 300 suitcases. My boss never married and had a family by opening her home to foster children. Her story made me think about other ways of having a family. I decided that one day I want to adopt children. The more I thought about it and the more I learned about the foster care system, the more problems I realized there were in Mississippi. My Dad was, like Ashley, in-and-out of the foster care system in

various states most of his life, but he was never adopted and ended up going back and forth between the system and his parents. His dad, and caregiver at the time, died when he was eighteen and he was on his own from then on. Because of how bad the past hurt, it was something my family never discussed until my interest in adoption started. When I learned about the foster care system, I realized the children I would be adopting would come out of that home. I cried about all the children I could not adopt one day and I desperately wanted to do something to improve their lives. I started an organization my junior year of high school called 37 Books which was named for the 3,700 children in the foster care system in Mississippi at the time. After watching an interview of the VP of Walgreens who went through the foster care system, I learned that books offered an escape for these children from the tragic circumstances of their lives. I made it my mission to provide books for these children, first in my hometown in Warren County, then across the State of Mississippi. The first year, I was blessed to be able to collect over 2,500 books and the next year I doubled that number. Every year I try to get more and more people involved in what I call “my family” and improving their quality of life. I learned about myself that no matter how bad it is, I will eventually make the best of a situation. I learned that maybe I was not meant to have two children and that maybe I was meant to have 3,700 and eventually in the last year 4,600, and I would not have it any other way.

Although I never personally experienced poverty or the trauma of the foster system, I am similar to Ashley in that I had to grow up sooner than I wanted to. I was forced to see the world as an adolescent not through rose colored glasses, but unfortunate reality. The world that I saw is eerily similar to the world Ashley saw at my age. I saw a world that was broken and it still is a broken world. However, like Ashley, I want to shed some light on this dark place. I was never abused by my parents the way Ashley was in some of her foster homes, but I saw the effects of

those same things in my own father. *Three Little Words* helped me better understand the life of my family member and potentially my own children that I will adopt.

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“As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”