



UNDERSTANDING MY INCOMPLETE IDENTITY

by Matea Kitchen

Staring intently at the cobblestone below me, I kicked my feet. It scuffed the bottom of my sandals, but was still well worn from use. Beside me, my mom was silent and watching. I knew she wanted me to be excited, but the doubt that whispered in my ear would not allow it. I could feel its breath on my ear as it spoke in hushed tones, “She doesn’t love you. She doesn’t care about you. She abandoned you.” I tried to ignore the constant barrage of words; however, my attention was grabbed when my mom motioned for me to stand. As I did, I finally took my eyes off of the cobblestone beneath me and looked up. I clutched my mom’s hand and she squeezed it in return. In the distance was a woman I had never wanted to meet: my birth mother.

I hated my birth mother growing up. To me, she was an enigma that I only heard of from my adopted mom, something I would never understand. When I tried to picture her, I had no idea what to imagine; she was just a tale in the wind. What I did know about her, I only knew from stories. This is what I knew: my mother, Lidia, lived in a small village in Guatemala. She was a poor single woman who had seven children, most of which were still minors when I was born. She was barely earning twenty dollars a day making tortillas. Her education was no better – she could sound out words, but couldn’t read. Lidia wanted better for her children; however, with so many children and such little income, she was having trouble supporting her current family. So, when I was born, I was put up for adoption.

When I was nine months old, I officially became an American citizen. My mom brought me home to her home in Iowa, and I was raised there. She was my mom, and I was her daughter. I grew with the knowledge that I was adopted; my mom would tell me her stories of when she visited me. She wanted me to be proud of being adopted, and I was; however, that changed as I became older. I became ashamed when I met other kids. They knew so much about their parents and who they were; however, I only knew the basic history of Lidia. It felt like part of my history, my identity, was incomplete. The fact that I knew nothing about her sent me spiraling, but the remarks made it even worse. “Your mother didn’t love you” was once said to me as a joke, but it hurt so badly. Was it true? All I knew was that she had given me up, and I didn’t know why. I just wanted to understand why; maybe if I understood, it would fill the aching hole left in my heart.

It was 2016 when my mom brought the suggestion to me. We were lounging in the living room; she was laying back in her La-Z-Boy while I was strewn out on the couch. She didn’t bring up Lidia often since she knew the topic was a sore spot for me. That’s why it surprised me when she brought her up.

“Have you ever thought about meeting Lidia?”

“No.” I never even wanted to think about her.

“You should think about it.”

I shot up. “Why should I? She didn’t want me, and I don’t want her either!” I didn’t want someone who left me, who never wanted me.

“It will be good for you,” my mom paused, “you need it.”

When my mom first suggested it, I was strictly opposed. Lidia had made her decision a long time ago when she gave me up, and I had no desire to meet her. In fact, meeting her turned into one of my greatest fears. What would she think of me – would she be proud or be ashamed of me? Finally, I acquiesced. I would meet Lidia, and show her what she had given up.



An outdoor market in Guatemala

On July 13, 2016, I met Lidia. The meeting spot was a McDonalds in Antigua, Guatemala. So unlike anything I’d ever seen, I took a bit to admire it. Instead of a hot, greasy building that made me nauseous, I was met with a grand patio. The patio was paved with the common cobblestone used everywhere in Antigua. In the center sat a small fountain with water slowly trickling out of it, a calming sound to the otherwise busy street. Vegetation surrounded the perimeter of the patio – cropped trees and shrubs, wild grass, hanging ferns, and fuschia roses. Spread throughout the patio were aluminum tables and chairs. The patio was gorgeous enough as is, but the view from it

was even better; looking out I saw a clear view of the volcanoes surrounding Antigua. Even though the surroundings were so beautiful, I couldn’t help but feel the dread creeping up on me. The place that looked heavenly, would be the same place where I would meet the person I hated the most. Even so, when my mother motioned for me, I tried to prepare myself. I pushed my shoulders back and tried to make myself taller than I was – I wanted to be stronger than I was.

I felt my heart seize when I saw her. Instead of seeing a stranger, I saw myself. It was my own face – downturned nose, almond-shaped eyes, and downturned mouth – worn with age. Her face wore the same stoic expression mine did, but her eyes betrayed her. I looked at her, and there was so much love. I couldn’t move; my throat constricted and my feet felt like lead. She wasn’t anything like I imagined. Instead of an intimidating woman, she just seemed tired. The eyebags under her eyes were deep, and wrinkles were apparent on her face. Looking at her, the dread left my body. Now all I was, was tired. I was tired of fighting my background, I was tired of fighting my thoughts, and most of all, I was tired of fighting my mother. For all of my life, I just wanted to have her love. I wanted to understand her, and now I had the chance. I shuffled to Lidia, and she pulled me into a hug. I stood a few inches taller than her, but that didn’t change the fact that she was my mother. She was the one who had given me life, and tried to give me the best life possible. Warmth surrounded me, and I felt her love.

I spent most of the day with my birth family. I was able to meet some of my siblings, as well as nieces and nephews. And while I didn't talk with Lidia much, I knew she was happy and proud of me. Occasionally, I would find her looking at me with a slight shine to her eyes. She didn't shed tears, and neither did I. Even so, I knew how she felt.

Not too long ago, I found a report of when my mom searched for Lidia. The report had given information on Lidia and my birth family. It also had a message from Lidia to me,

"I love you very much Matea. I carry you in my heart and will think of you until the last minute of my existence. I do not have you with me physically but you live in all of my being."

With that message, I began to understand. My mother had wanted to give me the best life possible, and she had tried her best. As an adopted child, it was easy to feel incomplete. I felt like I was supposed to be a copy of someone I never knew. I felt like I was always missing something that all of the other kids had. Instead, I had so much more. I had my own identity. I had a mom who chose me, and a family who valued me for just being me. They were all I truly needed.