

Would he come find me when he turned 18?

When I handed my newborn over to the social worker, I was eighteen years old. Eighteen years seemed like a long time to an eighteen-year-old, so instead of dealing with the emotional pain and emptiness, I shoved them down my throat along with a bunch of cookies and left them for future me to deal with.

Those eighteen years evaporated much more quickly than I anticipated. In the six weeks leading up to the boy legally becoming an adult, I crammed years of events and emotions into a few pages. This is what I would have told him...

"If you ever wanted to know what a woman's journey through trauma looks like, start here. This memoir is brutally honest, heartbreaking, and at times soul-destroying—but it never quite reaches despair before the author rises again with hope of finding peace, light, and love. Inside, a woman sorts through the ashes of grief and loss to find forgiveness, faith, and hope. What a privilege to have this journey opened to us as we see the rough and dimly lit path of hope to healing. This is a life that's not over but remains in search of elusive peace and forgiveness of oneself and others. This story is not for the faint of heart. You will need courage to read it and will want to embrace the author with all of your love."—JULIETTE MAJOR



Born at an early age, Lili spent most of her life as a "Lake Effect Kid" (Thanks, Fall Out Boy). She thrives in dichotomy land: loves to jog, box and lift, but also loves to write, eat pizza and be sedentary. She also struggles to fill out race questionnaires, and would speak every language in the world if she could. She gave herself the name "World Cricket Girl" after learning about and falling in love with the sport of cricket. She has traveled the world teaching Empowered Cricket, a unique way of teaching personal voice and personal boundaries to help individuals prevent or/and heal from trauma. Learn more at www.empoweredcricket.org



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What I Would Have Told You

LILI STEPHENSON



"Raw. Vulnerable. Real."—JENNY THOMPSON, HER WORLD CRICKET TOUR

What I Would Have Told You

LILI STEPHENSON
WORLD CRICKET GIRL

AWKWORD CONVERSATIONS

What I Would Have Told You

a memoir

Lili Stephenson



Awkward Conversations

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Content Warning: This memoir contains references to disordered eating, descriptions of self-harm, references to a pornography addiction, references to and one mildly graphic description of childhood sexual abuse, and non-graphic instances of rape and consensual sex between teenagers. This content has been included by the author to remain true to her experiences while also attempting to be considerate of a wider audience; none of the content is portrayed as healthy, positive, or to be gratuitous in any way.

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All identifying details, such as names and specific dates, have been changed or omitted to protect the identities and privacy of those mentioned. This narrative is told from the author's point of view and all experiences, knowledge, and opinions come solely from her perspective.

Quotation from *An adoptee writes an open letter to parents on Christmas Eve* by Anne Heffron (blog post from anneheffron.com, published on 24 December 2016) used with permission.

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*This book is dedicated
to those who choose to place their child for adoption,
to those who desperately want a child,
to those that are able to adopt a child,
to that child,
and to all of those touched
and affected by the process.*

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IN 1990, WHEN I HANDED my newborn over to the social worker I had been working with for five months, two things became painfully obvious: a) my life would never be the same again and b) at some point this tiny boy would be eighteen himself. Eighteen was the alleged magical adult age of enlightenment. Considering I was just barely eighteen myself, I questioned the rationale of that accepted notion. Eighteen years until he could legally come find me... I had eighteen years to get ready for something that may not ever happen. With all that time to come, I promptly put off the preparation and shoved the emotional pain and emptiness down my throat along with a bunch of cookies and left that for future me to deal with.

The years evaporated: highs and lows, lower-than-low, subterranean lows, enough-counseling-that-I-should-have-an-honorary-PhD-lows. Future me was very upset with past me. There were so many things that I would have said had I a) been brave or b) been diligent about writing events down. I was neither. Just like writing and completing my 25-page senior thesis in two days (with top marks, mind you), I decided to cram years of events into a few pages over the space of six weeks. With any luck, he wouldn't come calling anyway and I'd have a little more time to accomplish what I should have done for posterity's sake ages ago.

Six Weeks to Go

“So? WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE TOLD him?” Therapist Cody questioned, pen at the ready for what was to come.

“That I loved him.”

I allowed the phrase to whisk me back in time, back to the time that I thought about writing everything down. Writing allows you to capture the emotions and events that shape you. But what if you don’t want to remember those things, though? That’s the trouble with writing: it helps you remember the tragedies that cut you to the core. Why would you want to remember those things—those dark days of emotional anguish and black holes of emptiness?

Maybe so someone else knows they aren’t alone in the dark.

I imagined myself in my room back in The Ville, dark wooden paneling covered with Duran Duran posters and the one of David Hasselhoff in nothing but a red and black striped speedo and black leather jacket. The Cure’s “Love Song” lilted in the background from my Heartbreakers mixtape (that took up permanent residence in my boombox) as I tried to decide which of the dozens of pens in my pen box was worthy of the task. Subconsciously, I criss-cross-applesauced my legs in the present as past me picked a traditional black Bic.

I love you.

I didn’t always love you. When I first found out about you, I was very much afraid of you. In fact, just after I found out about you, I went to a party and drank copious amounts of alcohol in hopes of making you go away. However, I found out later that alcohol helped create you, and you were here to stay.

Wow, all that I can say is thank you. When I opened this and saw how much was there, I was expecting the first line to be “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” It has been an interesting (I can’t believe only) twelve days. For me there have been a lot of ups and downs, but I am looking at a brighter tomorrow as I believe you are also, and I have you to thank for that.

May God bless you and your family as you so richly deserve.

Now according to my dictionary “Zyryanovsk” is the last word, so I guess that I got that in this time.

Best Wishes and Fond Memories

I learned that our reality is based on the lenses through which we look. Those lenses can be dark, clear, colored, hazy. My lenses started to lighten. Instead of darkness everywhere I looked, there was a bit of sun, a bit of light in my vision, very literal light.

There was a day I took the kids out to play at the school ground. I saw them running, playing, and things got brighter. The fall leaves suddenly had crisper, brighter yellows, reds, and browns. The grass was vibrant, the sky a beautiful azure, and the clouds a stark, contrasting white. It’s as if someone took off the sunglasses that had been shading my vision and showed me this amazing world. I could not believe how breathtaking the fall was.

I immediately called my bishop and excitedly told him what I saw. All the hours that he and Cody had put in had truly affected me. I was happier, I enjoyed my children. I still loved you, but I knew you were with a loving family. I knew you’d always be a part of me somehow, even if it were just the few memories we shared during the first few days of your life.

This would be a great place to end the story: birth mom sorts out past with birth father, still loves child, and wishes him nothing but the best. She is able to stop counseling and finally heal and be the best mom ever—in spite of not doing everything right—to the family the Lord has given her. Things were looking pretty awesome. I could see the future bright in front of me. My shades were finally gone.