

The Tragedy Before Adoption

My middle daughter, Nina, asked why we didn't have any of her baby pictures. We adopted Nina shortly before her 4th birthday from Ukraine. When we met with the adoption officials (the SDA) there was a baby picture in her files and they gave us the only baby picture of her there was. But this is not the type of baby picture you display on a baby book, or enlarge in a photo frame.

That picture was the opposite of this:



A few days ago, I took out the picture and showed it to her. She stared at it and swallowed hard. "I don't like it," she said.

I don't like it either.

"She looks so ... miserable!" my oldest daughter said.

She did. A fragile baby in a sterile environment. No fussy cute blankets to lay on. No soft bed. No loving arms holding her and smiling, savoring the fact that she was only 27 weeks old when she was born—but she had made it through. She survived!

I want to pick that baby up and hold her close, telling her that she is loved, that she has a family that will love her unconditionally. I want her to know the feel of a mother rocking her to sleep, the coos from an adoring older sister or the gentle touch of a strong daddy who will protect her always.

I missed so much of her life, and she missed so much by not having a family for almost four years of her life. But I cannot undo the tragedy of adoption, the fact that she was an orphan or the reality that I wasn't there from the beginning

of her life!

I missed the days in the hospital when she was a preemie baby fighting for her life. I wish I could have been there, sitting by her side and talking to her, a steady presence of love. Praying for her body, praying for her health.

I missed the celebration of taking her home, of parties and "welcome home" cards with messages that will someday bring a smile on her face, knowing that so many people had been praying for her all those early months of her life.

I missed the love that as mothers we give when our little ones feel pain or feel sick.

I missed the early development and watching her discover a beautiful world. Instead, her world consisted of an orphanage with little stimulation and interaction.

I missed teaching her that there are people you can trust, that being naughty does not mean you will be tied down to a crib.

I missed being there for her diagnosis of cerebral palsy, making sure she received adequate medical intervention and therapy.

But more than anything, I wish she had always had a family, that she had always known the safety of a home, the love of a mother, a father and siblings. I wish she had known that moms kiss owies and that fathers are strong, and they can throw you up high in the air and catch you while you feel the wind on your face as you laugh so hard. I wish she'd known that siblings can be your best friends, and that by playing, you discover adventures and so much about how to interact with people.

So much loss. The tragedy.

And so many years, so much life away from each other. I missed

so much. But I won't miss anything else.

I will cuddle her now and kiss her owies now. I will tell her that she is brave and loved. I will be there as she fights the emotional trauma from her life in the orphanage. I will stand with her and be a steady presence as we tackle PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), anxiety, depression and RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder). I will be there when she doubts herself, reminding her that she can do it.

I will be there, always! I cannot undo the last four years of her life, but I can be here and now, cheering her on, reminding her of the truth: She is wanted, she is precious and she is loved. Always.

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog at . Ellen is a pastor's wife and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real-sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly-aspects of faith, parenting, special needs and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.*