

...And Baby Makes Tallimat



By Jane Truelove

A blue-toned satellite image of Earth, showing the continents of North and South America. The image is centered on the Americas, with the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The landmasses are a darker shade of blue, while the oceans are a lighter shade.

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Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre

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Dedication

To my ultimate Daddy
for lighting my inner spark
(...and being the
ultimate Grampy)



...and my point is

This is not a book about Inuit culture, it's not a book about adoption and it's not a book about my family. It is a book highlighting my personal journey through all this. A book about recognizing and being grateful for your foundation; about absorbing every minute of joy that you are blessed with; about the beautiful marriage between who you were raised to be and you were meant to be. It's about knowing that life is everchanging, sometimes it will make you laugh and sometimes it will make you cry. Sometimes it's about adding a life and sometimes it's about saying good bye to a life. But always there is joy... and this is what my children have taught me.



Atausiq...

I closed my eyes and made a wish and blew out all the candles on my 37th birthday cake. As my family watched, I secretly hoped the candles had some extra magic this year because I only had one wish. I had dreamt of a little boy with dark hair sitting on the hardwood floor watching me as I did my nightly yoga. I wondered if it was just a dream, I didn't care, I couldn't stop thinking about it – I loved how it made me feel, in this dream – I was a mom. That's when it started, it was a vivid “beginning” of the end of my childless contentment.



Marruuk...

My "I" became a "We" on August 5, 1992. I never knew what my life's journey would be but I always knew it would be with Brian. I also knew it would be different and I knew we would march to the beat of our own drum. My father proudly captained his boat as we enjoyed the early morning on the water and were pronounced husband and wife.

Following that memorable birthday, as my thoughts turned to all things babies, we began to talk about nothing else. I wanted noise in the house, I wanted daily excuses for our own goofiness, I wanted family trips and excited Christmases, I wanted to make bottles and buy tiny cloths, I wanted my parents to be grandparents... and we had our heart set on adoption.



Pingasut...

They were wondering if you might want to adopt him? That's what the words read, just in a casual email from a familiar work colleague who I talked to multiple times every day. What does one do with information like that? It was our first time, we were overjoyed, terrified and very uncertain of how to proceed. From the mouth of a dear friend came a confident statement that made things crystal clear: you need to go to Toronto. On my cell phone with my father, while walking through downtown Toronto, he directed me to the address we were given. I'll call you back I said, here it is.

They gave me three rolls of film to develop. How do you say his name again? I asked several times, not yet recognizing the rhythm of a language that was to become music to my ears. Do you think they were really sure? Did I hear wrong? My wish was coming true. I talked to a beautiful woman with the longest, thickest black hair I had ever seen and a name that seemed to have just too many letters to pronounce. This beautiful Inuk woman and I talked for hours in the parking garage of a hospital in downtown Toronto. Oh please, was all I could think, let her see me. Let her look at my eyes and know that I am the one, let her see my strength, let us both have a connection that could only be explained by the accomplishment of fate let her see how much I love her hair. And, let her know that I am the one to kiss that same hair on her baby's head everyday for the rest of my life. Be real, be yourself, but don't mess this up.



As I flipped through the processed photos I saw his face over and over. I examined his feet, his hands, his look, his smile and that gorgeous, thick, black, and now familiar, hair. I ached for him to be with us and my confidence that he was already our son made patience possible. Katsua was no longer an unusual name to me, it rolled of my tongue with ease as if a child of mine would have no other name.





My labour: endless packing, unpacking and re-packing; multiple sleepless nights; a 6 hour drive in one of Ontario's finest winter storms and a late, lost arrival to a dark and snow covered city. My delivery room: a very elegantly decorated home in Markham Ontario, which I would notice the next day was facing a park. My doctor: a beautiful Gyanees lady with a warm and leading presence who would prove to be unforgettable as the years would pass. Nurses and attendants: multiple members of our host family and of course, staff from Native Child and Family Services of Toronto.

My smiling doctor handed me my happy, chubby bundle and said "here's your baby". I had forgotten my labour and my delivery room because at that moment the only thing in the entire world that I was aware of was the dark eyes now examining my face. I am certain he must have wondered why my face was scarlet red and seemed unable to move from the ear to ear smile that had been there since he first laid his 8 month old eyes on me. He put his little chubby hands on my cheeks and I was in awe at that moment that he was holding my face. Our gaze was intense, both of our chubby cheeks in the biggest smile possible "Hi" I said to my beautiful son...and that marked the first of thousands of moments just like this one where the world would disappear and my son and I would be totally alone in a moment together





There's a baby in the car! We remarked to each other multiple times through our smiling faces as we started the long drive home to Ottawa. Katsua sat contently in his brand new car seat, with his brand new blanky and brand new bottle, putting his trust in his brand new parents. We arrived home on December 22, 2005 as it was just getting dark. My parents, keeping a respectful distance of our new bundle greeted us in the driveway. My father was eagerly snapping pictures of this child who had been destined to be our son, his grandchild, and as suddenly as we had become 'mom and dad', he became 'grampy'.



That started our blessed life as a family of three. Through the awesomeness of fate, my journey into motherhood led me on a unique path. I had made a commitment after all...a commitment to raise any child I adopted in their own culture and it started as simple as that. But, from the first “akuuluk” I was home. And over the next three years I would fall in love yet again – with a people, a culture and a language.

Let’s just go in, we said to each other as we toted our now one year old son, and nervously we walked up the stairs of The Ottawa Inuit Children Center. We weren’t sure how we would be received but we knew we were meant to be there.

Once inside the center for the first time, we saw a smile we would grow to need as part of our daily life. A smile that we knew was always there and a smile that would love our son as we did. Then we realized there were many such smiles in there. All these smiles would teach us about Inuit culture, about parenting, about togetherness, about language and about strength. Deeply in awe of the open arms around me, my confidence soared that my son would have everything he needed...and so would I.





Tisamat...

Don't you want to check with your husband? She calmly said for the second time on the other end of the line... No, I replied with a quiet confident euphoria. Our very welcomed caller was not aware that I had mouthed 'baby girl - Inuk' to my husband before she even got the words fully out. He was wildly dancing around with both thumbs in the air. No, definitely no need to confirm with him. It was the Friday night of mother's day weekend, 2008. Only minutes ago I had remarked to my husband that we should just have a quiet Spring and stop wondering when we would get the chance to add another heart to our family. Quiet Spring gone, pure joy is here for the second time.

As we sat at the board room table I went over in my mind how it really doesn't matter what you are planning or preparing for in your life everything comes down to a bit of cold, necessary administration. I reminded myself over and over in my head that at this board table I was not the one doing a job, I was not at a meeting or required to give any type of report, we were the guests.

I gave myself permission to be the nervous mommy to be. At that moment I was asked if I would like to see a picture of Cynthia. My thoughts were racing, could I look at her face for the first time in front of all these people and stay even a tiny bit composed? I have often thought about how mothers who give birth are physically exhausted, already in a compromising position, and have plenty of medical staff around them. Seeing your child for the first time at a board table in a meeting room of several people doing a days work is something quite different. I would internalize, that was my solution, I would take it all in and look at her face, say little, express little, and soak up every second. I flipped through 3 pictures and saw my daughter, my husband's daughter, Katsua's little sister and my father's grand-daughter. Often as I was growing up my mother would explain to me that when you are a mother, you have a pocket in your heart for each child. At that moment, my heart made Cynthia's pocket.



The pictures were no longer enough and we wanted to meet her with an urgency that was difficult to contain. We wanted her to know the goofy, silly and unconditionally committed and loving household she would be joining. With a certain sense of déjà vu, we nervously rang a strangers doorbell to meet our child for the first time. Her foster mother casually said 'there's Cynthia' and everything slowed as I turned my head and looked to the top of the stairs. I saw eyes that already had a history, a small cautious smile and a pink floral nightgown that I will never forget and would keep forever. Don't scare her, be calm, I said a few dozen times to myself.





On a rainy June 3, 2008 our little angel was coming home. We drove home as a family of four with a lifetime of stories ahead of us. As we arrived in our driveway it was again, to my utter joy, my father who came running with the camera, a grampy now for the second time. As we stood there on our front walk way, each child with only one boot on, smiling at my father as he snapped away I knew without a doubt this day was the epitomy of happiness.

This would be a surprise to them as we had not yet told our Inuit family that Cynthia had joined our family. Again, we nervously ascended the stairs at The Ottawa Inuit Children Center and again the smiles greeted us, the open arms around us...the hugs...the akaaluks. As tears and smiles followed her around the room our beautiful Cynthia, who stuck very close to her new brother who she had already discovered would take care of her, took her first steps. Her first step towards experiencing and learning her culture, in the city, in Ontario, with her non-Inuit parents.





Tallimat...

Surprise! And you are due when? I said with a mix of shock, overwhelming joy and a sudden case of the giggles. The beautiful Inuk woman, who was by now very familiar with my telephone voice, was bestowing the ultimate gift on our family...again. Without a second passing I smiled my biggest smile and began to tell the world. Completely in awe at the idea that fate would smile on me again, it began to sink in that we would soon be a beautiful family of five.

I was at my desk September 2, 2008. Not your average voicemail: she is in labour and will call you soon, we could have a baby in a few hours. My face was red, my hands shaking and I was positively bubbling over with excitement. Yet again I contemplated the arrival of a child through birth as compared to adoption. Was I in pain? No. Did I have to rush to a hospital? No. But I was in agony. I was in agony at the idea that a new life was coming into this world, a life that would call me mommy, and I was sitting at my desk 5 hours away. I gave up working and rushed home to do absolutely nothing but wait by the phone.





At 1:18am on September 3, I sat on my green sofa with the phone in my hand holding back tears. He just isn't doing well, he is only 4lbs and is struggling to breath. That is what a somewhat panicked voice said to me. I will call you when I know more. Then silence. Alone with my thoughts and willing the phone to ring again, all I could think of was that he was just too good to be true. Still, I prayed. And as it usually does, the light of morning brought better news.



He was doing well, thank God. For days I could hardly move but my 3 year old Katsua and my almost 2 year old Cynthia kept me busy and plenty hugged. This would be the first of many times that the smiles and laughter of my children would carry me through a difficult time. The news continued to get better and I began to breathe again for the first time in days. My tether to my new bundle was growing tighter and tighter and the urgency to have him home was all I could think about. He was a fighter. My extra tiny little surprise began getting stronger. Many things had to happen for him to arrive in this world, and stay in this world, and I was certain at that moment that he was to accomplish amazing things in his life.

A name is the beginning of your story. I wanted his name to be unique, I wanted his name to identify only him but I also wanted his name to honour pieces of his story. So my little Inuk bundle became known as Keenai John Michael. This name was complete. It was unique, it honoured my father and fulfilled a request from his birth family. His name would have stories that would give him strength and belonging. It would allow him to stand alone when he needed to, yet remind him where he came from. It was perfect. Now we just needed Keenai to come home.

Sixteen days of medical and administrative obstacles later, Keenai was on his way to us. Yet again I did not wait for my baby in the most traditional place, I waited in my driveway. My husband was on the road with his video camera, my family with me in the driveway and my father, ready with the camera. We weren't looking for a doctor, we were looking for a blue Toyota and willing the distance between Toronto and Ottawa to be as short as possible. At 7:30pm, Keenai arrived in our driveway for the very first time.

I kissed his head and sank into a moment I would never forget. Then, I grasped tightly to the warm bundle of blanket in my arms as I crouched down so Cynthia and Katsua could see Keenai for the first time. They were now siblings. Siblings who would be together forever. Siblings with the same ancestors. Siblings who were soon to ascend the steps of The Ottawa Inuit Children center together, for the first of a million times.

Then we all looked up to smile at my father as he took a picture that was to take it's permanent place hanging on our wall. We smiled our biggest smiles, and he became a grampy for the third time.





There were pumpkins everywhere. To this day when I see a pumpkin I am filled with joy. This was our first outing as a family of five. There was always something about leaving the house as a family for the first few times that accentuated our bond. Even in the huge pile of pumpkins at the pumpkin patch – we were together, a family, an awesome, beautiful family of five individuals who were all finally home.

Proudly Ananna...

As they were lighting the candles on my fortieth birthday cake, I was glowing inside. I had my three year old Katsua eagerly ready to beat me to the candles, my beautiful two year old Cynthia clinging close to my side, and my three month old tiny Keenai sleeping in his bucket. I was a mommy times three...and it was awesome. At that moment I recalled my 37th birthday wish and how I felt so much

older that day. When my children found me, I found myself. Now I change diapers, fix bo-bos, make a mean palauga and I always use an ulu to cut my pizza. Inuit day is a very big deal and, I have not said 'butterfly' in English for years. My friends all know what maktaq is and I can get you freshly hunted seal meat from Nunavut if you need it. I can do the laundry, make dinner and finish reports for work all at the same time, and I am the queen of stopping nose bleeds and controlling fevers. I know that I will cry everytime I see my sons drum and my head turns if I hear a child's voice say "annana". I also know, without a doubt, that an amauti with a doll in it is an absolute necessity for a four year old girl. My family is my foundation – my children, my husband, my mother, my sister and forever, my father. I also belong to a villag, a beautiful, loyal and deeply awesome village.

I know just how huge my family is and I know I will never have a problem and be alone, I know my children will never ever be alone.

...And without fail I cry everytime I hear a prayer in Inuktitut because it fills my heart and I know that guuiti ataata has blessed me.



