

First place, Nonfiction, Ages 14-18

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The Greatest Blessing We Could Ever Imagine

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It is Thanksgiving afternoon, but my mind is miles away from the bustle of pre-meal preparation in my aunt and uncle's suburban home. It is a scene of organized chaos, with adults busily preparing heaps of food as children play basketball out in the warm Florida sun. There is much talking and laughing, and the closeness of family is wrapped tight around us. We are all healthy and safe. There is so much to be thankful for, and yet we would soon be bestowed with an even greater gift.

I try to focus on setting the table, but all I can think of is *him*. As we all spoon turkey, cranberry sauce, and mashed potatoes on our plates, my mind wanders to his cute little nose. Even green beans (my favorite) cannot keep me from remembering his dazzling smile that makes the room light up. I pretend that I am laughing at my cousin's corny joke, but really, I am smiling at the thought of his deep brown eyes framed by long lashes, eagerly taking it all in. I can't help anxiously looking from the clock to my dad as the apple and pecan pie is sliced. When will we get the call? Even as the plates are cleared away, I see an impatience in my family's eyes. We cannot get our minds off of *him*.

Who am I describing? No, it is not a celebrity.

It is Jayden.

His smile? Well, it is toothless. In his short six-month-long life, he hasn't had much to smile about. His nose? It is a baby's sweet little nose, and has probably inhaled more cigarette smoke than I have in my entire life. His eyes? They are beautiful, and still the picture of innocence. We barely know him, but already we love him.

And then, the call comes.

It feels as though we have been waiting for centuries, but really it has been mere hours. My dad goes to pick up the beautiful baby we will foster. There is something about him; he is special. When he finally arrives, I feel as though I can breathe again. But why? I have barely ever met this baby, and now I suddenly can't spend a day without him? Maybe because even through the misery that he has endured, he immediately looks in your eyes and loves you. And I can't help doing the same to him.

It's been a crazy road since that Thanksgiving. How could I could have ever known that he would be my future baby brother? He was destined to be in our family from the beginning of our lives.

How could we know in December as people awkwardly cooed over him, not wanting to overdo it, because they figured our hearts would just be broken? How could we know as his grandfather prepared for the final home study that could take him away forever? How could we know as my mother stayed all night with him in All Children's Hospital for a respiratory virus as she would her own child? How could we know as we visited with awkward teenage parents who couldn't go thirty minutes without a smoke?

God never forgot little Jayden. He knew where this little boy always belonged.

On Christmas Eve, unbeknownst to us kids, my dad received a mysterious text from Jayden's birth father: "We can't take care of him." Two days later, the grandfather who had been wanting to gain guardianship asked if we would take him permanently. The road to adoption would soon begin. His young parents loved him enough that they did the best thing for him, though it might have been the hardest for them: they gave him a new family. It's hard to know what their definition of love really was, but they loved him enough to give him to a family who could not only love him with their whole hearts, but also care for him.

Some people might say that Jayden should have been the thankful one that Thanksgiving. He will grow up with four older brothers and sisters, two loving parents, and a complete network of support around him. But now, as a whole family, we can say that *we all* received the greatest blessing *we* could ever imagine.