

COURAGE
+
DREAMS

= Me

by Holly Love King, Tennessee

I've been a seedling far too often and for far too long. I've been leggy, sticking my neck out, searching for the sun, until all I have to show for it is a crick.

Maybe it's because at the ripe ole' age of 19, I became a mother. Or almost a mother. Not the one that gets to love her newborn baby, but the other kind—the one that must give it away and let another mother, a more "suitable" mother, raise her baby for her. A birth mother. The definition of seedling. Sprouted, sure. But blossomed into a mom? Not so fast. A seedling stuffed so full of love and heartache that she just sort-of got stuck that way.

Maybe blindsided is more like it. Grief that seemed to hit so hard I couldn't laugh, cry, or college-kid my way out of it. Grief that reeked of shame and shame that stuck like fear, a fear that lasted, well, decades. Afraid to be honest. And honestly, no single clue as to who or what I was or wanted to be. Other than a mother that almost was.

How could I dream when the only dream I almost had was lost? How could I do anything other than "die" and let the world and its labels not swallow me whole? So I did. And my dreams died right alongside. Except for one ... to be a mother.

Thankfully, I got to live my dream come true. Nine years later, I gave birth to a daughter and named her Scout. She is now 15, and I'm riding the joyous adventure of having a teenager. However, I got more than that. I also have a close relationship with the baby boy I placed for open adoption 25 years ago. His name is Andrew, and I often pinch myself. I even got a "bonus

baby" named Braden, my 12-year-old stepson.

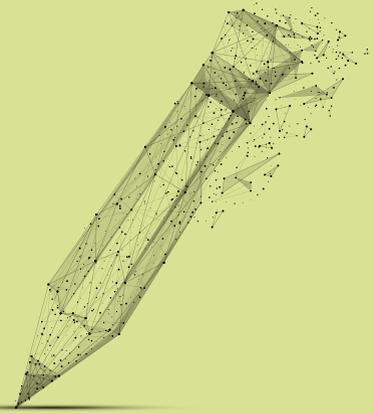
Yet decades later, I still feel like that little 19-year-old seedling. Trying to see past the brand of birth mom or now mom. I was so traumatized not getting to be a mom that my sole focus and life devotion has revolved around mothering.

In many ways, thanks to learning how to mother my children, I've also learned how to mother myself. I know when clothes don't fit anymore or the only way to jump off the diving board is to do it scared. I know it's time to seek courage and pursue it. Time for finding. Time for me.

And what I find are words. *My words*. In hundreds of journals and even in a self-published book. All over the walls of my heart. Words that have held me from middle school to menopause. I even choose a word for the year every New Year's Eve. I get quiet and ask the silence to speak. "What is my word for the year"? Then I write down the first word that comes to mind. 2022's word of the year? Dream.

So, dream I will. I'll dream of growing beyond sprout and into blossom. I'll re-pot this crowded seedling with some room to breathe. It's time for old leaves to fall and new shoots to take root. I'll look at my children, my abundant dreams come true, and remember I *do* have what it takes. They've taught me so. For buried deep within the walls of my mothering heart, I'm a writer. A writer of millions of words just waiting to be released. Words that today remind me yet again, courage + dreams = me ... a mother *and* a writer.

Holly shares, "In addition to being my daughter's Uber, I own my own housecleaning business and pursue writing. To learn more, visit HollyLoveKing.com."

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