

## The Gift of Hope

*Compassion isn't about solutions. It's about giving all the love that you've got.  
~Cheryl Strayed*

I looked down at the two lines on the pregnancy test, and my heart stopped. I had only recently graduated from college. I was married, but we were newlyweds, and my husband had just lost his job. I was working in a temporary position, struggling to find permanent, full-time employment. Having a child was a “someday plan”—and that day was supposed to be many years in the future.

A few weeks later, I had a bad day at work. My bus ran late, my report didn't save, I jammed the copier, and I accidentally left my lunch at home. On a typical day, these things would have been minor annoyances at best. Since my thoughts were already consumed by the possibility of being responsible for another life while struggling to take care of myself, they seemed completely overwhelming.

I started to tear up at my desk and made a dash for the women's restroom. Soon, I was in the middle of what could only be described as a nervous breakdown—loud, anguished, hormonal sobs complete with mascara running down my face. I hid in the stall, but the sound was impossible to disguise.

A handful of people entered the room, heard me crying, and left without saying a word. I didn't blame them. We've all been told that crying at work is unprofessional—even if it seems like your world is falling apart and you have no idea what to do next.

Then, one older woman to whom I'd only spoken a few times knocked on the door to the stall and handed me a tissue. Nobody I worked with knew I was pregnant at the time, but I told her everything between attempts to make myself look somewhat presentable.

I fully expected her to imply that I was careless and irresponsible for getting myself into such a predicament. It's the story I was telling myself, and women of her generation didn't seem to have such bad luck.

Instead, she gave me a hug and told me that everything would work out. She said that even if I didn't think I could handle the responsibility of an unplanned pregnancy, I was smarter and stronger than I gave myself credit for. She told me that if it was what I wanted, I would be a wonderful mother, and my baby would be the light of my life.

Later that day, I found an envelope on my desk. She had written a note wishing me well and enclosed what I suspect was all the cash from her purse. I cried again when I found it—only this time it was because I was relieved that someone believed I'd find a way to make things okay.

One of the things I bought with that money was a small Winnie-the-Pooh baby rattle. My son's a teenager now, but that rattle is one of my most prized possessions. Whenever I look at it, I'm reminded that hope is the most precious gift of all.

—Dana Hinders—