

A letter from Tatyana Rozhnova

Dear Friends,

Imagine leaving everything you have ever known for the first four years of your life with two strangers who don't even speak your language. That was my experience when I was adopted from a Russian orphanage. I still remember my panic on the plane when I realized I had no way to communicate with them.

I never felt loved in the thirteen years between saying goodbye to my best friend Anya at the orphanage and coming to *New Beginnings*.

I didn't bond with my adoptive parents and started running away in third grade. My parents' response was to lock me in a room. I was isolated and miserable. When I was thirteen, my adoption was officially designated as a failure, and I entered the foster system, living in twelve places and attending eight different schools in five years.

When I finally got to *New Beginnings*, I felt more at home there than with foster families. I knew how to live in a group setting from the orphanage, but I am still learning about living in a family. I appreciated the structure, although the staff might not have thought so from the way I acted! I was always trying to sneak away and missed a lot of outings because of my behavior.

The other girls made me feel like I was part of a sisterhood. Just like sisters, we hated and loved each other at the same time. The staff taught us how to do our hair and cook and so many other life skills I had missed out on. They were our cheerleaders, encouraging us when things were hard. They worked to make holidays special, particularly for girls like me with no family.

Looking back, I clearly see what a pivotal role the staff played in my transition to adulthood. They gave me perspective about my situation and helped me understand that I wasn't the only person with a traumatic past. And they listened, always without judgment.

Fifteen years later, I have an even deeper appreciation for the safety and acceptance I finally found at *New Beginnings*. I have my GED and have worked toward a college degree. I work full-time, and I have the privilege and honor of serving on the Lighthouse Board, where I can advocate for the youth they serve. I've learned as much from my board service as I did from the *New Beginnings* staff.

I am excited about Lighthouse's plans for moving *New Beginnings* to a better and larger facility. I want more girls to have the same opportunity for a second chance that I did!

Sincerely,

Tatyana Rozhnova