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# Ona and Andra's Story

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It started for me when I heard a song that she loved and realized that I was probably the only person that knew that that song meant something to her. I think it was 'My Baby Love's Loving.' And then I started thinking about how few people remembered her and that that maybe wasn't good enough. And then I started just wanting to know more about her. The more I found out, the more I needed to find out. So, I just kept searching and kept writing what I remembered and putting it together.

So, we grew up in Far Rockaway, Queens. She was six years older than I and adopted into our family. I adored my big sister and followed her everywhere. She was always in trouble in our family. She began running away when she was 12 and I was six. I didn't know where she was when she ran away. I missed her terribly, but I don't think that I knew to be curious at that point. She was either home or she wasn't home and I wanted her home. My parents started saying, 'if this keeps up,' you know, just kind of normal, typical teenage acting out—smoking, running with guys, and running away. They said she was wild, that was how they interpreted it. They didn't look at the way she was treated in the family. And I witnessed a lot. There was a real lack of compassion for her, especially coming from my mother. I now understand that she really had a reason to run away. And to look for something outside our family.

At the time, I was told running away was just another thing she did because she was wild and uncontrollable. So, they started threatening to send her away. They sent her away when I was in first grade. I remember being really excited to see where she lived because when I tried to picture it I couldn't. I just pictured all these teenage girls in a row — like a row of Barbie dolls in stasis. So, to actually see her in a physical place was interesting to me. I remember her talking to my parents and I couldn't stop touching her hair until she told me to stop because I was annoying her. I remember that she'd made a suede choker in arts and crafts and she was wearing it. I begged her to let me wear [the choker] and it was kind of big on me, but I begged her to let me keep it — and she did. I remember meeting a friend of hers in the bathroom and the friend kind of looking at us together in the mirror and saying, 'Oh yeah, I can tell you're sisters.' We were kind of smiling at that because she was adopted. So, we weren't blood sisters, but we liked that she made that connection — that she saw that.

I have photographs from two visits, which I can tell because the outfits change. She seems happy; there's a glow about her in these photos that isn't there in other photos. And she looks beautiful in a way that she blossomed into her beauty while she was there. She found her style. She'd found a confidence about her. The families that the kids created explains it. They created a support system and I think she must have had love there. She was a very sexual person very early on and I think she would've been really comfortable taking a role as somebody's wife in that imagined family. I do believe that she managed to find community there and some kind of familial and romantic happiness.