American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Advocating for adoption through her personal story

11/22/2019

When Shelby Jenkin's was 11 years old, her mother told her she was adopted. Shelby put it in the back of her mind, not really grasping what it meant. The Miami International Airport (MIA)-based flight attendant said she learned that when she was an infant, her biological mother left her at a caregiver's house and never returned. Today, Shelby shares her story in hopes others can see how adoption has shaped her life and led her down the path of helping others.

"My parents gave me an amazing life," Shelby said. "I grew up in Miami, and, after high school, I went to college at Kentucky State University on a legacy scholarship." While there, Shelby joined a sorority and was named Miss Kappa Kappa Psi. She was also the band fraternity queen and joined the dance team where she flourished. While competing in dance she decided to pursue pageantry. She thrived in the pageant world and loved being a part of something that gave her an opportunity to share her voice. In 2012, Shelby competed in and won Miss Black Kentucky USA. After graduating, she took a job at Baylor Hospital in Dallas and continued competing, winning another title in 2016 — Miss Texas US International.

"Part of pageantry includes having a platform," Shelby said. "When I thought about what set me apart from the other contestants, and where I could make a difference, I remembered the conversation I had with my mother 10 years earlier. I knew my story could help the community understand that you can positively impact a child's life through adoption and show them a world outside of foster care."

Utilizing today's online DNA technology and public records, Shelby began to learn about her heritage.

She remembers the day she got the results. "As a proud African American, you could imagine my surprise when I discovered I was not African American, but Afro-Cuban," she said. But that wasn't Shelby's only surprise. "I always

thought my birthday was July 12. Turns out when the adoption agency was producing my papers, they had to come up with a birthdate and picked a day in the middle of the year — July, 12. I don't know anyone else that can honestly say they don't know when their birthday is." Being based out of MIA, Shelby gets the opportunity to discover and familiarize herself with her newfound heritage through her work travels. "Servicing flights to Cuba and South America, I'm able to learn more about my Hispanic culture that I never knew about, and I'm so grateful for that."

While Shelby was unable to find any information about her mother, she doesn't let that discourage her. "There seems to be a stigma surrounding adoption," Shelby said. "A woman once shared with me that she was so ashamed of her adoption, she couldn't even tell her husband. I want her and others to know that adoption is part of our story, and we should be proud of it. We can use it as an opportunity to teach others about unconditional love and sacrifice."

MIA-based Flight Attendant Shelby Jenkins joined the American Airlines team in November 2016.

November is Adoption Awareness Month

Nearly three years ago, American Airlines launched an adoption assistance program for team members, which includes financial assistance amongst other expenses. Team members can also receive two roundtrip tickets if they need to travel to take custody of their new family member. This program has been instrumental in making the adoption process more seamless for team members and their families. The adoption assistance program has helped nearly 60 team members in the last three years.