



Stories from the Adoption Circle



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INTRODUCTION

Stories from the Adoptive Circle:

Remembrances and Perspectives of Birth Parents, Adoptees, Adoptive Parents, and Connected Others

I have chosen to present personal stories from what I call the “adoption circle”. It is a circle and in the center of the circle is the adoptee. It has become apparent to me over the 40 plus years that I have been working in the field of child and family welfare, that each of the folks around the circle touch the life of the adopted child and the child touches the lives of each of the members of the circle. A lot has been learned over the years about the effects of adoption. And those effects and experiences vary from positive to negative and everything in between. No two stories are identical even when they come from the same family, because everyone experiences the growing of family by adoption differently, even if the persons occupy the same space within the circle. My reasons for choosing to gather personal stories comes from the desire to have folks share with one another their experience in a very honest way. In the “ask” I did not set any parameters about what one could talk about, nor did I choose one story over another. All of the stories that were submitted are featured in this publication. Several of the submissions are by known professionals who themselves have lived the life experience of foster and/or adoptive children and as an adoptive parent. It is my hope that these writings will reach others in the adoption circle; those curious about adoption and how the members of the circle cope, and also, perhaps, be a springboard for formal or informal support groups.

For more, visit <https://theadoptioncircle.org> where we will continue to share stories of the adoption circle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Storytellers:

With much gratitude to all who have written your stories: birth parents, adoptees, adoptive parents, and connected others. You have shared with all who read this book your feelings of pain, your challenges and your joys. And in doing this, you will continue, to bring more understanding, connection and healing to those within the adoption circle and those who are considering joining it. Thank you!

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PROLOGUE

Adoption is defined as “the action of legally taking another’s child and bringing it up as one’s own”. In reality it is so much more...it begins perhaps in a hospital, in Court, a decision made in the middle of the night. A decision made with love and courage, often with uncertainty (for the seen and the unseen) and almost assuredly, with a sense of loss. These stories from the adoption circle, share each person’s side of the story, each person’s truth. The stories reach across years and are stories of circumstance, grief, resilience, connection, and, even in some cases, reconnection.

BIRTH PARENTS



Often times, when talking about adoption, the focus is on the adoptive parents. It is so very important however, to also hear the voices and stories of birth parent. They tell the stories of our children's beginnings and yes, their sacrifices because their lives are forever affected by the act of "giving" and NOT what is traditionally and wrongly labeled, "giving up".

1972 BIRTH MOTHER ADOPTION STORY

Over time, I have come to realize my story is not unique. There are so many things to write about from this experience, it is hard to know where to begin. In 1971 my father and mother took sabbaticals from their teaching jobs in Indiana and moved us to a small island in Michigan where they taught school for a year. In my family I was the oldest girl, with one sister and five brothers. We were an Irish Catholic family that went to church every Sunday. There are a lot of circumstances that led to my pregnancy, but they can be summed up by the idea of two love struck teenagers that thought they were ready for sex and the world. The reaction of my parents was to follow the church and society's recommendation that I be banished, sent away and upon the birth of my child, he was to be taken from me and given to someone else. I was then expected to return to high school, with a well-rehearsed lie to tell and a secret to keep. No one in the family was to talk about it. Silence and Pain.

I was initially sent to live with an aunt and uncle. Restarted high school in yet another location as a "pregnant and troubled teen". Friends at this point were non-existent. I was heartbroken and lonely. Every effort was made to keep me from my boyfriend and other friends he and I had in common. My Aunt and Uncle were not as successful at that as my parents had hoped. So when the semester ended, I was removed from there and moved to a Catholic home for unwed mothers back in Indiana where I waited out my pregnancy.

They had counseling for us "sinners" and lots of opportunities to go to Mass and confession. I refused both and found a few friends within the home. The take-away from counseling and input from my parents was if I did not agree to 'adoption' as a solution to my situation, I was on my own and my son would be ostracized for his entire life. Statements like "he would be known as a bastard", or "if you keep him, you can't come home".

At 15 and no prospect of family support, I began seriously thinking about how I would feed him and manage as a single mother, with no job, and no education or job training. During my time at the Home. I stayed enrolled in high school classes in an effort to stay on track to finish my education and maybe.....

In my time at the Home, I only saw two young women leave with their babies. One was in her 20's and the other was a Black girl whose family did not believe in letting someone else take the baby. She had a big family that embraced the

child-mother and the child. The latter was a scenario I prayed for, but it was not to be.

I must admit that many of my notions, plans and thoughts at this time were the musings of an adolescent with no real clue how tough the world could be.

The time came for birth. We did have a series of classes of how to get through labor. Each of us went as friends with one of the others as they gave birth, for their support as well as our education for what to expect.

My due date came and went and eventually I was taken in to be induced. The friend I took with me to the hospital started to feel sick and they took her back to the Home. I was now on my own, scared and determined to do this without screaming. I had heard quite a lot of that in labor and delivery. I was given a Spinal and with the help of forceps, my 10lb. baby boy was born. I insisted that he be shown to me and I could hold him.

When I returned to the Home, I developed a fever and a kidney infection. It gave me time. During the next 8 days, I made my way to the nursery on site, (yes, the babies were in a nursery at the Home).

I was able to hold, rock, bottle feed, nuzzle and imprint as much as I could on my son. Now knowing that we were to be separated soon.

I had learned to knit and crochet during my stay and made several blankets and small hats for him. I took them to the nursery and wrapped myself and him in these objects and asked them to make sure they went with him to his new family. I found out later this didn't happen.

I was finally over the infection and deemed well enough to leave. The decision was finally due and made in favor of leaving him behind and going home. I prayed he would have a good life and I gave him a strong name in hopes it would protect him. This too would not go with him into adoption.

I started back over again in my old high school with a made-up story about where I had been and why.

I'm not sure any more what the time frame was but some months went by before final papers were signed. I kept holding out hope that my parents would reconsider and bring him into the family. Of course there were no conversations, no discussion, only silence and pain. Lots of crying at night, my sister knew because we shared a room. Once she went to my parents concerned and my mother came and sat by my bed. She said nothing.

The day came, I signed final papers and stopped crying. Silence. I prayed he would have a good family but had nightmares of that not being the case. I had

nightmares of him being abused or even dead. Pain.

I learned to compartmentalize my emotions and fears. I stopped crying. I learned to swallow my tears, my fears, and becoming numb I could move on. The next few years my effort to stay on track with my education paid off and graduated high school on time. I made friends, and in keeping with my compartmentalizing, I had two groups of friends. My girlfriends I got goofy with, and my stoner friends that I got high with.

I went back to the Island in Michigan to work for the summer after graduating. I met the man I am still married to today, 50 years later. I stayed away from my first love on the Island. I couldn't bear to speak to him or meet with him until some 30 years after.

When I told my secret to the man I was going to marry, he didn't run away and his first words were, "is it too late, can we go get him?" I realized that no matter what my fears were, I couldn't "go get him". I wouldn't do that to a child that only knew another mother for two years or to the woman that considered him hers. I had already had my child taken from me I would not consider inflicting that on another. I found out many years later that his adoptive mother had great fears that I would try to take him back and slept on the floor in his room many nights.

My parents once again tried to interfere with my relationship with my fiancé' and were reluctant to give their blessings for a wedding. We went through three marriage licenses for three years before we actually got married. It was a rough time with them, and I stayed away as much as possible. The story now became about me finishing my degree and getting married and settling down.

The two years between the birth of my son, meeting my husband and telling my secret for the first time were filled with lots of acting out. Sex, drugs, concerts, hitchhiking, and basically all things that risked my wellbeing. It was a double life because I managed to stay in school. I was a pro at telling lies about what I was doing and who I was with. My stoner friends were a wild bunch.

A year after getting married I was pregnant with my oldest daughter and focused on caring for her. All the time feeling the guilt of having given up my son. One and a half years later, another daughter was born. I tried to be a good Mom. I had lots of support from my friends at the time. One friend asked me why I was such a helicopter mom and kept trying to get me to relax. I never let anyone babysit my daughters until they were three and four. My parents were struggling with the fact that I would not let them be with or babysit them

without me. My underlying fear that my daughters would be taken from me helped pus the decision to move 1,000 miles from my parents. I had lot of practice starting over and making new friends.

I was also doing my best to keep moving forward in my life. My son's birthday would always bring anywhere from a day to a week of melancholy and sadness every year. As my daughters grew up, they began to notice. My husband was understanding. Eventually when the girls were 11 and 12, I told them they had a brother.

The Search:

When my son was 18, I knew it would be possible to contact him. I tried and I kept hitting walls within the system. I finally filled out the proper paperwork and got it to the right desk to let him know I was open to his contacting me. That's how it went. Only if he was looking, would I be contacted or notified. I never heard anything.

Another 18 years went by and my daughters and husband encouraged me to try again. I did and found out that all the records at the maternity home had been destroyed. I can't remember if it was a fire or flood, but they had no record of my request or his birth. A wonderful individual at the Home explained that the laws had changed, and I could get his records at the State level. She gave me the information to accomplish this. She said that the diocese also had a private investigator I could hire that specialized in finding the adoptive parents and children if I couldn't get the information I needed. Once again, I filled out all the required papers to get the information and sent it to the proper department at the State. Before I knew it, I had his birth certificate in my hands, along with the adoption records and address of his adoptive parents. When it arrived, I sat in my home office and cried. Now with his new name, I had the ability to find him. The internet was a wonderful help in all of this. I found his address and phone number. I think he was about 35 years old. I kept it on top of my desk and did nothing for weeks.

I finally decided to write him a letter; six week went by, and I heard nothing. One evening I sat in my office looking at the information and was exhausted from work. I picked up the phone and called my son. His wife answered the phone. Her excitement and astonishment was palpable. My son would not speak to me, but his wife did. She explained that they had moved and the letter I wrote 6 weeks earlier had just shown up in their mail that day. They went to the

internet and looked me up. They had both been sitting at computer looking at my business website when I called. What had been strictly a coincidence took on a supernatural nature. We laugh about that now.

My Son:

My son's wife became the conduit to my son and she gave me all kinds of information, history, pictures, and solace. I started to email my son and separately his wife. She always answered. He did not at that point. I found out he was in counseling because he had tried to commit suicide a few years prior. He had a reoccurring nightmare most of his life of being thrown over a cliff. He was diagnosed by his therapist of having "non-attachment disorder". I had never heard of this but tried to find out as much as I could so I could understand him. His adoption history as his wife described it was complicated and played into his situation. I was told he went to a foster home from the maternity home. He spent about two weeks there before being turned over to new adoptive parents. They were thrilled to finally be parents. His adoptive mother had numerous miscarriages and didn't seem to be able to carry a pregnancy to full term. Two years after the adoption, his mother found herself pregnant again and very sick. Unable to care for a toddler, he was at that point sent to a cousin's home. After his sister was born, he was brought home for a short while. As a curious toddler, one night he crawled into his sister's crib. His mother was terrified he would hurt her, so once again sent him away. This time to his grandparents. He became very close to his grandfather and his adoptive dad. At four years old, his grandfather died, more separation. Having thrown myself into raising my daughters, I had learned the importance of the bonding of newborns to parents and family. I understood his non-attachment now.

Back with his adoptive family he was raised in the Catholic church, went to a Catholic School and lived a typical midwestern, small-town life. He went to college and met a girl and got married. He couldn't seem to stay in that relationship, had affairs and the divorced. His current wife had been a high school sweetheart and had gone off to college, married, had two sons, divorced, and came back to the small town. They rekindled their relationship and are still married now.

Back To My Story...

I was rushing around one evening trying to get out the door to go to a party with

my husband. The phone rang, so I ran back in to get it. It was my son. I sat down and for the first time, we talked, for almost an hour. It was like I had known him forever.

After a few months of calling him every Sunday, the honeymoon began to fade, and we called less often. By the end of that year, he and his wife came to visit. They arrived on Christmas night to meet us. We had postponed Christmas Day and dinner until the following day to include them. We had room for them at our house, but they hedged their bets and stayed in a hotel. My daughters, his sisters, welcomed him with open arms. I will be forever grateful to his wife for being the conduit to his heart and being instrumental in our reunion. She told me the nightmares had subsided, and he seemed more present. I credit his wife and therapist for this, but I hoped his knowing me helped as well.

My son eventually met all my siblings and when lined up with my brothers, he looked like the youngest of the same family. They also welcomed him. My parents welcomed him, but made no apologies, ever, for their decision to let go of their first grandchild. They did, however, support my looking for him and bringing him home finally.

I gave him the information I had on his bio-dad. I reminded him, I knew his bio-dad for a very short time as a teenager so could not tell him much about him as a grown up man. He has gone on to meet his dad and has become part of their family as well. It seems he has attachments now, everywhere. I feel good about that.

The one event that seriously turned his emotional life around was the birth of his own daughter. It is the strongest attachment. As he explained it, after years of feeling completely singular and adrift even while married and raising stepsons, finding his biological family, his daughter was his blood, and he was now attached.

There is so much more to all of this. We are like families everywhere now. We disagree politically, on religious matters, and differ in lifestyles. We, however, love each other, and that love keeps us together and makes us a family. I am proud of my son and his accomplishments. I love his family.

One thing I want to mention, as I met his adoptive parents. I thanked them for their love and care of my son. They thanked me for giving them the opportunity to be his parents. I had already decided I would not refer to myself as Mom, only by my name. he had parents and out of respect for them, I would not try to usurp that position. His adoptive mother has since passed, but I still refer to her as his

mom.

I remind my son I love him and always have. I end every conversation with “I love you” or “I love you all”. If I never hear it, it’s ok, I don’t require it to be grateful he is a part of my life and part of the family.

The story is not finished. The experience is my own. However, I have met many other women with similar experiences. Maybe our stories are unique to ourselves, but as women come forward more and more, I find we were not sinners and misfits. Just girls that made a mistake and paid the full price for this. So did our children. The other women I know have sought out their children and found them. One has always been in touch through open adoption. Two young women that worked for me were both adopted through the same agency and had their own stories. The women my age had similar experiences to mine, but through perseverance have re-united or at least have contact with their children.

DIANNE

At sixteen, Dianne and her then-boyfriend Chet got pregnant and had a baby boy named Christopher. They lived in Los Angeles, California. With the support of her parents, Dianne managed to graduate high school while raising her son. At eighteen, Dianne was a high school graduate with a two-year-old son. Sadly, Chet decided he wasn't ready for the responsibility of fatherhood and left to pursue his own adventures, unaware that Dianne was pregnant again—with another baby boy.

It was the 1960s. Dianne was an unwed mother with one child at home and another on the way. She didn't have a steady job, but she had the love and support of her parents, Chester and Ada, who stepped in to help raise young Chris while Dianne went away to what was known then as a 'pregnant girls' camp.'

In those days, unwed pregnancy was a source of shame. Families often sent daughters away to carry their pregnancies in secret, avoiding community judgment and stigma. Dianne spent months in that camp, writing letters and wrestling with the hardest decision of her life.

Dear Mom and Dad, I'm so sorry I've put you in this position. I'm so lost and confused that I don't know what to do. I love Christopher and adore him as my son, but being single and raising a boy is going to be difficult enough, let alone bringing another baby boy into the house. I love him too as he grows inside of me, but I can't help but wonder, with no husband, no career, and only 18 years old, I don't know how in the world I will be able to raise two boys on my own. Please help me decide what to do.

The letter continued... *If I put him up for adoption because he deserves a life that I can't give him, he will never know how much I love him, and I will wonder where he is and how he's doing every day for the rest of my life. I will never see him again. On the other hand, if I keep him and Chris, I will likely struggle for a long time, if not the rest of my life. I won't be able to provide the type of life they both deserve.*

Her parents assured her they would love and support her no matter what she decided, but sadly, they could not decide for her.

Because of her family's religious beliefs, Dianne had only two choices: raise the baby herself or place him for adoption. Abortion was illegal and never considered. She prayed deeply, and with a heavy heart, chose adoption—hoping to give her son a better life than she felt she could provide.

We read in the bible that “Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for another.” I’m no biblical scholar, but I have to believe the decision of a mother to give up a child that had been growing inside her for 9 months might be more painful than death and potentially exhibit even greater love than dying. I know that without hesitation if saving one of my children meant giving up my life, start planning the funeral. But ask me to give one of them up? Ultimately, Dianne chose the most loving, selfless act she could for her baby boy. She gave up her life with him so that he might have a chance at a better life that she knew she couldn’t provide, so she gave him up for adoption.

ON THE OCCASION OF HER 34TH BIRTHDAY

"I'm glad you exist," the woman said.

Thirty-four years before this day, I was sixteen years old and seven months pregnant. It's hard to be a pregnant teenage girl. Challenging enough because of the hormones like punk rockers at a rave. But the worst part was the shame. Shame came from every direction. Societally, we behave as if a pregnant teenage girl is one of the worst things that could possibly happen. I felt the full weight of the scorn and shame. I felt it at school, at home, in the community. I felt it from the pro-life advocates who left little plastic models of fetuses to convince me to choose life. It was dark and heavy and lonely. And I internalized it all. I was ashamed. So much so that once I decided to have the baby, I also decided that I wanted to go away for the duration of the pregnancy.

I moved to an institution that housed and cared for pregnant teens. It was seventy miles or so away from home. Once, when the staff took a group of us to the mall, some woman approached us and asked if we had a contagious disease.

We couldn't escape the shame that came along with our condition.

I had decided that the best thing I could do was to let someone adopt my baby. I was so young and my home life had been so hard. I wanted this child to have safety and stability. I wanted a different kind of life for both of us than the one I had grown up with. I knew it would be hard and I knew it would be best.

My water broke about six weeks before my due date. People at home had to scramble to get there. We had all been planning for this child to be born in April, but here it was early March and I was heading to the hospital.

The baby was early and small. The medical staff was attending to her and no one thought to share any information.

"She's having trouble breathing so we need to take her...." I don't remember what they said. I didn't get a look at her. They whisked her away.

When I was able, I visited the NICU. She was tiny and jaundiced, in an incubator with electrodes and wires attached to her everywhere. I reached in to touch her but I was too afraid to hold her. Too afraid to let myself fall in love with her.

She was still in the hospital when I was released. Before we could finalize the adoption, I developed a kidney infection and had to go back into the hospital. A different hospital this time, not the one where my baby was still receiving intensive care.

She was 12 or 13 days old before I could sign the papers. That day is a blur in my memory. I signed for what seemed like hours.

The only word I remember is irrevocable. It reverberated in my brain.

Irrevocable. There would be no going back. My signature on this paper meant this baby would not be mine. Through blinding tears, I signed.

Then I went to the hospital, and I held that girl in my arms for the first time. She was so tiny. I wondered what her life would be like, what her parents would be like. I held her and said goodbye. I sobbed as we left. I still sob every time I recall that day.

There's no way to explain what it's like to be the birth mom of an adopted child.

Our adoption was closed, which meant I didn't know where she was. Her birthdays and Mothers Days were particularly difficult. I wondered how she was. Was she happy? Were her parents good? Was she well? I learned to live with the ache of not knowing. And over the years, I convinced myself that I would not try to find her. I wanted her life to be so comfortable and safe and whole that she had no need to know about me. And, truth be told, I never wanted to risk her saying that she didn't want to know.

It was my mom who instigated the attempt to contact her. A letter to the adoption agency prompted them to inform her that there were notes and cards from her birth family in her file and what did she want them to do with those things.

Not long after we got a letter from her. Her name is Kate. It was a wonderful letter, full of reassurances about her happy life with her family.

Not long after that, we met her for the first time.

A couple years after that, I got to go to her wedding.

And last summer, I got to spend a little time alone with her for the first time ever. Something magical happened in that visit. We became aware of, or realized more, how we belong to each other.

And on the day of her dissertation defense, one of her committee members said, "I'm glad you exist."

Kate had invited me to be there, saying she wanted "her people" in the room. I love being her people.

Kate, of course, did excellent work. The kind that displays the author's heart on every page. She thinks teachers of every subject should also teach people to take the perspective of the "other." I love that this is her work in the world.

After they announced that Kate is a new PhD, her adviser said some words of affirmation to her. It is such a deep joy to watch people appreciate her. And then he turned to us, her community. And I cannot remember the words he said because in that moment of inclusion and pride, the shackles of shame fell away.

One cannot be proud and ashamed at the same time. And there is nothing in me that is ashamed at all that this beautiful human exists and is offering her heart for the betterment of the world.

Tomorrow is her birthday. A day when we celebrate this amazing woman. This woman that I love more than my own life. This woman who knows instinctively that there is no "other"; there is only us. This woman who will change the world one moment at a time simply by showing up and being present. This woman who sets me free.

ADOPTTEES



The voices and perspectives of those who are truly, the middle of the adoption circle.

The perceptions and insights of the adoptees are critical for the understanding of the effects of the whole adoption experience.

I IMAGINED I DID A TED TALK: A LETTER TO MY BIRTH FATHER BY JEANETTE YOFFE

I can picture it so clearly. I'm standing on a brightly lit stage, the iconic red TED letters behind me, a folded piece of paper trembling in my hand. My heart races, but I breathe in deeply, centering myself. I step forward into the light.

"This" I would say, holding up a letter, "is the letter I wrote to my birth father... I never sent it. Not because I didn't want to, but because I knew he wouldn't read it. He couldn't."

I'd pause, letting the words settle over the audience.

"My father rejected me—more times than I can count since I found him at the age of 17. And every rejection felt like the ground gave way beneath me, sending me spiraling into a void of questions: Why? What did I do wrong? Am I not enough? It took me years to realize his rejection wasn't about me. It was about him—his grief, his unresolved trauma. His pain from losing my birth mother, Celia, to mental illness.

You see, when my mother was hospitalized, her mental illness and absence consumed him. He couldn't handle the weight of it all—the grief, the guilt, the responsibility—and he made a decision to place us in foster care which left my brother and me to navigate the system separately, in two different homes. It wasn't that our birth father didn't love us; he just didn't know how to survive his own pain."

I'd glance at the audience, feeling their quiet attention.

"Rejection is a wound, isn't it? It cuts deeper than we often admit. For a child, it's not just a no; it's a message that echoes: You are not enough.

When my father turned away from me, it wasn't just his presence I lost. I lost a piece of myself. For years, I believed I could win his love—if I tried hard enough, loved him enough, proved myself enough. But here's the truth I had to learn: Rejection is rarely personal. My father's grief was a storm he didn't know how to weather. He couldn't look at me and see his daughter because, when he looked at me, he saw her. My birth mother. Her smile, her struggles, her loss.

And that was too much for him to bear."

I'd take a breath, grounding myself in the memory of the moment I began to understand.

“It took me years to see that his rejection wasn’t about my worth but about his wounds. When I finally stopped asking, why doesn’t he love me? and started asking, Why doesn’t he love himself enough to let me in? everything changed. That shift didn’t take the pain away, but it gave me something I desperately needed: perspective. Compassion.

I saw that I wasn’t the only one living in the shadow of rejection, grief, and trauma. That realization became my purpose.

That’s how I founded Celia Center, which I named after my mother, as a place for people connected to foster care and adoption to share their stories, their wounds, and their healing journeys. It’s a space where we acknowledge the ripple effects of trauma and celebrate the resilience of those who refuse to let it define them.” I’d hold the audience’s gaze, sharing the tool that changed me.

“Here’s one of my favorite interventions: the Self-Forgiveness Pool. It’s an exercise where participants write down their guilt, shame, or regret on dissolvable paper. Then place three rocks with words of strength written on them in a bowl of water. Then they immerse the paper in water, watching their shame or guilt dissolve and they are left with the essence of their strengths.

It’s simple, but it’s transformative. The act of seeing your pain literally disappear creates space for self-compassion. It’s a way to let go of what weighs us down and make room for something new.

Because healing isn’t just about forgetting—it’s about transforming.”

I’d then pause, looking at the folded paper in my hands.

“In this letter, I wrote everything I never got to say to my father. Let me share it with you.”

I’d open it, my voice soft but steady.

“Dear Dad,

I wish you could see me. Not as the reflection of your pain, but as me. Your daughter.

I wish you could know how much I’ve forgiven you. How much I’ve learned from your silence. How much I still love you, even now.

And most of all, I wish you could forgive yourself. Because your pain isn’t your fault, but your healing is your responsibility.

Love always,

Your daughter.”

I’d look up, folding the letter gently.

And then, I’d close with what I wish someone had told me years ago.

“If you’ve ever felt the sting of rejection, know this: You are not defined by who walks away from you. You are defined by how you rise, how you love, and how you heal.

Rejection doesn’t have to be the end of your story. It can be the beginning of something new. A choice to confront your pain, to forgive, and to create space for healing—not just for others, but for yourself.

Together, we can break the cycle. Let’s choose healing.”

I imagine the audience applauding, the warmth of their connection filling the room. In that moment, I’d know I’d shared not just my story, but a message of hope and resilience for anyone who’s ever carried the weight of rejection.

I am thankful, tearful and hopeful...

A TAPESTRY OF LOVE: MY JOURNEY AS ADOPTEE, ADOPTIVE PARENT, AND BIOLOGICAL PARENT

There is a saying that family is not defined by our blood but by the bonds we create. As someone who has stood on all sides of the adoption triad—adopted child, adoptive parent, and biological parent—I have come to see the truth in this sentiment. Each role has shaped me, softened me, and brought me to a deeper understanding of love and connection.

The Adoptee's Beginning

I was too young to recall the moment I left one family and entered another. But even in the absence of memory, the body remembers. The longing for belonging lived in my bones. I felt it in the quiet moments when my mind wandered, and I wondered about the people who came before me—the ones whose faces I might never see but whose echoes I carried in my DNA.

Growing up, I was surrounded by love, yet there were times when love alone couldn't answer the questions in my heart. "Who am I really?" I'd ask in fleeting moments of reflection. The love from my adoptive parents held me, but the absence of biological connection created shadows I couldn't ignore.

Stepping into Parenthood

Becoming a biological parent was my first glimpse into the other side of the story. I watched in awe as my child, flesh of my flesh, mirrored parts of me I didn't know were there. The way she smiled, the arch of her brow—each feature felt like a revelation. But with this connection came a wave of realization. I began to feel the weight of what my birth parents might have carried—the complex love and grief intertwined in separation.

This insight softened the edges of my own questions. I was beginning to understand the silent sacrifices that shape the adoption experience.

Choosing Adoption Again

Years later, life led me to adoption, but this time I was not the child but the parent. I thought my journey as an adoptee would prepare me. I believed my

experiences could shield my adopted child from the unknowns I once faced. Yet, I quickly learned that love alone—though powerful—does not erase the layers of grief, fear, and longing that adoption weaves into a child's heart.

My adopted child brought with them a story I could not fully rewrite. I could hold space, but I could not erase the echoes of their past. And in that realization, I found a strange peace. I didn't need to be the whole story—just a steady chapter.

Healing Through Connection

Parenting, I have come to realize, is less about fixing and more about showing up. It's about bearing witness to another's journey while carrying your own. As an adoptee, I sought answers. As an adoptive parent, I learned to sit in the unknown. As a biological parent, I saw the power of shared history.

These experiences have woven together a tapestry of understanding. Each thread—whether frayed or whole—contributes to the larger picture of my life. I have learned that while adoption begins with loss, it can also blossom into belonging. To those who walk this path—whether as adoptees, adoptive parents, or birth parents—know this: Our stories are complex, but they are also beautiful. Each role carries a gift, and together, they form the intricate fabric of family.

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MY ADOPTION STORY: A JOURNEY OF GRATITUDE AND IDENTITY

I was adopted when I was just three weeks old. My birthparents were only teenagers—16 and 17—and unprepared to raise a child. They weren't married and didn't stay together. From the beginning, I've always referred to them as my birthparents, because that's what they are to me: people who gave me life, but not the ones who raised me. That role, and every ounce of love and sacrifice that came with it, belongs to the people I call my parents.

My adoptive parents are two of the most loving, steady, and inspiring people I've ever known. They had struggled with infertility for years, enduring at least one heartbreaking miscarriage before they adopted me. Their longing to become parents never wavered, and the way they loved me—from the moment I was placed in their arms—felt deep and unconditional. They've now been married for over fifty years and are still very much in love. Watching their marriage has been a blueprint for how love should look: grounded in patience, partnership, and care.

When I was four, my parents adopted my younger brother. Our family was complete in many ways, but I often felt like an outsider among them. I didn't share many of their traits, interests, or even the way they processed emotions. As I grew older, I began to sense just how much of who we are is shaped by genetics. I often felt chaotic inside—restless, lost, and at times empty. It wasn't something my parents could fix, but they never stopped loving me. Even when we didn't quite “get” each other, I always felt their love was unwavering.

What grounded me most through my life was the moral compass my parents helped instill in me. When faced with tough decisions, I often asked myself, “What would my mom and dad do?” That question has steered me through some of life's hardest choices. Their values—compassion, honesty, responsibility—are embedded in me, even if my personality sometimes feels like it came from a different world.

When I was 42, I finally decided to explore that other world—my biological roots. I signed up for 23andMe, and through it, I found a birth half-sister. We met, and together we tracked down our birthfather. I met him, he shared the name of my birthmother, and I reached out to her as well. We chatted a few times

over text. It was strange but also settling. I learned I have three biological half-sisters and three half-brothers. I don't have an active relationship with any of them, but I'm glad I know they exist. The only biological relative I stay in touch with is my birthfather—we text every few months to say hello.

That search didn't fill a hole, but it did close a chapter. I'm grateful I found them. Knowing where I come from has brought a quiet sense of peace, even though those people are not part of my daily life. They are pieces of my puzzle, but they don't define the picture.

What truly defines me is the gift I was given at three weeks old—my parents. The love, safety, and foundation they offered shaped the best parts of me. I can't put into words how thankful I am to have been raised by them. They are my real parents in every sense that matters. My story began in uncertainty, but it unfolded into something rich with love, loyalty, and resilience.

If I've done anything right in life, it's because of their influence. They didn't just give me a home—they gave me a sense of worth, and for that, I'll be forever grateful.

COCO'S STORY

I was adopted at 4 1/2 by a Jewish family. I was the oldest of four girls. They were my half-sisters, I think. I am not sure if any of us had the same father. Their names in order would be Aloha, Hiawatha and Desiree. As far as I know I was taken from the home due to some sort of fraud that was being investigated. Which brought the authorities into the home to find my sister, Aloha deceased. I am not quite sure how that happened. I was told and I believe read that we were malnourished and neglected. Aloha, I think died of hyperthermia. How she happened to die of hyperthermia is questionable. My biological mother at the time was pregnant with my biological sister Hiawatha. She claims a couple different stories but the one I'll go with is that Hiawatha's father was abusive towards her. She says that he came in from the back door and she had just gotten Aloha out of the bath and placed her on the couch. I feel I was in a pack and play for some reason, I'm not sure though, watching TV. She said when he came in she was afraid and ran out the front door leaving it open and ran to a neighbor for safety. She's states that she had asked someone to come and take us, but they did not. Nor do I believe she came back for either of us. If she did it was too late. Because of whatever fraud she was committing, she was being looked into. Because of that the police or whatever authorities found us and we were taken from the home and I was placed into foster care. I was around 1 1/2 or 2 years old. I was in several foster homes and an orphanage several different times during that 2 year period, until I was 4 1/2 years old. My biological sister, Hiawatha was born and then, I think, placed into foster care, until she was adopted by my biological mother's friend. I gather during the time that Hiawatha and I were in foster care, my mother was pregnant with my youngest sister Desiree who was also placed into foster care and I believe was adopted as a baby.

I came into an already made family of two brothers and two sisters, three of whom are older than me and one younger brother. My parents are Jewish and they had my two sisters and then and adopted my brothers and me, all separately.

I had a very nice upbringing. Although I was very tempered child. I came with a lot of issues. I always felt alone as a child. I think it was hard growing up in a predominantly white area. I think as a child I was aware of the differences from

where I came from to where I ended up. My family was very pleasant and nurturing and treated all the children the same. But the race issue did stand out. Soon after I was adopted, we went and lived in England for a while. Spending a total of the year and a half in Europe which was hard, although I believe it was a good experience for me in the long run. I don't remember a lot about it. I do remember that I thought I could be a princess with all castle's I had seen. I felt like my mother was very connected to me and understanding me without words like any other mother even though she was not my biological mother. My parents did the best that they knew to help me as a child growing up. They tried to understand that I am black and tried to help me identify as being proud to be black. At that time, there was nowhere for kids of color to go to interact. And also not a lot of products or magazines for young black girls. My parents did try to get me Ebony magazine and other black magazines, but they were mainly geared towards women, though it did kind of help.

TESSA'S STORY

Thank you for writing about people's experience with this. I think some people forget that there's attachment issues and abandonment issues even when you're raised by family that love you too.

I don't really remember a time before living with my Grandmother and Grandfather. When I was an infant in 1999 there was a nasty CPS case in between my Father and Mother because of my mother's substance abuse, police reports and court documents from that time record all of those happenings. I had a step-mom from 0-2 who didn't like me much. And my Dad remarried in 2001 and I was given to my Grandparents on my Dads side because they weren't ready to raise a child together. It was all I really knew at the time. I remember brief snippets of living with my Father and 2nd step mother, but no concrete memories. My Grandparents facilitated visitations schedules between my Mother and I, and I saw my father infrequently. I remember feeling abandoned by my parents time to time. But I remember a whole lot of love from my grandparents. Now I recognize them as my parents, they raised me for the most formative parts of my life. I had some emotional and behavioral issues that stemmed from traumatic experiences with my mother, my grandparents sought out counseling for me and things seemed to be getting better. Briefly from 10 years old to 16 years old I moved back in with my Dad and step mother. It was a horrible traumatic time filled with emotional and mental abuse. I was taken off my psych meds, and removed from therapy. I wasn't allowed to have any opinions or feelings. I was a scapegoat. I was never believed if I was sick or not feeling well. I was isolated away from my grandparents who loved me unconditionally. When my father and step mother got divorced in 2015, I was returned to my grandparents as my father could not take care of a 16 year old by himself. This was the greatest blessing, yes it did hurt. That feeling of abandonment that had lingered my whole life reared its ugly head. But I knew my grandparents loved me. There was times in my late teens where my mental illness and PTSD made our relationship tumultuous, even toxic. But I moved out on my own at 21 years old and we have had a beautiful relationship ever since. I have struggled with mental illnesses such as PTSD, major depressive disorder, substance abuse issues and Borderline Personality Disorder partially as a result of the feelings of abandonment I've struggled with my whole life. While I see a

therapist for Dialectal Behavioral Therapy and just celebrated a year sober in the Alcoholics Anonymous Program I find that I can still struggle with the feelings even now at 25 years old. I do still have contact with my Father, Mother and step mother. I love them, I forgive them. But my Grandparents are my parents. My Grandma specifically is my person. I know we have each others backs no matter what, she's saved me over and over again. I would not be here today if she had not taken me in multiple times over my life time. I will never be able to thank my Grandparents for what they've done for me. I just hope somehow, they know.

JEFF'S STORY

As a boy– as most adopted kids do – I started asking questions about my origin story. Where did I come from, who was my mother, why did she not want me? etc.... In truth, I was mad. I wanted to confront the woman who had done this terrible thing to me, abandoned me. I thought, who could be so cruel? So, I set out on a journey to find out. Ruthie and Albert were very helpful. They realized this was not anything against the love and care they provided and was in no way being ungrateful, but it was a natural course of action, and they encouraged me to explore.

They explained that the adoption was closed, they knew I was born in John Wesley County Hospital in Los Angeles, and the birth certificate they were given from the adoption agency simply said, Webb Baby. Of course, they went to the courthouse and got a proper birth certificate, which listed them as the mother and father.

Through some research, I found an agency that specialized in finding adoption records. With the limited information I could provide, they went to work, and much to my surprise, within weeks, they had an address and phone number for Dianne and her parents, Chester and Ada, my biological grandparents. So, not wanting to intrude, I thought a letter would be the best course of action. That way, she wasn't being put on the spot if she didn't want to respond. I crafted the letter and sent it.

No response

Months passed, and I decided that I still didn't know if she got the letter and chose not to respond or if she didn't get it. So, I called the phone number. A man whose voice sounded eerily familiar answered. I was nervous, so I made up a story about being on the high school reunion committee and trying to find Dianne's current address. The voice on the other end said, Lakeview Memorial Cemetery. I hung up. I was in shock and didn't know what to say. I had begun my search only to find my mother, now, laid to rest in a grave in California. And as she had speculated, when she made that excruciating decision, she would never see me again. After a few minutes, I gathered my composure, called back, and explained the truth of why I was calling. It was Chester and Ada, my biological grandparents, on the line. After about an hour of questions and discussion, I committed to flying out that weekend and visiting them in

California to get the answers I was after.

I learned that one of my mother's hobbies was painting; she was quite good at it. I learned about her childhood, her passions, and her struggles, and throughout the weekend, they provided more than enough information so that I felt like I knew her. She was creative, a writer, a singer, a painter, and everyone loved her. She was charming, intelligent, genuinely nice, and loved people. I began my search in the summer of 1985, and after a couple of months, had what I needed to make contact. Only to find out that my mother had died 6 months earlier on Thanksgiving Day, 1984

Chester and Ada pulled out a shoebox from a closet shelf and said, we don't have any idea what compelled us to keep this, but these are the letters Dianne wrote to us when she was pregnant with you and some other little keepsakes she had. Now, we know why we kept it; so we could give it to you. It was confirmation that I needed that my mother was an amazing lady, not some irresponsible, uncaring woman. But a woman who found herself in an impossible situation and made the only decision she could live with. I cried. A lot. With gratitude and humility.

I wasn't abandoned. I was chosen—by a mother who made the hardest decision of her life out of love. By a family who said yes to raising a child that wasn't biologically theirs.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS



Stories from the trenches of those “next of kin”, the parents who walk the walk regardless of where it may lead and the joys and travails that are experienced on the path.

OUR ADOPTION STORY

Our adoption story began not as Dan and Cari, but as Cari. Our adoption story began with a marriage ending and the subsequent realization that my biological child, who was miraculously conceived after 7 years of infertility, had significant special needs and would never drive a car, graduate high school with an earned diploma, go to college, get married, or live independently. He was diagnosed with Isolated Lissencephaly Sequence, a brain malformation that left large parts of his brain without the valleys and grooves needed for proper development. My marriage had fallen apart, I was trying to sell a home, understand the nature of my son's needs and learn how to advocate for him through tears. I invested all I had into my wonderful son for four years. I found myself with a new perspective of what was important in life, and found the strength to be a single mother working full-time to build the best life for myself and my son that I could.

Fast forward four years...my son is the light of my life, crushing expectations of his abilities, and excelling in preschool. My heart has always had the need for service and children, so I decided to attend foster parent training as a single adult woman. I did the classes, met all the requirements of training and paperwork, and a little after three months, was a fully licensed foster parent. I still hadn't sold my marital house, but that didn't stop me from continuing to answer my heart for fostering. My very first placement was a baby about 6 months old who was with me for one week. He ended up going to his grandmother, which is, of course, the goal of fostering...keep the child within the biological family if at all possible. A short time later, a call came asking to take a four-month-old boy who was living on the streets with his mother and five siblings. His biological father was incarcerated. I was nervous, but I said "yes". Soon after, I had an offer on our house, which meant I would need to find a new house and move within a short amount of time. The baby came to me that evening and had the worst cough that never quit. I was afraid to lay him down at night for fear that his cough would stop his breathing. After months of doctor visits, ER visits, specialist visits, we finally got the cough under control through inhaler treatments. Two months later, I moved houses with a four-year-old and a six-month-old under tow. My memory of that time is a pivotal moment of knowing that I could handle anything that life might throw at me. I was strong and not

only capable, but confident that I was enough for these two boys who counted on me every day to provide for them. For the next 18 months, there were visits with biological parents and siblings and a lot of team meetings, but there was no progress toward reunification. Parental rights were eventually terminated on all six children. Four of them stayed together in one home, one was with another family, and I was the intended permanent placement for "AJ". His adoption was final when he was two years of age. He was thriving, healthy, and my biological son adored him. Life was truly good. Little did I know that my journey into fostering and adoption had just begun.

Three months after my adoption of Andrew was final, I met the man of my dreams. I was certainly not looking for him, but we kept running into each other, as his daughter had special needs and we swam in the same special needs swimming program. His daughter also attended the same elementary school that my biological son was now in for kindergarten. He eventually asked me out and I knew, he was the one for me. He was kind, attentive to his daughter with autism, gentle, and had the best blue eyes I had ever seen. I was hooked. We dated for about a year before he was ready to ask me to marry him. That was the easiest question I have ever answered. We got married and a few months later, he adopted Andrew as well. We were suddenly a family of five (actually, seven as my husband, Dan, had two adult step daughters that he raised and were now adults).

After a lot of discussion and soul-searching, we talked about having a biological child together. That was apparently not in the cards, as my infertility continued. However, Dan was open to fostering and learning more about it. He went through all the trainings and paperwork knowing how important that part of my life was to me and about a year into our marriage, we were ready to accept placements.

In our tenure as foster parents, we fostered two sibling groups (each time, a brother and sister) that each were reunified with their biological mothers. I am happy to say that 15 years later, we still have contact with those children. They tested us and our marriage in many ways, but they also made us better people and parents.

After the second sibling group was reunified, we got a call for a newborn African American (we are white) boy still in the hospital. His biological mother was found to be of very low IQ, mentally unstable, and unable to care for her newborn. We were placed with "SW" three days after his birth. During this

time, we were also finding out difficulties AJ was having in school and we were trying to find how we could best help him. We eventually learned that his siblings were diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and after doing some research, AJ checked almost every box that is common with FASD. So, we now had a daughter with moderate autism, a son with Lissencephaly, and a son with FASD, and newborn baby. SW was a joy to his older foster siblings. He had a lot of GI issues, however, and required special formula to be able to keep anything down. He was otherwise seemingly healthy and growing quickly. After about 12 months of sporadic visits with his biological mother, it was determined that she was just unable to care for SW. The father was unknown and so after the mandatory time requirement, we were able to file a petition for adoption. SW joined our family at age 15 months.

My husband felt ready to call it quits. We had all we could handle and life was full and crazy. A few years passed by and we continued to provide all we could for our growing family. SW was now an ACTIVE toddler. He was about three years old when I approached my husband about maybe fostering one more time with the hopes of a girl after all these boys. My husband, being eager to always make me happy, agreed and we soon got a call to foster another newborn, but this time a baby girl. Her mother had an arrest warrant out for her in another state right after her birth and her grandmother felt unable to provide for a new baby. To complicate matters, the baby was born 4 weeks premature and weighed only four pounds and six ounces. Unbelievably, she was ready to leave the hospital after three days, having passed all the necessary tests. We now had a newborn baby who fit in the palm of our hand. Newborn clothes simply fell off her and we had to quickly find preemie clothes at a moment's notice.

After about 10 months of meetings, court hearings and one visit with her biological father who lived in another state, the department of family services was contacted by a distant cousin in yet another state who wanted to take "EJ" (nicknamed – Tiny Baby). We were devastated. We wrote a letter to the court explaining the harm of moving her to a distant relative and the love that our family had for EJ. EJ was bonded to our family, especially AJ, who was so attentive to her. There was a final hearing about the situation and we had all her bags packed, expecting the judge to order her removal. Our caseworker came to the house after the hearing with a smile on her face, informing us that the judge had denied the move and ordered Elizabeth to stay with her current placement. That was the moment I knew our family was complete. Several months later, our

adoption of EJ became final and we were a family of seven...plus two wonderful adult girls who were starting families of their own.

Fast forward to today...my wonderful husband and I have been married for almost 16 years. He is my rock and our family's biggest cheerleader. My biological son is almost 24 years old. He has earned a Certificate of Completion from high school and loving his day program he attends. He loves all people and continues to amaze us with his perseverance. My step-daughter is 28 years old and lives primarily with her mother and also attends a day program. We have her every other weekend and every other week in the summers. Our first adopted son, AJ is 20 years old and earned a general education diploma from high school with a lot of hard work. His FASD severely limits his executive functioning and social skills, but he has earned his drivers license, purchased his first car, and holds a job working about 30 hours per week. He is our child with the biggest heart and will absolutely help anyone in need. Our second adopted son, SW, is now 13 years old and in the seventh grade. He has been diagnosed with ADHD, anxiety, and sensory processing disorder. He knocks on the door of autism, but the testing does not qualify him. He is our child who is in it for himself, but he is smart, funny, and loves playing saxophone and music, in general. He is also our gamer to the end.

Our baby of the family, EJ, is now 10 years old and in the fourth grade. She is extremely talkative and social. She is funny and loves her family fiercely. She, too, has been diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety. However, my husband and I feel as though her issues are so similar to Andrew and knowing her biological mother's history with drugs and alcohol, feel she deals with the effects of Fetal Alcohol as well but to a lesser extent than AJ.

That is our adoption story. It is complicated, it is messy. It is full of doctor appointments, medications, diagnoses, specialists, Medicaid Waivers, and love. We adore each of our children, whether we are genetically related or not. They are each special and unique in their own way. They fight amongst themselves, they yell at us, they have trouble handling their emotions, but in the end, we are a family and family is everything.

THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Ruthie and Albert met at the Redeemer Bible Church in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in their early teens. They fell in love and got married at ages 17 and 18, respectively:

They started their lives together as husband and wife. They moved from Niagara Falls to Tyler, Texas, where all became foundrymen. After four years of wedded bliss, they welcomed baby Carolyn into their family and the world.

When baby Carolyn was 3, it was time for more children. They really wanted a boy. So, for three years, they tried unsuccessfully to have another baby. When it became apparent that it was a medical issue and it wasn't going to happen, they decided there had to be another way to complete their family and get their baby boy.

They started investigating adoption. After a lot of paperwork and interviews, they were approved into the program, and the waiting began. After months of waiting, the adoption agency called and said they had just received a baby boy who had just been born, and he was available immediately.

They rushed over and met the Baby. Albert's first reaction when seeing the child was: "I don't know Ruthie, he looks like a scrawny little thing." Ruthie picked him up and said, "Albert, I can fatten him up a bit, and I think he'll be perfect." They had a birthday celebration for him. Ruthie was thrilled she had her baby boy, and Albert was over the moon happy that he now had a son and a complete family: a daughter, Carolyn, who was naturally and apparently miraculously born, and then a son.

The only person who seemed a little unsettled by the events was Carolyn, but she quickly took the baby under sisterly care and cared for him. Ruthie was a former English teacher and loved writing. When she brought the boy home, she wrote a little poem on an index card:

To my son: "You are not flesh of my flesh or bone of my bone. You didn't grow under my heart... But in it. I love you, Mom"

OUR STORY OF ADOPTION

Our adoption story is one of awareness and growth. My husband and I adopted 2 children as newborns in open adoptions. A third young lady joined our family as a college student with no where to live. As infants, adoption is easy. Everyone loves a baby! And our extended families could pretend that the children were born directly into our family. We played along but made references to the kids birthfamilies frequently and without hesitation. The birthmothers were invited, but never came, to any and all milestones (birthdays, communions, graduations). The children knew their stories and listened to us tell the story until they could add details and tell their own story for their perspective. Our daughter matched us culturally and looked very much like her triplet cousins. Our son doesn't match us culturally and as a child referred to himself as "Halffrican". My grandmother (GG) told some of her friends he was part Native American and other friends that he was I-Talian, which emphasis on the I. We would simple shake our heads and tell ourselves, By the time he is old enough to realize GG is talking about him, GG will be dead or senile!

Adoption allowed us to meet so many people that we hold dear. And when the children struggled, this community provided us with support and resources to handle situations with grace, support and knowledge. Adoption was the inspiration for a children's picture book I authored. The book was from a young boy's perspective of why he didn't look like his sister.

A difficulty that we experience is that we are all wired very differently. As the kids grew up and we saw the differences. My husband and I are college educated and love school. The kids not so much. They struggled academically in school, it was not a passion or a pathway they chose. Despite our best efforts and advice, they both stopped their college experiences. This pattern is similar to their birthparents. Our kids are not overly motivated by financial freedom and the opportunities that working 2-3 jobs brings. We have accepted that they don't mind living on the edge, that they're motivations are very different than ours. The nature versus nurture argument is very real, and Id say most of the adoptive parents I know line up on the nature side.

Since we only have adopted children, I can't compare building a family with biological children or a family that includes both biological and adoptive children. I do know that in our home we strongly emphasize acceptance of

differences, belonging forever, and love at all costs. We have wonderful conversations and discussions, mostly funny but some deep and philosophical between the 5 of us that I'm guessing biological families never have.

OUR SWEET LITTLE VALENTINE

We brought our daughter home when she was just a few months old and amazingly our adoption was finalized on Valentine's Day, which is actually her gotcha day. When we arrived home, our daughter got to meet her big brother who was four years older than her. He was so thrilled to see his little sister. He had prayed for a little sister for an entire year and couldn't wait for her arrival. One of the first things that happened is she got to have her brother hold her while she was propped up on pillows and he gave her her first bottle to drink, it was such a sweet moment and luckily, we captured the memory. Then we knew that our dog, a miniature schnauzer had to get acquainted with our new baby, so we gave a bag of gifts with dog toys to our dog got had a little gift from my daughter for the dog and so it was really really special...we wanted to make sure that the dog was allowed to sniff her and just get used to her and it didn't take long. The transition went very smooth smoothly. Our dog did a great job and you just have to remember that pets notice the changes too and you need to make sure that everything is comfortable For the baby and the pets. It is always easy to remember Gotcha day each year because it's Valentine's Day. The best Valentine's Day gift we could've ever received. 💕

FAV ADOPTION STORY

My fav adoption story: Robi was born 8/21/88 in Calcutta, and we got him 4/2/89. We were awaiting another child from India. We got a magazine every month, "Ours by Adoption" every month that, in the back, featured waiting children. I, several months in a row, pointed out a Thai boy to Jim. No, he said, we are already set up for another child from India." Months later, we heard from our agency. They wanted us to consider a child that was waiting in Thailand. After consulting with medical pros, we said yes. Requires a whole new home study, as Thai rules were different. It then took 13 months to get our second boy home. Six months after he arrived (born in Bangkok 8/7/89, came to us 11/14/91), I had a dream that our sweet boy was the boy I had pointed out to my husband. I got up, and went through old "Ours" magazines, and there he was - our boy- always, apparently, meant to be!

And to you - Never thought Robi would stay local, but he did. PHM's teacher of the year last year, made it to top 10 in the state. Teaches music. If I could have hand picked his wife, I would have picked his Dani. My selfish favorite thing about her is that she is very family oriented, so I see Robi more. She is also a teacher. They have Bryer, 7. - smart, empathetic like his Papa, sweet, and very feisty Nova Mae, almost 4. Pretty sure no one will ever push that girl around, and grateful my kids know not to parent that out of her. Than lives in Goshen, and works for an RV parts distribution plant. His life has never been easy, but he is doing pretty well... great uncle! When Robi was in middle school, he brought Josh home - a smart, hilarious boy, from a horrible home situation, who we pretty much took in, though not legally. He is married to Ashley, who I also would have hand picked, and they have August, almost 8. Josh is also a teacher, and Ashley is a guidance counselor in the same school. All live nearby and I see them often. A fortunate woman, am I.

Go—DON'T Go

The summer and fall of 1969 involved preparation for the adoption of our first child. We had been married 2 years and decided early on that rather than “make” babies, we would adopt since there were many children waiting for homes. We envisioned a diverse family make up.

We were living in St. Louis and working with Lutheran Child and Family Services.. After our home assessment we participated in a 12 week therapy group with other couples interested in transracial adoptions. I thought to myself, at the time, that if people had to go through this thoughtful process before they became pregnant, they would be better prepared for parenthood.

Jan. 2, 1970 we received the hoped for phone call. “You have a baby boy! He is 8 weeks old and is in Fort Wayne, IN” We were thrilled beyond belief and started making plans to go to Fort Wayne and welcome him into our family. Then the second phone call “You cannot go and pick him up. There has been a delay of the adoption.” It seems that it is a bit more complicated when there are 2 states involved. The adoptive parents cannot get custody without prior court approval. Thus, the agency started the court process.

Within a week, the social worker called with the news that we could go and get our son. I was elated. Shortly after that call, another call saying the adoption has been delayed—again. I felt like a yo yo—up and down with no control over what was occurring. This time the delay came from a “high” level. The governor of Missouri, who did not approve of transracial adoptions, intervened and put the adoption on hold. Yet another week went by without our baby. Sadness reigned. Finally the courts determined that the governor did not have the authority to stop the adoption.

At last it was a go for Fort Wayne and our, now, 11 week old son. It was such a relief to be off the yo yo of Go—Don't Go.

TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE

It seems a long time ago now. Christine and I agreed early on in our marriage that there were only two types of people in the world; those that had children and those that didn't. We desperately wanted to belong to the former club. After many years of trying the old fashioned way and several IVF attempts, Christine exclaimed, "I want my body back!", after the third try and so we began our adoption adventure.

To prospective birthparents we were considered, "old", being 43 and 45. We were financially stable and living a very interesting life; we would be quite a catch even though we didn't have safety locks on our cabinets and fork proof electric sockets. We went high-end, working with the Cradle in Evanston, going to adoption classes, listening to stories from adoptees and adoptive parents and I even passed the CPR test performed on a plastic baby. It was all very interesting and overwhelming, "intellectual copulation", I called the process. Meanwhile our Puerto Rican friends told us they would get pregnant by merely sniffing each others underwear.

Because we were not remotely concerned with having children that looked us we decided to pursue an adoption from Asia since Christine had just returned from Viet Nam. Plus our odds at a foreign adoption were better as older parents. Then I got a phone call from a friend who worked at a hardware store.....

Sharon told us that her boyfriend's niece was only 14 and 6 months pregnant. She knew of our desire to adopt (tell everyone, its all about networking) Oh, a baby from a hardware store, that seems appropriate for a sculptor. We met Jessica, the birthmother, almost immediately, dropped the Cradle and 2 months later we were parents but not yet fully enrolled in the club. There were hazards ahead.

From my point of view this was no different from being a "real" father. Dads at this juncture do what ever needs to be done. Christine quit a well paying job at the Art Institute which scared me since I would be the sole breadwinner but I had confidence that we could manage, and we did.

I worked almost exclusively with men so I wanted the balance of girls. Anna was beautiful and intelligent and would be everything I always wanted in a baby. But there is always a BUT, and our big but was that the Adoption was not final. By law Jessica had I think 90 days, maybe more to change her mind. Though her

family was wonderful and fully supportive, the birthfather's family thought they would be second in line to the parenting throne.

They didn't know that they had to fill out paperwork and we weren't about to tell them. By now the birthfather was in jail, I can't remember what for but Christine went to his trial to check on his demeanor and looks. He passed that test.

After 2 months we took Anna to England for Christmas to meet her grandparents and godparents. Everything appeared to be wonderful. I had moved the possibility of losing her to the back of my mind.

We were up in Scotland when the other shoe dropped. Jessica had not signed the documents and we should be prepared to, "hand the baby back", on our return. The possibility of losing her was now all I could think about. At a New Year's gathering at the publisher, Jamie Byng's home we met an IRA informant who told us he could get new identities for us and Anna. We would be fine as long as we never tried to contact our families and friends again. This was serious and we were prepared to make that leap. In less than 3 months, I was considering giving up the life I knew for an adoption adventure I didn't see coming. All for a cute little baby that slept, pooped, didn't cry much but I think it was those brown eyes that seemed to stare at everything in wonderment that got me.

It's a foggy memory now, but we chose not to give up family and friends and decided to take our chances in court. You have to remember that birth mum, Jessica was only 15. She wanted us to adopt her too (that version will be in the novel or the movie) How about we keep the baby for five years and then give her back? There was a showdown at some nondescript building on the south side with our attorney, legal council for birth mum and I think Jessica. Christine gave an Oscar winning performance as the adoptive mother as she stormed out of the meeting, " its obvious that there is no child to adopt here!" I had no idea what was going on, just playing the dumb father role.

After two appearances in family court, Jessica eventually signed the papers and the baby was ours and could not be taken away. That baby grew into the person, who is our first daughter, Anna.

Now I felt we were on an equal footing with, 'normal parents'.

ON BECOMING PARENTS

The journey of adoption is certainly different. No pregnancy tests, ultrasounds. No feeling the baby kick or friends rubbing the stomach for good luck. For us we became parents at a gate at LAX and for a second time in a foreign land and at the airport.

When we first started the international adoption process, our Indian social worker took a chance and tried to place us with a new orphanage in India that she had never worked with before. We lost our place in line at the go-to agency in India where almost 100% of US adoptions took place. After 6 months of waiting, the new orphanage wrote us and denied our application, saying they preferred to place as they usually did with German Catholic couples. We were a Jewish couple in the entertainment business, so strikes were against us.

We were heartbroken and faced the reality that we had to start over. But two weeks later we got a photo of a young baby girl abandoned at birth and were asked if we would adopt her. We joyfully said yes and were eventually named her guardians in the courts of New Delhi.

Our planned trip to get her took a terrifying turn when a fatal flu epidemic swept the orphanage, and we were told we had to get her out immediately. Our social worker found an American nurse flying back to the US who agreed to escort her. We met at an airport gate waiting area. The baby, weighing only 9 pounds at 6 months old, saw my wife and put her hands out to be held. And the journey began.

For our son the process was equally a roller coaster. We were identified as potential parents of a male baby in Romania through our same social worker. This was after the famed 20/20 expose on Romanian orphanages. As the guardianship hearing got closer, we were told that the baby's mother we were paired with had second thoughts, and a second baby that was paired with us was too sick. So our third pairing of a baby boy whose mother couldn't afford to feed him led us to guardianship in the courts.

I boarded a plane to bring him home, but when I landed due to national shame all adoptions were being shut down in ten days. With the teething 5-month old baby on my hip – I called him the baby until we were able to leave the country so as to acknowledge that it might fall through – I waited at the consulate for 14 hours a day for 8 days straight trying to get his Visa to leave the country. It was a

madhouse. I lived on baby food as the stores were all empty since the fall of the dictator. Finally on day 9 I got his visa and flew west. My wife became a mom for the second time at the international terminal of LAX. I then called him by his name for the first time on American soil.

Our little United Nations family was created. And it has been a beautiful complex journey.

OUR FAMILY'S STORY: PERSPECTIVE OF AN ADOPTIVE MOTHER

We are a conspicuous family. A label I first heard from an adoption a professional used to describe families who do not look alike, their ethnicity, eye shape, skin color, size, shape, hair texture. It was odd to hear our future family described like that, especially because we never set out to build a family that looked just like either one of us. That was not the criteria... hmm we just wanted to be parents. Little did we know how complicated life would become for us.

The 4th and the last IVF treatment ended in loss; the year was 1998. The adoption law required us to wait an additional year before we could submit an application for an adoption. After that year passed, we were encouraged to apply for an international adoption because of our age. The statement "No domestic birth mom is likely to choose you to parent their child over someone younger." The words stung then; they still piss me off. My heart makes me think of all the children who really need to be loved into life, to live safely, to be parented into their adult lives; their chances were missed because of someone's professional opinion and just like that- they were steered away. There are many reasons this happens: a couple doesn't have enough bedrooms, or no safety covers on their electrical outlets, or their smoke detectors aren't hardwired into their home, or, or, or.

Meanwhile, we lived on a corner in a community filled with people with strollers, young unmarried girls with strollers; some with boyfriends that kicked them and yelled profanities over their newborn child while dragging a toddler by their outstretched arm, the other one dangling in the wind. We waited for documents, inspectors, we waited for home studies to be written by strangers who then waited for authentication letters from state agencies that verified our marriage certificates and birth certificates were in fact real. We hadn't realized until far, far, far into the process as adoptive parents, we had no rights, none, even though we opened our entire lives and the lives of our extended family members to complete strangers, all we could do is choose to wait, obey, pray, and wait some more. Did we trust the process? We must have, blindly I think, and without any reason to do so. Then one evening at 5:00 PM, as I was getting ready to leave my office at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, my phone rang

and Sharon, a women who worked at TUREK'S Hardware Store in Greektown in Chicago called. I'll never forget her words, "I remember you and Rupert said you want to adopt a child and my fiancée's niece is 14 years old and is 26 weeks pregnant. There is no way for her to keep this child. Are you interested?" "Yes please!" Our parent journey welcomed the detour. New label: Domestic Adoption, new agency.

My father had to die before our first daughter could be born; the miracle of birth, the cycle of life, unstoppable, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

THE BEN STORY

It was January in Chicago, 1985. I unlocked the door of our second-floor apartment to let Michael in. I pulled the door shut and turned to see my husband standing in the center of the foyer. He looked puzzled. He scanned the living room, pulled off his hat and pivoted to look down the hall. He paused, turned, and said, "Somebody's missing." I was a little slow on the uptake so he gave a double-double head-bob and said it again. "Somebody's missing." This time I got it: we were going to initiate the process of adoption.

About a week prior to the incident in the foyer, Michael had gone in to have his sperm tested. We had been unable to conceive for over two years and it was time to take action. The lab reported "no sperm detected." They figured it was a mistake and scheduled a second test. The result was the same. Michael had faced unimaginable health challenges and setbacks without complaint but this news hit him hard. He was devastated. He sat slumped on the couch staring at his hands and said, "I guess it'll be just the two of us." I said some things. It was not my finest moment. As I recall, I hit the wall. I mean, I actually hit the wall. He looked up and said, "Well. Maybe we could adopt?" I sat down next to him and said, "that's a thought." So that's what we did: we sat and we thought. This wasn't the kind of thinking you could do out loud or maybe even in words. It was the kind of thinking that takes however much time it takes.

Michael, a theatre director, did his most important thinking by visualizing specific choices or scenarios and observing consequences unfold in his imagination. In the following days, he imagined life with a child and a life without. When he stood in the foyer that January day, he was stopped in his tracks by the unexpected conviction that somebody was missing. This was an acknowledgement of fact, not a decision. Looking back, it has occurred to me that if Ben hadn't found us, somebody would have been missing for the rest of my life. But we did find each other and miraculously, he was home in less than nine months. Thus began our son's favorite bedtime story: The Ben Story.

One day Mommy and Daddy came home and Daddy said "Somebody's missing." Mommy said "Where's Ben?" We looked in the bedroom. No Ben. We looked in the bath tub. No Ben. We looked under the table and in the highchair. No Ben. We looked in the park. We checked the car seat. We looked in Tony's back yard and at Grandma's house. No Ben. Where could he be? Everybody

knows we can be a little absent minded. It's a problem but everything gets found eventually. We told everybody we knew and in no time at all, the lady at the Bensenville Home Society called up and said, "I found Ben! He's in Korea!" Of all places. She said his Oma in Korea had been looking for us and the nice people there would send him home on an airplane. The trip home was thousands of miles and took three days. When the plane landed in Chicago, Ben was grumpy and hungry, but that was OK because he wasn't missing anymore.

The Ben Story was improvised with many additions and variations. Ben added his own artistic embellishments. He knew this was a made-up story just like he knew that hedgehogs can't play the banjo (*Mama Don't Allow*) and that there's no such place as the yucky Camp Wannabarf (but if there was, he would most certainly escape). Ben knew that he was born in Korea and that he had been adopted, whatever that means. Stories are just stories but stories can tell a different, deeper, and sometimes, a more important truth. That being said, I believe this to be a true story. The End.

Julie Jackson, Sunday, January 12, 2025

IT'S OFFICIAL


After the adoption was official on our second trip, M drank lots of formula on our travels home. He ate up all of his orphanage powered formula immediately so we switched quickly to Americans formula. M drank constantly using his orphanage bottle with large rubber tip. He sucked so hard and chewed it causing a hole. He was on the bottle so much not just because he was hungry but it helped with soothing him on the trip. The airplane ride was an adventure!! Because of eating and switching formulas so quickly it gave M diarrhea!!! And we ran out of diapers and only had large diapers we picked up along the way. So I held M and his diaper blew and poop ran all down my clothes and then later my husband held him and poop landed on his lap....we had constant diaper changes. M even pooped into his socks. We had to clean ourselves with wet wipes he always had...M was cleaner than us and when we landed in Chicago all M had clean was that he was wearing his last diaper and his clean baby blanket. I wrapped him up tightly. We got home eventually after a 3-4 hour drive! It was not funny at the time but boy does it make a good story now and has gotten many laughs over the years!!! We still have that old glass baby bottle which is a special keepsake for M. You just never know what could happen during your adoption journey. 😂

LOVE BINDS

Dearest child,

Only Love

adoption, mere word
love binds
your hand in mine
walk the world
warmth
sunshine
jump clouds 1-2-3
puddles splash
under our feet
skipping
raindrop beats
walk in sync
stumble
fall
lay your head upon me
ride storms
play hide n' seek
peek,
rainbow colors
blue skies
storms pass
sunshine guides our path
adoption, mere word
love binds
time passes
roots twist, switchback
grow together
near and far
memories drift

dandelion puff
it happened so fast
out of my arms
standing on your own two feet
together
we discovered
no other word connects
only,
love binds hearts together
 ~ Mom

Author: Tracy Rogers Sult
December 2024

FROM GRANDPARENT TO PARENT

Marie was conceived out of wedlock. The mom is an alcoholic who abuses OTC and illegal drugs. My son received custody when Marie was 18 months old. I pretty much had her then. Michael, my son, married another woman. That marriage lasted less than a year due to the new wife not liking Tessa and being jealous of her. She told Michael to choose between her and the baby. (Really) Then my son married the second time. Marie was 2 years old. Shortly after that his new wife had a breakdown and was hospitalized. They asked me to watch Marie for 2 or 3 weeks so Michael could continue to work. They never came back to get her. They rarely ever came to see her. When her dad was going to pick Marie up for a couple of hours, Marie would try on all these clothes to impress her dad. He would come to pick her up and the first thing out of his mouth was, "you're not wearing that with me". So, she would have to change. She was young. 4 and 5 years old. She could sing very well. Ever since kindergarten she would be in singing competitions all the way through high school. Her dad never went to any of them. She had a chance to go to State Vocals and he took that opportunity away from her the morning she was to attend. She was 13. And on and on...

She was a very hard child to raise. Very opinionated, strong willed, stubborn and had mental issues. She was a very angry child and defiant. She was diagnosed with childhood schizophrenia at age 6. I had her in counseling. She was on medication. She was having night terrors and sleepwalking. I was dealing with medical issues myself. I had never seen anything like this. I had no idea how to help her. She would take her anger out on me. I guess because she knew I would always be there for her. I love her. I didn't have any help from my husband. Michael didn't want to talk to me about what was going on. He blamed me for any problems Marie had. He would not continue to take her to counseling and took her off of her meds.

When she turned 9 years old, my husband and I were taking her and a girlfriend camping for the weekend. Marie's dad came and picked her up the day before and decided to keep her without either of us knowing he was going to do that. I knew they wanted to have their own kids when out of the blue he decided to keep her. He rarely saw her. That is why they kept her. He could hardly have a baby and not have his own child. So, they kept her until she was 15 years old. It

was a living hell for her. She was afraid of the dark. She would cry and try to get out of her bedroom. He would hold the door close. She would sneak downstairs and call me. Begging me to come pick her up at 2 and 3am. It was heart wrenching. I could continue to tell you story after story about how bad things were for her.

At age 15, Michael and his wife were having marital issues and dropped her back off at my house. She had been abandoned for the 3rd time. She was drugged and gang raped at 17. She became obese, using drugs and alcohol. Needless to say, her mental illnesses just grew. She has many, many medical issues. I believe it is due to her weight and trauma. Her mental issues include:

- Clinical depression with psychotic features
 - Borderline personality disorder
 - Anxiety disorder
 - Complex PTSD
-
- These are the ones I know.
 - She is 25 years old now. She has been drug and alcohol free for 15 months. I am proud of her. She has a long way to go for her mental healing and obesity. But she tries.

FROM FOSTERING TO ADOPTION

We began fostering in 2018. This was an area my wife knew was an incredible need from her nearly 30 years in teaching. We got a placement in about 2 hours from our license being final. That placement was 2 children, a boy and a girl, siblings, who came to us with nothing. We did the scramble, got some basic supplies, and began our fostering journey.

We have one regret on our journey and that is we didn't set ourselves up to adopt. We were a foster home, not adoptive, and eventually sent the children on to a foster to adopt home. We worked on being 'Aunt and Uncle', and we visited them often. They gained a baby brother along the way, and we spent time with him as well. The short version is that pre-adoptive family didn't work out, and just over 2 years from them moving on from our home we got them back, along with baby brother, to foster and adopt.

We worked our way through DCS, our LCPS, and all the training and house prep. We thought and prayed and got full support from our 4 biological children, our own parents, and took the 3 kiddos in to adopt. We watched our family grow into amazing older siblings and we became parents of young kiddos, again. We also watched as our parents became grandparents, again, and aunts and uncles and cousins all gained more precious family. Now, our family grows in so many ways and we see our "little ones" become aunts and uncles to our grandchildren and watch the family shape and grow.

The most rewarding part of adoption is just seeing the relief and joy in the kid's faces and actions knowing they are in a loving and stable home and family. Two of our kids spent over five years in the foster care system. We watched this just wear them out and add so much confusion, stress, anxiety, and chaos to their lives. The baby was in foster care for over three years. That is a long time in chaos and uncertainty. The second the judge made us parents again we felt the reward and with our witnesses we just saw the love and joy in everyone.

The most challenging part of adoption is everything leading up to adoption and seeing the effects all of that stress and chaos on the kids. It takes years and years of work to help children heal. Sorting out what is normal kid behavior versus what is the result of years of mental, physical, and emotional stress, combined with learning how to parent children, with different pasts and childhood, from our biological children is very challenging. The parenting from the birth of a

biological child to an adoptive child is not the same and it's a struggle every day. The difference in parenting from our children, 4 born in 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2003, vs adoptive children in 2021 (and beyond) is very surprising. The parenting techniques are completely different. The wins are hard to see sometimes, but they are there.

Somehow we went through two adoptions with the same family and same foster placement. Three kids on two different paths is how we learned the successes and failures of the foster care system ultimately leading to our adoptions.

We have two pieces of advice to give, and they seem to contradict each other. The first is to never stop advocating for the kids, especially if they are in foster care. If you have kids in the foster care system that you wish to adopt, fight for them and don't worry about anyone else but them. The second piece of advice is to be patient when needed and know not all things will be on a good timeline. I say this as I was never patient and that can have a bad effect on one and it did with me.

We brought in three kids to adopt and we knew two were going to be a fairly simple adoption as that was their path. It took longer than it should have taken with them in the system for over five years, but it was going to happen. Our third child was on a different path and while set up to be adopted, that changed when both parents, at different times, got back into his life. Honestly, this seemed to only add trauma to him nearly two years before adoption was set to happen. In there were two years of complete frustration with everything going on in his life and times to fight and times to show some patience. We wanted what was best for him and prayed that would happen and it eventually did but not without tests and fights and a lot of 'how does this happen?' and 'why does this happen?' in a system that seems to just grants chance, after chance, after chance without considering the rights of the child/children.

But now, we are still in contact with the biological father of our children. He has done a tremendous job of being a positive influence on the kids, and he works very hard at making his time with them special and important. We go to parks, the zoo, children's museum, out to eat, bowling, etc. The kids enjoy their time with their bio dad, and we all work hard to make the visits fun and positive. Stay the course- and know the course will change from smooth to bumpy to mountainous and all over again. Keep fighting until that gavel hits the block in court and in that moment you will realize the glory of adopting and of establishing your family.

MEMOIR/BLACK-WHITE

As you already know from a previous memoir, I live in an interracial family. Let me introduce you to them. Jean-Marc is 50 and has two children: Danielle 27 and Christopher 25. Simone is 48, is married to Shawn and has one child: Jaycee 25. Marcel is 47 and is married to Jenny.

Actually, this journey began in the 50s. Somehow I learned that there were Korean war orphans, fathered by American soldiers, who were available for adoption. I begged my mother to adopt one of these children. She, the mother of 4 children, refused to consider this and said "If you want a Korean war orphan, you can adopt one when you grow up". I took that message to heart.

Between January 1970 and June 1973 we adopted two children and had a biological child. We were a rather unusual family for the time—2 white adults, 2 Black children, and 1 white child. Out and about, we would get many double takes. Being an inverse paranoid (I believe the world is out to do me good) I figured most people were simply curious. I only remember one hostile encounter. It began as most interactions did with a woman asking if we had adopted the two children. I smiled and said yes. Whereupon she raised her voice and screamed "Are you out of your mind?!" We quickly backed away and removed ourselves from her presence. Not hostile, but still hurtful to the children was a common observation "oh you have one of your own". My reply was to say they were all my own.

In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers condemned interracial adoption, saying that the children were at risk for developing a poor racial identity. Since there were not enough Black families adopting, the upshot would be children moving from one foster family to other foster families. How could that be healthier than being in one loving family that just happened to be white?? We made a commitment to always live in integrated neighborhoods starting in Oak Park and then on to Beverly. My husband at the time, was a Lutheran minister and served a parish and school in Englewood. Our children went to grade school there where Marcel was the only white child.

An example of how well our family blended and bonded with one another happened when our granddaughter was 8 or 9. She and I were going through books deciding which one we would read together. She came across "Now We Are A Family" and asked what that was about. I told her it was a book about

adoption that we read to her father. She said in a stunned voice “My father is adopted??”

As a family, we presented our journey to social workers, therapists, and psychologists. We were featured in a couple of articles in the Chicago newspapers. I hoped our sharing our lives was a small step toward the reestablishment of transracial adoptions. In 1994 an Act was passed that forbid agencies from delaying or denying the placement of a child solely on the basis of race and national origin. Amen.

CARLOS

One of my son's favorite games as a child was to play Ship, where the two of us sat inside a large cardboard box, he the captain, me second in command. He narrated our adventures, sometimes heading into rough waters, and at other times, finding a beautiful island filled with lush, ripe, ready-to-be-eaten strawberries. I followed his lead, leaning away from the torrential waves or leaning forward to move the ship closer to its calm, idyllic destination.

As I was thinking of writing this about my experience of being the parent of an adopted child, this memory came to mind because it serves as an apt, if imperfect, (always) metaphor for my experience as his parent.

Carlos was first adopted by my partner from Central America when he was nine months old. I did not meet him until he was about fifteen months old, and in those six months between his adoption and meeting him, much had happened. He went from being unable to relax, to craving physical affection; he went from never crying to crying frequently, with the knowledge that his distress would be heard and responded to.

He spent the first months of his life in an orphanage where there were not enough staff to care for all the children. In order to be more efficient in feeding, bottles were placed against a pillow in each crib. My partner purchased a beautiful wooden rocking chair with a pillow covering made from the textiles typical for Carlos' country, imagining it would be a place he could be fed, read to and soothed, and that the colors and feel of the fabric might be comforting. In his first months after adoption, he had a challenging time with being rocked and held and seemed distressed.

By the time I met him, he had become very affectionate, eager for physical affection and he struggled with too much incoming stimulus. Everything seemed too loud, too much for him, the world a volume dial turned up, never relenting. He would hide when loud commercials would come on when he was watching television. He held his nose and pushed away food which had too strong of a smell. Once we took him and a friend to see what seemed to be a fairly innocuous show for toddlers, with the use of uncaged birds.

The unpredictability of the birds, of their freedom to fly, was too much for Carlos, and I took him out of the small auditorium. He watched the show through a glass door, with my promise that he could stop at any time, and we could go for

a walk outside, or whatever he wanted to do. He needed to steer the ship, making the captain's decisions. That gave him a sense of safety.

The other huge milestone was that, when Carlos was first adopted, he never cried. He slept through the night without difficulty. To others, he looked like an 'easy baby,' one who seemed calm and easygoing. My partner and I both felt some concern about his lack of crying, but friends waved that off, telling us to enjoy it, to appreciate our good fortune. At some point—I cannot remember at what age—he began to cry more frequently, and going to sleep in his own bedroom was difficult. In some way, we took this not as something negative but as a positive sign, the transition between being in an orphanage with not enough staff to respond to knowing that we would respond to him, that we would understand that he needed or wanted something, and that we were there for him.

During his years of childhood, he struggled in many ways—his anxiety continued to stop him from feeling comfortable around other children, from being separated from my partner in any way, and in making transitions. He was a Latino child in a mostly white city and with white parents. While at times he seemed to want to disappear, his appearance often made it impossible, with no possibility of anonymity, with others projecting all kinds of assumptions onto him.

He continued to show a remarkable degree of sensitivity, one that could render the world too much for his nervous system and emotions, and one that also yielded a remarkable capacity for empathy and what others might call 'emotional intelligence.' Some of his teachers noticed it and we did as well.

When he was raging angry, he often allowed my partner to hold him, while he yelled and cried. He did not try to resist this comfort, so he could be distressed and connected. It was a remarkable shift from bearing his anger and frustration in solitude, tucked away. He cried for as long as he needed to, and, as he grew older, he often said he wanted to go in his room for some time. Afterwards, he would ask to talk to us, or to talk to the one who accidentally knocked over his majestic Lego creation. Or he would write his thoughts down on paper, a flurry of words, a poet's fury, longing, and fears.

Sometimes he could not explain why he felt as he did. Or he would say he just needed some time, and did not want to talk about it anymore. At times, my partner and I looked at each other in amazement, fully aware of our own adult shortcomings in naming emotions or being able to articulate as he did.

Carlos is loved by many, many people, which has been hard for him to take in at times. When in school he was identified as being extremely bright and with a learning difference, countless teachers went out of their way to advocate for him, to find diverse ways of presenting information. For example, while his early language learning included rote memory of words and spelling, he did better when he was able to put the words in context. He loved reading and stories, and we encouraged him to produce his own stories where the weekly words were included.

When we spoke even a little Spanish with him, as a small child, he would put his hands over his ears and yell at us to stop. When he was three or four years old, we went to Mexico for a few weeks and stayed with a host family. Our host family was warm and welcoming, and they cherished Carlos, who became a friend to their six-year-old daughter. When we walked through neighborhoods, ones in which we were strangers, he seemed more relaxed than I had ever seen him before. He finally had anonymity, the freedom not to be scrutinized or even noticed. Or at least, this is what I thought might be happening at the time. I always leave room for the possibility this might not be the case.

I read as much as I could from various sources about adopted children, ever mindful that while I gathered information, I did not want to reduce Carlos to a category, to attribute everything about who he was to being adopted. When he was in his late teens, he expressed that he had a concern about others seeing him this way. Sometimes I had no idea how to respond to his distress, heartbroken in witnessing it, and paralyzed. Sometimes his boat arrived, and I totally missed it, because of my own anguish at his anguish or because I just read it wrong.

He talked with me a couple of years ago about the fine balance to strike between the narratives about resiliency and trauma which he places on himself, and which others project onto him. He had suffered so many losses from the beginning of his life, ones that I could never imagine, even intellectually. He also has demonstrated great resilience. Carlos is a loving, compassionate, funny, and remarkable person who says that he knows he still has his struggles. Some of those are particular to his experience of adoption and loss and growing up in a world that is not the one he knew for the first months of his life.

ODE TO RESILIENCE

My daughter is 35 years old. She came home to us 30 years ago in June. She had been removed from her bio-mom at age 2. The circumstances are unclear but an infant in the home was found dead from malnutrition. Nicole had several foster placements with interim placements in a large emergency shelter facility (housing toddlers to 18 year olds). We were her fifth placement in three years. We knew that her bio-mom had some type of mental illness. Suffice it to say she was born in stress and continued to be traumatized and re-traumatized. Nicole came into our family as 5th in arrival order, but 4th in birth order. Our youngest child was 3 ½ years old, our oldest was 9. Nicole was very cute (and actually is now quite a lovely young woman though life is beginning to take its toll on her young looks). It was a good thing that she was cute because her behavior was off the charts...testing us, always testing us; manipulating, lying, and stealing. At age 7 she was diagnosed as Learning Disabled and ADHD. She struggled with us, she struggled with her siblings, and she struggled with friends.

Her father was a university professor and I worked in Child Protective Services. We knew she needed help and we needed help dealing with her. We did charts, stickers, consequences, "logical" consequences and as I write this I wonder why I'm even saying these things. Please note that although 30 years ago mental health professionals were talking about bonding with adopted children and lack of attachment and although we all knew that children with my daughter's history had lots of issues...no one!!!! was connecting it to the unconscious brain, or for that matter, conscious brain. And everyone thought love was enough and love was defined as having clear and logical boundaries and consequences. Interestingly enough my daughter had no memories of her life before coming to live with us. Perhaps her history was locked in her state memory. I became pretty convinced by the time she was a teenager, that she was bi-polar and of course that it was from her bio-mother. (Note: I got my MSW when my daughter was 14). Ever hear the saying "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing"?

My daughter didn't have an easy time after she was adopted either. Her father was fairly rigid and I went along with the program, his program. Nicole was/is very unfocused and would forget to chew with her mouth closed, couldn't remember to make her bed, couldn't clean her room even when given 8 hours

(!!!!) to do it. We divorced (another loss/trauma) when she was 12; she was molested (TRAUMA!) and when she was 13 Her father moved out of state taking her younger brother with him and NOT even offering to take her. (TRAUMA!)

Nicole graduated from high school and had a variety of jobs, mostly waitressing; tried going away to college for a semester and basically lived on the fringe of the community with friends who were also on the fringe. And she started using drugs and drinking by the age 18. Through all of this she made friends (good friends in her eyes) but she couldn't ever maintain stable relationships with men or women. She would want so much from them and then they would tire of her and she would blow up, become belligerent. She has spent weeks in jail and has faced felony charges. Most of the cases involved poor decision making at times when she was under stress and incapable of coming from a rational, cognitive place.

My daughter's story goes on through her 20's and halfway into her 30's which is now. Through all of this, she has stayed close to me and to her brothers and her sisters. And we have loved her and given her unconditional support. She became a mom at age 31 and she is a wonderful parent. She seems to know instinctively how to truly nurture my grandson. As a result, he was filled with that incredible neural chemical oxytocin. She cuddled with him, she slept with him, and she breast fed him for almost 3 years. She has always remained calm with him even if the world around them is in turmoil. Right now she is struggling to crawl over the biggest obstacle of her life because she has been separated from her son. She wound up homeless and addicted to the lifestyle of someone who smokes joint after joint to keep life from crashing in on them.

Nicole put herself into a residential drug treatment program and wasn't able to be with her son for more than 4 or 5 hours at one time since late February.

My daughter has many traits that are diagnosable should one care to spend time with diagnoses. She has been diagnosed with ADHD, Borderline Personality and Bi-Polar. And even I believe, at this point, that medication would help stabilize her. She also has many traits that make her a wonderful, caring person and a terrific Mom. And she displays these when she is okay; there are many hours in a day when she is okay and sometimes there are even several days in a week that she is okay. She is working very hard to get on her feet and make decisions that really are in her best interest and in her son's best interest. The hardest decision she has made is that he should be in his father's physical custody for now and

she will try to spend as much time with him as she can. As her Mom, I listen to her when she is down and I don't try to change her point of view until she sounds desperate and then my own fear kicks in and I plead with her to b-r-e-a-t-h-e, to realize how terrific her son is because of all that she gave to him his first 3 plus years of life and how much she would be missed and how traumatized he would be. Yes, my daughter has been suicidal; she has made threats and gestures through the years. And I am under no delusions that it won't happen again. But I can love her, I can talk with her sometimes 10-12 times a day, be grateful that I am an hour and a half away and hope that this time she will finally pull herself out and try to get help to once and for all deflate the demons that live in her state memory.

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Fostering Families Today

TO MY SONS BIO MOM

To my son's bio mom: you're on my mind tonight; it seems I can't sleep until I write this out.. When I first met ER I loved him instantly and hated you all the same. (I honestly didn't even think I was capable of hate until that day). When I found out his condition and that it could be attributed to your cocaine use and lack of prenatal care, I loathed you even more.. I was boggled as to how any mother could be so selfish to use drugs while carrying another living being inside of her. I blamed you for everything.. Every seizure he endured was your fault. I hated seeing him suffer your irresponsibility, your stupid choices, I still do. But to you I say tonight, I forgive you... I forgive your lack of common sense and apathy toward my child. No, I thank you. I thank you because you could've taken the easy road out, you could have aborted him. But instead you carried MY son in your womb 9 months and delivered to me a beautiful baby boy.. I thank you because you realized you couldn't raise him and did the responsible thing of walking away so that I could love him as much as he deserves.. And let me tell you, he's getting that and soo much more. You will probably never read this, and even if you do, you will probably never know that it's about you. But I'll still say that he is loved as much as any child could ever be loved.. They probably told u that he would most likely never develop but he smiles and laughs and babbles and has a lil personality all his own.. I can't even imagine my life without him.. So much I've learned these past 16 months and n I have yet a long way to go... I can't say I'll never be mad at you again, but with God's help, I will continue to pray for you. I pray that you get it together and never make the same mistakes again. And I pray that if he ever reaches out to you in the future, he finds a sober woman willing and ready to answer all of his questions.. I guess that's all on my mind for now. God bless and goodnight. Edna Lee

ADOPTION: IT'S IN THE BLOOD

I didn't mind it when my mom and dad adopted their four children, long after I was an adult. In fact, I think that I was well into my forties when I found out that Mom and Dad had planned to adopt. My sister and brother and I vowed that we would do whatever we could to help them with our little siblings, but adoption was never something that we'd planned to do.

As long as I could remember, my parents were always helping out some wayward soul, even before they decided to become foster parents. From the time that I was about three years old, I can still remember the names of friends and family who came to live with us when they needed a temporary place to stay until they could get themselves together: Anna, Liz, Nick, Rose, Carl, Aaron, Eddie, and the list goes on and on. Most of them were young people, recently out of High School, needing somewhere to stay until they could decide what they were planning to do with their lives. So, helping others is a trait that was passed down to us from our parents.

Though my siblings and I never planned to adopt, three of us had attended classes to become foster parents. So, the tradition continued. Before I knew it, my sister and her husband had broken our vow to never adopt, and adopted two of her foster daughters. We were an African American family, but her girls were Latino. Just as we'd vowed to help our parents with their children, my nieces vowed to help their mother with their acquired siblings. We were just a big, happy family. Holidays were the best!

Vow or no vow, the tradition did not stop there. I, too, had fostered many children prior to meeting my own adopted daughters. However, after my dad passed away, My husband and I let our foster parent license expire, and remodeled our home to move my handicapped mother and her four adopted children into our home. Our home was large enough, but we wanted my mom and her adopted daughter and three adopted sons to have a comfortable space that they could call their own. So, our attached, two car garage became Mom's mother-in-law suite, and our English basement, which consisted of a full sized bathroom, a laundry room, two bedrooms, and a large recreation room was remodeled to accommodate her four children. The recreation room was cut down to a nice sized family room, and the other half of the room was divided to make two more bedrooms, which gave each child their own bedroom. Our two

biological daughters kept their bedrooms on the main floor, and my husband and I moved to the area above Mom's room, the reconstructed attic, where we could hear her when she needed us. That attic stretched across the length of the house; so, along with the bedroom, there was a walk-in closet, a sitting room, a bathroom, and a linen closet. Our old bedroom on the main floor became the guest room.

All of my adopted siblings were teens when they moved in. Our own daughters were 15 and 10 years old. Three of my siblings were biological siblings, but one of the boys was their brother because of the adoption. Each of them came with their own issues. These issues brought with them challenges that we'd never before experienced in our home. Although every child was raised by the same parents that raised me, their motivations were different, and therefore, their perceptions and determinations varied. One thing that I struggled with was their lack of appreciation for a clean environment. Their level of cleanliness may not have been as bad as I perceived it to be, but I had never taken in teen-aged males, so it was a real challenge for me. However, the one brother, who was not biologically related to the others, was immaculate. The difference between their rooms and his was like night and day. However, he brought his own set of issues that caused us a great deal of unrest. He was in and out of trouble the whole time he resided in our home. I could never get used to visits from the police, him being put out of every school he attended, sneaking girls into our home, getting involved with substance trafficking, etc.... If there was trouble, it seemed to find him. On the other hand, he could be very pleasant, a beautiful smile, and a real charmer. You really didn't even want to be angry with him, but closing our eyes to the truth of his shenanigans was only causing issues for the rest of our family.

The youngest of the biological siblings was a female. She struggled with issues of identity. She was, often, torn because she had a deep desire to identify with her biological parents. This made it very hard for her to accept the lifestyle that she was afforded in our home. She, often, isolated herself. She was quiet and usually very sweet, but at times, she would display hostility as a result of desiring a life with a traditional, biological family.

Our own daughters knew no other family but ours. They were used to us reaching out to help others, and even though we all lived together in the same house, it was necessary for us to strictly monitor their interactions to make sure that our own children continued to uphold our values of spirituality, education,

work ethics, and family, Don't get me wrong, we went on vacations together, enjoyed family picnics and outings together. We sat down and had meals together, celebrated birthdays and holidays together. We made sure that there was a sense of family togetherness, even though we had to ensure that our own children were safe and secure and had a clear understanding of our expectations of them.

When my mother passed, we'd already seen our oldest adopted sibling off to college. We continued to help them throughout their college years, and still keep in touch throughout their adult lives. On the most part, they are doing well, working, rearing their children, and two of them even own businesses. We were met with challenges, but we met them head on, refused to give up, and can feel a sense of pride of how most of them are doing.

Once all of the children had left home, our own included, we found ourselves with an empty nest. Yes, my husband and I were living in that big, old house all alone. It was mostly me there alone because my husband was often away on business trips. I thought about how successful our children were, and most of our foster children, as well. I realized that taking in these children and helping them to work through their issues and guiding them into becoming well-rounded, productive people had to be our ministry. It was something we were destined to do. So, after five years without a license, we decided to renew our license, and foster children again. We found out that it had been such a lapse in time, we'd have to start all over. So, we did what we had to do, and before long, we were a certified therapeutic foster home with adoptive parents certification, as well. We never really planned to adopt, but our instructor felt that because I was a certified teacher and my husband was a mental health doctor, it made sense for us to be completely licensed. So, we did it.

I was so excited to host our new fosters. I'd requested littles girls, not more than three, who were between the ages of five and ten. It seemed like it was taking forever for us to have children placed in our home. It was probably only a matter of weeks, but I was so excited until I'd become impatient. At the end of October of 2014, I received a phone call asking me if I could, temporarily, take in three little girls, ages five, seven, and eight. I readily agreed. They warned me that the girls were caucasian, and not African American like me. I informed them that race did not matter to me. I sat and thought about what I'd need to do to prepare for these girls who I could expect to move into my home within about a week. However, I got another call, explaining to me that this would be an

emergency placement, and they needed to move the children right away. So, I agreed to take them the following day.

They arrived with their caseworkers the following day. They had large garbage bags, filled with their belongings, which consisted of a few toys and some clothes of which some were too small and others that weren't in good shape. So, our next day would be a shopping trip. The children greeted me, calling me mom right away. It surprised me, but there wasn't a single shy bone in their bodies. They were excited, running from room to room, making their claim as to which room would be theirs. It was, somewhat, overwhelming, but refreshing all at the same time. It didn't take us long to warm up to each other, at all. It was as though they'd known me their whole lives.

My husband was away on a business trip when they came. A few days later, we had to go to the station to pick him up. When they saw him, they didn't wait for him to approach them. They ran to him yelling, "Welcome home, Dad!" They hugged him, and offered to take his luggage. I could see the shock on his face, even through his smile, at how comfortable they were with accepting him as their dad.

Soon, we were informed that the girls' biological parents had lost their parental rights to the girls, and they would be put up for adoption. Their caseworkers and therapists worked hard to prepare them to be adopted. The question that they continually placed before the girls was what kind of family would they want to adopt them. Week after week they brought that same challenge to the girls, and each time, the girls told them that they wanted to stay where they were. They were told to draw a picture of how they'd like for their new family to look. Each time, the girls would draw a picture of us. The girls began throwing tantrums and crying uncontrollably each time they'd bring it up. It made me cry because I felt so sorry for them. I never really wanted to adopt, and I made that clear to everybody. However, when my husband proposed to me that we should go ahead and adopt them and save their lives, I agreed. So, the process began. In less than a year, the process was complete, and we welcomed our new charges into our family. Just as with our other adopted relatives, the girls were welcomed by our extended families, who were willing to help out in any way they could with helping us to care for our new family members.

As with our other adopted members, our babies came with challenges. They had a lot to overcome. Defense mechanisms are behaviors that they acquire as a means of survival. Sometimes, children can become introverted or extraverted to

try to protect themselves from the abuse or neglect that they had to live with. Lying, hoarding, stealing, manipulation, anger, fighting, and controlling can all be defense mechanisms that children acquire as a means to survive the harshness of their realities. With my three girls, I've experienced all of these behaviors. On the most part, I can say that we worked through most of them, and with much prayer, overcame a lot. However, though it's been over eleven years since they walked into my home, and they are mostly adults now, there are still some issues that we continue to work on.

Along with defense mechanisms, education was a major challenge for them when they came. They were behind in school, and had a hard time learning new skills and information. Even though I worked with them daily, tutoring them and helping them with their assignments, it took some time for them to learn new concepts. They did not have a good working memory, and simple tasks seemed difficult for them. When I questioned my daughter, a psychologist, about it, she explained to me that a part of the brain, the amygdala, swells up in people who have trust and detachment issues. She assured me that as they feel loved and accepted, the amygdala would shrink back down to its original size, and learning would no longer be such a challenge. This has proven to be the case. Another challenge we faced was the cultural difference. Our girls are Caucasian, but we are Black. For most of us, this was not a real issue. However, at least one of our girls had a problem identifying herself with us as she became a teen. She didn't verbally admit it, but whenever we'd go in public places, she'd walk away from us. She wouldn't sit with us at church, and whenever she could, she'd try to attach herself to a Caucasian family to avoid us. She even attempted to run away a few times. Not only was this an issue with her, but some blacks expressed anger at us for adopting white children. They asked us why we'd adopted white children when there were so many blacks who needed to be adopted. Additionally, some white people expressed that they felt sorry for our girls for having to live with black people. There were times when racist white people would discriminate against the girls just because they had a black family. In closing, adoption can be a beautiful thing. It is a way that we open up our hearts and homes to those who may need a home, and give them the love and acceptance of a family that they can call their own. However, it is not for the faint of heart. There are some real challenges to adopting. There are so many factors that play into the behaviors that you will have to deal with: DNA, prior environment and exposure, defense mechanisms, cultural differences,

expectations, physical limitations, the opinions of outsiders, etc.... And adoption is not a temporary fix, it is a lifelong commitment to be an integral part of a person's life with whom you may or may not share any DNA. It takes love and understanding. It takes acceptance. It takes patience. I know that my husband and I have cried many tears. On the other hand, we have rejoiced over many victories. It has not always been easy, but on the most part, it's been worth it.

MY FATHER WAS BORN...

(And that's pretty much all I knew / know about MY family)

My father was born in the coal region of Tamaqua, PA. on November 5th, 1922. The earliest picture I have of him is riding a tricycle wearing a diaper. My grandfather Benjamin was an Italian immigrant who came to America on a boat. Benjamin became a Barber. I never did get the story of how and where my grandmother met my grandfather, and how and when they wound up into Tamaqua, but I do know they birthed 6 children together: Joe, Carmella (always referred to as Sis) John (Johnny), Michael (Mike), Elizabeth (Liz) and Angelo (Angie), in that order.

How could it be I am 67 years old now and I do not know how when and where this part of the family story began? The sole survivor now is Liz. Liz will be 100 years old on June 23rd, 2025, God willing.

Liz married and lived with Frank Joyce until he died. She worked as a hairdresser with her sister Sis from the age of 15, until she retired in _____. Liz and Frank never had children, by choice I always believed. Sis's son Robert looks after her now.

Roger was away at work when Sharon called, he insisted I meet with our new birth family ASAP so we didn't miss the chance to be chosen to parent this new life. Great Grandma Toni, Andy her son, Vanessa his daughter, came to visit. They brought photos, pictures of grandkids and cousins, aunts, and uncles. I faced this introduction alone. The people in front of me introduced themselves as a Mexican American family that grew up on the edge of Chinatown. Their relatives in the photos had an uncanny resemblance to my own cousins who lived in Florida.

A strange feeling came over me and I was immediately comfortable with Grandma Toni. She was comfortable enough to ask if it bothered me that our new baby would be part Mexican?

Not a question I expected... hmm. What did I expect? Maybe, how old are you? Why isn't your husband here with you? Are you Catholic? No one asked about our smoke detectors.

I suppose Sharon had already shared everything she knew about us; how hard working we were and friendly, kind, outgoing, honest, interesting, curious, and compassionate. Vanessa seemed relaxed with me. Her father seemed relieved

too, maybe for the first time in a long time. Maybe because he could finally see a light through the trees, his prayers for guidance were appearing. His mother was holding his hand, he in turn was holding Vanessa's.

Instant pivot occurred; The Cradle Adoption Agency was notified. Enter: Lutheran Child and Family Social Services; Counseling for Birth Families, Adoption 101, Counseling for Adoptive Families, Red Cross training, CPR, First Aid. transfer the home study, new introductions.

Sunday family brunch happened every week at Grandma Toni's house on Hayne's CT. Like clockwork the tray of bacon appeared, the tray of fried chicken, pancakes, eggs. We felt we were a welcome addition to the Martinez family. Vanessa's belly grew. We asked if we could call her baby Doriana, and from that day forward we all talked of Doriana's arrival. We awaited her scheduled arrival of November 5th, 2000.

Earlier, in August of 2000, I prepared orientation to welcome new international students to the School of the Art Institute. The semester was about to begin when I got a call from home.

My father's cancer had returned, his lung cancer had become esophageal cancer, he'd already lost 14lbs. and was unable to swallow solid food. I flew home to be with my mom, two brothers, and my sister. Our family was already a bit lost. None of us knew exactly where Johnny was living, not that he was living separately from Gail, his wife of 24 years. Kathy was the youngest and had two small children to raise while working full time. Mike was in charge. It seemed to make sense. After all, he worked with my father every day for his entire life. My mother never learned to drive, so Mike was the person she depended on for transport. When I arrived, all I could really do was ride shotgun to the hospital. We were in search of hospice care.

We scheduled a meet & greet at home for the following day. We were all gathered in the livingroom when the doorbell rang. A hospice nurse entered the scene.

THERE IS HOPE

As I sit reflecting on my journey as the happy, anxious, prospect of finally becoming a mother to a child I wanted so much, I now wonder, "If only I had known then what I know Now! What a difference in parenting style I would have had! I was unaware of the upcoming emotional rollercoaster of being an adoptive aren't.

I remember how wonderful it was to hold my baby for the first time. My heart was busting with pride. My beloved late husband Bill and I named our son Bryan. A year later, we adopted our daughter Kristi. Although we are all now emotionally connected, the journey was filled with stress and emotional pain. We hadn't a clue about parenting children with significant emotional needs. Many years, many great challenges, and sleepless nights later, I can look back and forgive myself for the things my husband and I did not know. We did our best, and I'm sure you have as well. For all the painful memories, there are many great ones filled with laughter, pride, and thankfulness. I love my children dearly, and I always have.

I am so proud of my son. Through all the hell he raised as a child, he has grown into an angel. I take comfort in knowing that intuitively we did many things right. One thing that he has told me before, that I offer to you now, is never give up on your child---no matter what might happen and what you might go through. As long as God gives us air in the sky to breathe. There is hope...

From the Forward to the book, Fear to Love, by Bryan Post
Written by Opal Post, Bryan's mother

TO MY BABY E

Dear Baby E,
6 months have flown by already
Since the day you were brought to this earth
And they tell me your struggle started
As early as 12 hours after birth
But like the soldier you are, my fighter
You made them all go away
Then at 10 days your mommy met you
And I promise, I'm here to stay
I remember day "10", or day "1" as I call it
They said you'd never walk, let alone run
With tears and smiles I looked down on your face
And said "I don't care. He's still my son"
I then took you aside and we had a talk, you and I
We made a deal on that special day
And I told you that as long as you never quit
Mommy would fight, you'd see we'd go all the way
And I believe God heard our conversation that day
He heard mommy's pleads and cries
And in 6 little months, so much has happened
Each day you continue to surprise
The laughter, the tears, we've shared them both
Sometimes all at one time
And even when I feel I'm losing my mind
You smile, and again, I know I'm just fine
My angel, I could've never imagined
The ups and downs this would entail
But if there's one thing in life I'm sure of now
Is that you, ER, I won't fail
You've talked, you've laughed, you've rolled over
And I can't wait til you walk and crawl
In the future you'll share of His healing and mercy
That's what I wait for most of all

I speak blessings and coverings as days go by
Over you, for you are my love
And as I lay my head down to sleep each night
I'm comforted by the Peace from above
We started w prayer, fasting, and fighting
But, believe me, this isn't the end
I declare healing and health upon you, my love
Know that in Him, you have the Greatest Friend
Well there's not much more to say for it's only been 6 months
But one thing won't change, it's true
It might sound cliché, but I'll say it anyway
ER, mommy loves you
♡♡♡♡♡♡

THE ADOPTION OPTION

I am a parent of multitudes. A parent of three, a stepparent of three, a grandparent of six, and a previous foster parent of two. Of course, most people would say I am a parent of three, and some people may even deny me that label. I adopted my three, existentially mine forever, beloved and delightful children from abroad. It is somewhat controversial now, but it wasn't so much then. Let me tell you how it came to be my way of parenting.

There I was, a poor college student with a seemingly intractable health problem, one that would make pregnancy dangerous, even life-threatening, for me. As I formed ever more serious relationships, I would have to discuss this. When I married for the very first time, my husband agreed to have a vasectomy, not wanting children himself. However, when we went to arrange this, the doctor wisely said, since I was the one with the health issue, why wouldn't I get a tubal ligation? So I did. That marriage ended in friendship, and I was resolved to be a happy, child-free person. Except I wasn't all that happy. Children, it turns out, were important to me.

My next long-term, serious relationship led to a celebration of marriage, and we began to consider adopting children. We were both 30 by the end of our graduate school careers, and ready to launch into academia. Adoption was a highly accepted and common event – so common that we were told it would take seven years on a waiting list before we could have a home study* completed, and then we might have to wait up to seven years for an infant to adopt. We could be as old as 44 before a child might arrive. This was the process, we were told, for domestic adoption through the public social services. I tried again to wrestle with the reality of being child-free. It still didn't work for me.

Into our world came an example of an alternative path to parenthood. One wintry, cold, and dark evening, a relative my age and her husband stood at my front door, holding a bundle of smiling joy! This couple had just picked up their tiny child at the international airport and would stay with us overnight before returning to their hometown up north. We were thrilled to discover the reality and the possibility of international adoption.

We consulted our social worker. She gave us a referral to a small agency in the state we were moving to as we began our university careers. This agency, which she was familiar with, specialized in international adoptions. As soon as we

relocated, we contacted this agency.

When asked whether we had a country we were especially interested in, I responded with a question. "Of the countries you are working with, where are the most children waiting for adoption?" India was the response. I knew Indian culture – sacred literature, music, and so on. Also, as a cross-national family sociologist, I knew something about family life and social realities in India. Our first child would be from India. In 1981, adoption wasn't as normatively accepted within some countries as it is today, and we welcomed my infant son from his orphanage when he was just four months old. Other older children and a few infants and toddlers came on the same plane he was on.

This was the first joyful addition to my family, and many stories of my son's life and times remain to be told. Adoption was our option for building our family. I happily learned all the lessons and received all the blessings of parenting – starting with pediatric visits and specialists because my son had some heart issues. I enjoyed sharing him with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and community friends.

When he was nearly two, knowing that the process would take a while, we started another adoption through having a home study. I was offered a good position at another University. We prepared to move, but somewhat sadly. Since our home study in one state was complete, we thought we would have to wait until we arrived in our new state and start all over with another home study, wasting at least a year.

And then, the grandparents arrived to visit, arriving with a strange but very consequential request. My mother-in-law was a wise and wonderful woman. It was very unusual for her to ask to go anywhere to shop, much less request to go to a specific store. She had seen a shoe store from the highway and apparently, they were having a sale she just had to go check out! We went, of course. As she was looking for shoes, I saw a family like mine – a white mother and a little boy who seemed to be from India! They were driving from one state to another, passing through our town on the highway. Someone in her family saw that same shoe store and insisted they stop!

As Moms, we were happy to chat with each other about our international adoption experiences. I shared our dilemma: a completed home study in one state but an anticipated move to another. "That should be no problem," she said. Their adoption from India, she said, had been through Holt International Children's Services, an agency working with various countries to facilitate

adoption. And, since they are licensed to operate in all 50 states, they could receive the home study now and complete the adoption even when we moved to another state. What a wonderful and, for us, miraculous meeting! I immediately contacted Holt, sent in our home study, proving us worthy, and the very real and joyful result was that just a bit more than a year later, my second child, a one-year-old daughter, arrived! I met her in New York and arrived too late for our connecting flight through Pittsburgh. I had a tiny baby and lacked the supplies for an overnight, but both the airline and the hotel connected to the airport made everything right. It was a lovely night, bathing the tiny girl in the sink and trying to sleep a few hours through my excitement and her uncertainty about where she had ended up! The next day, she was warmly welcomed by her big brother! We were now a family with two beautiful children from India.

Years passed. Many adventures were enjoyed. We met with other families of children adopted internationally and with multiracial families. Whether rainbow families by marriage, birth, or adoption, we had a good community. When my daughter was in kindergarten and my son in third grade, I wanted to add another child to my life. It was agreed that we would be ready for a somewhat older child. We could welcome a toddler rather than an infant, and so we were studied and approved again for an adoption through Holt! I was just starting my sabbatical year when our second daughter arrived. She was three years old. I have found someone who spoke her dialect in case we needed help communicating with her. But we had no problems using love, gestures, and words during the first few weeks. She was amazing at how quickly she learned English, especially with the help of her older siblings.

Adoption is a way to build a family. It is not without controversy and unique challenges. Families of all variations have challenges, and we learn and grow through them all. With a child of another race, a parent becomes well aware of endemic racism but also meets many people who are eager to get to know families like mine. Sadly, just as my children reached adulthood, my husband, who had been a partner in raising these children, decided to move on to another marriage. But, in time, we all healed. My young adults learned to accept it all – even having four ‘parents’ thanks to remarriage. Life is wonderful, bringing people together in all sorts of ways – adoption, marriage, remarriage.

Postscript: My son’s story ended with his death after surviving heart issues, diabetes, testicular cancer, a doctor who failed to recognize a condition needing treatment, and subsequent kidney failure. I am quite sure he had more years of

life, friends, loves, adventures, and joys in living as part of my family, even with these hardships and illnesses. My older daughter is married with a beautiful son and a wonderful husband. This grandchild of mine has seven grandparents (or maybe eight) because of the reality of remarriages. My youngest child is full of intelligence and athletic ability and is a creative and caring friend to others. She has faced various types of loss and betrayal and has grown to a strength and maturity I did not have at her age. We stand by each other, supporting and loving one another and celebrating the people we have each grown to be. None of us would be who we are without all of us. I thank God for the many ways to build a family.

FIRST TIME FATHER

It was scary being a first-time father. As time went on, it definitely became easier. You learn as you go. Our son quickly went from crawling to walking in like four months! He was very high functioning and a happy little guy. He came home to us at 10 1/2 months. He was absorbed by the colors of the outdoors, since he never got to leave the orphanage. He was also fascinated by textures like the feeling of carpet, his crib sheets, the color of leaves, and even water from his bath...we gave him his first bath! When he was in the orphanage, he was wiped down and cleaned with cloths. He had a few learning issues when starting school. A very good tutor helped him catch up. He has always been a sweet boy. He has grown up to be a successful welder with a great job. Strong in his faith. He also has a passion for blacksmithing. He's a very hard worker. When he was 6, he met his birthmother and a younger bio sister. He feels good knowing his birth family and having pictures of them. Over the years, we have shared cards, letters, a few phone calls and care packages with his birth family. We started very slowly getting to know them and moved forward and increased contact when interactions continued to be positive. Adoption can feel scary at times, the unknown of what will happen. We've had the support from family, friends, adoptive parents, teachers, and church family. It's been an incredible journey.

THE STORY OF OUR ADOPTION JOURNEY

We brought our son home at 10.5 months. He was a very happy baby. He has brought us so much happiness and joy. He was high functioning but on the fetal alcohol spectrum. This led him to being on stimulant medicine and he needed a tutor for early school years. Through it all he has shown much resilience. He graduated high school attended college and has a great job now. Our daughter came home at 6 months and was happy and healthy also. Yet as she reached puberty, she struggled with depression, suicide attempts and hospitalizations. She is much better now and is 17. The struggles now are much more manageable. We are truly blessed by both of our kids. As parents, we've needed extra support. Just know that adoption itself is a trauma and there are often unforeseen health concerns. Connecting with good doctors, therapists and school staff is so important. Also having an IEP for school may help as well as a state student advocate if needed for unresolved issues. Being a patient parent, listening more than talking, following a love-based approach really helps. Consequences have never worked for our kids. Try to find ways to connect with your child. Our daughter communicates more when in the car, at bedtime and by texting. Utilizing the Post Institute (Bryan Post) on FB is helpful. It truly does take a village to help some kids. We have found support connecting with other adoptive parents. Focus on the positives. Never give up. The journey has not always been easy. It's not for everyone. We have been blessed in many ways and are glad we chose adoption.

CONNECTED OTHERS



This group includes: a child advocate, a kinship adoption, and a godparent. All of whom have their own perspectives and experiences from their place in the adoption circle.

A VOTE FOR MOVING ON

Here's a thought for those of us interested in the cycle of adoption, and what the experiences of the birth parents, the adoptive parents and especially the adopted child may teach about that precious life. In short, keep the good, get past the rest. Joey was left at the fire station in Philadelphia. His early life with his new Mom, Dad and Sister was filled with fun and trips to New York to visit extended family, especially his two 'cousins,' boys about his age.

As time went on the cousins moved away, but his auntie kept close, with occasional visits, and of course, with a few dollars in a birthday and Christmas card. This was before social media and cell phones. This was before his adoptive dad started getting angrier and angrier. He never hit Joey, but shook him a bit too hard by the shoulders once or twice. This was before the divorce and shuttle visits to two households in two cities.

As Joey grew up and met friends, he 'knocked-up' a girlfriend, as he says it, and she gave the kid up for adoption. In later years as a young man, Joey wanted to know about his own kid: boy or girl, healthy, smart, nearby, "Can I see him/her? Can I know who adopted the kid and how they are doing as a new family? Are they having problems like I had?"

After getting frustrated with the child welfare system, Joey was frustrated. He couldn't find out about what happened before the fire station; who were his birth parents, where are they, what about Ginger who had his baby, where is she, where is the baby? None of this was easy, it just got more and more complicated and got Joey into a nervous state. He started hanging out with a marginal crowd of traveling alcoholics and soft then hard druggies. He contracted HIV, got a hard experience with the labyrinth of the social service system, and finally called it all quits.

Joey now has a place to live in exchange for doing odd jobs to help the building superintendent. He is clean, has new set of friends, health insurance through Medicaid and only now and then thinks about his past, his child, his birth family and adoptive dad who died a few years back.

Joey is as content as he can be. He has a cell phone and Facebook page that keep him connected and reasonably content. His new set of friends celebrate with him; they invite him to Thanksgiving dinner and birthdays. He hears from his adoptive mom who has remarried, and others of his adoptive/extended family

are as near as a text or phone call on the holidays. With his new stable living situation, the connection to his 'brother-cousins' who love him and never flaunt their marriages, careers, successful children or lifestyles. Joey has a more stable situation, health wise with HIV under control, emotionally with things to occupy his attention and small milestones each month, each year to look forward. So despite the tug on him, his cousins and his adoptive second family to delve into how he got to this place, who was his birth mom, what happened to his own child that was in turn adopted, Joey moves on. He is as happy as he can be with small victories, birthday celebrations now he has made it to fifty. Fifty! Joey votes for moving on.

BECOMING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Our experience with becoming adoptive parents began 26 years ago. The journey was not an easy one, but it's one of the best decisions that we have ever made.

Initially, we did not set out to become adoptive parents. At the time, we found out that my sister had drugs in her system when she delivered her baby. So she was given the option of taking classes for 6 months, have visiting rights, until she became drug free to have her baby returned to her or the baby would have to be placed into the foster care system until she was adopted.

After meeting with her caseworker she gave us the option of allowing a family member to go through foster care classes in order to temporarily keep the child until my sister completed her classes and could get her child back.

At the time, this seemed doable-right? After all, temporarily caring for our newborn niece for 6 months and attending classes while working everyday, could not be too challenging. Especially if it would help my sister to get her life back on track. So, easy peasy-we agreed to do it!

Our parents in their late 60's at the time began the process for 3 months, and when it became too much for them, my husband and I met with the caseworker and became the new caregivers to start the foster care process.

What started out as a 6-month temporary process, eventually turned into our adopting our beautiful daughter 2 years later!

Unfortunately towards the last month of the program, my sister had a setback and was unsuccessful with completion. Therefore, we were given a couple options. Afterwards, my husband told the caseworker, we've gone through the teething stage so there's no way that we are giving her up to be placed in the foster care system permanently!

So, we made the decision to complete the classes and went to court to become adoptive parents to our daughter. I was 40 and my husband was 44! Our daughter is such a joy.

We have been blessed to love her and be there for her throughout the past 26 years.

We've gone through all of the stages of life with her from watching her grow up, trying to be an example by giving her a foundation on Christian principles, and how to treat others with love and kindness. We have very fond memories of

watching her learn to take her first steps to getting her Driver's license to driving her first car. Or other memories of making sand castles and walking on the beach, learning to ride a bike, then on to swimming lessons, first day of school, ballet classes, sleepovers, cookouts, family vacations, gymnastics competitions to cheerleading. Then there's the process of finding the perfect dresses for her school dances and proms, graduations, pursuing gainful employment, and currently moving into her first apartment.

It's truly been an amazing journey. With God, a village of loving and supportive family, friends, and community; we have given her all of the tools necessary for her to live a full and productive life.

It hasn't been easy. As parents, we're not perfect. We've made plenty of mistakes along the way, but the decision to adopt our daughter, was well worth it.

With God, all things are possible!

BLANK PAGES

The story of any adoption can be told from multiple points of view. The most common are the obvious ones, those of the parents, adoptive and biological, and the child. But the story can also be the reflection and observations of an official participating and often facilitating the process. My view is that of a court appointed special advocate, a CASA. Each child who comes before the court is assigned a CASA to be his/ her advocate before the judge in each proceeding. My experience meant being in court, often for a limited amount of time, before a case was resolved. This story is about an extended effort to make a boy and his dad happy.

As a new CASA I was given a case involving several children, 5 siblings and a baby visiting with them at the time of the court's intervention. The siblings happily returned to the mother after her focused effort to meet the court's demands. The baby presented a separate challenge since his home was in another state, but Indiana now had jurisdiction. Jimmy (not his real name) was placed in a foster home as he began his odyssey through a supportive, but frequently thwarted, system.

Jimmy's biological parents had already been declared unfit to take custody, so our efforts began by looking at other family members. The paternal grandmother presented herself to the court as willing and able to accept responsibility for her grandson. Thus began the first chapter.

Working with her, we checked her background and her living arrangements. Finding everything acceptable we moved toward her adoption of Jimmy with permanency in sight. But grandma became ill, had surgery, and died while we waited. The one blessing in all of this was the quality of the foster care Jimmy was receiving. Through health issues and the first of his pre-schooling, Jimmy was well situated.

A great aunt in Jimmy's home state offered her home and became our second possibility. As we moved through this process, it ultimately became evident that she would not provide a safe, nurturing home for him. After emergency placement back in Indiana, Jimmy was returned to his secure foster home.

A national search for an adoptive family began. With several possibilities before us, we interviewed the prospective parents and chose a family. By now several years had passed and Jimmy was in school. He was also demonstrating

behavioral challenges. However, after visits both short and then extended, the parents were told “call your lawyer”. It was time to move to adoption. Days before the court appearance, the prospective parents changed their minds and called off the proceedings.

Once again pictures went out nationwide Jimmy was now in a residential facility that he found acceptable, but that was always with the idea that it was temporary. All this time I was visiting and watching as time passed and disappointments mounted. And then a single dad from out of state stepped forward. With much to share both materially and personally, Charlie wanted this boy as his son. He made four hour drives to visit with Jimmy. Not only did he confirm his decision, he confirmed the court’s faith in him. To their mutual joy the adoption was approved.

Eleven and a half years had passed before this happy resolution. It was a happy trip I made to a courtroom half way between the two homes, the one Jimmy was leaving behind and the one he was moving toward. There were challenges, especially at first, but Jimmy and his father have worked through them as we all do. A recent text message shared the news that he has graduated from high school with his dad by his side.

From my point of view I believe the court was a valuable asset in this extended process. We might have wished for a faster resolution, but with all the challenges and obstacles this happy ending, this happy family, seems worth the wait.

GUIDANCE



This section of the Stories from the Adoption Circle is included here to give some parting tips and advice for parents and caregivers. Both articles are written by experts in the field of adoption and also, are themselves, adoptees.

3 TIPS TO SUPPORT ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENTS

As a psychotherapist and someone with lived experience in foster care and adoption, I often reflect on how my personal journey informs my professional insights. Over the years, I've realized that by understanding what I once needed as a child, I can better guide others to repair what was lost and embrace what can be found.

Adoptive and foster parents face unique challenges. Raising children who may have experienced trauma, attachment difficulties, or feelings of rejection requires sensitivity, patience, and intentional care. These three tips are designed to help parents create an environment of empathy and connection, nurturing healing and growth for their children.

1. Be Mindful of Your Tone of Voice

Children with attachment challenges are particularly attuned to tone. A harsh or angry tone can feel like a threat to their sense of security, triggering fears of rejection or abandonment. For them, anger isn't just a momentary expression—it can feel like a door slamming shut on their connection with you.

Imagine their inner thoughts:

"Do you still love me?"

"Am I unlovable?"

"Will you leave me too?"

Why Parents Yell?

Parents often yell out of frustration, feeling as if their child is emotionally "out of reach." Ironically, yelling can reinforce this sense of disconnection. Instead of bridging the gap, it deepens it, leading to what I call "access denied" — a breakdown in emotional communication.

What to Do Instead:

Soften Your Tone: Speak calmly and with curiosity. Your calmness can soothe your child, even in moments of high stress.

Practice Empathy: Think back to your own childhood. What did you need most when you felt overwhelmed? Likely, it was understanding and connection.

Get on Their Level: With younger children, kneel down to make eye contact. Use a relaxed posture and say, “I’m here with you.” This physical and emotional grounding helps them feel safe.

The Brain Science:

A calm and empathetic tone activates the child’s adaptive neural network, enhancing their ability to regulate emotions and develop critical executive functions like reasoning and problem-solving. In essence, your tone can help rewire their brain for resilience.

2. Create Space for Feelings

Feelings can be overwhelming, especially for children or teens who have experienced trauma. Their emotions may feel so big that they struggle to process them, let alone express them safely. Creating a space where feelings are welcomed and respected is essential for their healing.

A Powerful Intervention: “This Is My Boundary, This Is My Space” I developed for children, which is inspired by Integrative Body Psychotherapy.

This interactive exercise helps children explore and communicate their emotional needs in real time, fostering a deeper understanding between parent and child.

Age Range: 7–17

Goal: Teach children/teens how to set boundaries and express their needs while helping parents learn to respect and honor them.

Materials: Pencil and paper.

Instructions:

1. **Set the Scene:** Explain to your child or teen that you’ll explore how much space or closeness they need when experiencing different feelings.
2. **Establish Boundaries:** Have the child/teen stand in one corner of the room while you stand in the opposite corner.

3. Explore Feelings: Instruct the child/teen to say, “This is my boundary, this is my space when I’m feeling [specific emotion].” Slowly step toward them as they speak. When they say “stop,” stop immediately.
4. Acknowledge the Space: Observe the distance required for each feeling. Some emotions might call for a comforting hug, while others may need significant space. Write down their preferences as a reference for the future.
5. Repeat and Learn: Practice this with various feelings to better understand your child/teen’s emotional needs in different scenarios.

This exercise empowers children and teens to articulate their boundaries and gives parents the tools to respect those boundaries, strengthening trust and connection.

3. Overdose on Positive Parenting Messages

Foster and adopted children often wrestle with deep-seated feelings of abandonment and low self-worth. Early separations or traumatic experiences can lead them to internalize the belief that they were unwanted or unlovable.

What They Need to Hear:


To counteract these negative beliefs, children need a steady “overdose” of positive reinforcement—messages that rebuild their confidence and sense of worth.

Ask yourself:

“When my child is acting out, what age do I see?”

Meet them at that emotional age. Speak the words they needed to hear during those formative years.

Here are some examples of Early Parenting Messages to heal unmet needs:

 <h2>Good Parent Messages</h2>		
Early Life	School Age	Teen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I love you. ■ I want you. ■ I see you and I hear you. ■ I welcome and cherish you. ■ I'll take care of you. ■ Over and over, I will show you how to trust. ■ My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos. ■ I am not leaving. ■ Sometimes I will tell you no, and that's because I love you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I love you. I want you. ■ I give you permission to be different from me. ■ I see you and I hear you. ■ My patience is stronger than your anger. ■ My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos. ■ You can trust your inner voice. ■ It is not what you do but who you are that I love. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I love you. I want you. ■ I give you permission to be different from me. ■ I see you and I hear you. ■ My love is bigger than your hate. ■ My care is more lasting than your rejection. ■ It is not what you do but who you are that I love. ■ I will not give up on you. ■ I have confidence in you. ■ I am proud of you.

These affirmations, when repeated consistently, act as counterweights to the feelings of rejection and abandonment they may carry.

Final Thoughts

Parenting children from foster care or adoption requires an extraordinary level of empathy and intentionality. By focusing on your tone, respecting their emotional boundaries, and consistently affirming their worth, you can create a foundation of trust and healing.

I often think about the kind of support I wished for as a child navigating the complexities of foster care and adoption. These approaches are rooted in that reflection—a blueprint for the care and understanding that transforms lives.

To every adoptive and foster parent reading this: your role is challenging, but

your capacity for love and connection is transformative. Adoptees and foster youth are resilient. With the right balance of empathy, understanding, and support, healing is possible—for them and for you.

You've got this, and together, we can break the cycle and build something beautiful.

PARENTING THE STAGE, NOT THE AGE: UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS

Why Meeting Your Child Where They Are Emotionally Is the Key to Healing and Connection

In the realm of parenting, especially when caring for children who have experienced trauma, traditional age-based expectations often fall short. Bryan Post, a renowned child behavior expert and founder of the Post Institute, emphasizes the importance of "parenting the stage, not the age." This approach encourages caregivers to focus on a child's emotional and developmental stage rather than their chronological age, fostering deeper understanding and connection. (podcasts.apple.com)

The Impact of Trauma on Development

Children who have faced early life adversities—such as neglect, abuse, or the loss of primary caregivers—often experience disruptions in their developmental trajectories. These disruptions can manifest as behaviors that seem incongruent with their chronological age. For instance, a teenager might seek comfort in ways typical of a much younger child, like using a pacifier or wanting to be held. Such behaviors are not mere regressions but are indicative of unmet developmental needs. Post explains that these actions are the child's way of communicating their need for safety, connection, and healing. By recognizing and responding to these cues appropriately, caregivers can provide the nurturing environment necessary for the child's emotional growth.

Understanding Emotional Stages

Traditional parenting often aligns expectations with a child's age, assuming that certain behaviors and responsibilities are appropriate at specific milestones.

However, trauma can arrest emotional development, meaning a child's emotional age may not match their physical age. For example, a 14-year-old who has experienced significant trauma may function emotionally at the level of a much younger child.

Post emphasizes the importance of assessing and responding to the child's emotional stage. This involves observing behaviors, understanding their underlying needs, and providing support that aligns with their current emotional capacity. By doing so, caregivers can help children progress through developmental stages that were previously disrupted.

The Role of Oxytocin in Healing

A key component of Post's approach is the emphasis on creating "oxytocin opportunities." Oxytocin, often referred to as the "love hormone," plays a crucial role in bonding and emotional regulation. Activities that promote the release of oxytocin—such as cuddling, eye contact, and gentle touch—can help soothe the child's nervous system, making them feel safe and connected. (postinstitute.com) By intentionally incorporating these bonding experiences into daily interactions, caregivers can foster a sense of security and trust. This, in turn, facilitates the child's ability to form healthy attachments and supports their emotional development.

Shifting from Control to Connection

Traditional disciplinary approaches often focus on controlling behavior through consequences and rewards. However, for children with trauma histories, such methods can exacerbate feelings of fear and insecurity. Post advocates for a shift from control-based strategies to connection-based approaches. (fasdsuccess.com) This involves prioritizing the relationship over behavior, seeking to understand the root causes of actions, and responding with empathy and support. By doing so, caregivers can create an environment where children feel valued and understood, reducing the need for maladaptive behaviors. (bryanpost.com)

Practical Steps for Caregivers

Assess Emotional Stage: Observe your child's behaviors and emotional responses

to determine their current developmental stage.

1. Create Oxytocin Opportunities: Engage in activities that promote bonding and emotional connection.

2. Respond with Empathy: Seek to understand the underlying needs driving behaviors, responding with compassion rather than punishment.

3. Maintain Consistency: Provide a stable and predictable environment to help your child feel secure.

4. Seek Support: Engage with professionals or support groups familiar with trauma-informed care to enhance your understanding and skills.

RESOURCES

All of these resources (and this list) are not meant to be exhaustive but useful to parents, adoptees themselves, family members, educators, and other professionals, for an understanding of children (and adults). One comes away with not only the knowledge of what is trauma and the effects of trauma, but how to respond when faced with the behaviors and emotions that seem inexplicable.

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CLOSING NOTE

It is my hope that these writings will reach others in the adoption circle; those curious about adoption and how the members of the circle cope, and also, perhaps, for the book to be a springboard for formal or informal support groups. A way to come together, share perspectives, and learn from one another. By offering this book at the required nominal fee, I hope to make these voices from the circle easily accessible to anyone who may be seeking, understanding, insight, and even healing. Perhaps, through reading the stories, reflecting and dialoging, we can better understand what adoption means and has meant in our own lives and the lives of our own family members.