

Adoption Today

May 2011

International and Transracial Adoption Resource
www.adoptiontoday.com

Karyn Williams

From an internationally adoptive family of 19 children, Christian singer Karyn Williams speaks out on behalf of international adoption

Addiction & Adoption

Singer Zara Phillips shares her thoughts and experience overcoming addiction and how it relates to her adoption story

Older Child Adoptions

- * *What to Consider Before Adopting*
- * *Tips for Successful Transitions*
- * *Uncovering Educational Challenges*
- * *Preparation is Vital*

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A Change of Heart or a Change in Attitude?

Once again, change is in the air. Or more precisely, maybe change is always in the air or in the everyday activities of our day-to-day lives. Certainly the politicians have the change mantra at the front of their “must have” vocabulary inclusions, but too often their idea of change reflects what I have left over from a trip to the gas station!

With all of the uncertainty that change implies, there is a high degree of predictability in the direction of child adoption. In an article published in *Adoption Today* in October 2007, we identified the trends that would reflect the future of intercountry adoption. One of the more significant changes noted was China's eagerness to jump on the domestic adoption bandwagon which we predicted would lead to a considerable decrease in the number of adoptable children available for intercountry adoption. It happened.

We also recommended this course of action in our article, “As an alternative, if you decide not to adopt internationally, consider adopting an American-born child, particularly an older ‘waiting child’ in foster care, or perhaps an infant or toddler of another race. Thousands of children of all races are in public and private foster homes here in the U.S., and many of them are available for adoption.”

So ask yourself, what is the difference between adopting a waiting child from the United States, or a waiting child from China, Ethiopia, Russia or any of the other participating international adoption countries? Their pathway to foster care or a waiting child identity is the same worldwide isn't it? Birth parent neglect, abandonment, loss of birth parent — you fill in the description and they all apply equally.

So how does this all fit into the “change” I began this discourse with? Isn't change what we in the adoption community are all about? Consider our difficulties with infertility? We change our image of family and choose to adopt! Wait times for your preferred international adoption country grown too long? We change your perception of waiting children and move to the front of the line to adopt an available child. The elements of family remain the same. It is our perception of family and how we react that makes the difference and ignites the fire of change in our hearts and minds.

As an example, for years, the faith community has embraced

the needs of orphaned children from around the world and provided support through a dedicated mission outreach. It was enough at the time to include spiritual and financial support to the most vulnerable of children in all countries, but barely enough to include the abandoned children here in the United States. But today, a dramatic change, emerging from the faith community and recognizing the plight of the abandoned and neglected children in America, has swept over our nation with a renewed focus on bringing America's children home to their forever family.

For the first time in decades, the number of children available for adoption from our foster care system is no longer growing, but on a gradual decline thanks to the commitment of the faith community to bring these children home. Should we attribute this to a change of heart from the faith community? No, the heart has always been in the right place in regard to the welfare of children. The change has been in the perception and attitude toward the waiting children available for adoption from the America foster care system. We have come to understand that children residing without families here in America are emotionally and psychologically no less needy than children anywhere in the world waiting for a family to call their own.

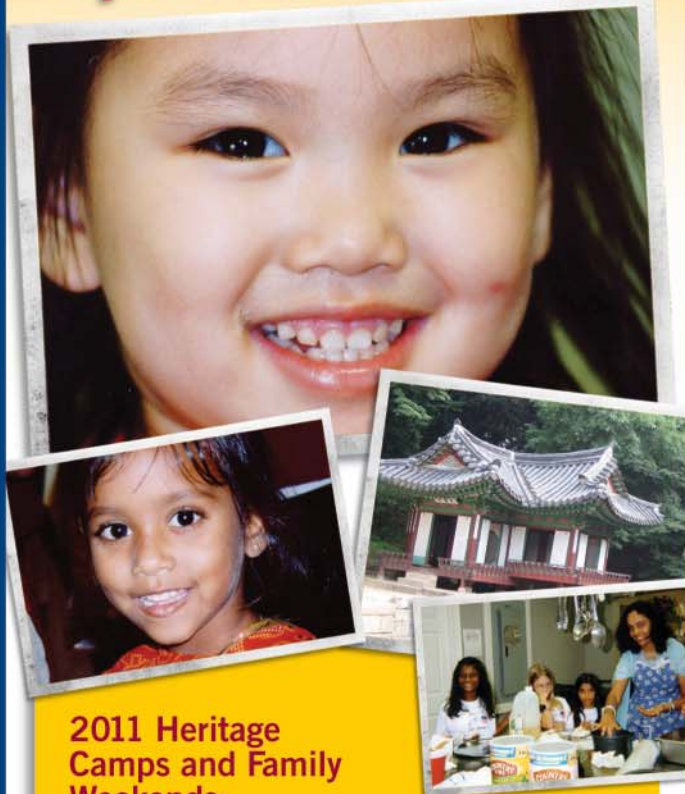
The children are all here and waiting — white, black, Hispanic, bi-racial, sibling groups, infants, toddlers, adolescents and teens. I know your heart is ready.

Are you ready for a change too?

To inquire about children available for adoption in your state, contact your local Department of Human Services. You can also preview photos and biographical details on children in your area through your state Heart Gallery program or through www.AdoptUSkids.org sponsored by The Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Human services. Our sister publication, *Fostering Families Today*, also recently launched a full-color informational flyer called *America's Waiting Children*. For more information on how you can help sponsor children in America's Waiting Children program, contact us at 888-924-6736.

For the Children,
Richard

Enter the World of your Child's Heritage



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| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
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| China Camp | July 7, 8 & 9 |
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| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
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| Visit Korea Family Tour | June 25 - July 6 |
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on the cover

Karyn Williams, Christian singer, shares her story of growing up in a large family with many internationally adopted siblings. Read her story on page 28.

KAAN Prepares for 13th Annual Conference in Georgia

The Korean Adoptee/Adoptive Family Network will host its 13th Annual KAAAN Conference July 29-31 in Atlanta, Ga. This year's conference will be hosted at the Sheraton Downtown in Atlanta and will focus on the theme, We Have a Dream. The conference will focus on the dreams we have within the community and what we are doing to pursue or achieve these dreams. For more information about the conference, visit <http://www.kaanet.com>.

NACAC Hosts Annual Conference in August

The North American Council on Adoptable Children will host its 37th Annual Conference in Denver, Colo., August 4-6. Pre-conference sessions will begin August 3. The keynote speaker for the event will be Dr. Bruce Perry, a best-selling author, clinician, researchers, professor and leading expert on child trauma. Perry will also present an all-day pre-conference session — The Impact of Trauma on the Developing Child — on Wednesday, August 3. For more information about the conference, visit <http://www.nacac.org>, or write to info@nacac.org.

Adoption Institute Hosts Taste of Spring Event in May

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute is preparing for its annual Taste of Spring event that will take place May 12 at the Metropolitan Pavilion in Manhattan. The star-studded event will honor Kristin Chenoweth, who partnered with ShoeDazzle last fall to create a limited-edition boot with the profits of the shoe's sale donated to the Adoption Institute. For additional information about the Taste of Spring event, contact William Boltz at wboltz@adoptioninstitute.org.

23rd Annual ATTACH Conference to be in Nebraska

The Association for Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children (ATTACH) is hosting its 23rd annual conference Sept. 21-24 in Omaha, Neb. This year's conferences focuses

on Attachment and Trauma: through the Eyes of a Child. For more than 20 years, ATTACH has been advocating for improved treatment services for children who have experienced significant traumas affecting their attachment. This year, ATTACH is bringing the conference to the Plains area. Approximately 400 attendees from across North America, as well as other countries, are expected to attend.

Attachment-related traumas can include child maltreatment, separation and loss of a parent, exposure to post-partum depression, domestic violence, and other overwhelming early life experiences that affect the child's sense of security. Research over 50 years has demonstrated that the nature and quality of the attachment relationship between a child and primary caregiver influences virtually all other spheres of development — neurological, behavioral, social, emotional and moral.

The ATTACH Annual Conference is an opportunity for parents and professionals to network with peers and to learn from world renowned experts about the most recent developments, research and training in the fields of attachment and trauma. The conference will include 35 workshops designed for parents and experienced professionals, as well as those new to the field. Two keynote addresses are also planned by Edward Tronick, Ph.D., developer of the Still-face paradigm, author, researcher and Harvard professor; and Laurie Anne Pearlman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist from Massachusetts, who specializes in vicarious trauma. Full day presentations at the post-conference institute will feature John Briere, Ph.D., author, researcher and professor at Keck School of Medicine, LAC-USC; and, a special workshop led by Victoria Kelly, Ph.D. and Lori Thomas, experts in the area of therapeutic parenting techniques for families parenting children who have experienced trauma in early childhood. For more information, contact Lynn Wetterberg at 847-356-3506 or Jackie Meyer at 402-336-4841.

State Department Issues Notice About Japan Adoptions After Catastrophe

The process for intercountry adoption from Japan has not changed as a result of the recent Earthquake. American citizens wishing to

adopt from Japan can learn more about this process on the Japan country information page of the State Department website at www.adoption.state.gov. The Department of State understands and appreciates the desire of American Citizens to offer their help during this crisis in Japan. For more information on what private citizens can do to offer assistance in the disaster relief effort, see the U.S. Agency for International Development website at www.usaid.gov/.

Experience a Fun Event for Families with Ethiopian Heritage

The Ethiopian Heritage & Culture Camp 2011, a four-day Camp, will be July 21-24. Families have the option to attend either the entire camp or come for the Saturday activities only. The location for this year's Camp is Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center, a beautiful setting in the Shenandoah Mountains, just a short two-hour drive from Washington, D.C. or Baltimore, Md.

This year four-day long camp will have a lot of fun activities, while offering educational and self-improvement opportunities for everybody. Families are encouraged to take advantage of all the activities available — all are age-appropriate and will appeal to parents, as well as youngsters. In addition to language and cultural awareness classes, there will also be seminars and conferences designed to help parents in raising children in a multicultural environment. There will also be programs for the entire family, such as singing, dancing (eskista), camp fire, a special movie, and group meals. By popular request, both the Gebeya (market) and the outdoor Ethiopian coffee ceremony have been expanded.

For more information, visit www.heritageand-culturecamp.org or call 800-775-1797.

State Department Issues Notice About Changes to China Adoption Process

The State Department recently reported the the China Centre for Children's Welfare and Adoption has provided the Department of State with a notice of a new policy that will allow qualified single females adopt from China. China is opening up adoptions of special needs children to single female applicants.

The State Department is seeking clarification on the details of the new policy and will make updates to its website as more details become available. For more information on all the requirements on how to adopt from China, visit http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_info.php?country-select=china.

Delays in Adoption Processing from Ethiopia Likely to Continue

The State Department recently issued a statement that delays remain likely for cases presented to Ethiopia's Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs after March 8. "The MOWYCA told American Embassy officials that adoption cases presented to the Federal Court of First Instance prior to March 8, 2011 will be processed expeditiously. However, cases presented to the Court after March 8 will be processed in a more deliberate manner to allow greater scrutiny and oversight. Based on their March 8 announcement the American Embassy anticipates that MOWYCA will process these cases at a rate of approximately five per day," according to the State Department website.

At this time, it is unclear whether the Ethiopian government will issue an official statement regarding the plan to reduce the number of cases adjudicated daily. Prospective adoptive parents who did not reach the court summons stage before March 8, should anticipate delays in the processing of paperwork through Ethiopia's government. Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to keep in close contact with their adoption service providers to confirm the status of their cases.

The Embassy's Adoptions Unit can be reached at consadoptionaddis@state.gov. For additional information, visit <http://adoption.state.gov>.

Ukraine Makes Changes to Adoption Processing Organizations

On April 7, President Yanukovich signed a Decree transferring all functions of, the State Department for Adoption and Protection of the Rights of the Child (SDA — the current central adoption authority of Ukraine), to the Ministry for Social Policy. The State Department does not yet know how the implementation of this transfer will affect processing of adoption cases. At this time, it is unknown whether SDA will continue processing currently filed cases. The Presidential Decree became effective immediately upon its publication in the Government's official newspapers on April 11.

According to SDA, there are now 134 U.S. families registered with the SDA, some of them already in-country. The State Department is requesting all American families that are currently in Ukraine or have appointments with SDA during the next few weeks to send their contact information to the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine's Adoption Unit at kyivadoptions@state.gov. Families should contact their local adoption service provider for further updates and details. For more information, visit www.travel.state.gov.

Latvia Issues New Post-Adoption Reporting Requirements

According to the State Department, Latvia requires periodic post-adoption reporting on the welfare of an adopted orphan in his or her

new American family. Latvian law requires that two post-adoption reports be submitted: one after the first year following adoption and one after the second year. The reports should be conducted by the adoptive family's adoption agency. The intercountry adoption process requires compliance with the laws of the United States and the child's country of origin. While the United States cannot enforce the laws of another country, in order for a strong country-to-country partnership on adoption matters to continue, families and agencies should respect the adoption laws of the child's country of origin. The State Department is encouraging agencies to comply with Latvian post-adoption reporting requirements and to submit reports on time. All agencies operating in Latvia have been notified of this requirement. Compliance will help ensure that Latvia's history of positive experiences with American adoptive families continues. For more information, visit <http://adoption.state.gov>.

Race: Are We So Different? Exhibit Displayed in Several Cities

Kip Fulbeck exhibits in film, photography, spoken word, and drawing, combining these media in his solo performances. Current exhibitions of The Hapa Project come from more than 1,200 portraits photographed throughout the country, and range from a classic black and white series to a striking full color editioned series. Exhibit can be found at:

- Boston, Mass. — through May 1
- Charlotte, N.C. — through May 8,
- San Diego, Calif. — through May 15

For more information, visit <http://www.seaweedproductions.com>.



Looking for an honest, hilarious, heart-warming speaker for your next conference, retreat, or event?

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Sally is the author of several inspirational books including award-winning Walk with Me: Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey. Passionate about the sacramental nature of friendship, life as prayer, and adoption, Sally is known for bringing apt words of hope and healing in her engaging offerings.

For more details about her retreats, conferences and books, contact Sally directly at sallymiller@ameritech.net or write her Director of Public Relations, Julie MacManus, by visiting www.sallymillergirltalk.blogspot.com

Child Welfare Waivers Up for

Child Welfare waivers were first introduced into federal law in 1994. The waivers are also known as demonstration projects or Title IV-E waivers (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act is the foster care, adoption assistance and subsidized guardianship and associated administrative costs). Public Law 103-432 approved 10 five-year demonstration projects, which allowed states the opportunity to implement innovative programs to meet state specific child welfare needs using best practices to improve outcomes for children in state custody. Congress passed the law, giving authority to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to implement

for certain expenses for eligible IV-E children such as: administration and placement expenses, adoption assistance, payments for child welfare employees and training, subsidized guardianship assistance, and foster care maintenance payments. Since original authority was passed in 1994, the waivers have been extended and expanded throughout the years through various pieces of legislation and as of March 2006 there is no authority for the Health and Human Services Department to grant any new projects.

According to the federal Children's Bureau, as of June 2010, nine states had active IV-E waivers. Demonstration projects are detailed

one or other services will be offset by reduced costs in other areas. The waivers also require an evaluation that demonstrates the results of the experimental design. Congressional action is required before any new demonstration projects can be established.

On March 10, the Senate Finance Committee held a full-committee hearing to examine the use and effectiveness of the waivers and to determine if Congress should work on legislation to extend the demonstration projects. Chairman of the committee, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., and Ranking Member Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, both made statements for the record and pointed out inconsistencies in child welfare financing and both mentioned child welfare reform. It's uncertain at this time what will happen in terms of comprehensive child welfare reform; however, legislation to allow states spending flexibility of current federal dollars may be on the horizon.

In March, Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., former Chairman of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, joined with current Chairman of the Subcommittee that is now called Human Resources, Geoff Davis, R-Ky., to introduce a bipartisan child welfare bill that would extend the use of child welfare waivers (H.R. 1194). This bill would renew the authority of the Secretary of Health and Human Services to approve demonstration projects designed to test innovative strategies in state child welfare programs. McDermott introduced the same bill in the 111th Congress in September 2010; it passed in the House, however it was never taken up in the Senate.

Advocates and state administrators have called on Congress to renew the waivers, but to also consider making improvements to the

The waivers offer states more flexibility of the federal IV-E dollars, that otherwise are subject to categorical funding restrictions. Title IV-E dollars are used to partially reimburse states for certain expenses for eligible IV-E children such as: administration and placement expenses, adoption assistance, payments for child welfare employees and training, subsidized guardianship assistance, and foster care maintenance payments.

alternatives to traditional child welfare programs to promote improved safety, permanency and well-being for children in foster care. In 1997, the Adoption and Safe Families Act extended and expanded authority of the waivers, allowing the HHS Secretary to approve 10 new projects each year.

The waivers offer states more flexibility of the federal IV-E dollars, that otherwise are subject to categorical funding restrictions. Title IV-E dollars are used to partially reimburse states

differently in each state and in the past they have allowed some states to focus on a broad array of expenditures in child welfare such as guardianship and kinship assistance, services for caregivers with substance abuse, flexible funding for prevention services, enhanced training for child welfare staff, adoption and post-permanency services and other innovative strategies to improve child welfare outcomes. A key requirement for any waiver is that they be "cost neutral" during the five-year period, meaning that any additional costs for

Discussion in the 112th Congress

current financing structure to allow for greater achievements. Testimony was shared at the Senate hearing and members of Congress were encouraged to focus on the successful outcomes by states with waivers and examine how specific efforts significantly reduced foster care caseloads and returned children to home safely and increased permanency for youth in their care.

While many parties involved in child welfare, including welfare administrators, legislators and advocates, feel the need for comprehensive child welfare financing reform, the reality is — agreeing on all of the components of reform and introducing and passing legislation will take some time. In the interim,

Congress has taken steps to examine what current demonstration projects are doing for children in care and what can be done to improve the current structure of state waivers to ensure better outcomes for children. Based on recent actions around waivers, by child welfare-ranking legislators, it is safe to assume that they are working to establish a waiver extension bill in the Senate.

Nicole Dobbins is executive director of Voice for Adoption in Washington, D.C., a national advocacy organization with a mission to speak in a single voice with policy-makers, representing the interests of foster children awaiting adoption and the families who adopt them. Previously, she served as director of

events for FosterClub, the national network for young people in foster care, where she was responsible for engaging young leaders from foster care to train 2,500 foster youth annually across the country. She has testified in front of Congress, served as a spokesperson for the National Foster Care Month campaign, and was recognized in 2008 as one of 10 Outstanding Young Leaders by the Kids are Waiting campaign, a project of Pew Charitable Trusts. As an alumnus of Oregon's foster care system, Dobbins leverages her experience and passion to advocate on behalf of young people she considers her "brothers and sisters in foster care." Dobbins is a graduate of Oregon State University, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



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Children's Bureau



Older Child Adoption

What to think about, tips for successful transitions **By Susan Serrano**

As more infants and toddlers are united with adoptive families within their birth countries, an increasing number of older children have become available for international adoption in recent years.

"I think older children have always been there, but there is a growing awareness that there are families interested in adopting them," said Denise Schoborg, director of Dillon International's China adoption program. "The need for families is very real, but prospective parents need to do some soul-searching to determine if they are ready to parent an older international adoptee."

The realistic expectations, research and education, that are key to any successful adoption experience, become even more vital when considering the adoption of an older child, who may have some additional struggles adjusting to life with their adoptive family.

"Kids that come from institutional settings are survivors. It may take some time for the child to learn what their role is in a healthy family and develop interpersonal skills in their new environment," explained Debbie Wynne, director of Dillon International's Texas office and Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services. "A child may be biologically a 7-year-old, but that does not mean that they have had seven years of nurturing by loving parents. They may even have been in a situation where they had to act as a parent."

"It is important for parents to realize that while they may be dealing with a 7-year-old that has the street smarts of a 14-year-old, that same child could also have the attachment needs of an infant. You have to be prepared to parent where that child is developmentally in the moment," Schoborg added.

Patience is critical as the child attaches to

Recommended Reading

- Raising Adopted Children by Lois Melina
- Attaching in Adoption by Deborah Gray
- Nurturing Adoptions by Deborah Gray
- The Connected Child by Karyn Purvis, Ph.D.
- Adopting the Hurt Child by Gregory Keck, Ph.D.
- Parenting the Hurt Child by Gregory Keck, Ph.D.
- With Eyes Wide Open by Margi Miller, MA, & Nancy Ward, MA, LISCW
- Toddler Adoption by Mary Hopkins Best, Ed.D.
- Parenting Your Older Adopted Child by Brenda McCreight, Ph.D., RSW
- Our Own - Adopting and Parenting the Older Child by Trish Maskew
- Adopted Teens Only: A Survival Guide to Adolescence by Danea Gorbett
- Beneath the Mask by Debbie Riley, MS
- Parenting Adopted Adolescents: Understanding and Appreciating Their Journeys by Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D.

the adoptive family and learns how to be nurtured.

"The child may take their disappointments out on their family, but parents need to recognize that the child is acting out of a sense of grief and loss and to steadfastly offer unconditional love in return. They should not take those attacks personally," Wynne said.

Families preparing to adopt an older child can pave the way for smoother transitions with plenty of advance education that focuses on

the needs of older adoptees. It is also crucial for families to surround themselves with a support network that includes adoption professionals and adoptive families, Schoborg recommended.

Securing the services of a translator and locating other language resources prior to the child's arrival will also go a long way toward building attachment and establishing relationships, Wynne added.

Although the adoption of an older child does come with some unique challenges, it offers advantages as well, Wynne points out. "With an older child, there is an opportunity to really 'see' them," she explained. "You can know their health and how they respond in social and educational environments. With an infant or toddler, you really haven't seen the person that they will grow into being."

"There are children who desire so much to be in a family," Wynne said. "The families that do well adopting older children are resourceful and committed to helping their child heal from the traumas of the past. It is exciting to see families that have chosen this path do extremely well. There are families for every kind of child."

Susan Serrano is director of media relations for Dillon International, Inc. Founded in 1972, Dillon International is a licensed, non-profit adoption and humanitarian aid agency that is affiliated with Dallas-based Buckner International. Headquartered in Tulsa, Okla.—with branch locations in Tustin, Calif. (in Orange County); the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area; the Kansas City, Kansas area; St. Louis, Mo.; Little Rock and Fayetteville, Ark; and Richmond, Ind.—Dillon International is Hague Accredited through the Council on Accreditation to process international adoptions pursuant to the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000.

TIFFANY AND GARTH WILKINS adopted Sasha, left, and Vladic, right, from Russia. Both children came to the family at older ages, Sasha, 9, and Vladic, 10.

Open Eyes, Open Hearts

By Tiffany Wilkins



Building a family through adoption was a dream of mine since elementary school. Although I had hoped that we would have both adopted children and biological children, only the future would unfold God's plan for me.

After five years of marriage my husband and I decided we were ready to start a family. While I had adoption on my mind, hoping that our adopted child would never feel like Plan B, my husband was daydreaming of having a child who looked like us. I conceded, thinking we could always adopt, but our biological clocks were ticking, so we might as well attempt conception. As quickly as we became pregnant, we lost the child through miscarriage.

Through the grieving process we discussed adoption and as the months passed our hearts were united to go that route. We then focused our energy on adopting from Russia, anticipating the referral of a female toddler.

While waiting, we learned about the needs of older children waiting in Russian orphanages. We discovered some heartbreaking statistics. At age 17, these beautiful children are emancipated from the Russian orphanage system with the equivalent of \$50. Around 10 percent are estimated to commit suicide within the first three years of leaving the orphanage; 40 percent turn to alcohol or drugs; 40 percent to prostitution and crime.

After sharing this information with my husband, Garth, we both felt moved to pursue adopting an older child. We talked at length with our caseworker and then revised our homestudy to reflect our decision.

Our agency put us in touch with other families who had adopted older kids, and we saw that those families had a variety of experiences. Some situations sounded amazing and some stories could have overwhelmed us with fear. With eyes wide open, we decided to move forward. We were matched with a 10-year-old boy named Vladic.

I'll never forget when we first met this shy, serious little boy with a backpack as big as his 60-pound frame. Our hearts were putty in his hands.

We went through some transitions that were difficult, but, with time, rewarding. The attachment process took time for all of us, which surprised me. I thought we loved him to the full measure the moment he got off the plane. But the truth is, we were all getting to know each other and adjusting to our new life together.

Vlad's heart continued to soften as we poured more love into him and the way he views the world and the way he responds to people and situations has changed dramatically over the course of these past five years. It has been wonderful to have his laughter fill the house and to share in his love of sports, math and science.

We loved the experience so much that we felt led to grow our family again in the same way. So four years later we returned to Russia to adopt our 9-year-old daughter Sasha. It has been a learning experience once again for all of us, with expected differences, because every child is unique not only in history, but also in emotional make-up. While her orphanage experience was a good one, nothing can substitute the love, security and instruction a family offers. We are grateful that she has embraced us as her family, knowing that the changes for her — just as they were for Vlad — are immense. Both of our children gave up all they had ever known, to be part of a family. We are so thankful it is ours!

Tiffany Wilkins lives in Texas with her husband, Garth, and her children, Vlad and Sasha, who they adopted through Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services' Russia program, which is managed by Dillon International through the licensed, non-profit agency's affiliation with Buckner International. Together, Dillon and Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services offer adoption programs in China, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Japan, India, Korea, and Russia plus a new opportunity in Ghana.



Adopting an Older Child

Preparation Is Vital

By Kimberly Offutt

THE OFFUTT FAMILY, front left 5-year-old Caleb, and 6-year-old Shamar. From left background, Marcus, 14-year-old Levi, Kimberly, 16-year-old Darius and 16-year-old.

Typically, when one thinks about adoption, the sweet face of an innocent newborn or toddler might come to mind. Or maybe the faces of the hundreds of thousands of children living in orphanages pulls at your heart. Yet, it is the thousands of older children who are living in temporary foster care — in your state, your city, or your community — who are often forgotten.

Children enter foster care because of abuse and neglect by their parents or extended family. Many children linger in foster care for an average of three to five years. Often, they have been moved from one foster family to another during that time.

Nationally, more than 25,000 youth age out of foster care each year. Statistics show that with-

in two years, 30 percent of these young adults will become homeless, addicted to drugs, or incarcerated. Without the permanency and consistency of an adoptive family, the future for these kids is bleak.

Had it not been for my experience as a foster care and adoption worker, I would not have known about the crisis of children in foster care. My husband and I always knew that we wanted to adopt, but that would come after we had “our own” children first.

Adopting an older child was not in our plans: we pictured ourselves adopting an infant or toddler. You can imagine our amazement when the first child we had the privilege to parent was 9 years old.

Were we really ready to adopt an older child

from the foster care system? Looking back, I would have to say probably not. We knew a lot in theory, but day-to-day living is another story.

As with any type of adoption, preparation is vital. When a family decides to adopt an older child, that decision is often followed by fear of the unknown. The best way to alleviate that fear is through education and preparation.

But how does a family truly prepare for the journey of adopting an older child? Below are what I believe to be three of the most crucial steps in the preparation phase of the adoption process.

Prayer

I believe that prayer is the first real step in any important decision, especially with the life-

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Arthur Becker-Weidman, Ph.D. is a Diplomate in Child Psychology and Forensic Psychology, the American Board of Psychological Specialties. He is a Registered Clinician with the Association for the Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children and is a Certified Therapist, Consultant, and Trainer of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy®. Dr. Becker-Weidman has edited and authored four books: *Creating Capacity for Attachment* (2005/2008), *Attachment Parenting* (2010), *Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy: Essential Practices & Methods* (2010), and *The Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Casebook* (2011). He has four DVD's: *Assessing Trauma and Attachment Disorders*, *Assessing Parent Capacity*, *An Introduction of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy*, and *Principles of Attachment Parenting*. Dr. Becker-Weidman has over a dozen publications in professional peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Becker-Weidman is on the Board of Directors of the Association for the Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children where he is Vice-President for Clinical Issues, serves on the Research Committee and Training Committee, and chairs the Registration Committee. He is an adjunct Clinical Professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Becker-Weidman is President of the Board of the Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Institute®©. Dr. Becker-Weidman provides training and workshops to parents, professionals, and governments across the U.S. and internationally (Australia, Bermuda, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Singapore, and Slovakia).



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changing decision of adoption. Adding to your family through adoption not only changes your life, it also changes the lives of the child or children you adopt, your family members, your community and your future.

An adoption decision should not be made lightly. Typically, thoughts about adoption have

it is God who placed it there. Seek His direction and wisdom regarding adoption.

Pray for the child or children who may join your family. Pray for their birth families, regardless of the situations that led to the children being placed in foster care. Pray for yourself, your mate, your current children and

Once your family is involved in the adoption process, it is your prayers that will keep you strong during difficult times. My foundation, my rock, is the fact that “I know that God called my family to adoption.” When He calls you to do something, He’ll give you the tools and resources to accomplish it.

Communication

It is also important to consider the potential impact of adoption on your family. If you have children — especially children who reside in your home — it is crucial that they contribute to the discussion and decision to adopt. Some parents overlook this vital step: they decide to adopt then try to convince their current children to be excited about having another brother or sister.

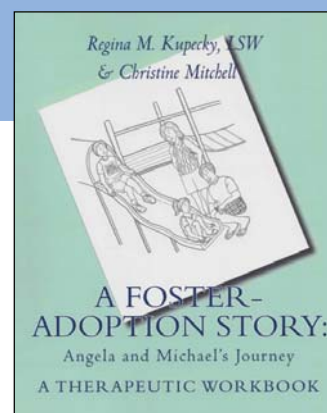
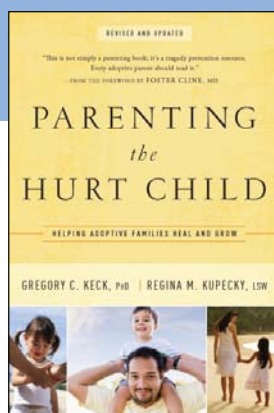
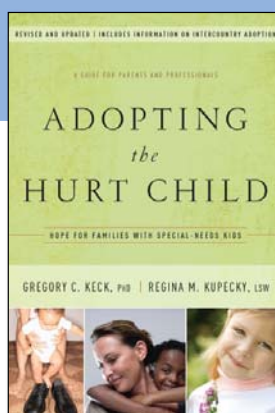
I was guilty of doing this but learned the hard way that I was setting myself up for serious conflicts in the future. Many of these conflicts could have been avoided if I had included our other children in the decision before we actually made it.

It is also important to consider the potential impact of adoption on your family. If you have children — especially children who reside in your home — it is crucial that they contribute to the discussion and decision to adopt. Some parents overlook this vital step: they decide to adopt then try to convince their current children to be excited about having another brother or sister.

been brewing for years. I fully believe that if adoption has been placed on your heart, then

extended family members. And pray for wisdom, guidance, patience and love.

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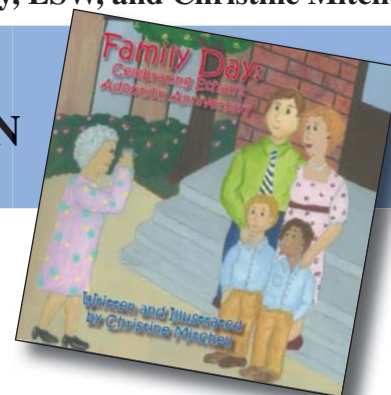
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Adding a child to your family changes your family structure, so it is important to discuss and plan for this change before you adopt. For example, family rules and rituals may have to vary depending on the age and needs of an adopted child. Schedules may have to be revised because children who have experienced abuse or neglect need daily structure and routine to feel safe.

There is so much to consider. How are you going to manage your time and schedule if you work full time? Your biological kids have a natural bond with you; they want to please you. How are you going to parent a child who does not have that connection at first? What about disciplinary techniques? What has worked for your birth children may or may not work for your adopted child. What about the birth order of your children? Does your son or daughter want to remain the oldest child in the family? Does your son or daughter want to remain the youngest?

Each of these questions deserves a thoughtful answer that can be agreed upon as much as possible before you adopt. Experience will help you add to this list of topics for your family to discuss.

Education and Support

The final, crucial step is to educate yourself and your family about the needs of the child you plan to adopt and to evaluate your ability to meet those needs. The trauma of abuse and neglect compounded with the trauma of being placed into a foster home impacts older children in a number of ways.

Childhood trauma may have a negative impact on a child socially, emotionally, physically and behaviorally. Educate yourself about the effects of early trauma on children. Attend

This list of things to consider before adopting is not exhaustive, but it is enough to start preparing you for the adoption journey ahead. Adopting older children from the foster care

Consider your support network of church, family and friends. Include them as much as possible in the education process. Evaluate your community resources, including schools, counseling centers, adoptive family support networks and other resources. Talk to and build relationships with other foster and adoptive families in your area — you will be grateful for their experience and support through this journey.

the agency's foster/adoptive parent training series. Read books and watch videos. Share what you are learning with your other children to help them understand and be prepared for what they may see and experience with their adopted sibling.

Consider your support network of church, family and friends. Include them as much as possible in the education process. Evaluate your community resources, including schools, counseling centers, adoptive family support networks and other resources. Talk to and build relationships with other foster and adoptive families in your area — you will be grateful for their experience and support through this journey.

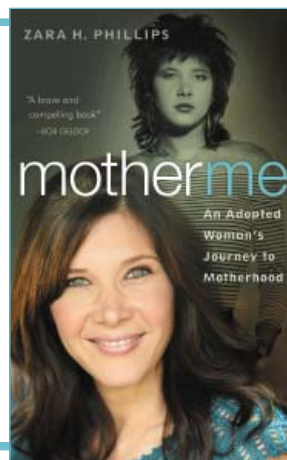
system is definitely one of the most difficult and rewarding decisions I have ever made in my life. And if I had it to do over, I would definitely do it again.

Kimberly Offutt has 12 years of experience in child welfare. She coordinates Bethany Christian Services' recruitment and support program for foster and adoptive families in Michigan called Project Open Arms. She and her husband, Marcus, are parents of five children, four of whom were adopted through foster care: 16-year-old Darius who was adopted at 9, 16-year-old Allaya who was adopted at 13, 14-year-old Levi who was adopted at 11, 6-year-old Shamar who was adopted at 3, and 5-year-old Caleb.

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"Mother Me captures all the feelings, thoughts and emotions of what all adoptees actually go through..."
— Darryl McDaniels, DMC, Hip-Hop Artist and adoptee

"Zara Phillips tells us what it's like to be adopted as she rocks and howls from adopteehood to motherhood."
— Betty Jean Lifton, Ph.D., author of *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience*

Educational challenges for 'older' children adopted from overseas orphanages

By Boris Gindis, Ph.D.

One of the common characteristics of children adopted internationally is that they are educationally "at risk" and present more academic difficulties and school-related behavior problems than their peers at large. According to research completed within the last two decades, nearly one-half of all international adoptees in the United States and Canada need either special education placement, classroom accommodations or academic supportive services during at least the first two to four years in school.

After the initial phase of seemingly rapid new language acquisition and adjustment to their new homes and schools, many internationally adopted children encounter significant difficulties in their academic work, leading to behavioral and emotional problems down the road.

There are several major causes of learning problems in adopted children, ranging from mostly biological to mostly social. Biological causes include such conditions as premature birth, low birth weight, severe malnutrition during the infant years, prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs, and neurological impairments of different origins. Social causes include educational deprivation during the pre-adoption years, first language attrition after adoption, and inappropriate school placement and lack of remediation after adoption. In most international adoptees with learning problems we see a combination of both factors; social and medical causes are so closely intertwined that it is difficult to suggest what the leading cause of their learning problems is.

Deprived of essential learning experiences in an early childhood spent in dysfunctional families and orphanages, internationally adopted children may have cognitive and academic problems when moving to more advanced levels of learning after adoption. The re-establishment and re-enforcement of their cognitive foundation is the essence of remedial programs for children with a history of educational deprivation in early childhood. Internationally adopted school-age children are expected to continue their education in our schools. In reality, the majority of these children were exposed to sub-standard education in their motherlands and have significant gaps and breaches in their actual knowledge base for their age and claimed grade placement. This creates a challenge for our educational system, which has to cope with the education and often remediation of thousands of former orphans born overseas who have to begin or continue their formal schooling while in the process of adjustment to their new families, new social/cultural environment, and new language.

On arrival, based on the existing practice for children from immigrant families, an internationally adopted child could be inappropriately placed in our school system and could be denied remediation based on an "environmental, cultural and limited English proficiency" basis. This happens more often than we think, as schools tend to disregard their actual compromised readiness for certain levels of instruction and place international adoptees according to their chronological age.

On top of this, many schools choose not to provide international adoptees with remediation

until they learn "more English." This, in fact, constitutes a continuation of the same educational neglect that these children had been exposed to in their native countries. Still another factor predisposing internationally adopted children for learning difficulties in our schools is abrupt native language loss called "language attrition." One of the most shocking discoveries made in the field of international adoption was the swiftness with which children are losing their native tongues and the profound nature of this loss. In a situation of full English language immersion, it takes children younger than 4 only seven to 12 weeks to reduce their expressive language to a practically non-functional level.

With older school-age children, the speed of language attrition is measured in months, not weeks, but still the swiftness of language loss is mind-boggling: in 7-year-old children it takes, on average, about three months to lose the functionality of their native language in the expressive mode and only two months longer in the receptive mode. For a 9-year-old child with literacy skills in his or her native language attrition will happen within the first six months in the English-only environment. There are, of course, some exceptions, particularly when a child is adopted as part of a sibling group, but the overall speed of language loss is still amazing.

Internationally adopted children learn their new language (English) quickly, particularly the communicative aspect of it that is needed for social interaction. First language attrition and English language acquisition take place concurrently, but at a different pace: losing language is a much faster process than new



language learning. This factor must be taken into account in schools when addressing the behavioral and academic difficulties of international adoptees.

What are the consequences of rapid language loss? Language is a tool, a mediator, a key element in most cognitive and behavioral skills. If the tool is taken away in an abrupt manner, all these skills can deteriorate, too. As a result, we see regression in behavior patterns (when a 6-year-old behaves like a 3-year-old), in communication (when a verbal child reverts to a pre-verbal stage, using mostly gestures and undifferentiated sounds), in cognition (when basic mental skills such as patterning, sequencing and discriminating vanish completely or become ineffective), and in the loss or weakening of academic skills and knowledge.

No wonder that internationally adopted children age 5 and older often need to start from ground zero not only in language, but in many other cognitive and academic activities that are mediated by language. That is why not

just education, but early, well-planned, systematic and intensive cognitive and language remediation is a necessity for the majority of international adoptees who will start formal schooling immediately after the adoption. An overall functional model of such remediation should include four steps:

- Accurate initial evaluation of educational needs.
- Proper placement according to actual readiness.
- Supportive and remedial services at school.
- Remediation via specialized methodologies, if needed.

Unfortunately, this proven model typically encounters major roadblocks at schools due to persistent misconceptions among school personnel and administration regarding international adoptees, such as:


- Internationally adopted children are similar to children from recently immigrated families and therefore should be educated the same way: placed academically according to their chronological age and taught “English as Second Language” the same way. The

parents would be generally advised to “wait and see” how their children adjust to the new social/cultural environment.

- No testing should be done before the children learn English.
- Difficulties, both academic and behavioral, are solely due to the children’s institutional background; thus, loving families, good nutrition and consistent schooling are all these children need for recovery.
- International adoptees may not be eligible for special education services because of the language and cultural issues involved.

All these assumptions are damaging for internationally adopted post-institutionalized children, depriving them of needed help and support in education.

Teacher preparedness for work with international adoptees is currently limited, at best, to sensitivity training: what is the proper language to use addressing adopted children and their parents, what assignments to give to adopted children in the classroom to avoid embarrassment, how to protect adopted



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children from bullying and teasing. All these are important topics which should be further developed and perfected, but they do not address the most essential educational, cognitive and language issues faced by international adoptees in school.

Program modifications and support for school personnel have to be specific to this group of children and need to include information on most typical disabilities and their implications for instruction. For example, the effects of post-traumatic syndrome disorder, attachment issues, and post-institutional behavior syndrome on child development and educational processes would be a good start. One also cannot overestimate the importance of teacher training on language attrition and its effect on educational processes.

The uniqueness of the educational situation in the field of international adoption is that often parents, as a group, are better prepared to handle their children's school issues than professional educators. The majority of parents who adopt internationally are well-educated,

middle class, mature individuals. Most of them have undergone special training before adoption. They belong to support groups and to parent organizations. Many of them are well informed about the challenges and opportunities in educating and rehabilitating their adopted children. Parents who adopt internationally are involved and active parents.

Unfortunately, often our schools cannot match parents in their preparedness. Although schools have resources and skilled staff, little training, if any, has been provided to school personnel for understanding this category of students and for promoting the various techniques and methodologies of physical, emotional and cognitive remediation for internationally adopted children. Lack of experience and information may lead to inappropriate educational practices and may result in tremendous frustration both in parents and educators, in legal actions brought against school districts by discouraged parents, and, most important, it may set up conditions for further aggravation of the educational problems of international adoptees.

During the last two decades we have learned the hard way that love and good nutrition are not enough to accelerate cognitive and language development in children who have been victims of deprivation, neglect and institutionalization culturally sensitive, age-specific, and persistent cognitive and language intervention should be applied in the schools to make remediation more effective and to reverse detrimental trends in academic performance experienced by many international adoptees.

Boris Gindis, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist in New York and a nationally/state certified bilingual school psychologist. He is chief psychologist at BGCenter (located in Nanuet, NY), a clinical practice that provides services for international adoptees and their families and the principal instructor at the BG Center Online School at <http://www.bgcenterschool.org>, where he created and teaches courses for parents of internationally adopted children, as well as for school and adoption agency professionals. To learn more about Gindis, visit www.bgcenter.com.



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In addition to providing the conference keynote address on Thursday, August 4, Dr. Perry will present a full-day preconference session on the effects of trauma and how to help children heal and thrive. The preconference session has a separate registration fee, although discounts will be offered to those who attend both the conference and the preconference session.

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A Mother's Long

The Older Child's Adoption

Many people believe a lot of things that aren't true about those of us who adopt older kids. We don't have the subtle art of parenting perfected; we're ordinary parents, the ones who manage, with more or less grace, to learn the new parenthood lessons that must be learned. You need passion to adopt a half-grown child. It's an experience unpredictable, unpretentious, rich, sometimes shattering and profound.

The adoption agency evaluated our family for strengths. We didn't have any serious marital difficulties (those came later). We didn't have unrealistic expectations for our children's success (other than believing no child is so damaged by past happenings that he or she cannot eventually learn to trust).

We must have reflected the ability to provide an older child with permanence, our household being a place to truly experience family. We liked children and enjoyed the challenge of parenting; most importantly, we knew kids didn't say thank you. We were verbally bright, well read, and without a shred of practical experience to prepare us for what came next. We adopted a 10-year-old, our third child, our second adoption.

Adopting transracially made a small impact on me compared to the larger impact of becoming the mother of a child so neglected she contained the rage and sadness, which

came to define her childhood. There is much agreement that same race, same culture placements offer children the best opportunity. But in the world as I've come to know it, the side effects of abuse are pretty much the same within every race and culture. How different would our lives have been if someone had prepared me for this?

And what if someone had thought to ask our daughter if she wanted to be adopted before she was sent to the United States? After she was placed in our family a therapist did ask her. She said, "No. I didn't want a new family, but nobody listened to me."

Clearly she needed a family. Our photograph albums show years of smiles at birthday parties, family vacations, but in each photo I look at her face and wonder what she was feeling. We had happy times, yet our years together were mostly a push-pull of subtle pressures and sudden knocks. There was some kind of barrier we couldn't break through. Yet she blossomed outside our family with outside relationships. She was happiest when a girlfriend extended an overnight invitation. She was the perfect houseguest; other parents adored her. Then she felt witnessed as a person. To be that kind of mother I needed more help than we could find or afford. So instead I was helpless in the face of the passion I felt for my child; a beautiful enough shock, while feeling perpetually overwhelmed.

Over the years we found the minute we said "international adoption," the door was closed to us for most provisions of general child welfare support services. For example we could have asked for a Safety Net Clause providing some financial help during the time period when anger made her a danger to herself, when she truly needed a temporary respite from us. If we'd had more support maybe she would not have felt so desperate.

Instead we toughened it out, and our other children suffered. We could have been better parents to them if we'd had more help for our daughter who was reeling from trauma.

I expect and offer no excuses. Adoptive parents often write about stories like mine. Reading them and remembering gives me the physical sensation of what it's like to have my feet on the ground, and then off balance the next. I also noticed that adoptive mothers tend to be a bit hard on each other. Comparisons are made, and someone always draws the short straw. I believe it is because we want to think we are immune to the hardships that occur with other families. Or that we are uniquely qualified in ways others aren't. Perhaps it's because the adoption process with its homestudies and long wait list to be matched with a child drives us to be competitive.

When my kids were growing up I remember telling myself the things other adoptive par-

THE TREVOR FAMILY, includes from left, Gary, Kyeong Sook, Jay, Terra and Vanessa, a few years after Kyeong Sook's adoption from Korea.



View

By Terra Trevor

ents experienced with an older child adoption would never happen to me. I thought maybe this is how it is for that parent, but I'll be a completely different kind of parent. In my early mothering years I had not let myself feel vulnerable or ambivalent, would not admit any feelings of thwarted self-interest, would not let myself feel weak, all the service of making the family work. Had I been able to ask hard questions at the appropriate time, maybe I would have been able to offer my family a smoother journey. Then again, had I ever been able to ask a hard question, an older child adoption in our family might never have happened in the first place.

And I thank my lucky stars the adoption did happen. Today my husband and I have a marriage logging 33 years, and the child we adopted at age 10; the live-wire pixie with flashing brown eyes — is a grown woman. Although our lives are not perfect and never will be, I'm thankful for the journey and for the opportunity to be Kyeong Sook's second mother. I'm second because I've come to understand and accept her feelings that adoption cannot ever replace the first family she lost. Not all adopted adults feel this way, yet my daughter does. Her love for me is not less, it means only that I came along second, when she was 10, almost 11 years old.

What has my motherhood journey taught me? If could jump cut back to my early parenting years and have a talk with my younger self, I

would say, "Terra you have three children and their childhood will run through your fingers like water as you lift your hand to capture a moment with the camera. In what feels like the flick of an eyelash they will be adults, miles and miles on their own."

I'd tell myself, "Every day write down three things you adore about your children, because

When my kids were growing up I remember telling myself the things other adoptive parents experienced with an older child adoption would never happen to me. I thought maybe this is how it is for that parent, but I'll be a completely different kind of parent.

you will want to have this list when your kids are grown, you might want to write it in their birthday cards when they turn 30 and 40."

I wish I could go back and tuck notes into my pockets reminding myself, "When I'm having difficulties, admit it. Line up support ahead of time. Find a good therapist before I need one. Keep my sense of humor. Whenever I can, laugh at myself. And so what if the house is messy, again, right after I've cleaned it. Every day I'd tell my children I loved them and let them know they are dear to me, even on the days when I was sick with a cold and had to work overtime and was in a bad mood."

I would send myself e-mails saying, "Don't worry that your child cannot accept your love. Remember, she wears a raincoat on her heart, sealed in plastic, to keep out further hurt and pain. Hug her lightly and often. Don't pay attention to what the experts say. You won't be able to solve the bonding problems, but if you give up your notions about the way things ought to be, and allow love to grow slowly, ebb

and flow like, waves rolling in and out on the beach — it will."

Most of all, I would tell myself to let go of my great expectations. To just take care of the moments and the years will take care of themselves. Because things will turn out to be better than what I mapped out and had planned, and that's a promise.

Terra Trevor is the author of "Pushing up the Sky: A Mother's Story," from which a portion of this article is excerpted. Visit her weblog In Writing Motherhood <http://inwritingmotherhood.blogspot.com>.

ABCs



of Emotional Health

By Louise Fleischman, LCSW-C

People often equate emotional health with happiness or satisfaction in life. Consequently, we think if someone is not generally happy, that this person is not emotionally healthy. However, emotional health is better defined as:

A – Awareness and acknowledgement of feelings in oneself and others,

B – Belief that feelings are shared among all people, and

C – Capacity to manage one's emotions appropriately.

All human emotions are contained in four basic feeling states: happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Glad and ecstatic feelings belong to the continuum of “happy;” disappointed and despondent feelings belong to the continuum of “sad.” Some feelings occur simultaneously: when children graduate from elementary school, they may feel proud (happy), as well as nervous (fearful) about entering middle school. These four feeling states vary in intensity and frequency throughout the day. While these basic emotional states remain constant throughout life, we express them differently as we mature.

Our emotional states also have a physical component. For example, when we worry (fear), we might develop a headache or stomach ache. When we complain (anger), our muscles tense up. When we are thrilled (happiness), we feel energized; when depressed (sadness), we feel tired. Our individual emotional responses may vary tremendously, depending on inborn temperament and early childhood experiences. For example, you may feel delighted to travel to a new vacation destination, while your child may not share your excitement because traveling brings up painful memories of moving after a divorce, foster care or adoption moves and other difficult

events. A third component of emotional states involves cognition, or thought. As your child's body tenses with anger, he or she may think, “I hate my mom!” And as your child's little

not be healthy for the child to remain angry or sad after the incident is processed with his or her parents and some time has elapsed. In some cases, the emotional responses do not

Behavioral displays of anger and aggression often are “cover-ups” for a child's more vulnerable feelings of fear and sadness. Children who have experienced trauma or family instability often have difficulty with emotional regulation.

body quivers with anticipation at an upcoming birthday party, he may think, “This is my favorite day of the year!”

Children first learn about their feelings from their parents. As parents, we instinctively mirror and connect the three components of emotional states for our children. When a child cries in reaction to a loud noise, a mother often will interpret the child's cry and say something like, “oh, that loud noise scared you...” Similarly, when a child laughs and dances to music, a mother might remark, “This music makes you happy...” Over time, children learn to recognize and identify emotions in themselves and in others. They also learn about acceptable ways to express their emotions. When a young child bites or hits, the parent says, with a stern facial expression, “I can see that you're angry, but you may not hit your sister!”

Emotional challenges occur when a person is unable to identify and access all four feeling states or becomes “stuck” in one of these feelings. For example, if a 5-year-old is caught stealing candy from a store, she may initially respond with anger, and later with sadness at disappointing his or her parents. It would

correspond to a given situation: for example, if a child laughs at a sad scene in a movie, or yells at a parent who is consoling him or her after waking from a nightmare. This child may not be aware of his or her sadness and fear or may be uncomfortable with those feelings and instead displays a different emotional response. Behavioral displays of anger and aggression often are “cover-ups” for a child's more vulnerable feelings of fear and sadness. Children who have experienced trauma or family instability often have difficulty with emotional regulation.

Supportive counseling that focuses on emotional health will improve self-esteem. As children become “aware” of their emotional states, “believe” that all feelings are valid and normal, they develop a greater “capacity” to manage feelings and express them appropriately. This set of ABCs will serve our children throughout their lives.

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MODELING her spring dress is 7-year-old Hanna, who was adopted from China.



SHARING a hug are Hanna, left, and her dad and sister.

In a multicultural family, an adopted child's birth heritage is only half

Before school one day, I am braiding Hanna's hair in the kitchen. Almost 7, Hanna is a bright, curious child with deep brown eyes and straight black hair reflecting her Asian heritage. She was adopted into our family more than six years ago. On this particular morning, Hanna, her older sister and I are talking about whether we will go to an upcoming Chinese New Year celebration. Kathryn, who is as blonde and blue-eyed as I am, says, "The trouble is, Mom, we are not really Chinese."

"Oh, this is a Families with Children from China event," I answer, while weaving the thick strands of Hanna's shiny black hair. "Most of the families will be like us, not all Chinese."

Kathryn giggles recalling the time Hanna and I attempted attending the "real" Chinese school at the nearby college. On the way

through the lobby, we passed an enthusiastic crowd of Chinese adults trying to learn an American line dance. I found this oddly amusing at the time, but no more so than Hanna and I in the upstairs classroom trying to learn Mandarin. We lasted one day, barely. Hanna fell asleep and I spent much of the lesson wondering if I'd fare any better in the dance class.

It was not only the language barrier, but also the nuances of the way the Chinese children related to their children, the Chinese children to each other, to the teacher and so on. Even if Hanna learned flawless Mandarin, I could never teach her the social dynamics gleaned from growing up in a Chinese family. Even though Hanna looked like the other students, she was as much "a fish out of water" as I.

I left Chinese school that day, cradling a sleeping Hanna on my shoulder, with a vivid view

of the divide between Hanna's birth culture and the one in which she is growing up. The Chinese dance students were seeking to grasp a part of the American culture, much like I was reaching for the Asian one.

While I believe this is admirable on both sides, that hapless day it seemed to me the two cultures were so disparate one could never become a part of the other. It's no problem really, except Hanna lives in the heart of this dichotomy.

"I'm half Chinese," Hanna pipes up this morning in the kitchen, continuing Kathryn's New Year celebration conversation. I pause at her comment. I'm not so sure about that.

"Hanna, you are all Chinese," I say, "both your birth mother and birth father were Chinese." She looks up as if she has never thought about it this way before. I know I haven't.



ENJOYING breakfast together are Stacy Clark and her daughter Hanna. Left, Hanna shares a hug with her older sister Kathryn.

of the equation *Half Chinese*

By Stacy Clark

Here's where it gets confusing. My husband and I, her adoptive parents, are American. She holds American citizenship and she is growing up in America. So, in a sense, isn't she all American, too? I put a positive spin on it for Hanna: "So you get to have two cultures!" I offer. But quietly I'm puzzling on this. I know from my advertising background, if you try to sell two things at once, you often fail to sell either.

Suddenly we have a human equation on our hands. Is Hanna half-and-half, or all of both? Are we talking ethnicity or culture, society or stereotype? If she is both Chinese and American, does she risk being neither? I fear her falling into the gap of belonging.

"Hanna's DNA is Chinese," states my husband, the scientific thinker in the family, who comes late to the conversation. "The rest of her is American."

Maybe, but it seems less black and white when I consider Hanna's birth origin and how that will play out in her future.

I think about those tiny boxes on a school record or medical form asking for Hanna's ethnicity. In medical terms, Asian may be a useful box to check. But in social terms, perhaps American is more apt. There are no half boxes. Is it permissible to check more than one?

I, the creative thinker, have never liked multiple choice questions. Some answers require the context of an essay.

Because no matter how I look at it, Hanna stands between two vastly different cultures, I strive to bring them together in her little life. Often my attempts are as clumsy as the Chinese line dancers. Last year, our moon cakes were more like moon rocks. One year,

Kathryn and Hanna danced in traditional Chinese dresses to an Indigo Girls CD, while awaiting the delivery of our Chinese take out. Still, it seems important to persist.

This year, our family will go to the Chinese New Year Celebration event, we will watch the lion dancers and learn about traditions of a culture so distant for three of us and so woven into to one. This morning's conversation is far from over.

For now, Hanna surmises her own answer. She may not know Mandarin, but she is the best of all of us at translating her part in two worlds. "My body is Chinese," she smiles between two tidy braids. "My life is American."

Stacy Clark is a freelance writer and mother of two daughters, one by birth and one adopted from China. She blogs about raising a family like hers at thissideoftheskies.blogspot.com.



A Less Than *IDEAL* Response

By Michael & Amy Monroe

The thought of an outdoor family photo strikes fear in the hearts of most parents with young children. This experience can leave even the best parents feeling utterly powerless against both the weather and their children's behavior. The stress starts even before picture day arrives. Finding coordinated outfits and keeping everyone's hair perfectly combed is a challenge all its own. This humbling and expensive rite of passage leaves many parents wishing for one thing above all else: Please Lord, let them smile!

Let's face it, situations like this can bring out the worst not only in our children, but also in us as parents. This was the case during what will certainly be known for all time as the Monroe Family Picture Fiasco of 2009. But from the mess of our poor handling of the situation came a real opportunity for better understanding and a chance to learn from our mistakes.

Two Wrongs Won't Make It Right

Everything was set for the early morning photo session at a local park and everyone looked "picture perfect." The photographer started with the kids, positioning all four — ranging in age from 5 to 9 years old on a white rock in front of the beautiful waterfall. She backed away and lifted the camera to her eye ... and then it all began to fall apart.

Carter, our 5-year-old boy, decided that he simply was not going to smile. There was no real reason that we could tell, he just wasn't going to. The photographer started with the old standby of silly faces. But it was to no avail. Then Mom and Dad got in on the act with a few tickles that quickly led to begging and pleading — still no smile. In fact, at that point Carter started to show more than a little attitude, as in, "I'm not smiling and you can't make me." And that's when we began to make a real mess of things.

Despite our sincere desire to be good parents we made some major mistakes in dealing with Carter's behavior. Looking back, we were primarily focused on wanting our kids to behave, not to mention wanting a good family photo. As a result, we failed to see his misbehavior as an opportunity for teaching and connection. We started by using bribes, from promising candy to going swimming later that day, and when that approach didn't work we immediately moved to threats. The more he refused to cooperate, the more we threatened him. The more we threatened him, the more he refused to cooperate. We were in a battle and we weren't about to lose — not to a 5-year-old. After all, we're the boss, right?

As the battle continued to escalate, Carter eventually began crying, which needless to say, doesn't portray the "happy family" we wanted everyone to see in our photos. Frustrated and embarrassed, it was time to

pull out the “big guns.” We took Carter aside and threatened to take away every privilege and ounce of possible fun he could imagine — for the rest of his life — if he did not stop crying and start cooperating by smiling NOW! These threats were accompanied by an onslaught of words, questions and accusations in increasingly louder and frustrated tones: “What is wrong with you?” “You are going to ruin this photo!” “We are wasting our money!” and “Why do you always do this?” Those are just a few of the loving and kind things we said to him in our own fit of frustration. But again, it was to no avail. The more we vented and raised our voices, the more Carter fell apart. By the end he was so upset that he couldn’t have smiled even if he had wanted to.

Our missteps along the way were too numerous to count; our approach was anything but ideal. We tried all of the obvious tactics but they led us nowhere. To make things worse, we lost sight of what was most important. Our goal should not have been good behavior; our goal should have been (and must always be) to deepen the connection between our child and us. Even, maybe especially, when they frustrate us the most. That connection can then serve as the foundation that helps our kids make the right choices and, when they fail to, allows us to help them get back on track. Instead, we lost our focus and allowed our frustration to keep us from connecting with Carter and him with us.

Making Things Right

Later that day we discovered, much to our shame, that Carter wasn’t feeling well. He was diagnosed the next day with a major sinus infection, which is a chronic condition for him and one of several legacies of the “hard place” from which he comes. While this certainly does not excuse his misbehavior and refusal to cooperate, it does highlight the need to better understand and appreciate the complex array of factors and influences that are always present with our children. Had we chosen to handle the situation differently by spending time trying to talk and listen to Carter about why he wasn’t cooperating and less time bribing, threatening and venting our frustrations, he likely would have told us he wasn’t feeling well and we could have given

him a big hug and talked with him about how we could help him feel better. If we had taken the time to respond to Carter in an IDEAL way, seeking to connect even as we corrected, we likely could have avoided a frustrating situation for all of us.

Back home, after all of the apologies were made, including many from us to all of the kids and accepted and after everyone had calmed down, including Dad, who spent more than a few minutes in the “think it over” chair himself, we were able to talk about the Monroe Family Picture Fiasco of 2009 and even have a few laughs. As things turned out, the photos weren’t all that bad. To our

surprise, the photographer somehow managed to sneak a couple of great shots of Carter smiling somewhere along the way. And in the end, despite our less than ideal handling of the situation, Mom and Dad learned some valuable lessons, and we all grew a little closer together as a family.

*This article originally appeared in **Created To Connect: A Christian’s Guide to The Connected Child**, a study guide co-authored by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Michael and Amy Monroe. The Monroes, together with Purvis, lead **Empowered To Connect** at empoweredtoconnect.org, an online resource for adoptive and foster families.*

The IDEAL Response

Dr. Karyn Purvis is the director of the Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth, Texas. For the past 12 years, she and her colleagues have been conducting groundbreaking research focused on helping adopted and foster children impacted by trauma and other harms. During this period, Purvis and the Institute have developed a wide range of insights and resources that are bringing hope and healing to adoptive and foster families.

One of these insights is the IDEAL© response, which is detailed in Chapter 6 of Purvis’ best-selling adoption book, “The Connected Child.” IDEAL stands for:

**I – Immediate
D – Direct
E – Efficient
A – Action-Based
L – Leveled at the Behavior**

This simple tool has helped countless adoptive and foster parents more effectively correct misbehavior, while also promoting learning, healing and connection.

To learn more about this and other proven strategies for adoptive and foster families, visit the Institute of Child Development website at www.child.tcu.edu where you can purchase educational and instructional DVDs, including the newly released DVD entitled **Trust-Based Parenting: Creating Lasting Changes in Your Child’s Behavior.**



KARYN

Though Karyn Williams is the biological daughter of her parents Pat and Jill Williams, most of her earliest memories include adoption. When she was just 4 years old, the Williams family welcomed Karyn's first South Korean sisters to the fold. And from there, her family continued to grow through adoption.

"International adoption is all I've ever known," Karyn said. "I actually remember it very well ... I was thrilled to have some sisters."

Current vice president and co-founder of the Orlando Magic, Pat Williams and his former-wife Jill began adopting children and the couple continued adding children to their family until they reached a grand total of 19 children.

"From there [the first adoption], my dad was hooked," Karyn said. "My dad doesn't know how to do anything halfway. We ended up with a total of 19 children."

Her parents' decision to adopt several children from Korea, the Phillippines, Brazil and Romania has greatly impacted Karyn's life. From the simple logistics of adding more than a dozen children to the family to dealing with some of the children's challenges from

From an internationally adoptive family of 19 children, Christian singer Karyn Williams is speaking out on behalf of international adoption and its impact on children and families.



KARYN WILLIAMS with her niece Laila Kindy, daughter of Karyn's sister Sarah adopted through Holt International in 1983.

WILLIAMS

By Kim Phagan-Hansel

their years prior to joining the Williams family, Karyn has seen the good and bad, the challenges and the rewards of adopting internationally.

"It's opened my viewpoint," Karyn said. "It's expanded my thinking of how many children are in need all over the world."

As Karyn grew up, on occasion she accompanied her family on trips to welcome additional siblings and she still recalls the journey to Romania to adopt one of her younger sisters.

"I was able to see her orphanage," Karyn said. "It's given me a real understanding of where these kids come from."

Karyn is the first to admit that her family wasn't without its challenges. Welcoming children from third world countries with difficult early childhood experiences into an American family with many children presented more than a few complications.

"We have dealt with everything from low self-esteem to more severe violence," Karyn said. "We have seen our fair share of struggles."

After her parents divorced, Karyn said the family seemed to fall apart for a few

years. When her father remarried, Karyn's stepmother, Ruth, helped raise many of the children and seemed to bring the family closer together.

"She was the reason things got put back together," Karyn said. "Ruth has been a huge

"We come from all different corners of the world ...and we're all brothers and sisters. We're all connected. Slowly we've come back together ... stronger than ever."

piece of the equation of making it what it is today."

As time has gone on and the family has reunited and re-established relationships, Karyn said she can't help but see the beauty of international adoption and the unique family it has created for her.

"We come from all different corners of the world ... and we're all brothers and sisters," Karyn said. "We're all connected. Slowly we've come back together ... stronger than ever."

Now a Christian singer with a new album coming out this year, Karyn is spreading the word about international adoption. She

has partnered with Holt International and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute to let people know about the option of international adoption.

"A lot of artists will find something they believe in and get involved," Karyn said. "What

this is for me is more than a platform, it's my life."

For the last few months Karyn has worked with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute to produce a music video using Karyn's song, "You Just May Be." Karyn presented the song at the 2009 Angels in Adoption ceremony, which appeared to touch many of those in attendance.

"At the dinner so many people came up to and told me how much the song moved them," said Kathleen Strottman, executive director of CCAI.

After the dinner, Karyn and Strottman felt

the song could help reach others as well and spread the word that there are children in the world who need families. In May, the You Just May Be campaign will be launched to celebrate National Foster Care Month and raise awareness about the thousands of children waiting in foster care, legally free for adoption.

“To partner with a cause you believe in as a family is unbelievably special,” Karyn said. “I believe the Lord calls us to give back and I’ve been given so much. I am called to help raise awareness.”

The video will be released through YouTube and on Williams’ website at www.karynwilliams.com.

**Share your story with
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KARYN WILLIAMS with her brother Thomas, adopted in 1986 from Seoul, Korea through Holt International.



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When Adoptees Want to Search

By Rich Uhrlaub, M.Ed.

Best Practices for Adoptive Parents

Not all adoptees decide to search for birth family, but, if we're honest with ourselves, most of us think and wonder about it — a lot. Even with today's increased openness in adoptions, many adoptive parents struggle with how to support their children as they search for and initiate contact with biological relatives. How involved should adoptive parents be? What should they say, or not say? Following are some recommendations gleaned from the past 20 years.

DO:

1. Be honest with yourself. It is not uncommon for adoptive parents to secretly wish their child would never feel the need to search. If you've never met your child's birth family, fears and overprotective instincts driven by negative birth parent stereotypes can lead to attitudes and behaviors that can impede adoptees in

their quest to integrate the story of both sets of their real parents into their identity. The frightened, confused girl who surrendered her parental rights 25 years ago may, or may not, have grown into a successful businesswoman with a husband and a family. She produced the child you love and raised, so speak of her with respect.

2. Realize that the desire to search is normal and not a commentary about you as parents or your love for each other. Genealogy is the number two hobby in the country behind gardening. Several major world religions teach reverence for ancestors. But adoptees, particularly those in closed adoptions, have been asked (implicitly or explicitly) for decades to be grateful for being severed from their roots, or viewed as somehow disloyal for wanting to know about them. Adoptees need adoptive parents to provide a safe haven and secure

base to return to, no matter what happens.

3. Be genuinely supportive. As appropriate for your children's age, tell them everything you know about their origins. No later than the age of majority, give them copies of all documents in your possession that pertain to them (keep the originals in a safe place in case the copies get lost or destroyed). I know some adoptees whose parents withheld identifying information about their birth family, or asked them not to search until after they were dead. I know other adoptees whose mother or father pouted in silence or offered a deep sigh along with the comment, "Well, I guess I'd want to know too."

A more loving alternative might be to, rather than placing the onus on your child to broach the subject, voluntarily convey your support by saying, "We know it's normal for persons

who've been adopted to have questions about their birth story and ancestry. If and when the time comes when you're ready to find out more about your birth family, we're here to help and support you in any way you'd like." Don't belabor the subject, but be aware that your child may need to hear this more than once in order to believe that you really mean it. Don't take it personally if your child wants to search independent of your help. Remember, this is about him or her — not you.

4. Respect boundaries. Because search and reunion can be complex emotionally, technically and relationally, many adoptees need some personal space during the search. Some take years, starting and stopping; energized, then exhausted; excited about possible connection, then terrified of possible rejection. Some take a "git'er done" approach, while others are immobilized by all the conflicting thoughts and emotions, or claim that it's "no big deal." For adoptive parents, watching this struggle can be torture, but it is important to allow your (minor or adult) child to take things at her or his own pace. Of course, if your child is acting out grief or rage through significant self-sabotage, addiction or other destructive behaviors, a more pro-active approach (often with the helpful persuasion of a counselor, clergy, search and support group or other neutral third party) may be in order.

5. Focus on the power of the process more than the outcome of the search. Something shifts inside the mind of an adoptee once we decide that we deserve to know our origins. We develop a greater sense of our own reality, become more aware of our emotions, more connected to ourselves and others and, often, more disoriented and "floaty" for a period of time while we sort things out. Whether we find welcoming birth parents and a pleasant story; a mixed reception (which is fairly common); or someone in a jail, mental health facility or grave (as in my case), adoptees who take ownership and initiative in their search process usually experience tremendous personal growth and transformation.

DON'T:

1. Create a competitive atmosphere. Just as

in the story of Solomon's famous judgment, when two mothers compete over a child they both claim to love, it threatens to split the child in half. According to research by Carol Sigelman and Elizabeth Rider in "Lifespan Human Development," it has confirmed that we are the product of the interaction between our genes and our upbringing/environment. One of the major developmental tasks confronted by adoptees is to integrate both sets of their real parents into their identity. No good can come from a situation in which a parent, in order to assuage his or her own ego or insecurities, asks an adoptee to deny part of who he or she is by choosing a favorite or acknowledging only one as the "real" mom or dad. If a parent can love and be devoted to more than one child, why can't a child love and honor more than one set of parents? Adoption, like the rest of life, comes with complications.

2. Perform your own secret search and background check. Especially if your child was adopted as a result of a dependency and neglect action in which the first parents were a known threat to the child's (or your) safety, this might sound like something any concerned parent would do. However, it is usually a bad idea because, rather than empowering the adoptee, it infantilizes him or her. Because of disempowering messages implicit in sealed records, most adoptees hate secrets and are offended by even well-intentioned covert activities that can easily be construed as controlling or manipulative. Open, collaborative communication that allows the adoptee to discover things for him or herself usually works best.

3. Expect to be part of the first meeting. Most adoptees search because we're looking for a missing piece of ourselves. Often, this means that our first meeting with our first mother or father needs to be with them alone. There are occasional exceptions, but for most adoptees, the amount of energy required to meet with the people who gave us life is overwhelming. There is something sacred and primal about a first reunion, and we need to feel completely free to weep, hug, stare, ask questions, and absorb the event. Additional family members can be included in subsequent meetings, but at first, it's usually too much for an adoptee to manage effectively.

4. Try to protect your child from unpleasant information. One adoptee, a retired Marine Corps Colonel, equated adoption search with the post-Vietnam war Missing in Action program when he told me, "It's not knowing the truth that makes us crazy." Give adoptees a little credit here. We know that there is a good chance we may not find a happy story, but it is, nonetheless, our story to find. Like those who were not relinquished and adopted, becoming an adult means learning to bear our own load in life, with help and support (not deception) from loved ones. As therapist and pastoral care professor Ron Nydam puts it, "Any news is good news because it's real news."

5. Thank your child's first mother for "giving us this precious gift." It is natural for any parent to feel like their child is a gift, but most women who, for whatever reason, couldn't care for and raise a child experienced deep trauma and loss. Reuniting with their child usually throws them back to that period in their lives and generates even more (painful but necessary) grief over the lost time together which they can never reclaim. They rarely, if ever, feel like their baby was conceived and relinquished as a gift to another set of parents. Instead, honor them by pointing out positive traits they share in common as parent and child and encourage them to form their own healthy, unique bond.

Even the best preparation won't prevent unforeseen twists and turns on the roller coaster ride of search and reunion. But keeping these principles in mind might just help prevent a catastrophic derailment of your child's future relationship with his or her birth (or adoptive) family.

Rich Uhrlaub, M.Ed., serves on the board of Adoptees in Search — Colorado's Triad Connection and the Legislative Committee of the American Adoption Congress. He speaks on adoption-related topics at workshops and conferences, and is a contributing author of "Finding Our Place: 100 Memorable Adoptees, Fostered Persons and Orphanage Alumni" (Greenwood Press, 2010). For more helpful information, see the AIS-CTC website at www.aistc.org.

A New Beginning

By Melanie Chung-Sherman

The pen that writes your own life story must be held in your own hand.

— Irene C. Kassorla



Melanie Chung-Sherman, LCSW, is a licensed child placing administrator with the State of Texas. She has worked in the child welfare field for approximately 12 years. She was the former Texas International Adoption Director for Dillon International, Inc and is currently the program director for Kornerstone, a private adoption and foster care agency in Arlington, Texas. She has traveled to Korea with adoptees and adoptive families numerous times. She advocates on behalf of children's rights and permanency issues and has spoken before the Korean Parliament with Adoptees for Children. She is an associate professor of social work at Collin County College in Plano, Texas. She and her brother were adopted from Korea in the 1970s and raised in Fort Worth, Texas. She and her husband reside in North Dallas with their two sons. She loves reading, trying new and exotic foods, the Discovery Channel and spending time with family and friends.

Ownership of one's life story should never be underestimated. The human desire to seek universal understanding of self and others through storytelling can be traced back through the millennia. Perhaps some of the greatest episodic adventures can be linked to the foundations of adoption from Odysseus to Superman — with the central characters who are originally orphaned and possess supernatural strengths and abilities only to be thrust into an ongoing destiny they had no intention of entering and ultimately persevering against great odds on a quest to find their “true identity” and reconcile their own life story. It can be argued that the archetypal threads of a good story can be found interwoven throughout an adoptee's lifespan as well. True to a classic narrative, the story itself is about the central figure, but rarely through that individual's eyes.

As an adoptee myself, I often come away with an entirely different perspective of the hero or heroine's journey and find that I infuse my own life story into the epic. While others can identify with the thematic quest of good versus evil, I tend to identify with the hero or heroine's yearning to find how they “fit” into their story with mere snapshots of their identity dictated by others along the way and how they captured their narrative as their own in the end — similar to the adoptee's story. I found that it is more than the adoption story, but the embodiment of the entire epic from beginning to end that encompasses all players from adoptee's birth parents, the relinquishment, adoptive placement and beyond.

Thus, I find myself encouraging the universal voice of adoptees to be heard and ultimately written by their own pen. To allow their story to become their own — separate from their narratives that has been both spoken and written for them. To empower adoptees to let their hearts be heard in an open, collective forum despite their worst critic — themselves. To allow other members of the adoption constellation a glimpse into an adoptee's perspective objectively because it is hard

to argue another's truth. So it is with great anticipation and excitement that I have the opportunity to help re-launch Adoption Today's “Reflections” piece that is dedicated to the voices and perspectives of adoptees as a platform to share their story.

I am often asked when I realized that I was adopted. Having been adopted from Korea in the 1970s and raised in a transracial home, my immediate response has been that I have always known. But when I really began to examine that response, I realized that I did not completely “know” my adoption story and how it truly resonated in my life until well into my 30s. Truth-be-told, it was my adoption story that helped catapult me into the professional field of adoption. I have been working professionally in the field of child welfare for approximately 12 years and have had a unique vantage point that few adoptees have had. I have had the opportunity to witness the many joys and challenges of adoption through the perspectives of the adoption triad members, agencies and governments.

Through the years I have worked with countless numbers of adoptive parents, birth/expectant parents, foster parents, adoption professionals and most importantly, adoptees. Ironically, my original motivation to enter the adoption field is also what I wound up separating from myself in an effort to remain objective so that I could cope with the fundamental complexities in adoption. I began to recognize that my adoption story was a narrative that was passed down by others both orally and by written word since I was a little girl, but I had yet to take ownership. By working so closely to a field that was intimately connected to me, I daily faced the reality of what adoption meant as I peeled back the layers to a story that was not necessarily easy to comprehend. I struggled with the “messiness” that adoption can bring and could no longer live behind the simplistic idealism that I had been taught that adoption was.

Intellectually, I knew that I had to fully own my story, but soulfully I had not been willing to go to that place for a long time. I began to explore what I had lost personally in order to fully rejoice in what I have gained. It was only then that my adoption story began to manifest into my own. And I began to embrace the reality that adoption is human — dynamically beautiful and flawed collectively, but nonetheless this is what each adoption triad member embodies as well.

It was not until my children were born that I began to engage my own narrative. This did not come without apprehension and critique by others, including myself. This is when parenthood and entitlement as both a mother and adoptee became concrete and not just a supposition. I morphed from the “adopted child” into an adult who happened to be adopted. I entered a sacred place that both my mother and birth mother have uniquely journeyed — and I began to understand adoption in terms as a parent, not just an adoptee.

I desired to write my sons’ birth stories and I found that I did not have my own story to give them. That realization did not happen in one event, but evolved methodically and slowly. I remember gathering the aging adoption papers my parents had kept and reading through them again. I recognized that I knew my adoption story in terms of how I entered my family, like most adoptees, but had spent little time exploring the reasons and impact of my placement and abandonment with my parents and others — but mostly with myself.

Ultimately, these were the facets that were the most difficult to narrate by all involved. I find this is true today for most adoptees and the portion of our story that tends to be cut-short or not spoken at all. I wept for the story that I had no recollection of, but remained dependent upon others to tell me. I wept for the feeling of helplessness associated with the unknowns in my life and what I could not impart in my child’s own legacy. I wept not for my adoption story and how I entered my family, but my relinquishment. I wept for my birth mother and what she had lost as I parented my

son. I wept for my parents who yearned desperately for a birth child when they adopted me as I began to understand their deep desire to parent when their bodies betrayed them. I wept for my son who would not have a complete story as well. I recognized that adoption was no longer individualized and solely about my experience, but now stretched to the contours of my children’s legacy.

Intellectually, I knew that I had to fully own my story, but soulfully I had not been willing to go to that place for a long time. I began to explore what I had lost personally in order to fully rejoice in what I have gained. It was only then that my adoption story began to manifest into my own. And I began to embrace the reality that adoption is human — dynamically beautiful and flawed collectively, but nonetheless this is what each adoption triad member embodies as well. That is when I began to become more genuine in my explanation of adoption with others and truly empathetic toward all members in the adoption triad. This recognition was not a dismissal of my story, but a critical addition. So when people ask me when I realized I was adopted, I now share that I have always known, but had not truly known until a few years ago . . . and that continues to evolve today.

Adoption is definitely not a pathology that so often I see is placed upon adoptees in particular, who are coming to terms with their story; but it is an intricate dialogue and event that forever shapes an individual and family from generation to generation. There are no easy answers just as there are no simple stories — and in that acknowledgment and support, adoptees can begin to find their own narrative.

resource reviews

My Family, A Symphony: A Memoir of Global Adoption

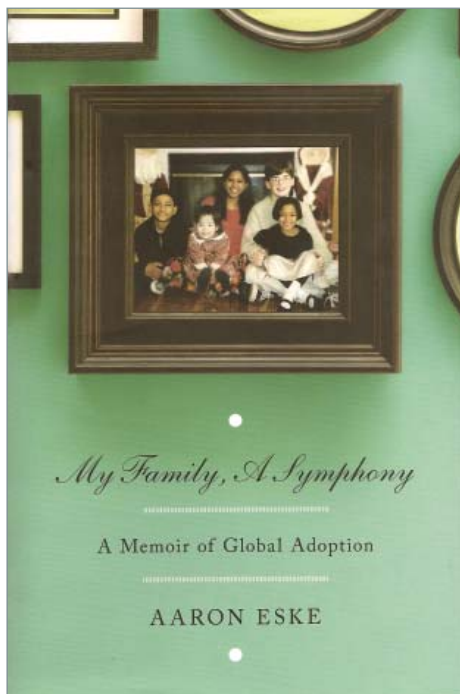
By Aaron Eske
Palgrave Macmillan,
2010, ISBN:
978-0-230-10415-0,
255 pages, \$25

Growing up in small town America, Aaron Eske was the only biological child of his parents, but had four internationally adopted siblings. All adopted through Holt International, each time a new sibling joined the Eske family all

of their lives were impacted. After experiencing the highs and lows of growing up in a transracial family, Eske distanced himself from the family after graduating from high school and college. But as the distance grew, the longing to reconnect increased for Eske. So, while studying abroad, Eske decided to launch a global tour to discover his siblings' beginnings and better understand how each one fit into his current family makeup. From Korea to India and Ethiopia to Oregon, Eske explored the beginnings of international adoption and his family, prompting him to write a memoir, "My Family, A Symphony."

"My Family, A Symphony" chronicles Eske's global travels in his attempt to gain a better understanding of himself, his siblings and his family as a whole. His ability to sum up his family and their experiences is remarkable. Not only does Eske look deeply into his family's core, but he also dissects international adoption as a whole and goes toe-to-toe with criticisms and controversy that have ensnared the adoption community in recent years. Eske's view is real, refreshing and provides a better understanding of the important role adoption plays in helping children when countries do not have the resources to take care of their own.

In each of his siblings' birth countries (India and Korea) great strides have been made since his siblings were adopted to improve the lives of children in those countries needing families, thus drastically reducing the need for international adoption. But to get a better view of some of the issues plaguing those countries at the time of his siblings' adoptions, Eske travels to Ethiopia, the newest international adoption "hot-spot" to understand the situations that lead to a country needing help for its



children. Amongst all of the criticisms and recent hot-and-cold views of adoption, Eske provides a well-written, thought-provoking look at international adoption and the positive and negative effects it can have on family. "My Family, A Symphony" is a real view of the American transracial, adoptive family and a worth-while read for any family touched by adoption. It's probably one of my most favorite books to date.

— Reviewed by Kim Phagan-Hansel

The People They Brought Me: Poems in the Adoption Community

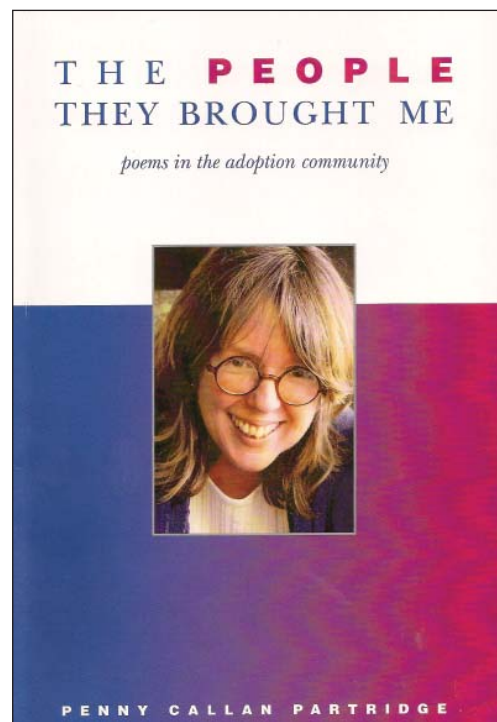
By Penny Callan Partridge
Penelope
Partridge, 2009,
92 pages, \$20

Filled with adoption-related poetry, "The People They Brought Me" written by Penny Callan Partridge doubles as a memoir of Partridge's adoption

journey. From poems about fighting for adoptees' rights to accessing original birth certificates to more personal accounts of discovering a piece of each of her parents — adoptive and biological — as part of her, the book provides a unique look at how adoption can impact so many facets of a person's life. The collection is an extraordinary example of the thoughts, feelings and emotions that influences adoptees every day. As each poem is presented in "The People They Brought Me," Partridge follows up with a description of how and why the poem was written. This format allows a greater understanding of the poem, the writer, the issues involved and the feelings behind it.

Not a real lover of poetry, I found the book insightful and as another creative way to look at adoption related issues. For some people a story provides a great impact, for others a picture and for still others poetry provides the greatest level of understanding. If these poems can touch someone's heart, help it heal and provide another level of understanding then they should be shared far and wide. The notations from the author about each poem bring an even higher level of opportunity to grow and understand what Partridge is sharing. The only thing better than reading the poems in "The People They Brought Me," would be hearing them recited by the author herself. To order a copy, visit www.pennycallanpartridge.com.

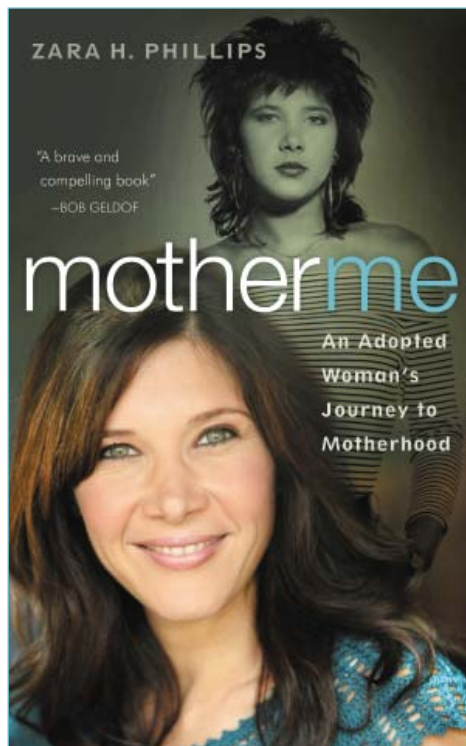
— Reviewed by Kim Phagan-Hansel



**Mother Me:
An Adopted
Woman's
Journey to
Motherhood**

By Zara H. Phillips
GemmaMedai,
2011, ISBN:
978-1-934848-36-4,
190 pages, \$14.95
paperback

With a clear, precise voice, author Zara H. Phillips reaches into the depths of her soul to share her experiences growing up as an adoptee in American edition of "Mother Me: An Adopted Woman's Journey to Motherhood." From cradle to stardom, Phillips continuously struggled with her identity as an adopted person without knowledge of



her birth family or birth history. After years of drug and alcohol abuse, Phillips worked to overcome addictions and reconnect with her adoptive and birth families. She shares the difficult feelings of loss and grief many adoptees experience. From finding her birth family to creating her own family, Phillips' story unfolds the challenges adoptees often face finding their place in the world.

Phillips gives readers a glimpse into the mindset of many adoptees as they struggle to find their place in the world. She takes readers along on her own adoption journey in the hopes that it will help other adoptees on their own journeys, as well as help adoptive parents better meet the needs of their children. She also provides a unique glance at how her own adoption story still affects her relationships with her husband and children. From a constant fear that her children will be taken from her to difficulty realizing that she belongs in her own family, Phillips' thoughts and fears are well documented in "Mother Me."

This book is a great window into the heart, soul and mind of an adoptee. Phillips' story is not so unique compared to other adoptees, but she does a great job sharing her insight on what she's learned from her own experiences. This is an excellent source for adoptive parents to learn from, as well as a great comfort for other adoptees who may be struggling with similar adoption issues. Definitely an easy must-read for adoptees and adoptive parents alike.

— Reviewed by Kim Phagan-Hansel

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Helping Children — One Child at a Time

Coming Home to Homestudies – Part III

I believe in de-mystifying adoption. In a previous issue, I discussed adoptive family decision-making. In this issue, we'll discuss: How do you respond to certain questions that might be posed to you? How can you make best use of a homestudy — you're paying for it — what would you like to get from the experience? Are there steps you and a partner can take to preserve the fun, love, romance and joie de vivre as you proceed in an admittedly stressful path?

1. During the homestudy, how do you respond to certain questions that might be posed to you?

Answer honestly. If you have worries about whether or not you can love a child not borne of your body, that kind of candor is helpful. Saying this out loud is also the only way it's going to be available for conversation, support and assistance from the homestudy social worker. If infertility has impacted communication in your couple relationship, don't hesitate to be frank — the social worker might make some recommendations for counseling to help you fortify those parts of your relationship that have undergone some stress. The idea of the homestudy is to genuinely be of service. If you treat it like an opportunity to review only the high points of your proverbial life's resume, it will feel as though you're going through the motions. For the homestudy process to be of genuine use to you, think/feel deeply about your concerns and make them available for conversation so that the homestudy social worker can genuinely help. A homestudy social worker will help you with the information and consultation that truly addresses your needs. One prospective adopter, who was also a therapist, asked, "Do you want to know how my family really is or how I think you would like it to sound like?" We both laughed and I was grateful to learn the true story of his colorful family; we understand that there can be alcoholic relatives, divorces and childhoods that are not stellar. You're not being evaluated on that. But it is important to see that you can talk about difficult subjects — this will be important if and when your child needs to talk about his or her feelings about the adoption.

Equipped with honest information, a homestudy social worker can help you identify what aspects of the adoption process and adoptive parenting experience might be easiest and which might be more challenging. The social worker can also make some suggestions that might help you achieve a good fit between your needs, given your life experiences, and

the adoption path and parameters that you choose. In short, be honest, real and authentic, as scary as that may seem at first.

2. How can you make best use of a homestudy — you're paying for it — what would you like to get from the experience? A final approved homestudy is like a driver's license — it gives you permission to move. But even drivers have "driver's ed," so too, any studying about adoption will help you in the homestudy process. Think about your deepest questions, worst fears and areas of frank ignorance; then go to tapestrybooks.com or perspectivespress.com — both specialize in adoption related books. Choose some books in the area which is a sore point, an area of confusion or questioning, a subject you have to admit is one that raises your anxiety. It is likely that there is information that can help you feel as though you can get a better handle on that theme. By taking your own adoption education into your own hands, you also empower yourself to make good use of the homestudy process — you can ask questions. Share your reading list with your homestudy social worker — he or she may want to read one of the books from your list if it's one he or she hasn't read before.

I recommend that all parents give extra thought to how they will handle discipline and limit setting. We have an unfortunate history of having once believed that violence was the way to teach children (read "Thou Shalt Not Be Aware" by Alice Miller, MD, for a fascinating/sad read on this subject). Despite being the academic one in my family, it was the athlete in my family who came up with the idea for how we'd raise our daughter — "How about a 'time with' instead of a 'time out?'" was the question that led us to hold our daughter and spend some extra time with her when she began to "act out." As a result, we raised a kid who never had a time out and, as a teenager, was someone who always consulted us about questions. We never had a top-down dynamic even if we did lovingly and firmly make decisions for her well-being. Our style of parenting might not have worked for a different child — temperament can count for a lot. But I think that reading, "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen/How to Listen so Kids Will Talk" by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish is probably the best gift you can give yourself and your child-to-be. Read it and have your homestudy social worker read it too, if they haven't already — discuss it during the homestudy. It's a great



Marla Allisan, JD, LICSW, is the founder and director of Full Circle Adoptions (www.fullcircleadoptions.com) a Hague accredited agency providing both domestic and international adoption services. An attorney and clinical social worker, Allisan has worked as a general practice litigator, a hospital outpatient psychiatric social worker, and university and medical school educator. She enjoys educating others on topics related to child abuse/neglect prevention, adoption, families and the law. When not at work, she enjoys hanging with her family, writing essays, playing piano and learning more about stand up comedy, which she performs on occasion...out of town.

gift for future generations to raise a child with respect and in a peace-loving manner.

3. Are there steps you and a partner can take to preserve the fun, love, romance and joie de vivre as you proceed in an admittedly stressful path?

During the waiting period, taking certain steps to add joy and even greater depth to a couple relationship can be one of the best gifts you give to yourself and your future child. Here are some ideas of what you can consider during the waiting period.

It can be helpful to engage a supportive therapist before the adoption process begins. Assuming you've done the majority of your grieving over infertility (if relevant), it is then good to work with a therapist who can know you "at baseline." What are you like "before" the roller coaster of adoption? If you're a couple, it's good for you to each have your own person in whom you can confide and explore the wide-ranging feelings. This will help you stay balanced during stressful times, be clearer during decision-making and will help you tease out your "stuff" so you can stay present and emotionally available for your partner.

For couples, it can sometimes be important to "take turns" being the "point person" for contact from the adoption agency. If one person has a demanding career and the other person is a stay-at-home spouse/parent, it can be easy to fall into a pattern whereby the at-home spouse is doing all the sweat-equity for the adoption process. This can lead to resentment and worries that the less involved partner may not be as invested in the process. It literally can be a relationship saver to assume that, no matter what other demands there are, it is simply fair to take turns. Try it and you'll probably see benefits in other areas in your relationship.

Sexuality can take a hit over time in any relationship. Add to that the stress of infertility (where applicable), the stress of the adoption process and the related stresses of the financial impact of the process and that can be a recipe for some angst in the bedroom. The waiting period can be a time when you give yourself some extra vacations, even if it means a "stay-cation" to minimize expenses, but one where you religiously put the cell phone, pager and computer in the closet and spend time together, eye-to-eye. It's hard to do this, in this day and age, but would you be more likely to if you told yourself that it could inoculate you against marital tension and discord? Try it.

As for sexuality and passion, directly, the waiting period is a good time to fill your mind with some superb books and even workshops. If you wouldn't mind spending a

weekend deepening your relationship, consider checking out workshops at such places as Kripalu, Esalen and Omega. These centers frequently have some of the authors referred to below as well as other workshop leaders who can take you on a "tour" of ways to refresh, rejuvenate and rekindle the home fires.

There's a wonderful book called, "Mating in Captivity" by Esther Perel, which provides a careful analysis of some of the steps couples can take to keep passion, vitality and love alive in a relationship amidst the wear and tear of daily demands. I recommend this book and the three books, particularly "Intimacy and Desire" by David Schnarch, MD. These are excellent books for any couple to read. There is also a book, whose intended audience is lesbian couples; it is wisely read by anyone thinking deeply about relationships. Renate Stendhal, in "True Secrets of Lesbian Desire: Keeping Sex Alive in Long-Term Relationships" eloquently describes how passion is borne of honesty. Her book, the book "Tell Me No Lies" by Bader, Pearson and Schwarz, and the Schnarch volume referred to above could benefit anyone taking a closer look at the interplay between authenticity, honesty and love/passion. The waiting period is a great time to focus on an area that is commonly thought of as delightful but not a focus of concerted thought and attention.

Decision-making in General

As with all decision-making, I recommend that you take a period of time which you would consider an "information gathering time." During that time, you would brainstorm questions to ask that are related to that aspect of adoption you are wondering about. You can brainstorm names of people with whom you might discuss the questions — social workers, other adoptive parents, agencies, people you know socially and personally. Don't rush to resolve the question — see what other questions arise. I wish you an informed and empowered journey in adoption. Feel free to email adoption@fullcircleadoptions.com or call (413) 587-0007 if you have questions you'd like to explore further.

It can be helpful to engage a supportive therapist before the adoption process begins. Assuming you've done the majority of your grieving over infertility (if relevant), it is then good to work with a therapist who can know you "at baseline."



Addiction & Adoption

By Zara Phillips

I was adopted as a baby in England in a closed adoption, which was common at that time.

I always knew my mother loved my brother and me, and that she enjoyed raising children, my father was a withdrawn man and had little involvement with us children. My parents had no idea what it would mean to raise adopted children.

Through no fault of their own we were adopted at a time where parents were told “just love the baby as if it were your own” and that there would be no difference than having a biological child.

It was never suggested to grieve for the loss of having a baby, or that adopted children may have feelings about their status.

We rarely talked about being adopted and I never talked about the constant void that was with me. I didn't really know what the feeling was, I just knew I didn't ever feel quite right, but no one ever asked me so I never told anyone. I suffered from separation anxiety as a young child and what I see now as a depression that came out as a moody teenager. My mother did not know how to handle me; it was a volatile relationship. I felt angry toward my mother and guilty for feeling that way.

I began to seek out experiences to fill the void and none of them were healthy for me in any sense. They gave me the short, quick fix and then the depression would hit. Then I would

need more drugs to take to cover the feelings that were getting harder and harder to keep at bay.

I wondered why I didn't feel good because I had everything a girl could want — a lovely home, two parents and yet it wasn't enough.

Drugs seemed an incredibly easy solution to my problems. For one thing, they took away the wrenching pain and allowed me to function without feeling constantly depressed and inadequate. They also dissolved my separation anxiety. Suddenly I could stay away overnight whenever I wanted without any repercussions.

I smoked my first joint with my brother just before I turned 15. My girlfriend and I were sitting in his room, watching him smoke, and I decided I wanted to try it. My friend was horrified but Graham was amused. He handed me a joint and they both stared as I told them I felt wobbly and strange. I giggled a little but on the inside, I perceived an awakening that I had never experienced before. I felt alive! Perhaps life wasn't going to be so bad after all.

Maybe, up until that moment, I just hadn't found the secret to happiness and now here it was! This was the connection that I had been missing. This was the way to fill that terrible void.

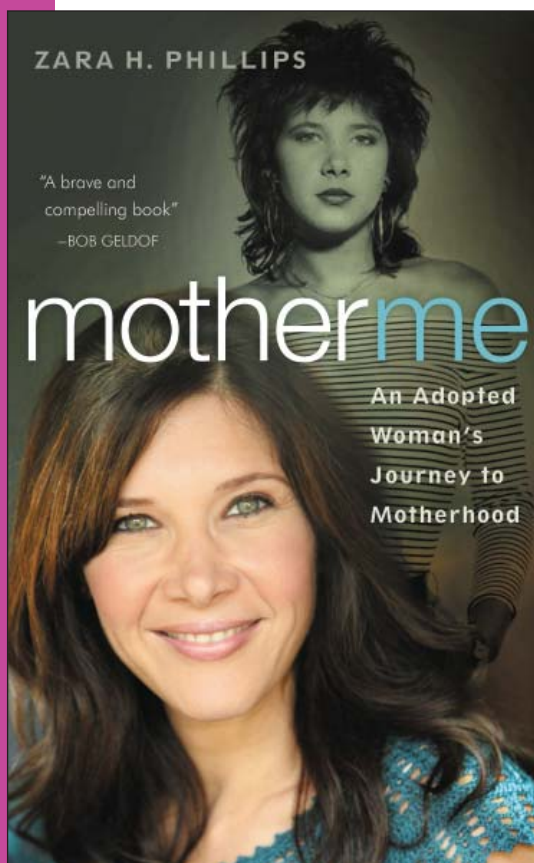
Drugs were a godsend. My fears vanished, I could sleep, and I felt invincible. I stopped caring what people thought about me. I had

confidence. I began to wear sexy clothes and stopped hiding my bottom with big sweaters (for fear it was too large), and men became interested in me. This was a volatile mix and I was still handling being a teenager, with all the emotions that come with puberty, as well as trying to find myself. The fact that I didn't know who I was or where I came from just exacerbated my difficulties. What was wrong with me? After all, I had a family. Wasn't I grateful for that? I was so confused, mixed up, angry and afraid that the only solution was to make a strong commitment to not feel any of it. And so I blundered on with no sense of direction. I never gave any thought about what I wanted to do or achieve, and I failed miserably at school. I could never concentrate or absorb any information that was given to me. If anyone had asked me what year I was studying in history, I couldn't have said. I had a lot of anxiety about failing and spent a great deal of time worrying.

It took a few more years of repeating the same old behavior before it sank in that I needed to change from the inside.

Once sober, the realization came to me within a couple of months that I needed to know my story. I needed to find my birth mother and understand more about myself. I did not feel that I could move forward without knowing the truth, the beginning.

I was terrified and I had a lot of sadness, sadness that I had never allowed myself to feel because it felt like it would swallow me up. I



realized that it was grief that I had suppressed for a long time, probably since the day my birth mother and I were separated. I began to get honest about how I truly felt about myself.

One night after I was newly sober I had a dream that I was in an old house and it was all dusty and cobwebs were covering all the furniture. In the dream, I stood on a chair on tiptoe and started taking box after box off of the top of the cupboard until there was a small box left at the back. I managed to reach the box. I stepped off the chair and dusted off the lid and opened it up and there inside was an ugly, strange looking baby, but I knew that the dream represented so much. I had felt my whole life that my birth mother had abandoned me, but I had abandoned myself and it was time to start developing a relationship with myself.

From that day on I have tried hard to care for myself as a mother would. I was taught in my early years of recovery to think of myself as a baby, asking “would you feed a baby chocolate for breakfast, a vodka and orange for lunch, and a pack of cigarettes for dinner?”

I had always needed my story and probably would have benefitted from the truth at a young age. Would that have stopped me using drugs? Would I have had a better sense of identity? I don't really know.

I couldn't imagine doing that to a baby and yet I would treat myself that way. And that was the beginning of healing, cleaning up my physical body to start looking at my physical and mental body.

I still have times where I forget the baby and abandon myself in various ways, but each time I do it I learn more about myself.

Is addiction connected to adoption? I really do not know. All I know is I was running from an early age, in anyway possible so I didn't have to feel the separation, the anxiety and panic that were always with me.

I had always needed my story and probably would have benefitted from the truth at a young age. Would that have stopped me using drugs? Would I have had a better sense of identity? I don't really know.

My story is not what I wanted to hear — my birth parents were not in love with each other, I was the product of a teenage pregnancy and I was sad for a long time about that. For years, it had meant in my mind that I was a mistake. But what then was I saying about my children if I said that about myself. I have had to go deep down to those primal feelings and grieve for that baby taken from its mother.

The void can creep up from time to time but I don't have to use mind-altering substances to run from it, I can sit with it and know that I will be OK and that I will get through it. Grieving has actually been a lifesaver for me because every time I allow myself to go there I get a little emotional freedom.

Today I know I have choices and that is a gift. I could not have done any of this work on myself if it wasn't for support groups. The adoption and addiction ones have been

a great combination for me, both offering things that I need to fill me up in a good way.

I am not perfect, I am not cured, but today I have the tools that I can reach out and grab at anytime during my day. I now have tools for living that can help me as I still dream about the unknown parent or whatever else is going on in my life.

When I was born I had no choice, others made all the decisions about my life.

Today I have a choice of how I live my life and for that I am eternally grateful. And I feel lucky to walk the path with some incredible people I have met along the way.

Zara Phillips was adopted in London England and started her career as a backing vocalist for artists such as Bob Geldof, Matt Bianco, Nick Kamen, John Illsely and David Essex. Her book “Mother Me: An Adopted Woman's Journey to Motherhood” was published by BAAF, The British Association of Adoption and Fostering in 2008. An updated American edition was recently published by Gemma Media. Phillips has also directed and produced the award-winning 30-minute documentary “Roots: Unknown” about the lifelong impact of adoption. “Roots: Unknown” has been screened at various film festivals and adoption events. Phillips co-wrote a song with hip-hop pioneer Darryl “DMC” McDaniel's called “I'm Legit” about the struggle for gaining open records for adopted people in the United States. A music video of this song is currently available on Youtube.com. Phillips' new album “you me and us” produced by Grammy-winning producer Ted Perlman, will feature “I'm Legit” along with 12 other new songs written and performed by Phillips. Phillips currently resides in New Jersey. For more information about Phillips, visit www.everythingzara.com.

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Peace...Even When Relationship Hurts

By Juli Alvarado

Life is complex. If anyone had told me years ago, almost 20 now, when my husband and I decided to foster and adopt children, that parenting them would be nothing like parenting our four biological children; that the kind of love that I knew was not all they would need; that their behaviors and emotions would make me feel crazy at times, I would not have believed them. No, I had to actually live it to believe it.

And if anyone had told me as I entered executive level positions in corporations and then in mental health and child welfare, that supervising employees, managing teams and leading groups would be everything like raising a family, I would not have believed it.

And had I not lived it, I would not believe in the hope of healing for all of us, individually, as family and as organizations. Had I not witnessed the tragedies and the healing that I have witnessed during more than two decades of working in this field, at home and in the office, I would not believe today as I do in the healing capacity of human brain and spirit.

When relationships hurt, we learn not to trust in relationships, whether at work, school or home. Yet it is that experience and relationship that we have to heal. The complexity in balancing that with those who have been hurt in relationship can become overwhelming. Learning to move from a place of brokenness, a place of anger and mistrust, of disappointment, fear and even rage...back to a place of joy, peace and serenity will take time and skillful interactions, especially for children and families of trauma.

Many children who come from backgrounds of maltreatment, abuse and neglect lose their parents when they enter foster care. Rather than moving through the pain, and healing the hurt, many try to bury feelings in a number of ways. And whenever something is buried that is not dead, it will come back to haunt us. We find that our children's

feelings continue to surface at the most inconvenient or inopportune times and their behaviors reflect that externally.

Quite often, these children take these unresolved feelings about relationship to “parents” or adults into their next relationship thereby setting it up for failure, which creates a vicious cycle of pain. We know that all too well, do we not? In truth, this is no different than the adults who you know that carry either childhood roles into adulthood and suffer through abusive relationships, or move from one failed relationship to another carrying with them the pain from the last failed relationship that becomes quickly the pain of the current relationship.

The healing process requires that we acknowledge the pain and move through the hurt.

We may have to remind ourselves and others of that from time to time. I encourage you to take a deep breath and go back, even now, and read that sentence again, quietly and slowly. We need to have others around us who are attentive, kind and gentle, whether or not they know much about trauma and healing or not, the attentiveness, kindness and gentleness will on their own, move us toward healing in relationship.

In this two-part article I hope to simplify for you some additional steps that we can all take in the healing of relationship with others who have experienced relationships that hurt.

For the past 20 years, I have been a student, teacher, therapist, administrator, client, caregiver, foster parent, founder, board member, fund-raiser, consultant and participant in both the private and public sector work of child welfare and mental health systems. I have a deep belief that we must each work to leave this world better than we found it, following in the footsteps of both of my parents, and hopefully leaving that legacy to my four biological and numer-



Juli Alvarado is the founder of Coaching for Life and an international speaker, consultant and expert in the area of relationships, foster care and adoption. She and her husband have been married for 21 years, have four biological children and have fostered more than 45 high needs children in the past 15 years. Along with regular speaking engagements and program development, she maintains a small private practice in Denver where she lives with her family. may be contacted through her Web site at www.coachingforlife.com.

ous foster children. If we could only know, believe and live by the paradigm that we are each doing the best we can in any given moment and that being kind to one another on a consistent basis could drastically change the society we live in, would we not live in a drastically better society? Sounds so simple, yet remains so complex.

There is a hopeful, healing presence in all that I do today, at home and in the office, however, truth be told, it emanated from a darker place. During the past two decades I have witnessed profoundly disturbing events and settings.

I have witnessed children being held accountable for their admission into foster care, residential treatment, inpatient psychiatric unites. I worked with Angela, a 6-year-old found in a shopping cart in the parking lot of a local discount store, who ran away from every home she lived in, always back to that parking lot where she last saw her mother, and then punished in such a horrific and abusive manner by the foster parents licensed to take care of her. And Gene a badly bruised, broken and burned little boy become the topic of every “tough to place” staffing at the county in which I worked, with whom nobody wanted to work; and then Anna, after two failed adoptions, and 17 disrupted foster care placements quickly diagnosed as reactive attachment disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder. I wonder, what would you and I look like after 19 homes, 19 moms, 19 families, 19 communities, 19 sets of rules, 19 different menus of food? Would we too, perhaps struggle to attach to anyone else?

I have worked in organizations where the leader himself was the perpetrator to others in the organization on countless occasions; and for agencies who were so traumatized through the vicarious experience of their clients and the system itself, that the agency did not feel like a safe place to be. I coach many employees of child welfare and mental health agencies who feel like their work environment is fragmented, chaotic and not supportive of what they are working to do with children and families.

The complex manifestation of that level of trauma added to a complex system of traumatized service providers has left us facing a crisis in effective healing programs that is pushing us individually and our programs to the brink of ruin. Both the financial crisis of our times, as well as the antiquated healing paradigms still in us have caused a cascade of dysfunctional systems, broken teams, programs in ruins and spirits, souls, body and minds forced into nothing more than a mere existence both at home and in the

office. We have known for centuries that the individual displaying dysfunction is certainly tied to a larger family, community, social, political and living system who is also displaying dysfunction upon close enough examination.

There is an individual, as well as collective consciousness and unconsciousness tied to all that we each are and will become. Effective healing paradigms must include a deep understanding of this connection and potential for mind/body healing for all, individually and collectively.

At the foundation of a successful relationship or successful system is trust and utilization of power. Both are vulnerable to human relationships. There are inherent differences in power in all human relationships, however, it is the means by which we leverage that power that may create healthy relationships or potentially lead to abuse of power in relationship.

Managing an ever-shifting distribution of power in the system in which we work and our own family systems require the development of trust, healthy communication, emotional intelligence and regulation. We, as the macro-system, must model the hope in healing and change if we are to encourage and inspire that in our clients and families. When we come to terms with the challenge of change on us as the system, we become more deeply empathic of the stress that change in our families’ systems create and the necessity to create treatment and healing paradigms that are both trauma sensitive and effective in the repair of past damage done in relationships.

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Helping Children Heal from Relationships that Hurt

During the past 20 years the amount of research in effective healing programs for children of maltreatment has exploded. We know that traumatic experiences, such as

abuse and neglect, affect the developing brain during certain stages of development, in differing ways. And we know that these effects to the brain manifest in challenging social, emotional and behavioral displays in our children.

Unfortunately, all too often I see children being held accountable for and even punished for their behaviors which are merely an indication of the level of distress internally that has caused confusion and chaos. As we have learned more about the developing brain and how it is impacted through childhood maltreatment, we have come to recognize that these negative behaviors emanate from parts of the brain that have become either highly activated or rather passive leaving the child with little conscious awareness of what is happening in his or her body/mind system. A cascade of chaotic and confused

emotions flood the child leaving him or her sometimes angry and hostile with outward manifestations of negative behaviors.

Many conventional treatment and healing programs continue today to focus on changing the external behaviors when in truth we now know that in order to change socially, emotionally or behaviorally, we must impact the neurodevelopment, or the developing brain, where those experiences originate from. We have learned that the brain is “fluid” or moldable and can be changed; most easily early in life when the brain is growing rapidly — through about the third birthday — but continues to have the capacity for

change throughout the lifespan.

Each child and family who we work with is different, and each of us is different. The relationship between the support person and the client is the most effective means of changing the brain. Trauma that occurs in the context of relationship will be most effectively healed in the context of healthy relationship. Research has clearly demonstrated that children of maltreatment will benefit most from relationship to adults who can make sense of their own childhood and who have worked to understand their own losses as they continue through life. Making sense of our own lives frees us from the patterns of the past, so we can lead others to do the same. In the absence of reflection on our own lives, history tends to repeat itself. This is the very dynamic that we work to free our child and family clients from; yet we can not provide this for another if we have not yet explored it for ourselves.

In part two of this article we will explore Five Approaches to Healing Parenting and four simple strategies we can employ in all healing relationships. In the meantime, if you are ready to begin your own journey, reach out, talk to a professional and get some support. You will find free resources at www.coaching-forlife.com.

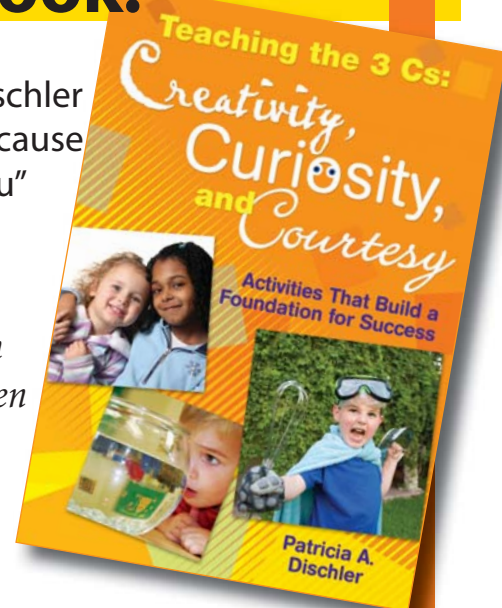
Until next time,
Peace, Juli

Each child and family who we work with is different, and each of us is different. The relationship between the support person and the client is the most effective means of changing the brain. Trauma that occurs in the context of relationship will be most effectively healed in the context of healthy relationship.

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Adoption TODAY CEU Quiz – May 2011

This is an "open-book" exam. As you read the articles identified below you should be able to answer the questions.

Either photocopy or tear out this page and mail it with a pre-addressed, postage paid envelope to:

Adoption TODAY CEU Quiz Monitor, 541 E. Garden Dr. Unit N • Windsor, CO 80550

Pre-adoption credits are not yet required in most states. Be sure to check with your agency of record to see if they will credit you for completing the CEU Quiz.

All responses must be returned by June 30, 2011 to receive your Certification of Credit for this issue.

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Learning Objective: to increase adoptive parents' ability to apply and respond to new information and conceptual frameworks to their work with children in their care.

Please rate the following on a scale of 1-4 (1 is poor, 4 is excellent):

The information was informative: (1-2-3-4)

The information was useful / helpful in my role as an adoptive parent: (1-2-3-4)

The information was thought-provoking, (1-2-3-4) especially to story on page(s) _____

I would be interested in reading more on the topic(s) of: _____

1. According to the article, "Older Child Adoption," on page 10, which of the following are among those who should be included in a family's crucial support network? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Teachers
- b. Adoptive families
- c. Adoption professionals
- d. Family members

2. According to the article, "Adopting an Older Child: Preparation is Vital" on page 12, which of the following are the most crucial steps in the preparation phase of the adoption process? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Education and support
- b. Financial preparation
- c. Communication
- d. Emotional stability

3. According to the article, "Educational challenges for 'older' children adopted from overseas orphanages," on page 16, which of the following are among the four steps of the functional model for intensive cognitive and language remediation? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Remediation via specialized methodologies, if needed.
- b. Placement in classroom based on age assessment.
- c. Availability of Individual Education Plans at chosen school.

d. Proper placement according to actual readiness.

4. What does the B of the "ABCs of Emotional Health" stand for according to the article on page 23?

a. _____

5. According to the article, "When Adoptees Want to Search" on page 32, which of the following are among the "Dos" for adoptive parents of children conducting a birth search? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Create a competitive atmosphere.
- b. Be genuinely supportive.
- c. Thank your child's first mother for "giving us this precious gift."
- d. Respect boundaries.

6. According to the column, "Adoption Journeys," on page 38, during the homestudy how do you respond to certain questions that might be posed to you? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Answer only what's required.
- b. Provide in-depth responses.
- c. Answer honestly.
- d. Avoid difficult questions.

7. How old was your child when you adopted him or her? What were the most challenging issues you had to overcome with your child and how did you deal with them?

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