



TAProot

Issue #39

February 2001

Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. is a non-profit adoption support group composed of adoptive families, fost-adopt, adoptees, adoption professionals and other interested in adoption.

TAPROOT is a quarterly publication of
Together as Adoptive Parents Inc.
478 Moyers Road
Harleysville, PA 19438-2302
(215) 256-0669

We urge you to send us any information that you feel may be of interest to our readers.

OUR MISSION

To provide a support network among parents in the greater Philadelphia area, to disseminate available services and information to members and to implement programs and activities which promote the well being of adoptive families.

Have any comments,
suggestions
or gripes?

E-mail us at

taplink@hotmail.com

or call us at

(215) 256-0669

MEMBERSHIPS

North American Council on Adoptable
Children
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United Way

President's Corner

I hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday. My holidays were very busy. Especially my new years eve. You see, my son who attends college in Florida informed me a few weeks before he came home for Christmas vacation that he had invited a few kids over for a "small" birthday party, (he was born on New Years Day). Well that "small" birthday party turned out to be over 100 people. I think the last kid left my house around 3:00am. I must admit it was a lot of fun. The kids played games and talked. Around 11:30 we all stood around the television waiting for the ball to drop. The next time any one of my children wants to have a "small" party at the house, I will be sure to ask them their definition of small.

The original article that I wrote for President's Corner was too long to fit into this small corner of the newsletter so we put it on the inside. It is entitled "Child Welfare and My Family". It is worth reading.

Remember this is the last TAPROOT you will be receiving if you have not sent in the mailer stating that you would like to continue receiving the newsletter.

I received a Policy Announcement from the Dept. of Health and Human Services concerning Adoption Assistance Eligibility. Some PIQ's have been withdrawn and new ones added. Before I put anything in the newsletter I plan on getting more information for you. I will try to have all the changes in the next TAPROOT and will also add them to the web site.

Some of you may have noticed that our web site, Taplink, has not been updated recently. We are in the process of changing our web hosting provider to provide us more expandability. We expect to be back on line shortly.

Phyllis Stevens

Child Welfare and My Family

(by Phyllis Stevens)

I would like to dedicate this article to all the people who work in the child welfare system. Especially to those of you who recruit families to adopt children with special needs. I would also like to challenge you not to forget the reason you chose your occupation. It was not for the money or the prestige. It was for the children!

A few months ago I went to visit my family in Detroit or Deetroit as some of you here in Pennsylvania call it. I always knew that all seven of my older sister's children aged out of the "system". When they became adults they all searched and found my sister. Until this visit, what I did not know was what the "system" had done to them

As I sat and talked with my niece Donna (now 37 years old), she told me about what happened to her as a child. The years of abuse started when she and her oldest sister Linda were sent to a home for children. It was not soon after that, that they were attacked by one of the man at the home. To protect Donna, Linda hid her in a wall and took the rape that was meant for Donna. As a result of the rape, Linda became pregnant. The baby was taken away never to be seen again. As they moved from foster home to foster home, the rapes continued by man and women until they "aged out the system".

For years Donna went from man to man trying to find hope in life. She finally found it when she took Jesus as her savior.

Linda tried to kill herself three times that I know of. She also went from marriage to marriage, finally ending up with an abusive husband. Linda too has now put her trust in the Lord and has found peace in Him.

Donna took out pictures of Linda's 50th birthday party. It was so nice seeing so many of my nieces and nephews together. It was a joy to see Linda smiling in every picture. Donna gave Linda her *first* doll as a birthday present.

As Donna and I talked she told me of the abuse that my oldest nephew went through. He was placed in several foster homes, but one of them was a living hell. When Willie was an adult, he used to have these nightmares about the green monsters in the closet and that is when she found out about this foster home. He told her that he was put in a closet and kept there. He ate in there and he slept in there. The only time he was allowed out was to go to school, the bathroom, or to be sexually abused. Now I understand why at my mother's funeral he yelled so loudly as the casket was being closed. "No, no, no, she taught me how to be a man. I am not gay, she taught me how to be a man." Today Willie wanders around the city of Detroit talking to himself and living on the street.

Donna asked me if I ever wondered why Barbara (another niece) never came around the family and was always to herself. She then told me of Barbara's abuse. Now I understand why when Barbara heard that three children she knew were being placed in foster care, she went to court and fought hard to have them placed in her home until the mother got her "act" together. She kept them until they were reunited with their mom. I praise the Lord that she is married to a VERY understanding husband.

When I left Donna I went to visit another niece Genice. Genice like the others was moved from foster home to foster home. She was abused in each one. She tried to explain to me why after 22 years of marriage she was leaving her husband and children. All she could say was that I could not understand what had happened to her starting at the age of 8, and that she needed to be alone. Looking back, now I understand why she, never let her husband be alone with any of their daughters at any time. She would always call my mom to come stay at her house whenever she went into the hospital to have another baby or would be away from the house overnight. She would beg my mom not to leave the house if her husband was home with the girls.

When all of this was happening I was very young, but talking with Donna has changed me forever. I hope it has made some of you rethink way you are doing, what you are doing. Please ask yourself; What was my original motivation to work in the child welfare system? When, specifically, did I lose it and why? What were my original objectives in this position?

I know that pressures and problems come with the job, but you have the power to control how you react to them. To you recruiters, *flex your creativity*. Please do not think that your job is just another job. You are just as important as a brain surgeon because you both do the same thing. **You both save lives.**

Opt to Adopt

ADAM

December 12, 1992

Adam is a cute African American boy who is quiet until he gets to know people. He does well with individual adult attention. Everyone who has met Adam describes him as good-natured. He prefers peace and quiet and becomes less functional in a chaotic atmosphere. Adam needs a home that has structure and consistency, especially when it comes to the house rules. Adam can be a perfectionist and likes to have things in order. He plays well with children, but is socially "toddler-like". He is mannerly and concerned about the feelings of others. Adam is not the aggressive type. He will argue with peers, but does not get physical.



Adam is curious and excited about new things. He doesn't watch TV, but is a "home-body". He likes to work with his hands. He enjoys catching bugs and frogs. He will need a parent to understand his delays and how they impact his behavior.

Adam resides in a therapeutic foster home where he is doing well. He needs supervision with hygiene and daily chores. Adam has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and is on Ritalin, which enables him to concentrate. His foster mother says that Adam has made major improvements.

Physically Adam is healthy. Emotionally, he functions at a lower age level. In addition to his medication, he attends therapy sessions. He also attends a therapeutic day camp, which focuses on socialization. Adam has tried mainstreaming in school, but due to his developmental delays, he now attends a special school. Adam does better in one-on-one smaller classrooms. His current teacher states that he has made significant progress in all areas.

Adam will need an adoptive family with a lot of patience, understanding, time and nurturance. All Families with older children will be considered.

Adam is not yet legally free for adoption.

For more information about Adam please contact Ms. Weber at (412) 473-2310

Journaling With Your Kids

By Laurie Elliott

"Whatever coaxes us out of hiding to write, record, and express is a revolutionary act. It says that we believe our lives count: or lives DO count."

-SARK

You don't have to be a writer to journal with your child. There is no right or wrong way to journal, but, not to try is perhaps to miss out on an opportunity to share yourself and come to better know your child. Determine **not** to place too many "rules" on the "how to", "how often," etc. Journalled items should only be discussed between the parties involved and then ONLY if agreed through writing. This is non-threatening and free manner of expression. A few other ideas to consider: don't pick your child who hates the actual act of writing for your first try at this; don't try to journal with every family member. Make this successful, pick a child you believe will enjoy the activity.

Swear to secrecy, to not let dad or mom or other family members read the journal without the other writer's permission. Don't nag "did you journal yet?" Make a pact from the start that any "confessions" in the journal will NOT be subject to punishment.

Remember this is a free-write exercise of self-expression which will come more and more naturally.

Are you ready?

1. You and your child go "journal" shopping. (A ruled journal is best for kids.)
2. Write your secret pact in the front, (see above).
3. Parents start the Journal
4. Print.
5. Keep it brief.
6. Use "I" statements.
7. Avoid using "you" or "do"
8. Share something that comes to your mind from your own childhood. How did you feel? What happened to you? Testimony works better than preaching, (kids want to know that their parents were once real kids).
9. Share some of your favorite things, colors, and places
10. Ask questions at the end of your entry. Try beginning questions with "how, when," "where", "who" and "what." This helps avoid "yes" and "no" answers.
11. Use feeling words often to stretch your child's feeling, vocabulary and show you have some.
12. Avoid "issue" discussions unless the child brings it up. For example: an entry starting with, "Son, I never did drugs." Is a red flag that dad's not journaling anymore, he's preaching. Rather, discuss issues that impacted you as a kid.
13. Remember to start out slowly. Kids are overwhelmed with too many questions or information.
14. Drawing in the journal is another way to express.
15. Use a pen, this will be a wonderful treasure of memories one day and pencil fades.

Please, tell your child from the start that anytime they have something they really want to write about that is serious, they can. If they just don't know how, then give them a code number to write, like 007 or 911. This means, mom, dad, what is on my heart is too big to write, or I am afraid to write it, or I need help NOW. NEVER make such a deal as this and then take it lightly if they use the code. (Stress ahead of time that you will take it seriously.) Also, don't immediately jump to conclusions about "what" they are concerned about or get others involved. Remember, you gave your work that they can confide in you. If events turn out to be so serious you must involve others, you still can share these decisions gently with your child.

I have journaled most of my life. It has been my time with my Heavenly Father. I now have a storage space rented containing 30 plus years of journaling and journey. I have also journaled with some of my kids with success, others without one response. I have journaled with friends and it has been very rewarding. I hope you will not let any past fear of writing, high school English, or lack of confidence keep you from enjoying this rewarding form of self-expression. If you start, God will meet you and your child there and you will be AMAZED!!! Enjoy.

Heart Connection Volume 1. Issue 2



Tax Benefits for Adoption

To learn about IRS Publication 968,
“Tax Benefits for Adoption”
Call (800)-TAX-FORM (829-3676) to
order forms and publication or
check the IRS web site at www.irs.ustreas.gov.
For answers to other tax questions, call
(800) 829-1040



Together As Adoptive Parents, Inc. has been awarded a grant Of \$4,950 from North American Council on Adoptable Children to add a discussion symposium to our web site Taplink.



We believe that this “message board” is one way that parent group leaders and members in our state can stay connected to each other. This will minimize burnout and hopefully help smaller groups in rural areas stay together because they will not feel alone.

Thank you NACAC!

Food Allergy Workshop

Food Allergy Network will be presenting an informational workshop on the Gluten and Casein Free Diet

Presented by Dr. Lisa S. Lewis
at the Souderton Mennonite Church
105 W. Chestnut Street
Souderton, PA 18964

On Sat. Feb. 24th 2001

10:00am to 1:00pm

Please pre-register by calling
Sharon at
215-234-9362

Stages of Adoption

ADOPTEE

0-4

Generally does not realize differences. If notices them, like to point them out.
Feels OK about adoption and thinks story is special.

5-6

Child begins to ask many questions about babies, birth, differences.
Likes adoption story, but does not understand concepts of adoption. Feels some differences, especially if in multi-cultural family.
Tells most people he/she is adopted.

7-11

Child understands basic concepts of adoption.
Begins grieving process.
May stop asking questions/denial.
Realizes she/he lost something in order to be adopted.
“Not everyone is adopted like me.”
“Why was I adopted?”
“Why didn’t they keep me?”
“Did I do something wrong?”
Increasing interest in birth parents.
Fantasies about living with different parents.

12-14

Anger stage of grieving and development stage.
May resist authority, try on new identities.
Begins separating from 2 sets of parents.
May be angry over loss of control over adoption decisions, wants more control in life.
Growing sense of self: identity issues.
More complex reasoning about adoption story and needs to look at grays rather than black and white.
Rejects kids who are different.
Generally does not talk about being an adoptee.
What does sex have to do with adoption?

15-17

Separates from 2 sets of parents.
Has second layer of concerns about leaving home.

CHILD WHO IS NOT ADOPTED

0-4

Generally does not realize differences. If notices them, likes to point them out.
Feels OK about adoption and thinks story is special.

5-6

Child begins to ask many questions about babies, birth, differences.
Does not understand adoption, but wonders about it when it comes up – and often asks simple questions to learn more.
Accept adoption as a way to form a family.

7-11

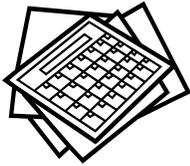
Does not understand adoption concepts, but begins to sense that it results when birth parents “give away” child
Reaction to adopted peers based on information from adults (if any) or media.
“Not everyone is adopted like he is.”
“Why was she adopted?”
“Could my parents give me away?”
“I’m glad I am not adopted.”
“Adoption is OK because I like you” or “Adoption is NOT OK because I don’t like you.”
Fantasies about living with different parents.

12-14

Anger stage of development stage.
May resist authority, try on new identities.
Begins separating from 1 set of parents.
Wants more control in life.
Growing sense of self: identity issues.
Sees many differences about adoptive families. Oversimplifies how adoption occurs and does not understand emotional issues.
Rejects kids who are different.
May be negative about what he/she perceives adoption reflects about adoptees.
What does sex have to do with adoption?

15-17

Separates from 1 set of parents.
May face concerns about leaving home, but usually feels secure about its permanency.



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Girdles, Laxatives, and Respite

By Gregory Keck

You're probably wondering just what these three things have in common, and even more likely, what they have to do with attachment! My answer? *Excessive* use of any of them may lead to further reliance upon them; in fact, ongoing use may increase the need for them.

Respite care, the focus of this article, has become sacred in some corners, hailed as the very thing perhaps the only thing that keeps some placements together. That may very well be true. However, I think that we should take another look at respite through these questions:

- Is respite supposed to improve the child's capacity to attach to the family?
- Is the ultimate goal of respite to no longer need or want respite?
- What is the message that respite sends to the child about the family's capacity to love, nurture, control, or manage the child?
- Does respite mimic or parallel the child's own approach/avoidance attachment responses?
- How is respite different from the child's experiences in multiple placements?

I would hope that the goal of any respite plan is to do more than give people a break. These breaks may actually further damage the breaks in attachment the child has already experienced; they may concretize the child's thinking that he only needs to be able to function for short periods of time, then he can go elsewhere for another short period of time. One of the goals of respite should be related to enhancing the child's capacity for attachment as well as helping the family address its difficulties.

I assume the people would like to be with their children. I assume that parents want their kids to be fun to be with. And, I would hope that kids would like to be with their families. That is the purpose of adoption! Therefore, I think the ultimate goal of respite ought to be the elimination of it, or at least a reduction in the frequency of it.

While it's difficult to estimate just what message any child gets about anything, particularly if he or she is quite disturbed, I think it is critical to evaluate this issue. If the child gets the idea that she has to go to respite because her parents can't handle her anymore, the child gains too much power. We need to remember that children and adolescents who have hurt so much in their early lives fear vulnerability. If the parents seem vulnerable, the child will have extreme difficulty ever attaching. Children with attachment difficulties will only identify with and attach in powerful images. After all, if the parents are too weak (in the child's view) to handle the child, how could they ever be counted on to protect her? Who would want to attach to someone who might not be able to protect (read: control, manage, love, nurture) them?

I think that ongoing use of respite parallels the child's fragmented attachment response. It seems to me that regularly scheduled respite allows, and perhaps even promotes, ongoing dysfunction. If parents end up feeling or thinking, "Oh well, at least he'll be gone for the weekend," they may also accept behaviors they would not if they knew the brake wasn't coming. They may avoid yet another conflict, just to hang in there for another day.

The child's already well-developed (though not healthy) temporal thinking patterns inevitably get reinforced. Everyone who works in the attachment field knows that individuals suffering from attachment problems perceive that yesterday was the distant past and tomorrow doesn't exist. Fragmentation in the child's life has led to this development, and I think that regular utilization of respite may perpetuate this kind of thinking pattern.

Continuity of environment helps to bring about continuity of thought. Thought continuity leads to improved cause and effect thinking, which in turn evolves into conscience.

Respite should be different from a child's pre-adoptive experiences of moving around. Children and adolescents who have had child welfare experience get accustomed to moving about. Moving in a way, allows them to remain irresponsible and unaccountable in their current setting. "After all," they might think, "if I'm making bad choices today (Friday), I won't have too much to worry about because I'll be going to respite tonight!" By Monday, of course, Friday will be ancient history.

I wrote this article to help us re-examine an assumption that I see developing. Parents and professionals frequently talk about just how important respite is. I agree that some families feel they could not exist without it. However, just like girdles and laxatives, too much use of respite or unfocused use of it may prove to be habituating. Excessive use may further complicate what I believe parents and professionals truly desire; children who can attach to

and live with them comfortably. Temporary relief may not be the solution to a permanent situation.

Before I hear myself misquoted as I frequently do, let me clearly state that:

- I am *not* saying that a respite plan is *never* helpful.
- I am not in a position to judge what and who other people can live with nor for how long at a stretch. Only individual families can decide that.
- I do think that respite is temporary relief that may become habit forming.
- I do think that the goals of any respite plan should include an attachment rationale.
- I do think that the ultimate goal of respite should be its elimination.

I hope that people will start to more carefully evaluate the issue of respite and not simply accept what we keep hearing so much about. Remember, what is accepted practice now will probably be critically evaluated by others in the future. Once upon a time (not very long ago), foster parents were discouraged from allowing infants in their care to attach to them; that was to be done later with an adoptive family. Now, how wrong was that?

Founder of the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio, Dr Gregory Keck works to help children and adolescents who have experienced developmental interruptions.

Dr Keck can be contacted through the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio

12608 State Rd, Suite 1, Cleveland, OH 44133-3208, (440) 230-1960

Fall 2000 Adoptalk

Interviews needed:

Have you adopted a child over the age of 4 out of the foster care system?

You are invited to participate in a study of fost/adopt families. The purpose of the study is to explore the process of incorporating an older child or children into existing families. I want to hear about the challenges and joys this process brings.

Participation involves an informal 1-2 hour interview at a time and place that is convenient for you. Full confidentiality is guaranteed.

For more information, please contact:

Heidi Hiemstra
Dept. of Sociology
University of Pennsylvania
215-386-7146 or hiemstra@sas.upenn.edu

ADOPTION PUBLICATIONS

An Educator's Guide To Adoption, written by Celebrate Adoption triad members, is a tool for parents to give to their child's classroom teacher to create a partnership on how to handle adoption in the classroom. To order: Send \$7.50 to Celebrate Adoption Inc. PO Box 2213, Silver Spring, MD 20915. Contact: Susan Saidman, (301) 649-0842 or susaid1@aol.com.

An Educator's Guide to Adoption, Written by Celebrate Adoption triad members, is a tool for parents to give to their child's classroom teacher to create a partnership on how to handle adoption in the classroom. To order call (301) 649-0842

Toddler Adoptions



Prospective parents considering adopting a toddler should be prepared for a complicated set of issues not inherent in adoptions of younger children. While toddlers need maintenance and care as much as infants, cognitive skills are more developed and emotional needs are more complex.

When a toddler is adopted, the child's worst fears of abandonment are realized when trusted caretakers disappear and the familiar environment vanishes. Despite the fact that the adoptive home may be a dramatic improvement over the pre-adoptive situation, the toddler thrives on structure and familiarity and feels keenly its unexplained interruption. For some, like my daughter Tessa whom I adopted a eighteen months, this may be the second such abandonment they face in their young lives.

Toddlers grieve as deeply as adults, says Mary Hopkins-Best, in her book Toddler Adoption: A Weaver's Craft. They often exhibit the same kind of grief behavior, including unexplained crying, lethargy, poor appetite, infantile behaviors, anger, and depression. But these signs can be missed because they pattern other toddler behaviors. But she points out that a grieving child cries differently than a toddler who is angry or frightened. When grieving, the child's body is typically limp or curled into a ball and there are lots of tears, as opposed to a range of fear crying indicated by a tense body and few tears. For the first three weeks after placement, Tessa cried or moaned without apparent reason for hours a day. Alternately, she appeared angry and would vigorously shred tissues for hours on end.

It is important to recognize the indicators of grief so parents can support their toddler and help them through the grieving process. Enacting transitional strategies upon placement, say Hopkins-Best. Asking for a significant article of clothing a blanket or other mementoes from the orphanage or foster home will help the child feel a bit of continuity. Taking pictures of the previous caretakers and bringing them out periodically will help the child feel in touch with those who are familiar to her. Even something as simple as letting the child have a good cry while holding her or stroking her back, will help her to work through it.

Another coping strategy is to provide consistent support. Parents may be alarmed when a child withdraws emotionally, but it is critical that they not react by withdrawing as well. Gentle and persistent efforts to connect with the child will convince the toddler that it is safe to bond again. In addition parents should prepare for some regressive behavior. But accommodating a child's need for being fed or comforted in a manner usually reserved for infants provides a wonderful opportunity to develop attachment. While sleeping in a parent's bed or coddling a child's fear of the dark is frowned upon in our society, it is often the ticket to easing a toddler's adjustment to a new situation. Had I not slept in Tessa's room for the first few weeks, none of us would have gotten any sleep. My motto became: comfort now and discipline later.

There is no reason to believe that toddlers on the whole can't develop strong and healthy attachments to their parents. With the bumpy initial period behind us, I have started to think of Tessa as just my daughter, not my newly adopted daughter. She is rapidly catching up in development and certainly appears to have developed strong, healthy bonds with our extended family and us. While she has become a happy and healthy toddler, it would have been a lot easier on all of us had I read Toddler Adoption before I left for China.

School Tests Not The Only Measure of Life Skills

By Susan Reimer

It is December and high school kids everywhere, not to mention the one hanging on my fridge like a vulture, are waiting to learn how they scored on the PSAT's and the SAT's.

It is an irony of these tests that they measure what our kids know about a variety of topics, such as analogies, that may never come up in real life or in a conversation with a potential employer.

But the kids know without being reminded by us that their scores are the first link in a chain of circumstances that will determine how they do in life, so they cram and get tutored and take courses and learn test-taking strategies.

We did some of these things in our house, but it occurred to me that while my son was prepared for this one Saturday-morning ritual, he wasn't prepared for life.

"You've got a lot to learn," I said, not for the first time. "You have great grades, but you don't know how to cook or sew on a button or anything." "Mom," Joe said wearily. "That's what bachelorhood is for."

His circular logic temporarily silenced me, not for the first time. But I began to make a mental list of all the things Joe needs to know before he is loose in the world, and how to replace a button is just the beginning.

He needs to know how to iron a dress shirt, press the wrinkles out of a tie without scorching it and how to iron a crease in his pants. Right now, the boy wouldn't know which end of an iron to grab.

He needs to learn how to balance a checking account and how to return an item to a department store.

He needs to learn what he can afford.

He needs to learn the addictive nature of credit and the astonishing mathematics of saving

He needs to learn his way around a grocery store and to realize that toilet paper won't magically appear under the sink just when you need it.

He needs to learn how to find a doctor and how to get a prescription refilled. He needs to learn how to cut grass, change a tire and carve a turkey, because no matter how liberated the woman in his life may be, she will probably require that he do the "guy" jobs.

He needs to learn how to make my spaghetti sauce so that when he is down or lonely he can comfort himself with familiar food.

Joe needs to learn how to check his credit card statement for mistakes, how to read a label, a utility bill, a newspaper ad and his paycheck. He needs to learn the restorative power of Motown music, the way to clean a bathroom, and the importance of stopping the mail and newspaper when you are away.

He needs to learn how to behave in a restaurant and in a job interview, and how to fill out all kinds of forms.

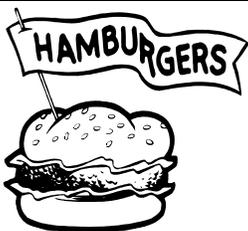
My mother will haunt me if I do not pass on the dying art of hospital corners, but it will be up to Joe to remember to change the sheets on his bed, not to mention the vacuum cleaner bag. He needs to learn how to do a load of wash, how to get the stain out of a favorite shirt, and that there are some things you just don't put in the dryer.

He needs to learn that the quickest way to do the thing isn't always the right way; that if you don't eat well, you won't feel well; and that you can't leave things in the refrigerator indefinitely. When I began to enumerate this list for my son, he stopped me cold.

"Mom," he said dismissively. "I'm going to pay people to do that stuff."

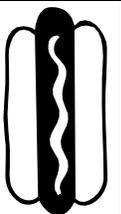
"Well," I responded, "You better hope you have a great SAT score."

Tressler Family Connections Nov./Dec. 1999



Together As Adoptive Parents, Inc. Annual Picnic
July 14th 2001

Don't Miss It!



My Adoption

By Jimmy Keola-Scott

My name is Jimmy, and I was taken from my first adoptive family at age four because of abuse. For the next 10 years I was in and out of foster homes and institutions. Finally, at age 14, I began visiting a family that had Korean and black kids. I am black and Korean, so this meant a lot to me. Each time I would visit them, I wished I could stay because when I was with them, I felt like a normal person instead of a freak. All the kids in the family are different races and adopted, and they all have challenges to work on, so I didn't feel so alone with all my problems.

My new mom was a single parent who already had nine kids, but they talked it over a lot and decided they wanted to adopt me. Then came many first things for me; going to a public school, trying out for a Little League team, having a daily chore to do, going to a family reunion...I also had to learn to live in a family, which I could not remember doing, and it was really hard.

There were little things I hadn't been doing, like picking up my clothes and turning off the lights at night. So many things had been done for me when I was in institutions. I just wanted to watch TV. But my mom wouldn't let me. She tried to get me to do chores and do things with my talents and do my homework. Well, she tried.

And it was hard learning to live with people all the time. I had been used to having people take care of me on eight-hour shifts, and now I had to stay with the same people 24 hours. My mom tried to get us to work things out. There were, and still are, problems, but my mom says that if we're working on them, we're headed in the right direction and that's the main thing.

One of my sisters who was adopted the year before I came to the family doesn't even like me, but I keep trying to be nice to her, and my mom says that someday she thinks we will be good friends because we're so much alike.

I have been able to do many things because I was adopted. All I have ever wanted to do in my life was play football, and I got to play on Little League teams. Then I lettered on my high school team. I also have four black brothers who are adopted and they have showed me how to do my hair and dress cool. I also like to play basketball with them in the basketball court our family built in the backyard.

From having a family, I got to go on my first vacation, and was able to get a real job. I've worked at a movie complex, Zuka Juice, and as a food bagger. I also got a paper route the first summer I lived here. I have even been on trips with the Boy Scouts. Last spring, I graduated from high school, and was accepted into the Navy.

These things might not be important to others, but they meant a lot to me. If I had stayed in institutions, I probably wouldn't have been able to do them. Being adopted allowed me these opportunities. I'm grateful for my family, because it's been really tough sometimes, and there was a lot I needed to do to get my act together. My mom never said she would send me back, and she always tried to show me she loved me, even when I messed up so many times and wasn't sure she did.

I'm so glad to have a family so that when I get leave from the Navy, I have a place to call home and I can go there to visit. Wouldn't it be awful if I didn't have a place to go?

Now I have plans for my future. I still have problems, but at least I'm hoping for a good life. Before I had no hope. I didn't even think there was a future for me. My family took a chance on me, and now I have plans to become a productive and responsible person.

I hope that all kids who need homes are able to find a good family. Kids need families who will help them feel like they belong, and give them a chance to make something of their lives, just as I have done.

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