



# TAProot

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

TAPROOT is a quarterly publication of Together as Adoptive Parents Inc.  
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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 children, foster and adoptive families.

Have any comments, suggestions or gripes?  
 E-mail us at  
**taplink@COMCAST.NET**  
 or call us at  
**(215) 256-0669**

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## Presidents Corner Phyllis Stevens

*This holiday newsletter is dedicated to:  
 Rayshonda Nathisha Harvey Lassiter  
 3/14/94 – 7/7/05*

Rayshonda was the daughter of Jenell Lassiter and the sister of Nichols, Mary, Jannifer and Nelson. Rayshonda was placed with Jenell when she was only a few months old. The agency told Jenell that Rayshonda would probably not live past her first birthday. Jenell knew that all her children including Rayshonda were a gift from God. Not only did Rayshonda live past her first birthday she lived to be eleven. It was the love that her family gave her that kept her alive. Jenell did not mind at all getting up several times during the night to check to make sure that her daughter was still breathing. She did not mind the countless trip to Children's Hospital or the times when she had to stay overnight with her daughter.

Even though the Lassiter's lived in Philadelphia they have been faithful attendees at our parent support group meetings. We all laughed when Jenell called herself "Sarah" she said that she was an "old lady" with three young children. Jenell may think that she is "old" but she is a strong advocate for her children.

Rayshonda had a major seizure while visiting relatives in North Carolina. I received the call the following morning. Jenell and I cried and prayed together. She told me that she had to make the decision to stop all life supports for her child. We again cried and prayed. I called her the evening they stopped the life supports. She said that her children went in first to say good-bye and then she went in. She thanked her daughter for 11 wonderful years and told her how much she loved her and that she would miss her very much. The doctors and social workers from the hospital asked Jenell if she had a support system once she returned to Pennsylvania. Jenell said "Oh yes, I have a wonderful support group (TAP). We are like family".

I flew down for the funeral. I was so please to know that many of TAP members sent cards and gifts. Rayshonda was beautiful! Jenell had dressed her in a pink Cinderella dress with ruffle socks and glass (clear) slippers. She was holding a purse that matched her hat with white gloves on.

Rayshonda may be with the Lord but she still lives on, her heart, eyes (even though she was blind), liver, intestine, kidney was all donated to help others.

## **“Nurturing The Whole Family“ was this year’s theme for our Adoption, Foster, and Kinship Family Conference.**

“ I recently attended your daylong conference in Phila on Nov 5. Let me just stop to say it was outstanding once again. This is an event I look forward to all year. It is just the right balance of socializing, networking, and instruction and it is so nice to have the kids nearby being so well taken care of...Thanks and keep up the good work. I certainly appreciate all your hard work ”.

Hello, Phyllis, I just have to thank you and your family IMMENSELY for all you do to bring such FANTASTIC resources to us in the conference. Jeff and I learned some creative parenting techniques, ways to build resiliency in our children, traded some stories and updates with other adoptive parents, got clothes for our family, and enjoyed the dancing. We all felt like we were 'wined and dined'!

“ This was a very timely discussion, that was badly needed ” (Allegation workshop)

“ I will apply what I learned with my husband (Vietnam Vet) and my foster son ” (Foster Parent Burnout workshop)

“ VERY GOOD!” (Kinship workshop)

“ Dr Glass made me feel comfortable, safe and secure. Excellent ” (Building Resilience and Attachments)

“ What a gift – Thanks to all the panel members to be willing to share their lives ” (Adoptee Panel)

“ Great! Interactive, funny, interesting invaluable ” (Transracial Parenting)

“ Excellent, Excellent,Excellent ” (Parenting in the Trenches)

“ Dr Thompson was wonderful ” (Keynote speaker)

These are only some of the many comments that we received from families that attended this year’s conference. The conference was held on November 5<sup>th</sup> at Deliverance Evangelistic Church in Philadelphia. Even though there were many adoption related activities scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> because of National Adoption Awareness month our attendance was up from last year.

Thanks to the Delaware Valley Adoption Council co-sponsoring the conference along with DHS we were able to give each child that attended a duffel bag and “carry all” bags to the adults.

TAP would also like to say thanks Foster, Adoption, Kinship Support (FAKS) for co-hosting the conference as well.

We will do it all again next year!

# Mouse Trap

*It's all connected... We are all connected*

A mouse looked through a crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package; what food might it contain?

He was aghast to discover that it was a mouse trap!

Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning, "There is a mouse trap in the house, there is a mouse trap in the house."

The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell you this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me; I cannot be bothered by it."

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mouse trap in the house."

"I am so very sorry Mr. Mouse," sympathized the pig, "but there is nothing I can do about it but pray; be assured that you are in my prayers."

The mouse turned to the cow, who replied, "Like wow, Mr. Mouse, a mouse trap; am, I in grave danger, Duh?"

So the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected to face the farmer's mousetrap alone.

That very night a sound was heard throughout the house, like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught.

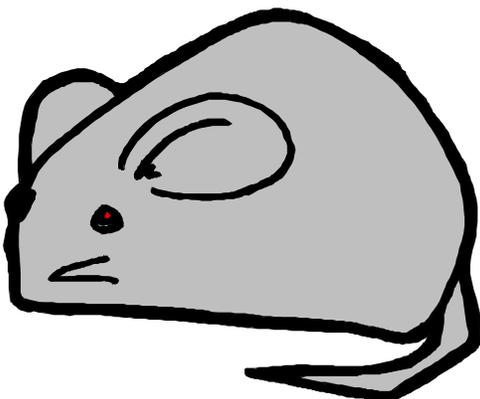
In the darkness, she did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital.

She returned home with a fever.

Now everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient.

His wife's sickness continued so that friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig.

The farmer's wife did not get well, in fact, she died, and so many people came for her funeral the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide meat for all of them to eat.



*So the next time you hear that someone is facing a problem and think that it does not concern you, remember that when the least of us is threatened, we are all at risk.*

# The Surprise Turns Into A Surprise

Phyllis Stevens

After going over TAP's finances I saw that we had a little extra money in our budget, so I called TAP's VP and told her that I would like to surprise our members and take them to lunch for the next support group meeting. We called Olive Garden and reserved a room for 30 people and sent out notices that our September meeting would be a little different, so do not bring food for this meeting. Andrea said, "Why don't we try to give each family a gift and have door prizes". So we asked stores to donate gifts for door prizes and we purchase picture frames to give out to everyone.

When all the members had arrived that were coming we told them that we were taking everyone to the Olive Garden *without* the kids r lunch and TAP was paying for it. We had a great time laughing and talking about kids, family and whatever. Along with giving out door prizes and picture frames we gave Jenell a beautiful porcelain angel in honor of her daughter Rayshonda.

Once we had finished Andrea told me to sit down. I thought she wanted to say something. She did, she said that she had one last gift to give out. She reached into a bag and pulled out a big box. Inside the box was a book. She then turned to me and said, "Phyllis we have a gift for you". She opened the book and started to read letters that people had written about me. I started to cry. There were pages and pages of letters honoring me for the work that I have done to help adoptive, foster, and kinship families. I can't even begin to tell you how it affected me, how it still affects me today.

I would like to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for all the kind things you said. I LOVE this work the Lord had allowed me to do. As most of you know I have received many awards locally and nationally for my work with children and families. There are two that means a little more to me than the rest they are:

- Ø The "Reaching Out Award" from the Special Kids Network (SKN). This award was presented to TAP because of the feedback that SKN received from families concerning the help that they received from TAP. And
- Ø This book of letters. Most of the letters came from the members of our parent support group. Thank you so much! We are truly a "family"

Did I mention that Andrea was putting this surprise together for me from her hospital bed? To you Andrea; "*A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart, and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words.*" Thanks for being my friend!

## Labels Are For Jars, Not Children

Parents usually don't mean to talk about their children in terms of diagnoses, but it happens sometimes when they want to quickly convey the daily problems they cope with as they parent. Avoid describing children as a series of acronyms such as RAD, ADHD, FAS and EBD. These labels help children qualify for services and give parents a starting point for finding help, but children are much more than their diagnoses.

NACAC Adoptive Parent Leadership Network

# Family Christmas Traditions

## Come and Give

Whenever our family hosts a birthday or holiday bash for the kids, the invitation always includes a request for specific donations. One Christmas, we asked each family to bring a pair of mittens, then donated them to a school to give to kids in need. At my daughter's birthday party, we asked the kids to bring backpacks, which we donated to a local foster children's organization. My children enjoy brainstorming an appropriate gift for each event, and it teaches them the importance of charity.

--Beth

## Case Work

My family and I have come up with an easy, inexpensive, and lasting way to celebrate the moments of our lives. We mark special times like birthdays, the beginning of school, and holidays by making pillowcases out of festively patterned material. We have pillowcases covered with Easter eggs, basketballs, and rodeo cowboys. We even made a vivid green one crawling with brightly colored lizards to mark my son's intense interest in reptiles. My children think it's a fabulous treat to sleep on their special pillowcases, and we are constantly reminded of some wonderful times.

--Lynn

## Secret Santa Surprises

My kids, loved having Secret Santas in school, so they asked if we could draw names at home too. In lieu of giving presents, though, the four of us, including my husband, decided to do nice things for one another instead. It was such a treat to come home at the end of a long day to find that, for example, someone had crept into my room to straighten out the shoes on my closet floor. And the girls were thrilled when they found that someone had fed the cats for them or made their beds. Amid the bustle and activity of the holidays, it was wonderful to see our children focus on performing selfless acts for others. We all got a chance to thank our Secret Santas on Christmas morning, when we revealed whose name we'd drawn.

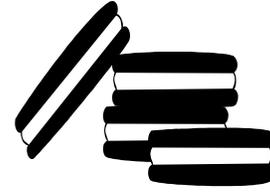
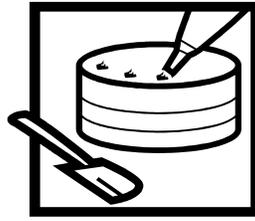
--Renee

## Pass it On

Each year after Christmas, our Camp Fire group runs a request in our school newsletter asking for old Christmas or other greeting cards. The response is always wonderful! When the holidays come around again, we recycle the cards by cutting off the fronts and gluing them to sheets of construction paper that we've folded in half. We write our greetings inside and deliver the cards to a local care home, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the veterans' hospital. We all have a lot of fun and for very little money are able to bring smiles to so many peoples' faces. This year, our goal is to make and deliver 2,000 cards to people in our community.

--Karen

## Tips for Successful Baking with Children



Whether you are painting cookies or decorating a birthday cake, you'll teach your child valuable skills in the kitchen. Most importantly, you'll build relationships and teach life lessons that will last forever. Here are some tips to make the experience with your child a success.

1. Keep it safe. Teach your kids safety. Keep younger children away from a hot stove and sharp knives. Even very young children will want to put the flour in the mixing bowl or break an egg. Turn the mixer off and let them do it.
2. Keep it simple. Choose simpler recipes and quicker recipes for young kids. Kids love to get their hands in the dough. Consider a cookie recipe, like snickerdoodles, where the cookies are hand-formed.
3. Make it feel good. Overlook boo-boo's like egg shells in the dough. Praise often even if the product isn't perfect. When a mess happens, take it in stride and don't voice blame.
4. Build kids not cookies. The kitchen makes an excellent classroom. Help the child read and interpret the directions--learning to follow written instructions is an important life skill. Help the child understand the fractions found in most recipes. With older kids, use the opportunity to pass a little wisdom along—even if it slows down the project.
5. Take your time. Neither you nor your kids will enjoy the experience if you're fighting the clock. It takes twice as long to bake with kids--it's just worth it.
6. Keep it clean. Teach good hygiene habits. Teach kids to wash their hands often and to clean and disinfect the counters. Help them use clean dishcloths and dish towels.
7. Teach ingredients. Teach them the basics of ingredients. Explain how yeast works or baking soda. Show them the difference between granulated sugar, brown sugar, and confectioners' sugar.
8. Keep that food safe. Teach them food safety principles. Make them aware of dangerous bacteria and how they thrive. Teach them to keep hot foods hot (over 140 degrees) and cold foods cold (under 40 degrees).
9. Consider mixes. Have a few mixes on hand for cooking with kids. With a mix, there is less that can go wrong. Since it takes less time to bake, a mix may be more suitable for a child's attention span or may better fit an available block of time.
10. Clean it up. Teach them to clean up as they go and afterwards. Let them know that the job is not done until the kitchen is clean.



# Lessons I've learned about Parenting

*By Terrell Woods*

*Since ageing out of care at 18, Terrell has earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and plans to get an MSW. He also works for the Storefront Group as a youth and family counselor for high-risk and economically disadvantaged African Americans, and serves as an on-call guidance counselor for homeless teens.*

I was initially removed from my mother's care (or lack there of) at age 12. Her inability to be an ideal parent was evident to child protection through unhealthy relationships with men, physical and emotional abusiveness toward herself and her children, and continuous with drug and alcohol abuse. After being evicted from three apartments and being asked to leave two family shelter homes for anti-social behavior, things were ugly and going to get even uglier quite fast.

After three uncomfortable years of bouncing around in foster care, I was placed into a home with loving, caring and nurturing foster parents who were employed by Family Alternatives. With these parents, I finally got the opportunity to live the life of a stable teenager, concentrate on academic achievement, and enjoy the many perks of living within a traditional family structure. It was about time!!

My exposure to adverse conditions stemmed mostly from the immoral practice of unfit parents (both biological and foster). My options of how good parents might act were formulated through what I went through with my mother, and not having my father around. I saw my father only one time after my family left Chicago for Minnesota.

I began stating to myself that I would NEVER do to my children what was done with me. I would often ask myself why one might choose to have children only to harm them or not be around as a positive influence in their lives. I can remember making statements like these as early as seven and eight years old.

Once I had a conversation with my mother in which she stated that my oldest sister was conceived through rape. She also said she was not ready to have another child when I was conceived with a different man. My youngest sister, she suggested, was the result of our loving our dad so very much. She thought maybe she and my dad would always be together, but made it clear that she didn't necessarily want three children. It was at this time that I realized people could or WOULD have children without truly wanting them. I don't recall feeling enlightened by this newfound knowledge.

At the tender age of 10, I proclaimed my intent to not have children unless I was fit to have them. I also vowed never to tell them they were mistakes. This was when some of my present parental practices initially saw the light of the day. Darn, I was sure growing up fast!

We all were called demeaning names where we "did something stupid," but my mother often said that I was the better kid of the three of us and the smartest. My youngest sister had it somewhat easier too because she was the youngest. When we got "whoopins," she didn't get hit as hard. My younger sister and I even got hit fewer times per spanking and with less physically damaging objects than our older sister. "You're the oldest, you should know better," is what my mother often said when she chastised my older sister.

But as I think back, I can recall feeling special growing up. As a pre-teen, I would make statements to myself such as, "I will NEVER hit my kids," and "I will NEVER be nicer to one kid than another." I was off to a pretty good start parent-wise I would say!

Going into foster homes didn't sweeten my life struggles any. The first home I was in gave me a taste of reverse-favoritism; there I was once made to sit outside on the front step of my foster mother's home on a 90+ degree day as my sisters were invited to accompany her grocery shopping. I was told that I was not trusted to be in her home alone.

When we had normal sibling rivalries, I was always marked as the antagonists and punished with no TV and no friends over for long periods. I was called a “worthless n\_\_\_\_\_” and other degrading epithets regularly and told I would amount to nothing when I rebuked her hateful action publicly. In this environment, my views on equal treatment of children and determination to never shame my future children with name-calling were strengthened. I was getting good at this virtual parenting thing!

My early life was plagued with over-whelming negativity. Now, years later, I would have to say my life has undergone a metamorphosis. I am 28 years old, a graduate of Hamline University, a youth counselor, the father of a six- year- daughter, a new home owner, and soon to be married. I still maintain a strong relationship with my foster parents and have opted to call them my real mom and dad.

I also say I have committed NONE of the inhumanities that haunted me growing up. Freedom from drugs and alcohol and the desire to raise a physically, socially, and emotionally healthy child have become my paramount priorities. This is by no means peaches and cream, but Simone didn't ask to be here, so I think I owe her nothing less. My past sufferings feel like warm embraces when my little princess says, “You're the best daddy; I love you” multiple times a day. Her statement is just a tad bit of an exaggeration, but I believe she believes what she says. Ironically, my past suffering may be the very reason I now receive warm embraces.

*NACAC Adoptalk Summer 2003*

## **Voices From TAP's Telephone**

I just received a call from a dad who is in the process of adopting a **17-year-old** African American **boy** from foster care. He wanted to know if there were any financial help available for him and his son. I ask him if he was receiving any subsidy for his son. He said that the county that he was adopting his son from told him that his son was NOT entitled to receive any subsidy except for the Medicaid Card (and as we all know that help stops at 18).

**The question here is, is his 17-year-old son entitled to an adoption assistance agreement?**

### Pennsylvania Rules on Eligibility

In order to qualify for Adoption Assistance, a waiting child must meet **one** of the following requirements

1. A physical, mental or emotional condition or handicap.
2. A genetic condition which indicates a high risk of developing a disease or handicap.
3. Be a member of a minority group.
4. Be a member of a sibling group that is placed together.
5. Be 5 years of age or older.

**His son qualifies under items 3 and 5 above**

### Notifying Prospective Adoptive Parents about Adoption Assistance.

The State title IV/B/IV-E agency is required to actively seek ways to promote the adoption assistance program (45 CFR 1356.40(f) This mean it is incumbent upon the State agency to notify prospective adoptive parents about the availability of adoption assistance for the adoption of a child with special needs.

**So the agency should also have notified him about the eligibility without him having to ask.**



## How are we doing???.... Give us some feedback

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to TAP

1. Does *Taproot* give you information that you are interested in? Yes\_\_\_  
No\_\_\_

2. Is there any type of information that you feel is missing?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what would that be?

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3. In our newsletter, would you like to know more about...

\_\_\_\_\_ Legislative Issues

\_\_\_\_\_ Adoptive and foster family stories

\_\_\_\_\_ Parenting Information

4. Do you pass this newsletter on to anyone else? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

5. What suggestions do you have for improving our newsletter?

6. Would you like to continue receiving *Taproot*? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Name (Optional)

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