



# TAProot

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Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. is a non-profit adoption parent group composed of adoptive, foster, kinship, families, adoptees, adoption professionals and others 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, adoptive, foster, and kinship families.

Have any comments, suggestions or gripes?

E-mail us at

**taplink@COMCAST.NET**

or call us at

**(215) 256-0669**

## MEMBERSHIPS

- North American Council on Adoptable Children
- Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network
- PA State Foster Parent Association
- United Way (10860)
- Delaware Valley Adoption Council

[www.taplink.org](http://www.taplink.org)

## Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday TAP

Executive Corner by Phyllis Stevens

In May of this year (2008) Together as Adoptive Parents turned twenty years old. Over these past 20 years the look of the support "group" has changed for the good. We now have chat rooms, virtual support groups, work place groups, support group that offer services such as respite, counseling, food and clothing cabinets, advocacy and more. Research shows us that the best type of support for adoptive and foster families is a support group. I have found that the best support group is one that includes the whole family.

If you talk to any member of our group they will tell you how much they love the group and how much it has helped there family. What they probably don't realize is how much each member has helped me. This really hit home last week. I called our local handyman in to replace door knobs on my bedroom doors. I really didn't think anything about it until he said to me. "Oh these new door knobs have locks. I never put on door knobs with locks for anyone bedrooms". I felt embarrassed. I felt guilty. I felt I needed to explain why I needed locks on my bedroom doors. I wanted to give him a life time worth of information about adopting children with challenging behaviors in ten minutes, but I didn't. I didn't say anything. I was just happy he was finished. I paid him and say good-by.

If during one of our meeting I would have mentioned that I put locks on my bedroom doors, they would not have asked me why, they would have completely understood. Support Groups makes us feel "normal". Members are able to laugh instead of cry about silly little things such as door locks.

On another note, my youngest daughter received her driver's license this week. Needless to say I have been praying a lot more (smile). As I stood at the door watching her drive to school for the first time, I thought about all the youth that are in foster care. Who will be standing at the door for them? Who will be praying for them? Did you know that we have enough children in foster care in Pennsylvania to fill every seat in the Wachovia Stadium in Philadelphia? Hundreds of these teenagers "age out" of the system every year. We must do more to find permanent homes for these teens so that someone will stand at the door and pray for them. "How much of human life is wasted in waiting" Professor Oxley, Indiana Jones

**LABELS ARE FOR CANS, NOT CHILDREN**  
**BY**  
**KIM STEVENS, MEd, LSW**  
**FOUNDER AND CEO OF *RAISING CHILDREN'S VOICES, INC.***

I'd like to ask all of us to please consider the way to talk about our children and the effect that can have- negatively and positively- on them, our foster and adoptive family community, and the community at large.

I am truly impressed by the number of great folks out there. People from all walks of life and with huge diversity in terms of culture, finances, education, career, family configuration, etc. –each one doing the best job they can to raise healthy and happy kids. Each one advocating, every day, for the supports needed to raise those healthy and happy kids and keep them safe.

We fight battles every day with the media, schools, doctors, therapists, insurance providers and child welfare agencies to provide for our children and to portray them in a positive light. We love our sons and daughters, not in spite of their challenges, but because of their strength and beauty and brilliance, etc., at times I think we are our own- and their- worst enemies in the larger world.

Every time we refer to one of our children as “my ADHD son,” “my borderline daughter,” or my RAD kid;” each time we say “Joe is ODD,” or “Wanda is LD,” we take something away from their humanity. And in so doing, we allow the rest of the world to do so, too. In this way, our kids go from being lovable children to being a diagnosis, a problem, and an issue.

Let's make it our goal this year, and in the years to come, to allow no one, not even ourselves, to dehumanize our kids, when fighting for the services and supports they need, when trying to explain to a teacher why their goals may not be the same as ours, when sitting over a cup of coffee with a friend or neighbor, when writing or speaking about them in support groups or professional circles. Instead let's talk about “my beautiful star Benji, who tries to find a way to use that same energy in school that gets him cheers on the field,” or even “my eldest is living away right now, trying to figure out what adulthood is all about.”

The language we use allows others to use for or against our children. I know having learned from mistakes I make in the past. Being the mom who was willing to believe her kids could do something wrong and know that her kids did need a bit extra, I made it easy at times for others to blame my children, to lower expectations, to ignore.

Several years ago, I consciously decided to NEVER say anything negative about my children in public. At school conferences, when the teachers and administrators would worry about lack of effort or impulsivity, I stopped colluding with them about the challenges of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Instead I thanked them for acknowledging how capable my child is and when to say how proud I am that this child's obvious joy at being in school among peers is such a delight. I thanked them for making an environment where they could be happy and enthusiastic and went on to suggest that a more kinetic way of teaching seemed in order. The difference it has made in his schooling, his social life, in me and in HIM, is incredible.

I try to take this approach in all of my conversations these days (though I confess I also try to stay away from political debate, the approach and such debate are rarely compatible). When talking to parents about their kids, when talking to kids about their parents, and especially when talking to kids about themselves and their worlds, I use positive language and avoid labels or generalizations. The difference it has made for me and for those around me is palpable. Most especially, the youth I know seem stronger, more self assured, more capable- and the adults around them know it.

## All True

*If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving isn't for you.*

*I wonder how much deeper the ocean would be without sponges.*

*Honk if you love peace and quiet.*

*Remember half the people you know are below average.*

*Despite the cost of living, have you noticed how popular it remains?*

*Nothing is foolproof to a talented fool.*

*Atheism is a non-prophet organization.*

*He who laughs last thinks slowest.*

*Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.*

*Eagles may soar, but weasels don't get sucked into jet engines.*

*I drive way too fast to worry about cholesterol*

## Mark your calendars

**July 19<sup>th</sup>**

our annual swim picnic

**September 20<sup>th</sup>**

second annual AdoptWalk™

**October 18<sup>th</sup>**

adoptive, foster, kinship conference

## A "Safety Net"

By Barb Tremitiere

"When I was in foster care," Karen said earnestly, "I tried to tell the kids that were born to my foster parents not to yell at their parents and talk back to them because they would surely be thrown out. They laughed at me when I said that, and kept right on yelling at their parents and talking back I really liked that home. I thought maybe, just maybe, it was okay to lose your temper and yell sometimes. Everyone else seemed to be doing it. So one day, I did. My foster mother said, 'I won't have a child in my home who yells at me!' She called the agency and I had to leave. I didn't believe it! Why me? She already did have children in her home who yelled at her –but they were born to her. That was different." No **"safety net"** existed for Karen. She had learned the lesson well that her security did not depend at all on who or what she was... only upon her behavior.

The behavior issue came up again at the same workshop when a teenaged boy, recently placed in his seventh foster home, asked me, repeatedly, when I was talking about my children, why I "kept" my kids when they did such "bad things." He was incredulous, and his eyes filled with tears when I said in our family we work things out, with help, even "bad" things. "But wouldn't having them leave be easier?" he asked. I said, "No." Where is that **"safety net"** for any of us that let us be ourselves? What "horrible thing" gets us "thrown out?" Sometimes, the kids say, they don't even know what the "horrible thing" is until they have done it. Then, as in Karen's case, it is often too late.

When I think about **“the safety net”** concept, I am reminded of my own growing up years. I was no candidate for Sainthood- that’s for sure! I talked back; I lied; I under-achieved; I procrastinated with chores; I destroyed belongings; I had temper tantrums; I fought with my siblings; I discovered boys... all of this within the **“safety net”** my family provided. I could always make them lose their tempers, but not their commitment to raising me. I always knew that the **“safety net”** was there, no matter how obnoxious my behavior was. Thank God my security did not depend on my behavior!

A **“safety net”**, as I see it, is another way of discussing commitment. Many times, I have been asked at workshops how I find “committed” families to take these children or how do I really know whether or not these families really have dealt with the issue of commitment in all of its ramifications. The answer is, “I don’t.” No one can judge the commitment potential of recruited families! I believe that the families must, realistically, be helped to assess for themselves where their level of commitment may well be while, at the same time, learning about the importance of the **“safety net”** concept in the lives of the children they might be selecting to parent.

Often, I have asked groups of experienced families who are parenting with great difficulty and stress children who are a constant challenge – “If someone would have asked you in the beginning to sign up for exactly the type of child you are parenting and to elect to experience exactly what you have been experiencing, would you have signed on and that by signing, indicated your commitment?” One woman, laughing, answered, “NO WAY!” She continued, “My son has physically destroyed three rooms in our home, alienated our neighbors by literally tearing out their plants and flowers by the roots and set a fire in our alley that burned down three garages. Would I have selected these as behaviors I most wanted to experience living with? I repeat- No Way!” “Then why,” I asked, “are you living with them?” “Because I am committed to my son. I knew his past history and behavior when I chose him. I knew the struggles and challenges would be major. Knowing where to go and what to do when problems came up- and how to parent him from a position of strength helped me to feel like I was in charge. I don’t look at behaviors as long term liabilities. I look at behaviors as realities to be dealt with today. We live each day for itself. We take each problem, one at a time, as they arise and work them through, making full use of therapy and support when we need it. We knew, from the beginning, that we were signing up for the job of providing stability for a child’s life. We are that child’s resource- we are, day by day, his **“safety net”**. Many times, I feel like quitting. Often, I sit in tears and dread tomorrow- but it comes- and we handle it and go on to yet another tomorrow. We are not committed to enjoying his behavior- we are committed to living through it and working through it with him.”

A **“safety net”**- is it there? No words can assure it- only day-by-day living can demonstrate it to the child whose experience hasn’t prepared him to expect it. “...and you still kept him?” is a question from experience. The expected answer is not, “Yes, why not?”

“Commitment” in one family’s words, “needs to be made long before the placement is made... it is the only way we

can help a child to realize what this strange thing called adoption really means. “Commitment,” another family stated, “is the bottom line, and the sooner we all realize this, the better off our children will be. We cannot give up. We must always be there. We must love, care, and share as we prepare our children for adulthood. We cannot keep them from making wrong judgments, but we can help when they do. This is the **“safety net”** spoken in the words of the families who have made their homes the permanent resource for many a challenging child.

Sometimes, this commitment has meant standing by a child in detention or in prison. Sometimes, it has meant having to institutionalize a child who needs intensive help. Sometimes, it has meant advocating for a child to get the help he needs beyond the ability of your family to provide. To provide a **“safety net”**, even in these cases, means being there – monitoring your child’s care – making sure he doesn’t fall through the **“safety”** relationship. Such is the self-imposed task of these adoptive families.

Over the years, observing children of all ages in all stages of adjustment to families, I have observed another aspect of the **“safety net”** implications. Children, especially early in placement, seem to have an uncanny ability to hear even the faintest whisper at the opposite end of the house in the middle of the night. “Joe,” Angie whispers tearfully at the end of a miserable day. “Do you really think we are going to make it? I really thought I was going to break down totally today. I wasn’t sure I could stand another minute.” Perhaps Joe held Angie, at that point, and let her cry it out, regaining strength for tomorrow. Perhaps the conversation continued in even more hushed tones or didn’t continue until the next day when the children were at school. Perhaps everything got resolved and the family meant to regroup and renew their commitment. The child never knew that part. He heard only the wavering, the insecurity, the lack of a **“safety net.”** Often, his response is to step up his acting out behavior as if to say, “Hurry up. You might as well throw me out before I like it here if you are going to anyway.”

In contrast, when the child feels that the **“safety net”** is really there, forever, he can relax and start to make a realistic adjustment to the family. I remember once yelling at one of my sons, out of utter frustration, “You are no thrill to live with right now, and I know you don’t think I am either, but neither of us is going anywhere else and somehow we are going to make it together!” In losing my temper, I still had managed to give him a **“safety net”** message on which we could (and did) eventually build a relationship.

As I’ve watched and parented many children over the years... ranging from “super” to “creepy”... I have become more and more firm in my beliefs that our commitment, if at all humanly possible, must be forever. We must provide a **“safety net”** environment for these children in which they, too, can relax and eventually function as themselves. They must receive consistent parenting because of who they are... not in proportion to how they behave.

Once, someone gave most of us that wonderful **“safety net”**... now it is ours to pass on. That kind of commitment, in its most simplistic terms, I guess, is what all of us hope someone feels toward us!

# Dating & Marriage through the eyes of Kids

## HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHO TO MARRY?

You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming.

-- Alan, age 10

No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you are stuck with.

-- Kristen, age 10

## WHAT IS THE RIGHT AGE TO GET MARRIED?

Twenty-three is the best age because you know the person FOREVER by then.

-- Camille, age 10

## HOW CAN A STRANGER TELL IF TWO PEOPLE ARE MARRIED?

You might have to guess, based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids.

Derrick, age 8

## WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR MOM AND DAD HAVE IN COMMON?

Both don't want any more kids.

-- Lori, age 8

## WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE DO ON A DATE?

Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough.

-- Lynnette, age 8

On the first date, they just tell each other lies and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO ON A FIRST DATE THAT WAS TURNING SOUR?

I'd run home and play dead. The next day I would call the newspapers and make sure they wrote about me in all the dead columns.

-- Craig, age 9

## WHEN IS IT OKAY TO KISS SOMEONE?

When they're rich.

-- Pam, age 7

The law says you have to be eighteen, so I wouldn't want to mess with that.

-- Court, age 7

The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do.

-- Howard, age 8

## IS IT BETTER TO BE SINGLE OR MARRIED?

It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need someone to clean up after them.

-- Anita, age 9 (bless you child)

## HOW WOULD THE WORLD BE DIFFERENT IF PEOPLE DIDN'T GET MARRIED?

There sure would be a lot of kids to explain, wouldn't there?

--Kelvin, age 8

Finally-

## HOW WOULD YOU MAKE A MARRIAGE WORK?

Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a dump truck.

-- Ricky, age 10

### Enriching our Community

Someone once said, "Volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless" Time is a precious resource that once given away, can never be gotten back. Therefore, offering to volunteer our time is one of the most unselfish gifts that can ever be given.

## Food for Thought: Pain

By JJ Hitch

*A junior at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, JJ is a Public Administration and Policy major who ultimately hopes to serve in Congress. He is also a vocal and eloquent advocate for child welfare reform.*

In my experience, most people do not voluntarily seek to endure pain. It was certainly never my plan to become my younger siblings' caretaker at age 10 and try to protect them from our birth parents' mental and physical abuse. My aspirations never involved bankrupting relatives who were there for us when life with my father became untenable.

As a young man of 20, I have experienced pain in many forms. Some of the pain was rather garden variety; other pain has been extraordinarily esoteric. All pain offers a universal message: something is wrong.

In our society it is not hard to come by a doctor (in person or online) who will prescribe some pill to solve our problems, to ease physical or emotional pain. In our society it is not hard to find some way to self medicate. It is not uncommon for some to pick up mind-altering substances like alcohol, pills, plants, or the many other forms of numbing utopia.

What I could never have predicted was how the pain of growing up without my mother or father would continue to haunt and hurt me. Make no mistake, I am truly thankful for my support system, for any person who takes the time to try to understand me and my pain. But at the end of each day, as I lower my head to the pillow, the pain of my life rises up inside. It seems that there should be some instant relief for the pain that lives on in my mind.

Many youth in the foster care system feel the same way. Some prosper by using their pain to fuel a passion for breaking the cycle of past generations' mistakes. Unfortunately, this paradigm does not work for most of my peers, nor will it fit all of those who follow my path through similar foster care experiences.

There is no set "recovery program" for individuals who have spent time in care and in an attempt to dull the inner pain, many participate in risky behaviors. One youth might race a car or motorcycle down the highway at 100 mph as though he can outrun his problems. Another might recklessly abuse a mix of alcohol and drugs to avoid feelings that surface when she has to face life sober.

Youth who become addicted to drugs may engage in violent crime, sell their bodies to get high, lose their homes and jobs, and perpetuate the cycle of child abuse. Many cannot understand why the pain of their situation hurts so much and for so long.

There have been many painful experience in which I played the lead role, many times going without food, without God, without the ability to produce the feelings of happiness. There is no magic eraser to wipe these images from my psyche or those of other youth similarly scarred.

Those who would help youth who have endured years of trauma and upheaval must know that risky behavior is not just a sign of defiance; it is an extreme expression of pain. If we can redirect how youth express their grief and torment and channel that energy into healthier pursuits, the potential for youth is limitless.

Pain fuels a fire that can take youth in different directions. With the same drive that brings some youth to ruin, I know graduates of foster care who are published authors, who are working to become professional skateboarders, and who have political aspirations. Others I know have been inspired to advocate for foster care reform or “give back” by working with youth in care.

Unfortunately, without a sense of purpose and a goal for which to reach, the human drive to self-destruction will prevail. I also know struggling teen mothers as well as youth who abuse substances daily, are in jail, or are homeless.

We must all work to swing the pendulum in a positive direction for traumatized youth. We must be the driving force of influence in the lives of foster care alumni and those still in care whose painful wounds are fresh. Youth need parents, caring adults, mentors, and friends who can model healthy choices and encourage them to dream instead of despair.

To help cope with pain, youth should be encouraged to keep a private journal, to get thoughts out of their heads and onto paper or a computer screen. It is a difficult challenge to budget time to resolve our inner pain while running the marathon of life alongside those who have no inkling of our troubles. Journals can become confidants, a place where a nameless, faceless audience is ultimately sympathetic and never judgmental.

Professional counseling is also essential. Youth have an absolute need to process the pain and abuse they have endured. Talking to a trained professional can help.

Once youth have stable support, a safe outlet for their feelings, and professional guidance, they need to find ways to enjoy life. Ask youth if there is anything they ever wanted to do, but never could. Introduce them to hobbies like bowling, fishing, canoeing, playing sports, writing poetry, swimming, cooking, making craft projects, etc. Have fun with them. Bike around a nature trail until the youth finds healthy activities that make him or her happy.

I don't want to oversimplify it, but current and former foster youth desperately need to find safe ways to be happy, to find some measure of peace and joy in this life.

To fellow foster care alumni (and future alumni), I offer this advice:

- Find solutions that work for you.

- Break the mold of the socially acceptable if that is best for you and do not chase the stamp of approval from our popular culture.

- Seek the truth.

- Know that your marathon will be run on a road filled with puddles and potholes, and create your own path to your vision of success.

I feel your pain, but don't lose faith. Remember that everything happens for a reason and what doesn't kill us will only make us stronger. At the end of the day, simple joy wouldn't taste nearly so sweet if it weren't for pain.

## Summer Reading

### **Bachelor Father Pioneer**

*By Neal Tiffany, 2007.* Not many single fathers adopted in the early 1970s, but Neal Tiffany was persistent and finally matched with an 11-year-old boy who lived in an orphanage. Now retired and the grandfather of three, Tiffany reflects on his experiences seeking and raising his family. Order at [www.bbotw.com/product](http://www.bbotw.com/product)

### **A Family for Leanne**

*By Shelby Griffin-Timberlake. 2007.* After she and her brothers enter foster care, Leanne is adopted by a new family. *A Family for Leanne* explores the emotions and thoughts she has since leaving her birth family and offers foster and adoptive parents a chance to open a dialogue with children in their care. Order through [www.foster-adoptionbooks.com](http://www.foster-adoptionbooks.com).

## Simple Home Security

Put your car keys beside your bed at night.. If you hear a noise outside your home or someone trying to get in your house, just press the panic button for your car. The alarm will be set off, and the horn will continue to sound until either you turn it off or the car battery dies.

This tip came from a neighborhood watch coordinator. Next time you come home for the night and you start to put your keys away, think of this: It's a security alarm system that you probably already have and requires no installation. Test it.

It will go off from most everywhere inside your house and will keep honking until your battery runs down or until you reset it with the button on the key fob chain. It works if you park in your driveway or garage

If your car alarm goes off when someone is trying to break in your house, odds are the burglar or rapist won't stick around... after a few seconds all the neighbors will be looking out their windows to see who is out there and sure enough the criminal won't want that.

And remember to carry your keys while walking to your car in a parking lot. The alarm can work the same way there..... This is something that should really be shared with everyone. Maybe it could save a life or a sexual abuse crime.

P.S. I am sending this to everyone I know because I think it is fantastic. Would also be useful for any emergency, such as a heart attack, where you can't reach a phone.

My Mom has suggested to my Dad that he carry his car keys with him in case he falls outside and she doesn't hear him. He can activate the car alarm and then she'll know there's a problem

## When a 'Life Book' Is All There Is to Recall a Childhood

*By TINA KELLEY*

EAST ORANGE, N.J. — Tawanda Parker, 26, keeps the photo album stored carefully in a thick plastic bag. Inside, there is a picture of her first day at a foster home, holding a blue stuffed bear while her sister holds a pink bunny. Another shows one of Ms. Parker's brothers turning 8 at a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant somewhere in [New Jersey](#). And, preserved in color, the last day she spent with her birth mother.

"If you can look at my face, my mom reached over because I didn't want to leave," Ms. Parker recalled as she flipped through the pages. "She tickled my neck. I'm very ticklish."

For children placed outside their homes because of abuse or neglect, such photo albums, known as "life books," can be a crucial mechanism, social workers say, to help them remember — and later, understand — where they have been and where they are going. Caseworkers in New Jersey decided recently to provide such life books to all children placed outside their homes, and to encourage social workers to take snapshots of them with their foster parents and siblings, and their new neighborhood, in the first month after placement.

"Youths who have life books have a very tangible tool," said Eileen Crummy, director of the State Division of Youth and Family Services. "They can look back at it, and not have to reconstruct the memories for themselves."

Ms. Parker, whose fresh-scrubbed apartment has photographs on walls, tucked in mirrors and framed en masse on tables, has trouble counting the places she lived after she entered foster care when she was 11. She calls her life book "my baby," and cradles its worn pages, fussing over the "e" from "Life" that kept falling off the cover.

"There was Joralemon Street," she began. "We lived there first with that family, and then we moved to the south, but we didn't stay there because we were abused in that home."

Ms. Parker stayed in eight foster or group homes before landing at a home for teenage mothers at age 16. In some places, she and her three siblings stayed together. In most, they did not. But they picked up and lost pseudo-siblings along the way.

"This little boy here, we became close," she said, pointing to a snapshot of a grinning child. "We were all in the same foster home until he was placed somewhere else."

After her biological mother died, Ms. Parker said, she used bits preserved in the life book to contact a newspaper in Trinidad in search of relatives. “Without it I don’t know if I would remember my mom’s face,” she said.

Deridre Carter, who was Ms. Parker’s social worker for many years, sometimes asks the children she works with if they will share their books with their therapists.

“When they go to therapy with issues of loss and separation, this is something tangible for them,” she said. “If I don’t have anything permanent in my life in terms of consistency, a life book is like the glue that holds it all together.”

For Jarisa Brannon-Davis, 18, who lived in at least four foster homes before being sent to a group home, the life book played a crucial role in her adoption. She was 13, and boxing in the East Orange Police Athletic League program run by Sgt. DeLacy Davis. When another officer told Sergeant Davis that one of the pictures in Jarisa’s life book showed her in a suggestive pose, he put the book away in his file cabinet, as he did not want anyone who might adopt her to get the wrong impression.

Later, when a person who wanted to adopt Jarisa needed a picture, she asked him to return the book.

“He said, ‘I’ll adopt you,’ and I started to cry, since I wanted to ask him for six months, but couldn’t bring it up,” Ms. Brannon-Davis recalled.

She has three life books. One includes an old page labeled “Activity #4, Family Activity,” with instructions to “draw a picture of your family doing something together.” Under the drawing, she wrote: “We’re playing and hitting each other.” There are also snapshots of favorite social workers, and a game of Pin the Nose on the Pumpkin.

“As I look back now, it helps me realize I was that kid, you’re still a kid, you’re not that old, even though you tend to act like an old person,” Ms. Brannon-Davis said, smiling as the family cockatoo squawked in its cage. “I’m surprised I held on to it. You lose a lot of things when you go from place to place. These were the three things I didn’t lose. It meant something, because I didn’t lose it.”

Lisa Haase of Ridgewood, who adopted her foster son, Ghana, 6, said that life books were helpful to the many children who go through the child welfare system feeling abandoned by their birth parents.

“Look at this picture,” she said, pointing to a picture of Ghana’s birth mother, whom he calls Mama Mary, smiling while giving him a bear hug. “Does this lady look like she wants to abandon this child? She fought tooth and nail for him for two and a half years. That’s good for him to know.”

Ghana’s book, which Ms. Haase and her daughter compiled, has carefully labeled pictures of him with Mama Mary, and little captions saying “I love my mom.” There’s also a wrapper from a Ghana chocolate bar, which the Haases handed out to friends at his christening. And a baby picture of him drooling rather extravagantly.

The books help cement adoptive and foster families by breaking taboos, said Rebecca Cerutti, a social worker at the family outreach program at Robins’ Nest, a nonprofit organization in Glassboro that runs group homes.

“If a child is sitting there hearing the foster parent saying wonderful things about the birth parent, that is just ideal,” she said. “The message is that the birth parent is someone they can talk about, without hurting the foster or adoptive parent.”

Kevin M. Ryan, the commissioner of the Department of Children and Families, said that thumbing through life books spurred him on in the agency’s effort to place children in permanent homes.

“They remind you there are no unwanted children, just unfound families,” Mr. Ryan said.

Some 2,000 children in New Jersey are waiting to be adopted; as of the middle of November, the state had exceeded its 2006 goal of finalizing 1,100 adoptions.

Lori Khan, 25, of Williamstown, whose life in foster care or group homes began when she was a year old, recently pulled out her life book to show her 3-year-old son, Cory.

“He was just saying, ‘Mommy plays basketball,’ and he was just like grinning and smiling looking at the pictures,” she said. “It was too cute.”

“It brings back good times that you had,” she added.

# TAP'S ANNUAL ADOPTION SWIM/PICNIC

**SATURDAY JULY 19th, FROM 12:00 TO 4:00p  
AT 478 MOYER ROAD, HARLEYSVILLE**

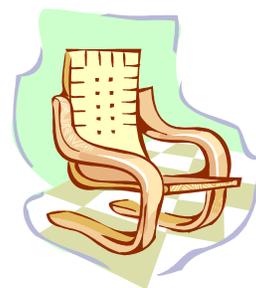
**TAP WILL BE SERVING HOT DOGS, HAMBURGERS AND DRINKS.  
THERE WILL BE SWIMMING FOR THE KIDS AS WELL AS ORGANIZED  
GAMES.**

(grandparents, nieces, aunts, uncles, everyone is welcome)



## **WHAT TO BRING:**

**A BLANKET OR CHAIRS FOR YOUR  
FAMILY  
AND  
A SALAD AND DESSERT TO SHARE**



## **Directions**

### **From the Schuylkill Expressway.**

Take the expressway to the exit for route 476 (Plymouth Meeting). Follow signs for NE Extension (Allentown). Stay left and go through toll booths onto NE Extension. Take first exit to Lansdale (Exit 31). Turn right after toll booths onto Sumneytown Pike. At 3rd light (by McDonalds & Harleysville Bank) take 2nd left after that light (Abram Bergey on right) onto Oak Drive. Take first left onto Moyer and follow Moyer past school on right. The long driveway on the left is 478. Look for the balloons.

### **From the PA Turnpike**

Take the turnpike to the North East extension (Allentown). This branches off just by exit 25. Take first exit to Lansdale (Exit 31). Turn right after toll booths onto Sumneytown Pike. At 3rd light (by McDonalds & Harleysville Bank) take 2nd left after that light (Abram Bergey on right) onto Oak Drive. Take first left onto Moyer and follow Moyer past school on right. The long driveway on the left is 478. Look for the balloons.

### **Want to ride the train?**

Take the R5 train to North Wales station. If you let us know which train you are on we will meet you at the station.

**From directions from anywhere else please call (215) 256-6438**

TAP Christmas Party  
Saturday December 8th  
See inside for details

**Together as Adoptive Parents Inc.**  
478 Moyer Road  
Harleysville, PA 19438-2302



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