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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 Resource Parent Association
United Way Donor Choice # (10860)
Delaware Valley Adoption Council

www.taplink.org

My Say

Phyllis J. Stevens,

I wish that I had coined the phrase “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” but Charles Dickens got there first. In May 2012 Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc will be 24 years old. Since we started support to kids the number of families that we help has grown every year. One of the reasons for this is that for the past few years Pennsylvania has placed a strong emphasis on placing older youth into permanent homes.

This is wonderful. Many of these youth have been in the foster care system for thirteen or fourteen years and all have been in multiple foster homes. We have also seen an increase in calls from relative caregivers, mostly grandparents who have Permanent Legal Custody or have adopted their grandchildren.

At our last Philadelphia support group meeting a grandmother told her story. She said that she had adopted her grandchildren when they were nine and twelve; they are now fourteen and seventeen. She cried as she told how they are verbally and physical abusive to her. They refuse to go to school. She could no longer control them and she needed help. I was able to direct her to the law relating to incorrigibility.

As tax time approached I have answered hundreds of telephone calls and emails concerning the adoption tax credit. I presented free adoption tax credit trainings for adoptive families. I have helped many of you receive thousands of dollars back from the IRS . I volunteered my time and expertise.

Our support services have increased but our donations have decreased. TAP is not the only organization that has seen a drop in donations. This economy has hurt many non-profit organizations. Some

have closed their doors for ever. Because of the drop in donations TAP's board of directors have decided to make TAP a membership organization. What does that mean? Inside of this newsletter you will find a membership application. It will explain the benefits of becoming a member.

Will TAP continue to offer free trainings? Yes. Will TAP continue to offer monthly support group meetings in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties? Yes. Will TAP continue to offer technical assistance to other groups and help to parents on its helpline? Yes.

In our 24 years we have never had a membership fee. If you value TAP and the work that we do for children and families please completed the membership application and mail it back to TAP today.



TAP Dates to Remember

- **May 12th** Subsidy, PLC, training at Temple Center City, 1515 Market from 9:00am until 12:30pm.
- Philadelphia Resource Families Network meets every third Saturday of the month at 8030 Thouron Ave. from 10:00am - 12:30p.
- Together as Adoptive Parents, meets every fourth Saturday of the month at Montgomery County Community College from 12 noon - 3:00.
- **June 16th** The Brain: Trauma and Healing training at Temple Center City, 1515 Market from 9:00a until 12:30p.
- **July 14th** TAP's annual picnic (see details inside)
- **September 29th** TAP's AdoptWalk, Lorimer Park 183 Moredon Road, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006
- **November 10th** TAP's annual adoptive, foster, and kinship conference, Deliverance Evangelistic Church, 2001 W. Lehigh Ave. Philadelphia, PA. 19132.

From a Satin Duvet to a Washable Bed Spread

Becoming a Foster Mom of a Five Month Old At 63

My husband and I have been married for 35 years and have five wonderful adult children. Four of the five children were adopted out of foster care. At this point in our lives we started to think about retiring and taking long naps. One telephone call changed my life forever.

I was working in my office when the telephone rang. I answered it as usual "Together as Adoptive Parents, this is Phyllis " thinking it was a resource family needing help. It was a member of my church, "Joyce". She told me that her four month old grandson had been taken into foster care and what could she do? I told her of course I would help. We talked a long time about her and her husband becoming a relative placement for him. She loved that idea. Before our call ended she asked "if we can't get our grandson would you take him?" I said, "Yes of course". Not really thinking about my answer. I thought for sure her grandson would be placed with her.

I told her that I would recruit some members of our church to help me get her home ready before Children and Youth came. A few days later I received another call from "Joyce". She said that she and her husband could not become relative caregivers because of their health. Remembering that I had told her that I would take her grandson if she could not I was speechless. My mind was racing all over the place. Finally I said "Joyce" would you mind if I talk to our Pastor to see if we could find a younger couple to become the Resource family for your grandson". She agreed.

There were several couples that were willing to adopt her grandson but none willing to become foster parents. When a child is taken into foster care the goal is for that child is to be reunited with its birth mother or father. Only when that is not possible will the goal become adoption for the child. At this point the goal for this little boy was reunification. It was time to call a family meeting.

"Are you crazy?" was the first thing my husband and I heard. "Mom are you and dad ready for 3:00am feedings". "Have you thought about bottles, diapers, car seats (my husband drives a 350Z convertible), doctor appointments and Children and Youth always in your home". Needless to say this was a very long family discussion. In the end all my children said that they would support us in our decision and that they would be available to help when needed.

My 25 year old daughter Alex and her 2 year old son, who live at home with my husband and I, were very excited. She loved the idea of having another baby in the house. She started talking about double strollers, and going through her son's clothes taking out anything that is too small for him and saving them for this little baby.

I started to prepare myself mentally. I emailed members of my bible study and asked them to pray that God's perfect will be done for this little boy.

I contacted Children and Youth to let them know that I knew the family and that I would like to be considered for a kinship placement. To my surprise I received a call back that very day. The case worker was very nice and said that Children and Youth would need to see my home before we could discuss a kinship placement. In the mean time would I fax over my driver's license.

Two weeks later two case workers for Children and youth were sitting at my kitchen table discussing this little boy I will call "Jon". During the conversation one of the case workers made a comment about my age and the picture on my driver's license. He said that he had to make sure that he was calculating my age correctly after seeing the picture. I smiled and said "Yes I will be 63 in May". We took a tour of my five bedroom home and talked a little more before they left.

I received a call a few days later from one of the case workers letting me know that they had approved my home as a kinship foster home. I was excited, happy and nervous all at the same time. My youngest child was 25 years old. I have not parented a baby since 1966 when my son was born. The children that my husband and I adopted were all toddlers. I started to think, okay what does a baby do all day. What will I do with a baby all day? How many times will he wake up at night? How many times will I wake up at night? While I was walking around with a thousand questions going through my mind my daughter Alex started to organize. Her first question, "mom what size diaper does he wear". "I would think a small" "No mom what number does he wear" "Do diapers come in numbers", I asked. "Yes Julius wears 2s". "Whatever happened to cloth diapers?" "Cloth diapers, I don't think I have ever seen cloth diapers before" I said, "Oh."

The permanency hearing for "Jon" was scheduled for the following month. I decided not to go but wait at home to see what happened. Shortly after the hearing was over I received a call from the case worker. He said that "Jon's advocate told the judge that I was too old to parent a five month old baby. That he would be better in a home with a younger couple.

To my surprise I was devastated. I wanted to cry. I tried to think of anyone that I knew that may be able to help me. I called a lawyer friend of mine that has been working in the child welfare system for years. I explained to her the situation. She suggested that I call the advocate and ask to meet with her. One of the problems was that the advocate had never met me and knew nothing about me or my family. I thought it was worth a try.

I called the grandparents of "Jon" and told them the news. They were devastated as well. They did not want to "lose" their grandchild to the system. I ask them if the birth mother would be at the next permanency hearing. They said "yes". I told them to tell their daughter that if she wanted her son placed with me she must tell the judge. I emailed members of my bible study and asked them to pray. I asked them to pray that God's perfect will be done, that God would do what is best for "Jon".

At the next permanency hearing the birth mother told the judge that she knew my family and went to school with some of my children and that she wanted her son placed in my home. I received another call from the case worker he asked if I was still interested in becoming a kinship foster parent for "Jon". I said "yes". He told me when the next permanency hearing would be. I told him that I would be there.

I still had not met the advocate. I did not know what to expect when I arrived at court with the grandparents. They introduced me to the birth mother's lawyer who introduced me to the child advocate. "Jon" was placed in our home as a foster child on January 30, 2012. My husband, daughter and I are having so much fun. "Jon" has taught me what is important in life and what is not. Missing a conference call that had been planned for weeks is not important. Having tickle time with "Jon" is.

I have put away my cashmere sweaters and silk skirts (at least when I am holding "Jon"). I replaced my beautiful Satin Duvet for a washable bedspread. I have more time to play with my grandson and "Jon" than I ever had when my children were growing up. "Jon's" grandparents get to see him every Sunday at church as well as every other Friday.

When it comes to parenting don't be afraid no matter what your age.

By the way; "Jon" is in a number 3 diaper.

Phyllis Stevens

From Fear to Advocacy: My Journey from Foster Care to Helping Others

By Steven K. Walker

Steven was adopted from foster care at ten. Below he tells of the events that transformed him from an abused child to a national adoption advocate. Follow Steven on Facebook at the official page of Steven K. Walker, Adoption Advocate.

“He’ll never amount to anything.”

Would those words destroy or motivate you? For me, the words simply seemed true; I *should* be a failure. Statistics would predict that I’m in prison, but that wasn’t my destiny, was it? Who can know for certain if I will amount to anything, and why would they say that?

My story started in August 1987 when Alice, a mentally challenged alcoholic, gave birth to an undersized baby boy (me) in Niagara Falls, New York. There was no father listed on my birth certificate; it could have been any of the men she brought home from the bar most nights.

From the hospital, my mother brought me to a filthy four room apartment that had only one outside window. There was no crib or baby formula, so Alice fed me whatever she ate. I often slept on a makeshift bed on the kitchen floor while strange men came over to abuse and take advantage of my poor drunk mother.

In November 1988, Alice gave birth to another boy, David. He and I shared everything and it was great because David gave me the attention my mother gave to strangers. Soon, however, life turned into a nightmare.

Alice kept bringing home men and some of them abused David and me physically, sexually, and emotionally. I tried to protect David by hiding us under the kitchen table, me covering him, and a blanket over us both.

If we refused to get out from under the table, the men would swear, rip me off of David, and beat him. When I tried to defend David and fight back, they beat me more severely. Though I don’t remember specific men, all the abuse is like a vivid Van Gogh painting in my memory that can’t be forgotten or erased. Inevitably it defines, in part, who I am.

Memories ate at me and made me second-guess everything. Was the abuse my fault? What about my mother—why didn’t she defend me against abuse that left me with a dent in the back of my head and hand tremors? Alice never abused us, but she did not keep us out of harm’s way. Later, I came to realize that it wasn’t her fault, and believe now that she tried the hardest she could to keep David and me safe. Through all the abuse, I cared for David as best I could. I always made sure he was fed before I was. I made certain he had a coat to keep him warm during the cold winters. Soon I became malnourished. David and I moved into foster care when I was four years old. With our things in black trash bags, we were shoved into the back of county cars, and said goodbye to our mother. It was confusing. I felt like a prisoner, but prisoners know where they’re going and we didn’t. What if we obeyed instead of fighting and hiding?

David and I ended up at a farm, with a mother and father who seemed nice. It was a hardworking Christian family who prayed with us before bed and got us up early to work in the barn. David and I did as they asked.

One morning, the foster mom assigned us to milk the goats. We didn’t understand why this needed to be done and were struggling to comply. The foster mom tried to make it fun by squirting us with milk from the goat’s udder. Unfortunately, the raw milk hit me in the eye. Six years later and several surgeries later, I became legally blind in that eye.

With my belongings in another trash bag, I went to the next foster home. My third foster home was supposed to be therapeutic. The mother had a Ph.D. in psychology and was a special education teacher. She claimed she knew how to care for David and me, but also told us that she really wanted a baby girl, *not* boys.

Just when I started to get close to the father, they pulled the rug out from under me. They claimed that I was a bad influence on David and sent me away. David stayed behind.

From this home I moved to a Pennsylvania group home. At age six, I was the youngest kid there. We had to complete chores to earn rewards but no one taught me how so I often had to do chores over when I messed up the first time. The head of the facility told me I should never have been placed in the

group setting.

Imagine my mindset. I was separated from my brother, lied to, and kept in the dark about my future. When I asked where I was going, the response was often, "Do you like ice cream?" People were saying they loved me, but then giving up on me in less than six months.

Next, I moved in with an older couple in Buffalo, New York. They made it clear they didn't intend to adopt me; they were only fostering to get money for the husband's heart surgery. I was eight, but was treated worse than the couple's five-year-old granddaughter because I was "not blood." This saying irks me. When humans get cut, don't we all bleed the same color?

On weekends, I visited potential adoptive families- too many to count. They all gave up on me, even the three families who signed the adoption papers. My feelings of hurt and distrust grew.

Just before my ninth birthday, I moved in with a family in North Tonawanda, New York. I knew them a little from having been in respite care with them a few times, including a time when David was there because his family went to Florida. Before I was moved in, the family sent me a letter with pictures of the family, house, and school. The letter ended with a question: Did I want to adopt *them* as parents? I was hesitant to fall in love, but this family reached out to me. They wore patches to see what it was like to be blind in one eye. They put ice on their hands to simulate tremors. Still, I could not give in. I hit, kicked, spit, bit, and swore. I told the mother that I didn't have to follow her rules because she was not my real mother.

Her response was always, "I love you no matter what." She got to know me and saw my broken heart. She learned that I loved sports and invested in hockey goalie equipment so I could take shots at her whenever I was angry. Afterward, she would rock me in her arms, give me a freezer pop, and tell me she loved me.

The mother was always open and honest with me. She and the father tried to answer my questions as best they could without lying. Around the time of Halloween, after I turned ten, they told me that they would only answer my questions if I called them Mom and Dad.

On New Year's Eve, Mom and Dad took me to Niagara Falls to see the ball drop. At the time, they said, "How great is it to be celebrating both our anniversary and our son." The words caught me. I chose to be adopted. I got to pick a court date and even change my name. To honor my dad, I took Kevin as my middle name.

On Tuesday, April 1, 1997, I went into the Niagara County Court House as a foster child and came out as Steven Kevin Walker, son of Kevin and Jody Walker. It was a relief, though I still wish I could have been adopted with my brother.

Since my adoption, my family has grown to include another boy and six girls. I graduated from high school at the top of my class, was Student Council president, captain of the football team, and a three-sport athlete. At community college, I was in more than 20 clubs, served as an officer in the student government, and earned my associates degree.

Today I am an adoption advocate. I share my story in the U.S. and Canada, have been published widely, and have appeared on the television and in videos. A man in Florida who heard my story donated more than 400,000 suitcases for youth in care so they can move with some dignity instead of having their things stuffed in garbage bags. In 2001, I helped write legislation to keep siblings together in foster care in New York State. In 2006, I got to share my story with then- Senator Hillary Clinton and leave copies of my speech with all 100 senators (including Barack Obama).

The message I hope to convey is: Don't give up on us. You never know who we can become. Accept each of us as your child; I am simply your son, not your adopted son, or foster son. All of the adoptive families who stick with the children they adopted from foster care are my heroes! Walk in our shoes and you will understand; our love is deep and the best place we have ever lived is the place with the family who keeps us forever.

Be Careful what you wish for

There was a blind girl who hated herself because she was blind.

She hated everyone, except her loving boyfriend. He was always there for her.

She told her boyfriend, 'If I could only see the world, I will marry you.'

One day, someone donated a pair of eyes to her. When the bandages came off, she was able to see everything, including her boyfriend.

He asked her, 'Now that you can see the world, will you marry me?'

The girl looked at her boyfriend and saw that he was blind. The sight of his closed eyelids shocked her. She hadn't expected that.. The thought of looking at them the rest of her life led her to refuse to marry him.

Her boyfriend left her in tears and days later wrote a note to her saying: 'Take good care of your eyes, my dear, for before they were yours, they were mine.'

This is how the human brain often works when our status changes.

Only a very few remember what life was like before, and who was always by their side in the most painful situations.

Life Is a Gift



A man and his ever-nagging wife went on vacation in Jerusalem. While they were there, the wife passed away. The undertaker told the husband, "You can have her buried here in the Holy Land for \$150 or we can have her shipped back home for \$5,000. The husband thought about it and told the undertaker he would have her shipped back home. The undertaker asked him, "why would you spend \$5,000 to have her shipped home when you could have a beautiful burial here, and it would only cost \$150?????" The husband replied, "Long ago, a man died here, was buried here, and three days later, rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance

TAP Picnic

Saturday July 14th

See inside for details

