

REACH Tulare County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



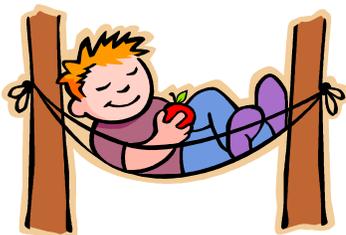
Summer 2011

REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Summer greetings to REACH families and adoption helpers. We hope you're enjoying a slower pace and finding ways to relax. Sharing adoption stories can be comforting for children and a bonding activity for everyone touched by adoption. Traveling, campfires, hikes and picnics are great storytime settings.

There's always something magical about family during the summer. Sir John Lubbock said, "Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass on a summer day listening to the murmur of water or watching the clouds float across the sky, is hardly a waste of time." And Ada Louise Huxtable said, "Summer is the time when one sheds one's tensions... and the right kind of day is jeweled balm for the battered spirit. A few of those days and you can become drunk with the belief that all's right with the world."

Many adopted children feel "all's right with the world" when they hear their adoption stories; when they understand how they came home to their families and how much they're loved. Everyone touched by adoption has their own story and we've asked several REACH families to share their experiences in the REACH 2011 newsletter. We've included families who have adopted from foster care and private agencies, as well as blog excerpts from a family that adopted two a large sibling sets internationally and through foster care. Additionally, we've included advice from adopted teens and advice for the first year of adoptive parenting. Although Aspiranet is not a faith based agency, you will notice many of the stories we've included incorporate a spiritual calling to parent orphaned children.



We hope these stories encourage parents, children and teens to spend time telling their stories this summer and make a point of celebrating the times when "all's right with the world."

Inside This Issue

1. Newsletter intro, REACH Staff
2. We Chose Adoption
3. Support Groups
4. Our Suddenly Large Family
5. Adoption is Our Life
6. Parenting Advice from Teens
7. Our Story: Yes to Forever
8. About REACH

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We Chose Adoption!

The Story of a Multi Racial/Cross Cultural Family

by Kathleen Trevino – CWS Supervisor/Tulare County Adoptions Unit

I was first introduced to adoption when I was a Tulare County Child Welfare Social Worker and studying for a master's degree in Social Work. As part of my training I was an intern in the Adoptions Unit for one year.

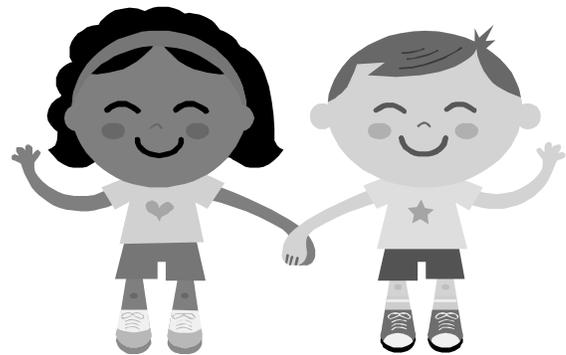
During that time my husband and I discovered we weren't able to conceive. We had medical treatments and a procedure, which was very expensive with no results. At that point my husband and I realized we wanted to be parents more than conceive or birth a child. With adoption, chances were 100%. With each expensive medical treatment, chances were 30% - no guarantee. So we chose adoption!

Our first adoption was through Infant of Prague in Fresno; we adopted a Portuguese/Irish newborn girl. The adoption was open and scary at first, because we didn't want to lose our child, but we met the birth mother and went to medical appointments and Lamaze classes before Kayla was born. She came home as a newborn, everything went well, and we are grateful to have information about Kayla's birth mom. We continue to have contact with her birth mother and grandmother.

The second time around my husband and I went through State Adoptions in Fresno. We met Felicia, who is Caucasian and African American, when she was seven months old and she came home two months later. At that time we didn't have a preference about race or ethnicity. My husband and I have different ethnicities anyway, he's Native American and I'm Caucasian. Fortunately, Felicia had one foster home before us and we maintain close contact with her foster mom.

When a family adopts from a different race or culture, it's good to adopt another child with a similar background. Adopting a child from another race or culture was a consideration the third time around. We went through a foster/adoption agency called Family Connections because they were active in searching and matching families through the whole state. Our son Nicholas is from Northern California and he's African American. We met him when he was two and he came home two months later. We have some information about his birth family.

We like to call ourselves a blended ethnic family, and we know it's important for our children to have relationships with African Americans to help form their identities. We like to go to Allensworth for Black History month every year; it's fun and we want our children to have first hand experience with their heritage. Museums, literature, fables, myths and movies are great, but we want our children to have more.



Our children attended a small private school when they were younger, then we switched to public schools so they could experience other cultures. With multi-race and mixed ethnic families, it's important to be realistic and give your children words to answer questions like, "Is that your mom, why you don't look the same?" They need to feel comfortable being different and have replies ready like, "God made our family." Or, "It's none of your business!" Parents have to acknowledge family differences to help their children interact with peers, and if parents don't bring it up, kids won't either. In our family my husband and I were open about adoption from day one. We let our children know it's OK to ask and talk about adoption; and being sad sometimes, or wondering about adoption won't hurt our feelings. Also, we try to balance issues like racial profiling with the understanding that every experience isn't about race.

I'm pleased our culture is more open about adoption than it used to be. All three of my children are friends with at least two other adopted kids, and they found each other on their own. According to my son, when family members look different, "You have to tell them (friends) more stuff" about being adopted. As adoptive parents, it's our job to make sure our children have the tools they need to be comfortable being different.

Support and Resources

TULARE REACH SUPPORT GROUPS & WORKSHOPS

All Tulare County REACH Support Groups are held at the following location from 6:30-8:00pm

Visalia YMCA
211 West Tulare Ave.

Parent Retreat Support Group

Enrich your parenting by learning from experts and other adoptive parents! Held every **2nd & 4th Tuesday**, child care provided, training hours available. RSVP with Marji Peterson, MFT-I at 741-7358.

The 2nd Tuesday of the month is driven by an adoption related topic. Suggestions for specific topics are welcome. The 4th Tuesday of the month provides an open forum for parents to share their experiences with other adoptive parents.

July 12 - Mini Workshop: Telling Difficult Adoption Stories

July 26 - Parent Retreat Open Discussion

August 9 - Mini Workshop: Parenting Children with Histories of Sexual Abuse/Trauma

August 23 - Parent Retreat Open Discussion

September 13 - Mini Workshop: Children's Developmental Understanding of Adoption

September 27 - Parent Retreat Open Discussion

6 Week Series For Adopted Children

REACH offers support groups for adopted children. Parents meet with a facilitator at the same time. **Dates and times depend** on the number of children who register and their ages. For more information call Marji Peterson, MFT-I at 741-7358.

Waiting/In The Making Family Mixer

This mixer, held every **3rd Tuesday of the month**, is designed for parents who are considering adoption, awaiting adoptive placement or have children recently placed in their home.

July 19 - Children's Developmental Understanding of Adoption

August 16 - Specialized Parenting & Self Care

September 23 - Now What? What to do When Children Are Placed in Your Home

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Hanford Group	Parent Retreat			
Oakhurst Group	Waiting/ in Making Family Mixer		Teens Summertime Chill	
Madera Group	Parent Retreat			



REACH Tulare County presents

Summertime Chill for Teens Touched by Adoption

REACH is hosting two forums this summer for teens entering grades 9 through 12. Adopted teens are welcome including teens with adopted siblings.

Older adopted youth will be present to share their adoption stories.

Thursdays, July 28th & August 25th

6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Visalia YMCA

211 West Tulare Avenue

Screening interviews required

For more information, please contact Marji Peterson, MFT-I at 559-741-7358.

**** RSVP A MUST BY July 26th & August 23rd ****



OUR SUDDENLY LARGE FAMILY

Adopting Sibling Sets

Excerpts From a blog's posts:

Here's the not so short version of our Suddenly Large Adopted Family: My husband and I were married 12 years ago in August of 1998. I gave birth to our first child just over a year after we married. We finished college, my husband finished seminary, and we moved to Oklahoma. During that time, my husband worked as a youth pastor at three different churches. We didn't have more bio children; though we weren't preventing. We always wanted a large family with four or five children, and we trusted God had a plan better than we could ask for or imagine. He did.

While in Oklahoma, we sensed God leading us to adopt. We were always open to it in the future, but it was time. We eventually adopted a sibling group of three from Liberia. They were four, five and seven when we brought them home in April of 2007. Our bio son was also seven. The older two are boys, the youngest a girl.

Four weeks after they came home to Oklahoma, we moved across the country again where my husband works as an associate pastor in the same town where we grew up. We had no idea we would need the family and friends who surrounded us there, but God knew!

Sensing the Lord's leading, we became certified foster parents early in 09 and had two little boys placed with us immediately. We fell in love and were devastated when they had to leave, but it stirred our hearts to adopt again. We decided to adopt from the US foster system which up until that time, seemed to be crazy! But... I was reading "Crazy Love" by Francis Chan.

We looked at some photo listings of foster children and found a sib set of four, ages 7, 5, 3 and 2. I sent an inquiry email in May of 2009. There were actually six siblings! We went to meet them and by August of 2009 we had three girls visit for 11 days. Another month later, they joined us for good and then two months after that, three brothers joined us too. The girls were 12, 10 and 6. The boys were 8, 3 and 2.

So in summary, in March of 07 we were parents of one biological son age seven. By November of 09, we were the parents of 10 children, ages 12, 10, 10, 9, 8, 8, 6, 6, 3 and 2. That's something like giving birth to three sets of triplets in just two and a half years. Is that even physically possible??

All our adopted children come from hard places and have
continued on page 7...



How to Support Adoptive Families Their First Year

1. The first year for parents who adopt children from "hard places" is totally consuming. Regardless of how old the children are, expect the parents will be as consumed as parents of a newborn... with colic. If they are adopting sibling sets, its like having multiples... with colic... and probably food allergies too... just to give some perspective.

2. A wonderful gift for adoptive families is to free adults up to parent. Intentionally parenting in a way that leads to healing absolutely requires 110% and no one else can do it. But, someone else can cook, clean, organizing clothing, shop, drive, take the dog to the vet, mow the lawn, etc.

3. Another great gift faith based or volunteer communities can give adoptive families is complete release from any and all obligations. Initially parents might think they can continue to serve, but they can't. And for that matter, release mom from any obligation for at least one year... including answering the phone!

4. Also during that first year, don't expect adoptive parents to get away without the kids much. As with a newborn baby, children benefit from mom and dad's constant presence. However, a trusted person who is willing to provide short term respite while mom and dad grab some dessert after bedtime, or when mom takes a walk during naptime, can be helpful.

5. Remember that for the first year and beyond, adoptive parents will be working hard to gain their children's trust and win their hearts. As support people, believe it or not, your intensions for good can actually be detrimental to this process. Indulging children with "stuff" or experiences can compete with the bonding process.

ADOPTION IS OUR LIFE

by Bob Chavez, Tulare County Adoption Lead Social Worker III

The most important roles in my life are husband to my wife and father to my children. Although I've had several incredible and rewarding jobs and helped a lot of people succeed in life, the most important role I have is accepting and appreciating people for who they are, especially my wife and kids. At the end of my life I want to know that I've done all I could to contribute and support my wife and kids in pursuit of their heart's desires. I want to encourage them to take every chance at feeling and being the most successful they can be in every part of their lives.

Parents need to understand their kid's experience because how they cultivate and blossom their children is what counts way more than jobs and titles. It's a life's work...

I met my wife Carol in 1977 at an orphanage called Hollygrove in Hollywood, CA. It's where Marilyn Monroe stayed when she was a girl. I was newly hired and Carol was getting ready to leave after volunteering for the summer. We married the same year and started planning a family in 1985. Eventually we discovered I was infertile so we started exploring options for having children.

At that time, I was the Director of Housing for California Baptist University in Riverside, CA, and Carol was a charge nurse at San Antonio Hospital. One morning I picked her up from work. She got in the car and said, "You won't believe what I just did." Carol said she had been approached by a pediatrician about adopting a Caucasian/Hispanic baby born that morning. Since we're a Caucasian/Hispanic couple, the pediatrician thought we might be a good match and Carol agreed to take placement. So it turned out my inability to conceive was the best of gifts. Without it, my children Becca and David wouldn't be a part of our family, and I can't imagine life without them.

Five and a half years later, Becca came to us saying she believed that God wanted us to adopt another baby. We suggested she pray about it and she did. Coincidentally, I was undergoing testing at the time because Carol and I were thinking about another child and infertility protocol and medications had changed over the years. A week later, an old friend approached me about adopting a child. The birth mother was very young, and her family was looking for a bi-cultural family to adopt a Caucasian/Mexican child. When the family heard about us they decided we were a good match. Sound familiar? We paid for the birth mom's prenatal care and the delivery and took David home the day he was born. We visited my parents that day, and the day after we went to a family reunion. David was introduced to aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents; I have a big family. Again we were showered with love.

Looking back, my education and career path did a good job preparing me to be an adoptive parent. I have a BA in Comparative Religions and an MA in

Churches. We worked with the United Nations High Commission and the State Department to reunite families broken and scattered by world events. Basically we worked with counselors, teachers, local churches and others all over Southern California to reunify 100 to 200 homeless people a month with their families all over the world.

At that time, Carol was a Charge Nurse for Labor and Delivery at St. Joseph's Hospital in Orange. While we both had great, rewarding jobs, we also wanted to raise our kids in a rural setting like we had when we were kids. We wanted Becca and David to have relationships with multiple generations, sort of like Mayberry on TV. We applied for jobs and Carol was offered a position at Kaweah Delta Hospital, and I was offered a position with Tulare County CWS as a Permanency Planning Supervisor. A year later there was a huge cutback statewide and I was "demoted" to the adoptions unit. I was irritated for a while, then one day I asked myself, "What's in your head?" I had the greatest job in the world and that realization was an epiphany. I fell in love with adoptive parents because there's something magical about adoption. One day, a child who's perceived as a burden becomes the most appreciated person in the world; this is the one child a family's been waiting for. I get to watch parent's hearts change from "this child" to "my child". Suddenly or slowly parents realize, "This kids not going anywhere." Working with adoptive parents is an incredible honor. Sometimes I ask myself why I get to do this work, it's so amazing.

Working in adoption re-validates the idea of accepting people for who they are. Kids 1 to 10 need a good foundation. They need stability, continuity, and consistency. Home needs to be the same place yesterday, today and tomorrow.

continued on page 6...

In the end I've decided it's not significant what other people think about how you got there as a family. Instead, it's important to embrace the people you're with and champion their hearts.

We took Becca home with us the next day. Since I was an administrator at the University, and Friday was church, we took Becca that morning. We sat in the back, and it was amazing to watch the congregation's awareness of her ripple toward the front. Eventually the president of the University said something about welcoming a new member, and everyone went crazy showering us with love. We hired an attorney to manage the adoption and California State Adoptions wrote our homestudy. 18 months later, Becca's adoption was finalized.

Social Science. Half my MA classes were geared toward counseling adolescents and early adult development, the other half toward management. After a few years, the University promoted me to Dean of Students and I got to work with teens and young adults with all kinds of issues: physical and mental health, housing, finances, domestic violence and grief. The University was like a little city, and I got to do a bit of everything.

After seven years at the University, I went to work for an organization called World Relief. It's the social services arm for the National Association of Evangelical

Parenting Advice *voiced from Adopted Teens*



These teens have participated in the REACH Adopted Teen Support Group

Miranda – Once you adopt a kid, that's your kid, you can't give him back. Treat them like your own because you can't give up on them.

Johnny – Think positive, it's a wonderful thing. You're helping someone who needs that extra help and you're opening a door for someone who can't open it themselves.

Keli – Don't make adopted kids feel like black sheep when you have other kids. Don't make them feel left out or favored. If you want to adopt a child, your commitment is to be there for them, so you have to be there forever. You can't just back out when your commitment is forever.

Vince – When you adopt kids from a different culture, you can't change that, so don't make kids feel less than or inferior if their culture is different than yours.

Ruben – You just have to accept that adopted kids have lives before you and you can't pretend that they don't.

...continued from page 5

Safety means I love you and gives kids the ability to explore.

Then it changes for kids 10 to 20, who need to know if their parents love them more than rules and values, even church, and that's really hard for some parents. Teens need freedom to develop trust, faith and confidence. Sometimes it's all about flying by the seat of your pants and embracing the adventure.

Lots of parents are concerned, and sometimes fearful about talking to their kids about adoption. Parents need get comfortable with the idea and language of adoption, because information about birth families will not end the conversation. Kids need to hear their story over and over again, so parents need to be approachable about it. I know this is tough, it grips the heart a little and parents are afraid. But, parents need to get comfortable with the idea of losing their identity as a traditional family. Then they can embrace the great story of their own family. That 2nd or 3rd grade family tree project is going to happen. I told our son, when their mom and I got married she became a Chavez. And when each of my kids was adopted, they became

a Chavez too. That seemed to help him find his place and understand our family as an adventure.

When parents adopt older children, it helps to remember every human being is their own subculture. Parents don't need to be experts on girls or boys, adolescents or cultures. But they have to have a fascination for how their own children feel and think, what friends they feel comfortable with, and what they want to do. They need to know how their kids learn, process information, understand God, and their emotional/physical attributes and capabilities. Parents need to understand their kid's experience because how they cultivate and blossom their children is what counts way more than jobs and titles. It's a life's work, and at the end of my life I want nothing left unsaid or undone.

Parenting adolescents? That's a hard time for everyone. Parents have to give more than they receive especially adoptive parents. Too many parents are disappointed because they want something back from their teens, but parents have to give three times over. The Bible calls it agape, a boundless unselfish love of one person for another.

Ask God what it's like to give more love and appreciation than you are given. Some have said that God bears the parenting of a reactive attachment disorder planet.

Meanwhile teens are self centered in a particular and stressful way. Teens feel too much and understand so little of long term significance; they are smart but have no wisdom. They feel judged by everyone all the time. There's tremendous pressure on their physical lives; their weight and appearance. Hormones! Estrogen is like LSD and testosterone is like meth. There's brain development and mood swings... this is not an easy or positive experience. I don't envy adolescents at all.

When it comes to parenting teens, my wife taught me that staying quiet can be the smartest and most loving plan, and being quiet around teens is very wise unless there's something important to say.

In the end I've decided it's not significant what other people think about how you got there as a family. Instead, it's important to embrace the people you're with and champion their hearts. ●

Our Adoption Story: *Yes to forever*

by Jennifer Wilker

Our adoption story begins in Africa. No, it is not what you are thinking. We did not adopt internationally. Several years ago, my husband and I, along with our two biological children, spent a week in Swaziland planting immune boosting vegetables for those suffering from AIDS. The trip was transforming in many ways. Not only did we experience the pure joy of the African people, despite great poverty, but our eyes were opened to how many children need homes. Little did we know that a year after that trip, our family would be presented with an opportunity to open our hearts and home in a very personal way.

Exactly a year after returning home from Swaziland, I was volunteering at church for an after school choir for school age children. That's when I met Samuel. One of my responsibilities after choir practice was to wait with the children until they were picked up to go home. On this particular day, 7 year old Samuel was the last one waiting to be picked up. As he and I waited together for his ride, we began talking. He told me he was looking for a "forever family" and then looked up at me and asked "Miss Jennifer, will you adopt me?"

My answer to Samuel that day was that I would pray and ask God. I went home and told my husband about my day, especially about the precious little boy that asked me to be his mom. My husband and I began praying together about opening up our home to Samuel. Several weeks later, I made a call to the county foster care department. I was put in contact with Samuel's social worker and told that yes, he was up for adoption but he had an older brother who we would also need to take. Two boys? Before we were allowed to meet Samuel's brother, we were required to participate in nine weeks of PRIDE classes. With the classes completed and criminal background check done, we met the social worker and Samuel and his brother Kent at a local park. The boys were told that they were going to meet a family who may want to adopt them. I will never forget the look in Samuel's eyes when he saw me walk up. He said he remembered me, and I reminded him that I said I would pray about his request.

Nine year old Kent was reserved at first. He has since told us that he didn't really understand who we were and why he was meeting us. While at the park, my son and husband engaged him in throwing a football and soon we began to see a smile that melted our hearts. The visit that began at the park ended with an impromptu visit to our home before the social worker took the boys back to their foster home. From that day on, there were many visits with the boys as we readied our home to be licensed for foster care.

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attachment issues, but we are so thankful for the healing and wholeness they are now experiencing. We are praying and therapeutically parenting the ones who aren't there yet. This is no small task and one that I fail often. And yes, we also home school. I can't imagine doing it any other way.

Life has been crazy, it has been hard; it has also been very

I wish I could tell you that the boys moved in and we all lived "happily ever after". For five months that was the case. When circumstances changed beyond our control and Samuel was moved out of our home, we grieved. Exhausted and emotional, we adjusted to functioning as a family of five instead of six. Kent remained with us and the adoption process began for him. Eleven months later, through joyful tears and a room full of smiling faces, Kent legally joined our family.

Samuel was placed with a wonderful family that began the process to adopt him. We enjoyed getting to know Samuel's new family and found comfort that he was loved and wanted. One month prior to the finalization of his adoption, Samuel now age 10, died from a pre-existing medical condition. While attending Samuel's viewing and funeral I was reminded that I was saying "goodbye" to him for the second time. Samuel's greatest gift to our family was bringing us Kent. Without his brave question "Will you adopt me?" Kent would not be with us now.

Kent has brought tremendous joy to our family. We have enjoyed watching him experience many "firsts", from his first time at the beach to his first airplane ride to learning to swim in our pool. We have seen him excel athletically and academically.

Kent is now almost 14 and about to enter high school. This change brings new challenges that we are dealing with every day. I constantly find myself asking the question "Is he acting this way because he is a teenager or because he is adopted?" My husband and I feel like we are parenting for the first time, even though we have an 18 and 20 year old. The layers of trauma and losses in Kent's life have us seeking counsel from professionals and reading many books.

I constantly find myself asking the question, "Is he acting this way because he is a teenager or because he is adopted?"

I am thankful for the days when that "smile that melts my heart" appears. On the other days, I pray, I read, and I remember the strong calling we felt to open up our home and our HEARTS. We are committed to our adopted son's well being and happiness for the long run. Even though we have hit some rough patches, we know that the stability and influence our family provides will serve Kent well in the future. Our deepest desire for Kent is to become a well adjusted, productive, and committed adult who is able to succeed in whatever journey life takes him on. ●

good. God has taught us so much, refined us so much, redeemed our children, healed hurts, formed bonds and attachments...truly amazing. Lots of days it's still hard and exhausting and overwhelming to the point that it drives us to our knees in prayer. So, that is the story of our Suddenly Large Family. In most ways the story is still being written. ●

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We're on the Web:
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ASPIRAnet
Raising Hope. Empowering Community.



Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support & referral to local services 2) referral to local adoption related community trainings 3) linkage to local therapists with experience working with adoptive families 4) lending library and website access 5) quarterly newsletter which includes book reviews, and relevant adoption related information.

Education: Educational support groups and meetings are held twice a month and offer a variety of topics pertinent to adoption. In addition, access to the lending library and website offer many opportunities to learn more about adoption and the impact of adoption on all members of the triad (adoptive parents, adoptees and birth family).

Advocacy: We are here to help navigate common issues facing adoptive families. We assist adoptive parents with advocating for the assistance needed in working with educational, legislative and community partners to best meet their children's needs.

Crisis Intervention/Case Management: Participants are eligible to receive short-term therapeutic services, free of charge, by master's level social workers who are trained and experienced in adoption-related issues. Families are also eligible to receive in-home case management services as needed. Spanish translation services are provided.

Hope: We utilize our agency values of Respect, Integrity, Courage & Hope (RICH) to guide our work with adoptive families. Our goal is to promote safe, healthy and stable adoptive families through access to our services.