

# Parent *to* Parent

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A Community within the city  
**NPN**

## The Adoption Journey

By Theresa Reid

### FOLLOWING,

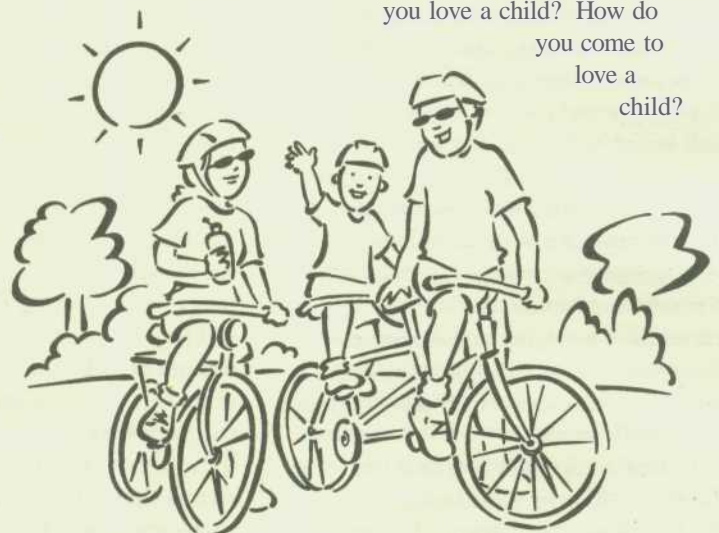
two women share their personal stories on adoption — one from the viewpoint of an adoptive parent, the other, an adoptive child. "The Adoption Journey" appeared in a previous issue of *Parent to Parent*, but is so inspiring that it is worth repeating. These stories express that it is not biology alone that creates a loving family bond. And while an adoptive family may face unique problems due to the lack of biological ties, those problems are not any more difficult than those faced by biological families. And, indeed, being part of an adoptive family may further increase one's appreciation of the loving family bond.

While the popularity and visibility of adoption seems to be on the rise, the process can still be painstaking and daunting. Luckily, there is a wealth of information and resources available to help make the process more understandable. There are also many resources that offer support to adoptive families. We've listed some of these resources at the end of the two articles. \*

They call it "the adoption journey," and the metaphor is a good one. The emotional, intellectual, and bureaucratic road to adopting our daughter from Siberia was as torturous as the literal one would have been before jet travel. We moved from "adoption isn't an option" to planning our second adoption from Eastern Europe in a period of about three years. Today, like any other couple who has fallen (or, more accurately, risen) completely in love with a child, we could not imagine our lives without our daughter, and our memories of the difficulties of the journey are as distant from our daily joy as the memories of labor pains.

Our first obstacle was the fear that we couldn't love a child who wasn't "ours." A good friend of mine, a social worker internationally known for her compassionate, pioneering work with victims of child sexual abuse, and herself a mother of two, said to me, "I admire you. I don't think I could love a child who wasn't biological." Even before we fell in love with our daughter, I thought my friend undersold herself. We could *imagine* loving a child who wasn't ours by birth; we just weren't sure we would. This is

a question about the basis of love. Why do you love a child? How do you come to love a child?



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## Once we admitted the possibility of adoption, pure slogging began. Where do you start? The questions are mind-boggling.

For that matter, why and how do you love anyone? Child abuse is evidence enough that love is not an inevitable result of biology. A biological connection is not a guarantee of love, we reasoned; surely it is not a prerequisite, either.

We moved past this point on the adoption journey purely on faith. We knew that our only opportunity to love a child was to try with a child someone else had created but could not raise. We were not sure until the day we met our daughter that we would love her. But we thought we could, and we wanted to try.

Once we admitted the possibility of adoption, pure slogging began. Where do you start? The questions are mind-boggling. Domestic or foreign? If domestic, private or agency facilitated? Closed or open? If foreign, what country? Why? In either case, What agency? Interracial or intraracial? An infant or an older child? Disabilities or no? How much will it cost? How long will it take? Can we afford it? Can we wait? We bought books, we read, and we agonized.

Not one single answer to any of these questions is simple. I will tell you our choices and our reasoning. Others' might be completely different. Every adoptive parent I know is besotted with his or her child. The road to love has many paths.

We chose Russia for several reasons. Because we were older, and there were no age restrictions (as there are in domestic adoptions). Because we are a mixed faith couple, and Russia doesn't care (unlike many domestic adoption agencies). Because my husband's family is Russian, so we felt a connection. Because we had traveled for pleasure to Russia (this is not a joke) and felt close to it. Because thousands of beautiful babies in Russia and other

former Communist bloc countries will grow up in bleak orphanages if they are not adopted by Americans. We said "no" to disabilities, because although we could love a child with disabilities, what parent asks for such heartache? We asked for a child as young as possible, because we wanted to know our baby for as long as possible, and to imbue her with ourselves.



International adoption has many drawbacks. The paperwork is staggering. During the process, I felt as if I were carefully gathering pieces of confetti and taking them here and there to be stamped, and stamped again. When you adopt internationally, you become familiar with the word "apostille." This is a term designated by a Hague Convention agreement intended to regulate international adoption (a worthy goal). An apostille is a stamp from the Secretary of State saying that the Notary Public who has already stamped your document is legitimate. (I asked myself, "But where is the stamp to certify the Secretary of State? And the stamp to certify that?") The practical implication is that after you cart all your 50 or so documents to the Notary Public, you have to cart them to the Secretary of

State's office for the extra seal.

Apostilles, as I say, were *one* of the obstacles thrown in our path. Finger-printing — twice (once for the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service, once for the State's Department of Children and Family Services). To adopt internationally, we had to become licensed foster parents in the State of Illinois. To become licensed foster parents, we had to have two bedrooms. To have two bedrooms, we had to sell our huge, dramatic, one-bedroom loft. We had to produce police reports as to our law-abidingness. Proof of prior divorces. Proof of marriage. Home studies. Proof of locks on cupboards where liquor and detergents and other poisons might be kept. Proof of financial viability. Proof of mental health. Proof of strong marital status. Proof of our own births.

Why don't biological parents have to prove all this?

My husband chafed more than I did. Once we decided to adopt, I had said to myself, "Whatever it takes. Just tell me what to do." I hated it, I was amazed by it, but I went through the paces like a dutiful schoolgirl, swearing all the way.

Amazingly, once the paperwork was done, the really hard part began. Neither of us expected this difficulty. But we discovered that simply waiting, with our fate completely in others' hands, was much harder than busywork with which we could anger and distract ourselves. The day after we Fed Ex'd all our documents to the international agency in Washington, D.C. (generally you have two agencies if you are adopting internationally: your local agency, which helps you cope with all the state requirements, and your international agency, which helps you cope with all the international hurdles), we really started to sweat. It was hard not to call the agency every

single day. When will we get a referral? When will we have a baby?

Yet harder even than the waiting, was getting a referral. The day they offered us our dream — a healthy, beautiful infant girl — was the most painful day of our married lives. Completely unexpectedly, we found ourselves back at square one of the journey, the place where so many people who cannot have biological children sadly stop.

What is love? How do you love a child? Why do you love a child? How do you know love? Would any biological parent love his or her child presented to him not as a biological fact but as a photograph? *This* child? *This* is the child for us to love? Oh, my god. That is not what we had in mind. We're not sure what we did have in mind, but this child isn't it. We faced ourselves and our demons.

How do you know that a child is yours if she is not born to you?

There is a myth in circulation in parts of the adoption community that goes, "When you see the child who is meant for you, you will know it." This is the "love at first sight" myth. How many of us are married to people we loved at first sight? On the other hand, how many of us are married to people we love?

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# On Being Adopted

By Marie Gall

I am an adopted person. I used to be an adopted child and now I am an adopted adult, wife and mother of two biological children. I appear to be well-adjusted and content to strangers. But inside, there is a raging emotional storm that knocks me over almost everyday. It began when my first child was very little, so dependent, and an uncensored thought crossed my mind, "How could anyone ever leave such a small child?" I felt so self-righteous and unforgiving. I would hold my baby close and promise to never let him down, never abandon him. I hadn't realized how rejected being adopted really felt.

Of course birth mothers make the right choices when they give their children a better future with an adoptive family — that isn't the point. As an adopted person, I can intellectually argue the benefits of adoption on any level. But that doesn't mean I am not blown away by the way my son's face is the same shape as my own! You see, adopted people don't have biological similarities to their family members. We aren't used to the genetic mirror everyone else has seen everyday.

The emotional storm continued when my boys gained mobility and I would lose my temper and hear myself yell at them. I was shocked, horrified! While every parent vows not to be like their own parent — it is inevitable. Not only because we are human, but also because we have the same worries and fears and frustrations with our children as all parents do at some point. It's just that, as an adopted child, my parents anger not only scared me, but I was certain that if I did just enough things wrong, they wouldn't be my parents anymore! Sort of as if I was an appliance that could be returned if defective.

Now my children tolerate my constant hugs and kisses because they know their mother needs to be affectionate. Like all parents, I do not want my children to feel unloved or unwanted or unnecessary, even though they will. I spend hours making things and doing things and imagining things with my boys. It's as if I am trying to parent for them and for me. My adoptive parents were incredibly loving and very much a part of my lives, but somehow, being adopted, there is sometimes a sense of uncertainty. My cravings for acceptance, affection and approval are heightened because I haven't had the assurance of knowing I was "where I belonged" as a child. This doesn't make me a bad person or parent, it just makes me — well, me. Some adult/parent adoptees I know can relate to what I have shared, and some don't. There are no set rules.

Adopting is not any harder or more confusing than biologically having and raising children. We are all amazed at our reactions to the challenges of being the kind of parent we want to be. It's important to share these reactions with others, adopted or not, and find we are not alone. It's good to hear one person's story. Please share yours. •

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*Marie Gall is NPN's Social Chair and is proud mom to two boys, Robeson and Langston, and wife to Bert.*

## Adoption Resources

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- National Adoption Center . . . . . [www.adopt.org](http://www.adopt.org)
- AdoptNet . . . . . [www.adoptnet.org](http://www.adoptnet.org)
- AdoptiveParents.com . . . . . [www.adoptiveparents.com](http://www.adoptiveparents.com)
- North American Council on Adoptable Children . . . [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)
- American Academy of Adoption Attorneys . . . . . [www.adoptionattorneys.org](http://www.adoptionattorneys.org)
- The Eastern European Adoption Coalition . . . . . [www.eeadopt.org](http://www.eeadopt.org)
- Adoptive Families* magazine . . . . . [www.adoptivefamilies.com](http://www.adoptivefamilies.com)

### ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Children at Heart Adoption Services, Inc. . . . . [www.childrenatheart.com](http://www.childrenatheart.com)
- Holt International Children's Services . . . . . [www.holtintl.org](http://www.holtintl.org)

### BIRTHPARENTS

- Adoption Services, Inc. . . . . [www.adoptionservices.org](http://www.adoptionservices.org)
- Open Adoption . . . . . [www.open-adoption-services.com](http://www.open-adoption-services.com)

### ADOPTED CHILDREN / NOW ADULTS

- National Adoption Information Clearinghouse . . . . [www.calib.com/nalc](http://www.calib.com/nalc)

# Are you a Penny Pincher??

With the economy still on a downslide, war looming on the horizon and companies laying off employees left and right, we can all stand to pinch a little here and there. Share your penny pinching techniques with us. Tell us your favorite children's resale shops, cheap eats and/or free/cheap things to do with kids. The next issue of Parent to Parent will feature your Penny Pinching ideas. Please send ideas to Lee Haas at lhaas@rcn.com or 773-506-0288.

THE ADOPTION JOURNEY *continued from page 3*

Thank god, we have many friends, friends honest enough to say during our frantic weekend of contemplation, "Listen, if we had had the chance to turn down [biological child number 1, 2, 3, 4] we'd have done so." Thank god we had a wise friend who said, "I have no doubt that if you bring home this child, you will love her so much you can hardly bear it."

We said yes to our daughter. Our trip to Siberia was oddly dual: familiar and exciting as an arduous international trip, a chance to be together again for an extended period, a respite from our consuming careers; yet utterly new, terrifying, and exhilarating as a trip to meet our baby, our daughter.

Lately I have compared doubts about love between parents and adoptive children to doubts about whether anyone can fully understand the experience of someone else. If I am *not* you, some people ask, how can I really *know* you? Biology is not the key here. Many biological parents and children are hopelessly estranged. I am closer to many unrelated

people (including, of course, my husband) than I am to members of my biological family. Husbands and wives, no biological relation, are expected to love each other as much as or more than they love anyone else. Why is it assumed, then, that biology is a prerequisite to "real love" between parents and children? Love is a matter of engagement, of emotional capacity, of effortful sympathy. My husband and I are as close to our daughter as any parents can be to their child.

If you are thinking about adopting, I urge you to do it. I love the Chinese proverb, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Tens of thousands of babies in the world need loving parents. I now believe that I could love every single one of them, and I wish with all my heart that I had the opportunity to do so. •

*Theresa Reid is a former NPN member, currently residing in Ann Arbor. She has adopted two children from Russia and is writing a book about her experiences.*

## CLASSIFIED ADS

Academic Tutoring In Your Home  
Illinois State Certified Teacher  
M.Ed in Elementary Education  
10 Years Teaching Experience  
Spanish and English  
Call Angela at 773-388-9890

### Combi Twin Savvy Stroller For Sale

2002 edition of the Combi Twin Savvy stroller, retails for \$339.95. Brand new; still in box. This twin stroller is the lightest and narrowest double stroller available. Fully independent seats that recline 3 positions all the way to 165 lbs — suitable for newborns, 5-point harness and adjustable headrest pillows, removable guard rails open from each side or in the middle for easy access. Comes with a stroller pack and acoustic canopy. Stroller folds quickly and easily and is self-standing. Lightweight aluminum frame weighs only 15 lbs. Open: 39"H x 31"W x 35"D. Closed: 39"H x 16"W x 15"D. Will sell for best offer. Contact Shana at shanatrombley@yahoo.com or 773-784-1413.

## Become a Northside Parents Network Member!

**T**he Northside Parents Network is a non-profit, self-help and mutual support group for parents and their children. NPN members share experience and ideas, whether they are first-time parents or old hands. We are not professionals offering disinterested advice, but friends and parents who have a storehouse of information and experiences to share. Membership costs \$30.00 per year and is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Because we rely so heavily on the energies of our members to make our organization work, we expect each member family to volunteer a few hours each year working on an NPN program or project.

I would like to donate time in the following areas:

- Education
- Publicity
- Graphic design
- New moms groups
- Writing articles for the newsletter
- Set-up or clean-up for Special Events



MOTHER'S AND FATHER'S NAMES \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

CHILDREN'S NAMES AND BIRTHDATES \_\_\_\_\_