

The Rest of the Story

A Two-Part Article Featuring the Voices of Adopted Staff Members

By Kimber Graves

Nothing excites Bethany staff more than visits from recently united adoptive families. From the tender embraces between a mother and her new child, to a father hastily chasing his bobbling toddler down the corridor, witnessing the expansion of families through adoption is a tangible reminder of the innate value each life holds. But the story of adoption does not conclude after the placement is final. Rather, adoption is a lifelong journey, filled with blessings, challenges, and new discoveries along the way.

While nearly a dozen staff members at the Indianapolis office have merged their personal and professional lives by adopting children, four staff members were adopted as infants. Their personal experiences afford them a unique perspective about the services we provide at Bethany. Monisha Mannan, Tara VanderWoude, Jennifer Wolosin, and LuAnn Woodruff recently shared some poignant insights about the significance of adoption. For each, information about their birthfamilies was scarce to non-existent.

“I was told as a child that my birthmother was a teenager,” shares Jennifer, who was adopted at five weeks old. “When I was 12, my parents helped me write a letter to my adoption agency, asking questions that were important to me. In my late twenties, I wrote my adoption agency again, seeking medical information. Though I wasn’t able to receive the medical history I needed, I did learn more about my birthfamily. Of most



Jennifer Wolosin



Monisha Mannan



Tara VanderWoude



LuAnn Woodruff

interest, I discovered that the two previous generations were all African American. I had been raised identifying myself as bi-racial and it seems that I’m not.”

Born in South Korea and adopted at the estimated age of 12 months, Tara had incomplete knowledge of her adoption story, though her parents shared with her the limited facts of which they were aware. “I knew I lived in an orphanage, but that was the extent of it,” she relates. “Having little to no information has caused me to either think little of my past or, at times, to fantasize and wonder: *Was I born to a poor family? Or perhaps*

my Korean parents were wealthy, but my birthmother’s pregnancy had to be hidden for some reason. Was I conceived from two people who loved each other dearly or who only knew one another casually?”

LuAnn, whose adoptive parents took her home directly from the hospital, also grew up without any awareness of her birthfamily. She reflects, “One thought that has always followed me, is: *Who do I look like?* I don’t have any physical resemblance to my adoptive family, and it would have been nice to have a photo or additional information.”

Candid family communication about the reality of adoption created an early sense of safety and security for both Monisha and Jennifer. “I have always known I was adopted,” says Monisha. “I am an advocate for telling children the truth about their origin. Because I was told so early and there was no secrecy surrounding my adoption, I never perceived it to be negative. My parents told me they chose me from all of the other babies and that I was special. I believed that. I have always believed that.”

Jennifer is similarly confident that her parents disclosed all available information known to them. “They were always very supportive about whatever I wanted to do in regard to my identity and my being adopted. They have been phenomenal.”

Though Tara’s parents occasionally discussed the topic of adoption with her, they usually waited for her to open the dialogue. “While I know they parented me how they thought best, I do wish my parents would have initiated conversations,” Tara shares honestly, “thus giving me unspoken permission to ask them anything related to my past. I think it is imperative for adoptive parents to initiate conversations both about adoption and race with their adopted children. Just because a child doesn’t ask about her past does not mean she isn’t thinking about her adoption.”

Raised in an earlier generation that was characterized largely by a “don’t ask, don’t tell” mindset about adoption issues, LuAnn also wishes that her parents had offered more opportunities for discourse about her life story. “They did not discuss it unless I asked,” she remembers. “The situation became uncomfortable when I did ask. I was told only that they didn’t have any information. I have since found my adoption papers, including my birthparents’ names, and I believe they [her parents] knew more than they shared. I wish they had discussed more with me. If I were younger, I might resent them for not sharing more, but I understand the culture I was raised in.”

In spite of her family’s stoic handling of the adoption topic, LuAnn achieved her own sense of resolution in adulthood. “My mother died about 7 years ago,” she relates tenderly, “and at this stage in my life, I miss her too much to be angry.”

...story to be continued in the 2009 Summer *Insider*

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