

God's Children by Adoption

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

—1 JOHN 3:1–3

One of our family's favorite hymns is "Sing Praise to our Creator." It's not the melody but the words that mean so much. In truth it's the phrase "God's children by adoption" that comes "alive" in this household, with seven out of fifteen of us adopted.

"God has *his* ways of bringing children and parents together," I've often told our young. One way is Plan A or "tummy" (as the kids would say). The other is Plan B or adoption. We've been blessed to experience both plans.

"All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:14).

I feel sorry for couples who would eagerly adopt but are prevented because of the astronomical costs and the

scarcity of babies. An anti-adoption mindset convinces millions of unwed mothers each year to abort or keep their babies rather than consider the goodness of adoption.

Certainly adoption isn't for everyone, but we felt led by *Someone* greater than we! It became our vocational call, and we can't imagine what our marriage and lives would have been like had we said no to that call.

"The desire to adopt is like a burning coal in my heart," I would tell my occasionally hesitant husband. The only "burning" he was feeling was in his wallet! Prayer, patience and *persistence* always seemed to bring balance when our family planning visions were not in unison.

Granted, that sense of *vocation* may have escaped us when we were rocking little ones to sleep after nightmares, disciplining erratic behavior—temper tantrums, spitting, biting and throwing food, to name but a few—or stretching a bulging budget to accommodate Catholic school tuition, hearing aids, medical needs, one more set of braces or glasses. But we were hooked.

Our adopted children enriched our lives in many ways. They brought us to our knees and helped us stay *God-centered*. We learned to lean on him for grace and all our needs. Their mere presence reminded us daily of the *real* meaning and purpose of life!

My husband is full Polish, and I come from an Italian background. Our children came from far and near. "It's a mini-United Nations!" our mailman used to say, as we began to blend a variety of colors and cultures, creating our own personal "melting pot." We learned to adjust, adapt and accept each others' backgrounds and biases, not to mention the biggest bugaboo of all: behaviors and temperaments! Our family came to experience with poignancy Saint Paul's words, "There is no longer Jew or

Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

We also encountered prejudice. Etched forever in our minds is the day that our black-skinned son Charlie, then twelve, was beaten up by a gang of white teens while on his daily paper route. After the police left and we gathered in prayer at the dinner table, trying to create an atmosphere of calm, it was Charlie who taught us a lesson in forgiveness. He prayed, "Dear Jesus, please forgive those boys. I know they just don't know any better."


Most of our adopted children were beyond infancy when they came to our home, and most arrived with physical, mental or emotional challenges. In the severe and in the small we saw that we could do little. One child's history of abandonment and abuse prevented him from ever accepting family life and love, no matter how hard we tried. He still reminds us of our human frailty and of the need to continue to rely on God's mercy.

Yes, we had our share of testing and trials—perhaps more than other families simply because of our numbers. Through it all we sensed that God had his eye on our "sparrows." "Even the sparrow finds a home, / and the swallow a nest for herself, / where she may lay her young" (Psalm 84:3).

Psalm 139 reminds us, "It was you who formed my inward parts; / you knit me together in my mother's womb. / I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. / Wonderful are your works; / that I know very well."

In other words, we know that *God makes no mistakes!* There is no such thing as an "unwanted child." God has a purpose and a plan for each of us. We are *all*, as the song says, "God's children by adoption."

What's it like at our house now, with most of the children grown and on their own? Five are married, and we have twelve grandchildren. The graduations, holidays, weddings, special events and Sunday dinners are what gather us together and keep us up-to-date and "united."

Did color, culture or adoption prevent closeness? To the contrary and in spite of the obvious distinctions to outsiders, we *live* and *love* as one family. As one of our little ones once asked, "Which of us are adopted? I forget!" 

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.

—EPHESIANS 1:3-5

A Father's View

I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

—2 CORINTHIANS 6:18

What are a father's feelings and fears regarding the adoption process? The following is an interview with John Kuharski, father of thirteen children, six of whom are adopted:

When you first adopted, you already had two children born to you. Why did you decide to add to your family through adoption?

My first thought at the time was, because there were kids in this world without parents and a home, brothers and sisters. I felt we had the ability to provide for more children, not just financially but also with love and a good moral foundation.

I found out later that this "savior" mentality was only half correct. We weren't just doing something for these kids. *They* were doing something for us!

Through the adoption process my wife and I discovered more about each other. We were able to share the anticipation and excitement, the unknown, the thoughts and feelings of who we are and just why we are doing what we're doing. It was something we were doing together, in total agreement. The adopted kids provided

us an opportunity to look at our own goals and path to the future.

As spouses in our culture were walking out on each other and talking about “me,” we were planning in terms of “US.” There was a wonderful sense of purpose, direction and unity.

What made you feel comfortable with the thought of adopting?

My wife was adopted, and my older sister had an adopted child. But more than that, I believe that all children come from God. Though I didn't plant the seed and my wife didn't conceive and nurture it, we knew God put our adopted children on this earth to be loved and cared for. Both Mary Ann and I felt sure that we could offer that love and care to an adopted child.

Did you have any reservations or second thoughts?

One reservation was financial. Could I provide for a large family adequately, not only when they were young but all the way through to college?

Also, would I be able to spend the amount of time with each of them that a father should? Would I be a good example to them—morally, emotionally and personally—so that they would grow up to become good Catholic men and women?

I wondered if I would love and care for the adopted kids in the same manner as the children who were born from our union. Would I treat any of them differently because they didn't look like me? Would I be as proud to have them in my family?

I remember thinking about our adopted kids' teenage years and wondering, “Will they be comfortable with kids

of the opposite sex and of a different culture when they begin dating and socializing? Will they have the opportunity to marry and have their own families? Will our adoption of them help or hurt?"

What we discovered was just how secure these children are. Our adopted children's dating and social opportunities were just as numerous and "normal" as the other kids'. They chose their friends and dates not by the color of their skin (many had dates with blacks and Asians, as well as whites) but by their code of conduct. Isn't that what every parent wants their children to be able to do?

What was it like to go through the adoption process?

The adoption process is NOT easy; in fact, it is very difficult. There seemed to be endless forms to complete, meetings to attend, waiting and then more waiting. And there were many disappointments along the way, such as when the process was delayed.

The waiting made me think of the child out there who was already born, perhaps living in an orphanage, who should be with a loving family but instead was *waiting* just as we were. The child may have been suffering, lonely, lying for hours in a crib without proper care or loving attention. It made me more determined.

With adoption I felt like a real participant in the whole process. With Mary Ann's pregnancies—as wonderful as they were—I could not experience the feeling of new life inside. I was only an observer during labor and delivery. And I couldn't nurse the baby after the birth! But with our adopted children we went through the "labor and delivery" together. There were the paperwork, the meetings, the waiting, the anticipation, the eagerness and

finally the excitement that the child was finally becoming ours! It was a growing and very moving experience.

Tell us more about the effect adoption had on your relationship with your wife.

I think adopting had a very positive effect on our marriage relationship. In the beginning stages the process involved a lot of discussion: "Should we, or shouldn't we?" "Can we care for and love someone else's child as well as we do our own?" "Can we financially support a larger family?" We shared our innermost feelings and even our fears and frustrations about children and about our goals and plans for the future. These discussions brought us closer together.

As the waiting and delays occurred, there seemed to be an even more determined "unity of spirit" in what we were doing. It was something *WE* were resolved to do, and it would be beneficial to *ALL* of us.

And then, when the child finally came, there was the shared excitement and joy over this precious new member of our family. We shared everything from tears to jokes as we grew to love children who looked unlike those born to us. It was a wonderful and really unexplainable experience.

Did you think about how adoption would affect your other children?

My hope was that our other kids would see the adopted children as their brothers and sisters and not just as people staying at our house for a period of time, such as in foster care. I was always *amazed* at how well they received the adopted child, treating him or her as part of the family and sharing toys and belongings. In some respects I think our

kids adapted more quickly than we did. We were too concerned with how all of it was going to fit together.

I believe the children's adjustment happened so naturally because Mary Ann and I shared the adoption process and procedure with them, so they were involved from the beginning.

Was there a concern about how your adopting would affect the extended family?

There was some concern, especially on my wife's side of the family. Her parents felt that because we had our *own* children, why adopt—especially children from other parts of the world. They accepted our first two adoptions but had problems with our third because of the darkness of his skin. We didn't tell them about the last three adoptions until the child came. It was easier on us that way. We thought it would be difficult for them to reject a cute little face, which it was!

One family member told her children that our adopted kids were *not* their cousins. She didn't want her kids to become friends with our adopted ones. She got her wish, but she and her family were the losers, not us. Racism does exist and we had a taste of it—from the inside and out!

My mother would always say, "You guys are crazy!" when we told her about our plans to adopt another. Of course, she also thought we were "crazy" when we told her we were going to have another biological child. In either case she *always* was there for us and accepted each the minute he or she arrived.

There was some concern on my part about how our neighbors would accept our adopting children of a minor-

ity race and whether they would allow their children to socialize with ours.

And would our children's classmates accept them? As it worked out, our adopted children had as many friends and opportunities as the others. Some even had more just because of their outgoing natures and involvements.

What was it like when your adopted child arrived? What were your feelings?

With Tina, our first adopted child, the first feeling was "Is she *really* coming?" We had waited so long, and there were so many delays.

There was a sense of mystery. What would she look like? What would she bring to our lives?

There were feelings of excitement. Many of our friends and family members were there when Tina arrived. There was such joy at welcoming home this little one, truly God's child.

Then there was a sense of accomplishment. We really did what we said we were going to do! She was now *ours* for the rest of our lives! Wow! Now the next step was to carry this out successfully!

And there were also the fears: "What did we do?" "Did we do the right thing?" "Can we be good parents to this little one?"

Interestingly, even after we became "experienced" as adoptive parents, those same feelings occurred all over again with each child. Each child brought indescribable mystery, excitement and, yes, fear!

Was the adjustment to a new child easier or more difficult than you expected?

The adjustment was definitely easier than expected. Yes, there were trying days with doctor visits, food adjustments and emotional outbursts, but nothing was intolerable or permanent. Our adopted children seemed to bond quickly, first to the other children and then to us. Probably it took longer for them to bond with my wife and me because they had been taken care of by various adults who were then taken out of their lives, which weakened their ability to attach and trust.

Our son Charlie was five and a half years old when he arrived. He was very dark-skinned, as compared with our white and Asian kids. I'll never forget the first bath I gave him. He really looked dark in that white tub! It seemed at first strange and then so fleeting, as it was only a matter of days before we were absolutely in love with him.

I remember Charlie's first Christmas pageant at St. Charles School. He was an angel, and Mary Ann dressed him in an old white sheet tied at the waist. She made white wings with gold around the edges and a halo for his head. His last words to us before he went on stage with his class were "Now, look for me in the back row. I'll be the angel on the left side of the room."

How could we miss him? He was the *only* black child in the pageant that year. He didn't get it, but Mary Ann and I loved it!

What about the risk in adopting those with "special needs"? Were their problems less or more serious than expected, and how did you handle them?

"Special needs" can be broken into three areas: physical, mental and emotional. Many of the physical conditions were easily rectified because of the medical and educa-

tional resources available to us. Some of the children needed extensive dental care; others, hearing aids.

The mental needs were also a concern. We had access to special education resources and tutors to assist with learning disabilities and motor coordination.

The emotional needs were sometimes more serious and difficult, because you can't get into children's heads and understand or *fix* what they are thinking. Therapy can be long and involved, and we learned that it doesn't always help.

There is a sense of "mission" and accomplishment that comes with adopting a child with "special needs" and helping remove some of the hurdles in his or her life. Even though this involved doctors and money with varying results, we felt that it was a unique privilege.

What about disappointments? One of your adopted children, after a five-year struggle on your part, failed to bond with the family. Was there a lesson there?

Before this adoption we naïvely believed that all it takes is love and faith for *any* adoption to be successful. Love will *always* cure and heal hurts, we thought. We were wrong.

It seemed that the more we showed our love and support to one of our children, the more he would lash out, getting into deeper trouble at home, at school and in the neighborhood. He was fighting and stealing. We couldn't trust him to behave properly around our other children—or *any* small children. We were heartsick.

We sought psychiatric care for him and counseling for us, in an attempt to heal the wounds his acting up had caused. He was hospitalized for mental health problems twice, for months at a time, and eventually was court-ordered to a shelter for young boys. We stuck with him,

hoping that he would finally believe, "I am loved. They are sticking with me and believe I can change and be good."

Yet his threats to the children and even to Mary Ann only increased. This child seemed to literally recoil at the prospect of having an emotional bond with others.

We now know that not *all* children are adoptable by families. Some have been too wounded and scarred to adapt to family life. Others, if they are older and have abuse in their history, should *never* be placed with a family of younger children who could become victims.

After five *long years* and his repeated threats, we finally relented to this boy's request and relinquished adoption. He was placed in a group foster home, and he remained there for approximately three years before he was legally on his own.

The lessons here are obvious:

- ✎ Always deal with a reputable orphanage and agency. Obviously the one in his homeland was not.
- ✎ Always get as complete a history as possible with regard to an older child.
- ✎ Every day is important in a child's life. The older the child, the less opportunity adopting parents have to share, shape and love. The younger the child, the greater the opportunity to bond and belong to one another.

There were other disappointments and hurdles we could not overcome. Still, we knew we were doing what God had called us to do. We planted the seeds of faith and love in each one. The rest is in God's hands.