

# Looking Back Over the Landscape of Adoption

## by a Reunited First Father

### Part 1: The Landscape

People use 'Life is a Journey' as a common and powerful metaphor that helps them understand their lives, and explain what to expect to others. In the same spirit one can talk about the landscapes that journey passes through, in an attempt to provide some signposts for those who are not as far 'down the road'. Of course, everyone's journey is her/his own and (with any luck) will never pass through some of the rougher terrain that others may have found.

I, and many others, have found ourselves shuttled off to the land of closed adoption with little preparation, no roadmaps, no advice on the dangerous bits. Indeed, many of us are actively misled by others or by our own needs. Also, many starting out on this particular journey, don't consider that they are taking others along with them and that the journey will ultimately end with the emergence of the adult adoptee.

The following is offered in the spirit of capturing, for your use (or not), what I and many others have found, looking back, to be a good path to take. One commonly traveled with success and with a minimum of risk.

Sometimes individuals feel either in control or powerless in this landscape. There are also certainly areas where one side or the other of the triad can be ambushed or get lost if they tread off the beaten path. Consider that power shifts over time, ultimately residing with the adult adoptee. If, at that time, the adoptee has been led well in the journey, *all* will prosper. Time is a great leveler and all parents (whether involved in adoption or not) lose their children to adulthood.

### Part 2: Where Others Have Trod

The beaten path through the landscape of closed adoption:

- The adoptee becomes the child of the adoptive parents through a decision often made voluntarily by their first parents.
- The adoptive parents will be the adoptee's parents forever.
- They will be that adoptee's guardian throughout childhood.
- The adoptee will experience no other parenting and will always see the adoptive parents as, simply, their parents.
- The adoptee has another mother and father, in addition to their parents.
- All of these adults are part of the adoptee and involved in who she/he is and who she/he will become. Adoption does not change this.
- In many instances, the adoptee's first mother/father consciously gave the parents those things listed above.
- The adoptee's second mother and father actively sought those things listed above.
- The adoptee's first mother/father did not agree to more than that.
- The second mother/father can not claim more - this is not an issue of power, it is an observation of fact.

- All these adults agreed to a closed adoption, because they believed or were convinced that was the best way to parent the adoptee for all concerned.
- The adoptee did not have a voice, but will form an opinion.
- Some of the adults may have other reasons for closed adoption. In this case, the adoptee needs you to set these reasons aside. If you don't she/he will either push them aside or become personally diminished, hurt, and fail to be whole.
- The adoptee, as all people do, will form their own opinion of their life and the roles people played and continue to play in it.
- The adoptive parents are not the adoptee's ancestors and never will be. Adoption does not change this.
- The adoptee will (and should) seek to know those ancestors. She/he will probably strive towards (and succeed at forming) a loving relationship with them.
- All involved can be included and all can be friends, proud of the adoptee and proud of collaborating on her/his success and the success of your individual adult relationships.
- The adoptee *does* have two families. Childhood will be spent with one. Her/his life will be spent as she chooses. The other half of their family will probably be broad enough to include many people that will value the adoptee and will be valued in return.
- These relationships across a broad, extended family are no more (or less) threatening to the adoptive parents than those the adoptee might have within their second family.
- The adoptee will be happier and healthier if these truths are known and seen to be comfortable.
- The adoptive parents are responsible, as all parents are, to expose their child to the truth.
- The adoptee, as all children do, will assess their experience of parenting based, in part, on how well the truths above are dealt with.

Let me suggest that the statements above do not assert intent, rather they observe fact. Adoption is very poorly understood and, worse, often poorly presented, even by those accountable (or at least, who should be accountable) to explain it in a manner sufficient for the responsible adults (initially the first mother and father and then the second) to form an informed consent.

### Part 3: How It Could Be

It is not the agencies' or social workers' role to make decisions or to guide a decision to a predetermined outcome. It is their responsibility to explain the truths of adoption. They should be required to explain what will be lost and what will be gained. They should also be required to explain what will **not** be lost or gained. They should be liable to prove that they have ensured informed consent without bias. They should be liable to deliver basic services (such as non-identifying information exchange) as well as any other service committed to as part of the adoption.

Here are some closing thoughts:

- Future success and happiness is not tied immutably to the factors most often reviewed in making an adoption decision (wealth, stability, two parents,

advantage, etc). Families with those things **do** fail, and those without them **do** succeed.

- First parents **will** remain the child's ancestor - they can't change that, and they should not deny or hide from that.
- First parents will lose the experience of their offspring's childhood and the ability to influence their parenting. If they agree to a closed adoption, they may lose all *knowledge* of these events as well. If that is undesirable, they should not make that choice, period. This should be agreed to and documented in advance.
- Second parents will gain a parenting experience. They will raise a person. They will have a parent<>child relationship with that person forever, whatever they make of it.
- Second parents will not gain a sole descendant as if they were fertile. They will become part of an extended family to which the adoptee is the tie and a permanent member - even if they choose not to exercise this fact. If this is undesirable, they should not adopt. This should be agreed to and documented in advance.
- Adoptees will not remain children forever, and adoption has no claim on adults. The agency should be contracted, in writing, to act as an information trust on their behalf, and be sued out of existence should they fail in this role.
- The responsible adults do not need to accept the views or practices of the agencies. If a particular agency will not agree in writing to what the parties would like, then no agreement should be made.

Adoption can be rewarding, wonderful, satisfying, productive, loving, and many other things... but these things must accrue to *all* the involved parties in an inclusive and unbiased fashion. Stereotypes about first or second families or the children they share should be as offensive as those about race. While there are many of good will involved in assisting adoption, there are also bigots who should be eliminated. While there is much light in the population at large, there is also ignorance.

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