



PARC NEWSLETTER

FOR ADOPTIVE AND GUARDIANSHIP FAMILIES

Region 5

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Journey of a Thousand Steps

By Rachel Mooney, PARC Worker

All I wanted as a kid was to have a family that loved me. I remember vividly the day I was taken from my birth family and placed into care. I thought the family I was initially placed with was going to be my new family, and I loved them very much. I remember watching hockey with the dad, talking to the mom, and playing with the kids as if they were my family. But after two years, I was brought to another home for what I told was a temporary stay. That placement eventually became permanent.

I was with this “permanent” family for a total of nine years. They adopted me and my two younger sisters after two years. I was so happy to be a part of a family. The problem was that I did not know how to be part of a family like this one. They lived in a nice house and were vegetarians. There were more rules than I could remember at first, yet I wanted badly to follow them all so that these parents would love me and keep me forever. I learned quickly when they asked me a question, there was always a right answer and a right way to say it. I never seemed to be able to do it just the way they wanted and soon even forgot what the real answer was in my search to please them.

I spent years trying to become the perfect child that they could love forever. My younger sisters had different problems. They had issues they could not control and were treated horribly for not behaving as expected. We were removed from this “permanent home” when I was 17 due to physical and emotional abuse.

Instead of agreeing to help, the parents decided it was easier to say goodbye to us all. I could not understand it. They talked about unconditional love, but I knew this could not be it. For years I thought it was my fault. If I had just kept my mouth shut and obeyed more. If I could have just convinced my sisters to eat rice without throwing up or



to get their school work right on the first try, then we wouldn't be without a family again.

After a few foster homes during my senior year of school and the summer that followed, I joined the Army instead of going to Michigan State like I had planned. I had to get away. Through all of this period, I had connected with a family from my church who let me stay with them before my enlistment. Over the course of the following year, I turned to the family a few times when I needed help and they were always there for me. When I came back to Michigan, they continued to be there for me and eventually earned my trust. They treated my children like their grandchildren and were kind and understanding of the many different emotional issues I was struggling to deal with.

They adopted me at the age of twenty-five and legally became my parents. Even with their commitment, I still struggle with feeling wanted every day. I grieve over my lost childhood. I hurt for my sisters and the horrors they endured as children. I hurt for every adopted child trying to adjust to another family, trying not to feel like an unwanted outsider.

Being adopted can cause feelings of isolation, deepen sibling rivalries due to jealous feelings of not being lucky enough to be born into a family equipped to care for a child, and make a child wonder if they are truly wanted or loved. However, parents who will never give up, give hope to the most bruised and broken hearts. Hope is essential for life.



IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

- PAGE 1: Journey of a Thousand Steps
- PAGE 2: Life with Siblings; Quote of the Month
- PAGE 3: Dealing with Sibling Rivalry; Three Strategies
- PAGE 4: Meeting and Support Group Listings; Three Strategies Continued Story; Contact Information

In Association With



Life with Siblings

Thoughts from Two Brothers

My Siblings

By T. C. Lopez, Social Worker

When I was 14 years old, my family gained two new members: my sister who was 2 years old and my brother who was 7 years old. Unlike the arrival of myself or my other three siblings, they arrived on an airplane flight instead of coming home from the hospital. They spoke no English and had spent the previous year of their lives in an orphanage where they were the only family either of them had. I won't go into how they ended up there because this article is about siblings, however their birth mother made what she believed was the best choice she could.

My family always lived in predominantly white areas, which became even more pronounced after my parents divorced and my mom and siblings moved to a rural town where my brother and sister were the only diversity in their schools. However, within my family there were no distinctions drawn. My adopted siblings were no more or less a part of my family because of how they joined it. I remember a couple of sad occasions when a relative would make a remark about my mom's "real children," though. My mom always defended all of her children, and she said we were all her "real" children. The way she stood up to these comments was important to all of us.

All of my siblings and myself have had challenges and struggles throughout life. My adopted siblings had different challenges, not just from the other four of us, but from each other, too. As often happened with my adopted brother, particularly in his adolescence, he got into trouble in ways that perplexed and frustrated my parents; yet, they never gave up.

Like most families, mine isn't perfect and we have our tensions and dysfunctions. Some of us don't always get along, and we sometimes argue at holidays when we are all together. At the same time, regardless of our differences or how we joined our family, we all belong. We all know that we are an important part of the Lopez family and that we always will be.

Living as an Adopted Child

By Christian Lopez, Adoptee

Each person has his or her own set of struggles. Mine happened to be living in a big family while looking different from the majority of them. It has not always been easy being the adopted child, especially in a family of six children. As a child, I was picked on at school. Kids can be very mean and that is definitely something that I experienced firsthand. People to this day still like to pick on me for my ethnicity.

There was often this harsh reminder that I was not like the rest of my family, excluding my birth sister who was adopted with me. My adopted family is Spanish, but they look like the standard Caucasian family. They have light skin and sandy blonde to brown hair. My biological sister and I have dark brown skin and jet-black hair. These differences were hard to reconcile with the outside world, but they did not discourage me from accepting my adopted family as a family and vice versa. Whenever I was picked on, I always had my family to have my back and look out for me.

It really should not matter what your family looks like as long as you have their love and support. If I were to give one piece of advice, it would be that blood does not determine family. A person can have the same genes as you but he or she could be the furthest thing from family. A family is determined by the love and support a person gets even when he or she is wrong. It's not wrong to want to know where you came from, but it's also not wrong to love who you are and the people that made you that way.

PARC would like to thank both T.C. and Christian for sharing their stories with us this month! We would also like to wish T.C. the best of luck as he moves on to complete his Master's degree. During his time with PARC, he displayed tremendous spirit, energy, determination, commitment in his work with families. Thank you, T.C.! You'll be missed!

Quote of the Month:

"A brother is a friend who was once a bother."

— Author Unknown



Dealing with Sibling Rivalry

By Rachel Kornilakis, PARC Team, Foster and Adoptive Parent

If sibling rivalry were an Olympic sport, my three adopted children would all be medal contenders. I can just see them in my mind standing up on the podiums with the American flag waiving overhead as the National Anthem plays. First, there would be shoving and elbowing; then fist fighting would break out over which one *really* deserved the top medal. Yep, that's my kids, and I can joke about it from time-to-time but, as you probably know, the struggle is real.

All my kids have lived in other homes that “didn't want them.” That's how they truly feel and no amount of comforting or therapy can change those deep rooted feelings of loss and rejection. I know these past experiences are at the very core of all the sibling rivalry as well as many of our other struggles. That knowledge makes it a little easier to deal with, but it doesn't make it easy.

I am always looking for ways to redirect their behaviors, and it is important to me that redirections and interventions support our attachment and encourage connection. So I was excited to find “The Get Along Jar” from www.kidspot.com.au in my Pinterest search. I'm not super crafty, so I didn't make an actual jar; however, I did use the list of activities the website provided with the craft--and they've worked like a charm. The activities are appropriate for kids of all ages. I've used the “Say 3 Nice Things about Each Other” and the “Write an Apology Note” activities several times now, and they are great to defuse tension.

For directions on “The Get Along Jar” and other helpful activities, visit: www.kidspot.com.au/put-a-stop-to-sibling-bickering-make-a-get-along-jar/



Image from www.kidspot.com.au



Three Strategies for Parenting Kids Close in Age

Excerpts from Amy McCready



Nationally recognized parenting expert Amy McCready is the Founder of Positive Parenting Solutions and a bestselling author. As a “recovering yeller” and a Certified Positive Discipline Instructor, Amy is a champion of positive parenting techniques for happier families and well-behaved kids.

1) **Fill their ‘attention buckets’ separately.** Kids want and need our individualized time and attention.

All kids want to find their very own spot in your heart and in your family's dynamic that is exclusively theirs. To give kids the emotional connection they crave and a secure sense of belonging in your family, be sure to spend individualized time with each child on a daily basis.

When you begin the individual “special time,” your kids may want to encroach on each other's time out of curiosity, sheer habit, or the fact that they don't want their sibling to have “alone” time with you. (That sibling jealousy is the precise reason your one-on-one time is so essential!) Fortunately, with a little training and patience, they'll come to love and appreciate the “just me” time with you and it will help keep some of that competitive spirit at bay.

Continued on Page 4



Region 5 Meetings and Support Groups

Build connections with and get support from others who truly understand!

In addition to adult meetings, PARC youth groups for older children and childcare for younger ones are available at most meetings! Please RVSP to Rachel_Kornilakis@judsoncenter.org.

Brighton Family Connections Meeting

Meets from 6:30-8:30 pm the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of every month. Potluck dinner to start the meeting; please bring a dish to pass if you are able. Location: 2 | 42 Community Church, 7526 Grand River Ave., Brighton, 48114

Fabulous Foster and Adoption Group

Meets from 6-8 pm the 1st Monday of each month and starts with a potluck; please bring a dish to pass if you are able. Offered in conjunction with the Fabulous Foster and Adoption Group. Nominal fee for childcare. Location: Summers-Knoll Elementary School, 2203 Platt Rd., Ann Arbor, 48108

Jackson Family Connections Meeting

Meets from 6-8 pm the 3rd Thursday of each month and starts with a potluck dinner; please bring a dish to pass if you are able. Location: Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1505 W. Michigan Ave., Jackson, 49202

Kalamazoo County Support Group

Meets from 6:30-8:30 pm the 4th Tuesday of each month. Offered in conjunction with the Adoptive Family Support Network. (AFSN contact sgarcia@afsn.org). Location: St. Ambrose Church, 1628 E. G Ave., Parchment, 49004

Lunch at the PARC

Meets from 12-1 pm the 3rd Wednesday of each month. Bring a brown bag lunch; we'll provide drinks! Youth groups/childcare are not provided, but very young children may attend if you can watch them. Location: Judson Center, 3840 Packard Rd., Ste. 170, Ann Arbor, 48108

For a complete list of events, visit the calendar page on our website. Additional activities and resources are listed there as well!
<http://www.parc-judson.org/calendar>

Three Strategies - Cont.

2. **Avoid labels.** Our society seems fixated on giving everyone a label. Old, young, tough, shy, successful, etc. Those labels might seem harmless but being compared to others, even the person closest to you or the one that looks like you – can be an ego blow and a fire starter for a feud.

Even good labels like smart, or talented are hard titles to live up to. What's more, a positive label for one child automatically implies the other holds the opposite label. (If you're the "studious one" – I must be the "slacker.") It's best to leave the labels out of your conversations and gently remind others to do the same. Every kid has attributes that make them unique and special – focus on nurturing the whole of what makes your kids amazing rather than the one feature that creates comparison.

3. **Unique vs. Unit.** It's easy to treat siblings close in age as a unit and it's certainly more time effective. But the package mentality is not always what's best for them. As you spend daily one-on-one time with your kids you'll see their unique talents and contributions more and more clearly. Encourage and nurture their individual interests. Help your children recognize the differences in each other and celebrate them.

Contact Us

Please feel welcome to contact the PARC office in your region, visit our website for information, or connect with us via social media!

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