

From Adult Adoptees to Transcultural Adoptive Families – Listening to the Messages and Taking Action!

By Arleta James, PCC

Adult adoptees are no longer the exception to the many voices in adoption that can offer adoptive parents essential tools for success! This article highlights two of the many adult adoptees who blog about their experiences of growing up as transcultural adoptees in American society. They also comment on the adoption process as well. Their thoughts, insights and feelings need to be a message to all of us in the adoption community! Once having heard the message, we need to incorporate it into daily family life and adoption ‘best practice.’



My Mind On Paper

<http://mymindonpaper.wordpress.com/>

Kevin D. Hoffman is the author of this blog as well as his memoir, *Growing Up Black In White*. Kevin’s autobiographical information includes,

Born into the racially charged Detroit of 1967 to a white mother and a black father, Kevin was placed into foster care and then adopted by a white minister and his wife, the parents of three biological children. Hofmann’s memoir reveals the racial tensions, the difficulties of feeling neither black nor white, his family’s loving support, and his struggles to define and embrace his own identity as he grew to be a man. This is a story of hope and promise, and

1 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

how we are able to define ourselves not through the racism and judgments of a challenging society, but through our own sense of self-respect and personal identity.

Kevin's blog reflects similar content. For example, in his post [Advice From An Adoptee To Mom](#), Kevin states,

*Sometimes I wonder about my biological/first mother and father. Do you think we could talk about them sometime? I have so many questions but I don't want to hurt you or upset by asking them. Again what's ignored gets translated in to **unimportant**. What I ignore shouldn't be translated in to unimportant. If I don't ever bring it up, it doesn't mean I don't want to talk about them or that they don't affect me. I am unsure how to bring them up or if you will be comfortable talking about them. Since you are the adult you set the comfort level.*

So frequently, adoptive parents operate off this assumption. I hear, "He is fine with his adoption. He never talks about it." It is fabulous to "hear" an adult adoptee validate what I always say, "He isn't talking about his adoption because he doesn't know how. We have to give him the words." Again, we need to "listen" to this message and "act".

Kevin also lets us know that [Culture Isn't Chicken, Tacos or Spring Rolls](#). While offering transcultural adoptees multi-cultural toys, art, books, and so on is important, it is more essential to meet and be-friend people of your child's culture. He provides his Cultural Connection Plan in his article [Intentional Relationships Lead to Vital Connections](#).

Harlow's Monkey

http://harlowmonkey.typepad.com/harlows_monkey/

This blog is authored by Jae Ran Kim. She writes of herself,

I am a social worker who doesn't believe that social work is just about "saving" people or "helping" people. Social work is about reform and empowerment, not about social control. I am attempting to be an agent of change from within the institutional structures that historically have been used to discriminate against those our society does not value. This blog was born in March of 2006 as a way to put down my thoughts about international and transracial adoption, foster care, race and social work from a point of view that is often missing - the adoptee themselves.

Jae Ran's candor is especially appreciated. A nice slice of it is found in her posts, Adoption Poster Child and Adoptee vs. Adoptee. In these writings she questions the adoption community's trait of putting forth success stories and "happy" stories. She makes clear there is another viewpoint to consider. There are struggles and challenges. A mixture is essential to acknowledge all members of our community, and to operate in a truly best practice manner.

2

Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

[Adoption Poster Child](#)

[Adoptee vs. Adoptee](#)

Her post titled [Fear](#), is essential reading for all adoptive parents. Some excerpts are below,

My own parents have never been able to talk about the elephant in the room, but I know that the idea of losing me was the reason they were unable to talk to me about my adoption. The sad thing is that by not talking to me about their fear of losing me, they forced me to find other people to process my adoption with and caused me to segregate my life. Thus, as I began to get my poetry and essays published, I never told them. As I began to get involved with Korean adoptee organizations and activist groups, I did not tell them. I didn't talk about my feelings about traveling to Korea. I didn't tell them I was doing a birth family search.

The reasons I didn't tell them these things was because I was protecting their feelings. Because I knew that in our relationship, their feelings were more important to protect than mine.

I didn't and couldn't understand how much my parents loved me and how much they thought they might lose until I had children of my own. Yet, the job of a parent is to give their children all the tools they can so as adults they can be productive and creative and loving and contributing members of society...

I think many adoptive parents make the mistake of fearing their adopted child's search to explain their past. They are afraid that if their adopted child finds birth parents that they'll love them (first parents) better or maybe in total. That they will lose their place as #1 in that child's life. Yet we fully believe that parents are capable of loving more than one child and we don't stop people from having more than one child because they "might" love their second child more!

Adoption reform can never truly happen until those who control adoption - agencies, the government and adoptive parents - get real about what adoption truly does. Adoption is not just about "building families." It's about the most traumatic event in a child's life - separation from his or her first parents - and the placement of that child into another family. Adoptive parents MUST face the fact that while they are the parents in charge of raising this kid to adulthood, that child still has a history and a story and a family that exists outside the adoptive parent's scope of control.

3

Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

Another message about honesty and truthful disclosure between adoptee, parent and the adoption community, commingled with the adoptee's need to seek out others of the same culture. What action can you take in your own home in response to Jan Rae's words?

4 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)