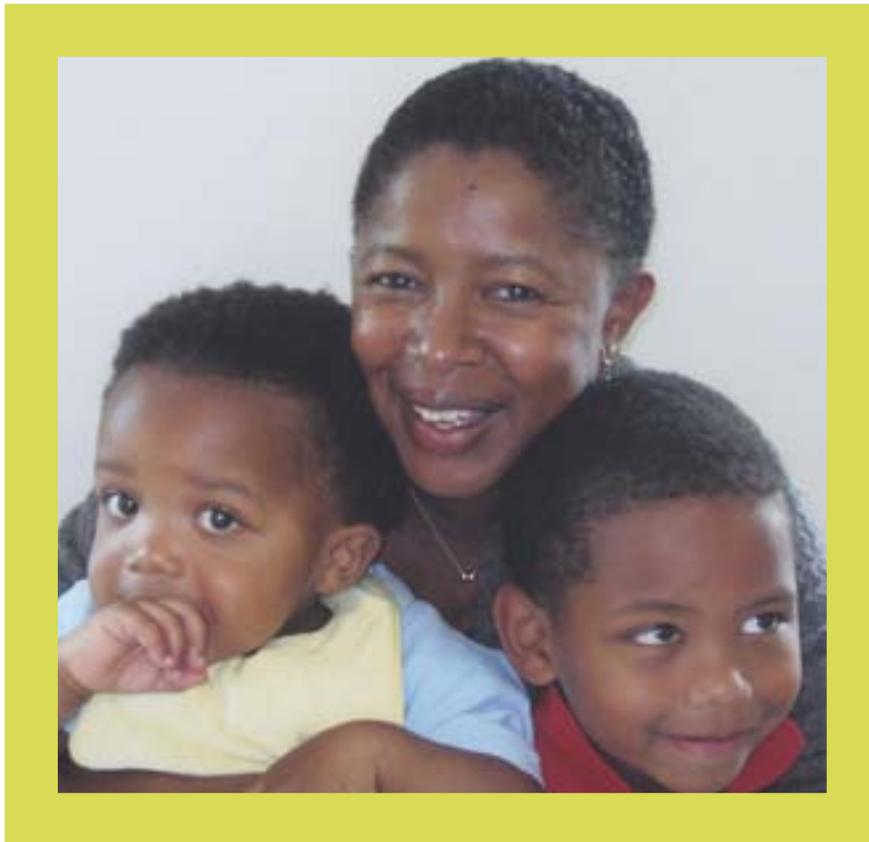


Pact Family Stories

Carnegie & Sons



Annette Carnegie is a self-described “spreadsheet person.” Once she identifies a goal, she works toward it methodically, doing extensive research and weighing her options. She brought these skills to bear when she decided to become a single mother through adoption, an experience that was both dream-fulfilling and eye-opening.

Annette was working as an attorney at a high-powered law firm in San Francisco when she decided she was ready to become a mother. She herself was adopted by members of her extended family in Jamaica, so adoption was a familiar option. As an adopted person, she wanted to work with an organization that treated all members of the adoption triad with respect. As a person of color,

she wanted to work with an organization that did active outreach to people of color as potential adoptive parents. Her research led her to Pact, where she felt the staff prepared her for adoption with thoughtful, provocative questions and the right mix of support and self-sufficiency.

After completing her paperwork, homestudy, and “Dear Birth Mother” letter, Annette settled in for the wait, which stretched over many months. During support group meetings, she bonded with another single mother anxiously awaiting a match—then watched enviously as her new friend showed up with a baby in her arms. Suddenly, while she was in the midst of a trial, she got the call. She had been matched with a little boy, born

a week earlier and living in foster care in Chicago. His birth mother had asked an agency there to find him an adoptive family—her only stipulation was that the parent(s) be African American.

Annette frantically gathered baby gear while working with Pact to figure out how to shoehorn her travel to Illinois into her non-negotiable trial schedule. When Annette arrived in Chicago, she was amazed to find that the local agency was entirely staffed by African Americans—yet they had no African American adoptive parents as clients.

Within just a couple of days, Annette was headed home with her son Daniel in her arms. She was grateful that he had been cared for by an experienced, loving foster mother. Annette did not meet Daniel's birth mother, but six months later the birth mother sent her a letter, and they have been in contact ever since, communicating via letters, emails, and a few phone calls. Daniel's birth mother has since finished college and is now pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education. Annette has been able to ask Daniel's birth mother questions about her family medical history and get her expert advice on Daniel's developmental progress.

An only child herself, Annette always wanted to have more one than child. By the time Daniel was three, she was in spreadsheet mode again, planning how she could manage work and childcare with two kids. She began searching for a less high-pressure job, and contacted Pact again. Just months after her file was activated, while negotiating a new job, she got word that she had been matched with a baby who was due to be born within days.

This time both birth parents were involved. They were quite clear that they were seeking an open adoption with a family of color, and had grown frustrated with the agency they were working with, who kept matching them with white families and/or families of color who wanted a closed adoption. Finally they contacted Pact themselves, who connected them with Annette.

Within days, she was on the red-eye to Florida, where she was able to witness the birth of her son Eli. Ten days later, the two of them returned to San Francisco, where soon Daniel was proclaiming, "Thank you for getting my baby brother, I love him so much!"

Eli's birth parents want to maintain regular communication, and Annette has worked with them to establish realistic expectations. She sends them letters and pictures, and together they are deciding when a visit will happen. She understands that their pressing need for contact stems in part from their experience in a system that was not respectful of their needs and left them feeling powerless.

When asked if she worried about the economic inequity between her and her children's birth parents, Annette made clear that because her own family has struggled with poverty, she is experienced in setting boundaries about what kind of support she can or cannot provide—a perspective shared by many African Americans who have risen from impoverished backgrounds and worked hard to achieve professional success and financial security.

Annette and her boys have settled into a busy, happy life. Annette gets help with childcare from a nanny and babysitter, and Daniel is now attending preschool (as well as swimming, soccer, and karate lessons). Because the African American population in San Francisco is relatively small, and her family is not nearby, Annette has joined Jack and Jill to make sure her sons have regular opportunities to interact with other African American children. She says she does not "flog" their identities as African Americans or as adoptees, but rather makes both a natural part of life.

Annette acknowledges that despite all her planning and preparation, some aspects of parenthood emerged unexpectedly. As she says, "People come to you...a community develops around your child." To any woman who is considering single motherhood, she says, "It is an incredibly enriching experience...you have so much to offer!"