

What, me worry? or How I Learned to Embrace My Inner Worrier

by Robin Lisa Sewell

The world is divided into two groups: those who worry and those who don't. My husband Chris, and I are definitely worriers. We have divided the duties of worrying about life in two so that we can share the burden. I tend to worry about political things, the state of the planet, and such, while Chris tends to worry about how his New York Mets are doing, monitors my San Diego Padres, and worries about other issues such as whether our cats enjoy their life with us. The fact that we worry about completely different things has worked well for us for more than 20 years. Deciding to adopt, however, put a new spin on our old friend. With the adoption journey, we were clearly in our element. Here was a process set up to make even the most optimistic person dizzy with anxiety. We thought it might overwhelm us, given the vast amount to worry about, but the long, drawn out process gave a natural structure to our worry.

We began the process worrying about our age, since we were in our late thirties when we decided that we were ready for children. We worried about our "Dear Expectant Parents" letter and all the forms we had to fill out. What was the last book we each read? Does a Star Trek novel make us sound like nerds? The last movie we liked? Do we sound like bad parents if the movie we really loved was "Bad Santa"? Maybe we should just write "Finding Nemo". How many pictures of our cats and rabbits are too many? Maybe we should add just one more.

For the home study I had my poor husband add safety features everywhere. At least two smoke alarms, CO alarms, fire extinguishers, and escape ladders covered every square inch. Naturally, our social worker seemed not to notice. We worried about the questions she would ask, then worried about the answers we gave her.

Then the true waiting began and while short, that time was nerve-wracking. We debated whether to assemble a nursery, researched each item of baby gear until we could argue the pros and cons of each stroller design in our sleep, and knew the price of baby formula at every store in a 10 mile radius. My sister alternated between awe and laughter at the amount of data I'd collected. We were quickly matched with a beautiful young girl whose baby was due to arrive in about 10 days. Of course, she went into labor early and I dropped everything to rush to meet her. What's funny is that I can't even remember the flight. I'm sure that I worried for 3.5 hours to Chicago, but it's all a blank. I just remember meeting her birthmother and family, marveling at how beautiful everyone was. It wasn't until they placed my daughter in the car with me that I began to worry. We had a lovely one-way discussion about how I knew nothing at all and she really needed to be nice to me. I do know that the next day was the longest day that I'd ever experienced-waiting for the call from the social worker that was visiting her mother. I tried to guard my heart as everyone suggests, but it's so hard when there's this little one designed by nature to grab your heart. I dealt with this by dressing her in basic white t-shirts. Once we received the call that her first mother had signed, I dressed her in the cutest outfit I had and we went out for a nice stroll along Michigan Avenue. It was there that I worried about whether she was warm enough, even in the 90 degree temperatures and high humidity.

The post placement visits were less nerve-wracking, mostly because I was well beyond sleep deprived. Working full-time with a new baby, well, was challenging to say the least. There were many things to worry about between placement and finalization, including our daughter's birthfather contacting us for the first time. Fortunately I had people help me to see that this was a

great thing. He wanted what we wanted, and everything has worked out. Finalization went smoothly and we are now an official family. More importantly, the finalization gave us permission to stop worrying about Christiane's adoption and start worrying about the next adoption.

As a control freak and first class worrier, I developed a few ideas to cope as I made my way through this process. Hopefully these will make the next journey a tad smoother. I learned that the loss of control in this process is what is most unnerving. After filling out the paperwork, we had nothing to do but wait and "prepare". We felt that we were floating adrift in the sea, waiting to be scooped up and paired with a birthfamily.

Oddly enough, I found that worrying gave me some feeling of control. Worrying led to researching, which led to articulating the worst-case scenario, and validated my feelings by anchoring them in reality. Once I confronted my darkest fears, I could then move on to dealing with them.

Before we began this process we read everything we could get our hands on, reading more than 20 books and endless articles on adoption, adoptive parenting, birthparents and adoptees. Pact helpfully provided many of those articles. We took our time filling out the many forms, using this as an opportunity for introspection. Even though we were not getting any younger, we decided this would happen on our timetable. We couldn't significantly speed up the process, but we could slow it down when we needed time.

During this time, we focused on what we could control. There were things we couldn't control such as exactly when we would receive "the call", but some things were up to us. We felt empowered by controlling these small things. Before our home study was completed,

we refused to prepare a nursery, feeling it was "bad karma". Of course we then had to hastily complete the nursery after our daughter's birth. We restricted knowledge of our impending adoption. Rather than risk the constant barrage of questions ("have you heard anything?" "When are you getting a baby?"), we took an unusual tack: we told almost no one what we had planned. This allowed us to worry in peace. We might have our own anxieties, but we didn't have to deal with other people, however well intentioned. Our employers knew, as did my younger sister and our friends who wrote recommendations. Everyone else knew nothing. We missed out on a baby shower, but we gained some much needed privacy and sanity. I also found a group of adoptive parents online in whom I was able to confide, to share my hopes, dreams and nightmares.

My advice is to take control when you can. This means something very different for everyone. We didn't let anyone push, rush, or pressure us. The best advice that we received during this whole journey was that there were babies out there. Taking our time and making the best decisions for our family would not change that reality. If you find yourself worrying, find a way to articulate and validate that worry. This is a worrisome process filled with risk for adoptive parents, birth parents and adoptees. Give yourself permission to wallow in that worry for a while. Do what you need to do to make it through to the end. You may find that you're more superstitious, more obsessive, more introspective, than you originally thought, but that's okay. It's about making a peaceful space in a hurricane of worry. Now that our adoption has finalized, we can get back to worrying about the important stuff. For me, that means worrying about everything including whether the relationship we have with our second child's birthfamily will be as wonderful as our relationship with our daughter's birthfamily. For Chris, that means worrying about whether our daughter will be a Mets, Padres, or Cubs fan.