

Making Sense of Living Transracially -- Teen Experiences

Writing can be a powerful tool for teens who are trying to make sense of their own experience as transracial adoptees. Pact recently received two narratives written by African American children adopted by white parents. One is from a middle school youth who, through participating in Pact Teen Club and Pact Camp, finds some protection from the judgment of outsiders in the community he has created with those who share his experience. The other is from a high school girl who feels alone and wonders if her feelings are somehow her "fault" or attributable to her experience. Side-by-side it is hard to miss the comfort that comes from connection to others who share and understand. Both young people are living with being judged because of the visibility of their adoptions, but one has found a community that makes a difference and the other is left to question herself as if she somehow bears the responsibility of her pain rather than it being an understandable and "normal" response to her experience. We noticed that she echoes an attitude that we hear often from white transracial parents who say that race is something that "shouldn't matter." Together these two short essays provide a powerful lesson. Here at Pact, they inspire us to renew our commitment to creating safe spaces for youth to connect with one another and mentors of color (both adopted transracially and not). And they serve as a reminder for all parents that isolation can make children vulnerable to lowered self-esteem.

From Ryo:

We face many problems in the world today. Some we can deal with, some we can't and some that simply don't apply to us. Is transracial adoption an issue in itself? My topic is transracial adoption. I picked it because I was adopted by a Caucasian family. We have faced problems everyday since day one. People look at my family and they wonder, how can this be? They don't even consider the reality of it. I'd like to know if other people face what I do?

As a baby I was adopted into a white family through Pact. The main problem I face daily is just being looked at differently. People say things like but your dad's white? Yes I know I understand that. I love my family dearly and the color of your skin isn't supposed to change anything no matter the situation. Unfortunately it does. Unfortunately there are some things that can't be over looked. There's no beating around the bush, I do not look like my family. I also experience other issues like fighting with my birthparents. I feel as if they don't care about me. I'm sure that's part of just being adopted. If I looked like my parents would I even notice I was adopted though? Would it be the only thing on my mind all the time? That is the heart of my question. I want to know if these problems I'm experiencing are because of me and the person I am or if it's part of the life I've lived?

From Jake:

I have one thing to say to you: I am normal! That's what we learn in Teen club. We learn about ourselves and people just like us. What I mean by us is that we are all adopted or we have siblings who are adopted.

I am adopted. Some people make hurtful comments about being adopted. At the club I get away from these comments. We party, we have fun and talk about ourselves in the magical place, people and time that make up the Teen Club.

In Teen club, we all have unique nicknames. My friend Jordan is "Peanut" and my favorite counselor, Kenny, is "Cashew" because they have small, nut-shaped heads. My friend Matthias is "Titobell" because he hates Taco Bell and his name has a "Tt" in it. His brother is "Ddaredevil" because of his wit and fear of nothing. I am called "Watermelon Hhead" because of my huge meaty head. These are my best friends. We may have silly nicknames, but that doesn't mean we are not normal. Perfectly normal, that's what we feel when we get together at the club. We feel normal when we laugh and have fun. Nobody looks at us when we're together.

The way I build up stress, it's good to let it go at Teen Club. Leaving at the end is sadness, pure sadness. But all in all, it's a happy ending because I have a place to go that re-convinces me that I am just like you, a human being. I am normal, but I am also different in my own special way, just like you. When I leave Teen Club, there is also a special glow in me. As I look back at all my adopted friends, waving goodbye,