pact's point of view
The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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Pact Family Stories

Surprise Adoption

I didn't know you could have .an unplanned adoption. There we were, spending the day In San Francisco with our two boys, Kieran, who was eight, and Kai, who had just turned two. I'd spent the earlier part of the week clearing out baby clothes and gear we weren't going to use anymore. Only the crib was left. Domestic chores well in hand, we headed out to play.

Kai had fallen asleep in the car on the drive into the city and my husband Ojas elected to sit in the car while Kai slept, knowing a nap would make the rest of the day go more smoothly. I took Kieran to the PlayStation store to watch a steady stream of teenagers play the new Guitar Hero game.

After about 30 minutes, Ojas showed up with a groggy Kai. "I talked to Shawna," he told me. That was good news. We hadn't heard from Kai's birthmother in several months. We had a good relationship with her and I was happy she had called.

"She's pregnant," Ojas said.

So, there we were, standing in the middle of the PlayStation store. Should we be happy? Concerned? We didn't know what this sibling-to-be would mean for Kai. We didn't know what this could mean for us. The store was too noisy for much conversation. Then Ojas's phone rang again –Shawna calling back. He spoke to her and then handed the phone to me. I asked her how she was feeling, talking about everything except the one question that I wanted to blurt into the phone: What are you going to do??

Afterwards in the car, Ojas and I tried to decode the conversations we each had with Shawna. In the course of about three or four minutes, we decided that if she chose to place this unborn baby for adoption, we wanted the baby placed with us. And boom, life changed. How could we make such a big decision so quickly? Simple: Kai. Kai already has two half-brothers he may never meet. To think that Kai would have another a half-sibling out there that he might never know if Shawna placed this baby with another family tore me up inside. How could we tell him it was inconvenient to

adopt his brother or sister? "Mommy was too tired?" How could we deny him the opportunity to have a blood relative in his life, especially when his older brother Kieran is genetically connected to me and Ojas?

It was another two weeks before Shawna confirmed her choice to place her unborn baby for adoption. But we had already made our choice. No, we weren't prepared for a third child at the time. Time and money were at a premium. Our two boys weren't exactly low-maintenance models. Kieran had been diagnosed with autism at age four-a diagnosis he has since lost. He has made tremendous progress, but still needs a special diet, social skills therapy, and extra support for school work. Kai had speech and developmental delays and was in an early intervention parent-participation program four days a week. Our proverbial plate wasn't just full; it was slopping over the edges.

We knew we'd need to get help with what lay ahead, including regular childcare. In hindsight, retaining a PR agency might have been useful, too.

Only one or two friends reacted positively to our news, primarily because they were hopeful I might get a baby girl. For the most part, I got a negative reaction, at times overwhelmingly so. A lot of scorn was heaped on Shawna, an anonymous figure to everyone but us. A couple of friends demanded that I get her tubes tied once the baby was born. Seriously. In these moments, I realized some of my friends have boundary issues –meaning, they don't know what boundaries are. I re-drew them clearly, in a few instances leaving some former friends behind. I deflected questions about potential drug use, educated about the role of poverty in adoption, and called out racist remarks for what they were.

At one memorable" mom's night out" dinner, a friend spent several minutes grilling me about Shawna's personal life, with growing irritation and specificity in her questions. I finally stopped her by holding up my hand and saying" Enough! It is none of your business what she uses or doesn't use for birth control. Just like it's none of my business what you use, or you, or you, or you." I pointed to each woman around the table in turn. "Change the subject or I'm leaving."

We have never doubted that this was the right decision. Kai is our son and Shawna is related to us by adoption and therefore forever part of our extended family. She isn't a random baby donor. She is an adult in a tough situation who, post-adoption, has also become our friend. She is Kai's birth mother-she sees him and knows him. And he knows her. It is imperative for Kai that we maintain the integrity of that relationship.

Baby boy #3, whom we named Micah, was born in March of 2007. We got physical custody when he was five days old and his adoption was finalized in time for Christmas.
Micah is an unexpected and wonderful gift. He is a typically developing child with an even temper and he slept through the night at age six weeks! He looks like an old soul;
Shawna's endearing nickname for him is "little old man." He is Kieran and Kai's baby brother. Someone with whom they share a childhood and in Kai's case, someone else who is a transracial adoptee in this little multicultural family of ours ... like a partner or a comrade-at-arms for those times to come when Mom and Dad "just don't get it."

Sure, life would have been simpler if we had not chosen to adopt Micah. But I know we would have always regretted it. During the process of Kai's adoption, I heard the phrase "the child who is meant to be yours will find you." In our case, we weren't even looking. Micah completely took us by surprise. And for that we will always be grateful.

The name of Kai and Micah's birth mother has been changed to protect her privacy.