



pact's

point of view

The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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My Dog Story by Penny Callan Partridge

In my last year of college, I got engaged, broke the engagement, and filled out an application for the Peace Corps. Among other things, I wanted new vistas.

And I got them. I was sent to a "bush" school in Nigeria. I saw people dance up to each other as their way of saying, "Nice to see you!" When the rain ran under my door, I went out and dug a trench to make it go around my house. I learned I could easily do without electricity or running water. And I got my first dog.

A volunteer on his way home had given me his dog, Kai Kai, named after the local palm wine brandy. Kai Kai was part Border Collie, part something else, and pregnant. One night around three a.m., Kai Kai came to get me out of bed. She nudged me into my biggest chair and climbed on my lap. She then gave birth to eight puppies. Each puppy sliding out of Kai Kai looked like a wet chipmunk in plastic wrap. Kai Kai got each one cleaned up and settled, and then we would go back into a kind of embrace to wait for the next contractions.

As a child, I had been upset that my parents insisted on having our cats "fixed"; I had so much wanted out household - probably our history - to include pregnancy and birth. I couldn't have said that I felt cut off from my own birth, but I did feel deprived of any direct association with birth. I felt exiled from the whole world of reproduction.

With Kai Kai giving birth in my arms, I re-entered that world. I began thinking that no less than these puppies, I myself must have slid out of a warm, wet body. Was that body still alive somewhere? And wouldn't the woman whose body it came from want to know the person who had entered the world through her body? I left Nigeria while the region tried to give birth to itself as the Independent Republic of Biafra - an effort that never succeeded. A few weeks later, I crossed the San Francisco Bay to the Children's Home Society in Oakland, where my parents had picked me up.

That day, for the first time in my life, I said out loud that I was interested in meeting the woman who had given birth to me. I didn't actually meet her for nine more years. And I never got to give birth myself. But "birth" has been given to me by Kai Kai.