

Different Birth Families of Adopted Siblings

by Pam Hutsell

Our introduction to transracial adoption began on a cold February day in 1985 when our lawyer called with news of a possible birth mother. The question she asked was, "Would you and your husband consider a Native American Indian child?" That evening we spoke to the birth mother, Beverly, who lived in Omaha, Nebraska. Although we always assumed we would adopt a Caucasian child, we felt no hesitation about meeting with her. We made arrangements and flew to Omaha that following weekend to meet with Beverly and her one-year-old son, Joshua. It was love at first sight for all of us. My only concern was not about parenting an Indian child, but that Beverly be sure that she wanted to offer her child to us, a Caucasian couple, to be raised in our family. We all vowed that this child would be involved in his heritage as he grew.

When Justin was born that November, I spoke to him, during our quiet times alone, about Beverly and his Indian relatives, aunts, uncles, cousins and brothers. I told him what I knew of the reservation at Macey and about his Grandfather, a Minister in the Native American Church. I also told him why he had come to live with us. We were given an Indian "board" for Justin to lie on. I used to take him with me wherever I went, while he slept on his board. People around us would stare and then smile to see this little baby sleeping peacefully on his board. Justin, now seven, has grown up knowing of his Indian heritage.

Our second son was born in May of 1987, two weeks after we first met his birth mother. When we were told about this baby, our lawyer said that the birth mother was Caucasian and that the birth father, a native of the Bahamas, was a mixture of Caucasian and Black. Again, we didn't hesitate to explore the adoption of a child of a race different from ours.

The day Chris came with her father to meet us for the first time, they both fell in love with 17-month-old Justin. They thought it wonderful that Justin was an American Indian and felt that our home was a great place for another child of color. We spoke of ways we were keeping Justin's heritage, and affirmed that we would keep the new baby's as well.

When Christopher was born I spoke to him, in the wee hours during morning feedings, of his birth father so far away in the Bahamas. I told him of speaking to his birth father's mother, his grandmother, telling her of his birth and sending pictures. I told him that some day we would make a trip to find that family and reconnect him to the roots he has in the Bahamas - a family and place rich in history.

During the past years there has been much visiting with both birth families. When Beverly came from Omaha to sign final papers, Christopher was just a few months old. She loved him at first sight and spent as much time holding and talking to him as she did playing with and talking to Justin. Whenever we speak on the phone, she always asks about Christopher and when she sends something for Justin, Christopher gets something too. She had a special Indian shirt with ribbons made for Justin and sent one for Christopher as well. Christopher is just as proud of that shirt as Justin is of his.

When Justin was four, Beverly and her parents lived for awhile not too far from us. We were able to meet Justin's birth grandparents and some of his aunts and uncles. His Grandpa Joe even held a special ceremony at our house to give Justin his Indian name. During this ceremony, he spoke to us about his observations of the way we interact with Justin and Christopher. He said he was pleased and proud that his grandson was with us and that he had faith that we would lead him down the right paths in life. He blessed our whole family. Justin's Indian name means "Real Omaha." He is very proud of his Indian and of his Grandfather Joe. There is a special spiritual bond between those two that is wonderful see.

Christopher's birth family lives very near and through the years they have included Justin in their lives as much as they include Christopher. The two boys spend occasional nights at their Grandpa's house where they visit with Christine, Grandpa, Great Grandma and Aunt. Christine shares with Christopher her knowledge of life in the Bahamas and has given him gifts that she brought back from her vacation there. Right now, this is the most of his heritage we can share with him.

Our children have changed many things in our lives. Through them, I see a grandfather, who is prejudiced, begin to grow. He has come to see his grandson as a person in his own right, a little boy who happens to be Black and White - but a little boy who is just a little boy, and his grandson. He also accepts the Indian child as his grandson. His family has changed drastically and he has a lot of love to pass to both boys. Our family not only has adopted these boys but it has embraced change in the structure and make-up of the family for generations to come. We are truly part of a diverse society. We have had, and will continue to have, experiences that will enrich us. It is up to us to seek out the best of all things in our children's birth cultures and use them to build a family that is strong.

My sons have an Indian "Dream Catcher" in their room. It is said that the night air is filled with dreams, both bad and good. The dream catcher catches the dreams as they float by. The good dreams know the way and slip through the center hole and float down to the sleeper. The bad dreams don't know the way and get entangled in the webbing and perish with the first light of the new day. My hope is that these children catch a

good dream that will last them their whole lives through.

Pam Hutsell is currently working for the Government. She has hopes of finishing her BA at Cal State University, Fullerton, with a degree in Special Education. Pam, Justin, Christopher and Jack live in Irvine, California.