

The Savior Syndrome

by Becca Martinson

I often wish I could make the horror stories of child abuse go away. I turn off the news and quit reading the newspaper. But it doesn't stop. If only I could save all the children - if only I could save even one child. But then, there are those who'd tell you I have done just that.

I am an adoptive parent of a healthy African American girl. She is an incredible, beautiful, joyful child, and I feel blessed every day to have her in my life. Which is why it's so perplexing to me to hear people comment about how fortunate this child is to have been adopted by me.

I have a friend who watches my daughter's normal development with amazement, as though he expected she should have grown two heads by now. After all, she wasn't a healthy, White infant - I was taking an enormous chance when I adopted her (says he). He constantly reminds me of what a saint I am. Someone else introduced my daughter and me by saying, "Can you believe that if Becca hadn't taken this child, nobody would have wanted her?" I call this the "Savior Syndrome": that is, people who find it easier to accept

a transracial or international adoption if they can believe the adoptive parents were saving the child from a horrible destiny.

Granted, I made a conscious decision to adopt a child outside of the "healthy White infant" category. And granted, a lot of children are helped through adoption. But if saving a child were the only motivation for adoption - if the adoptive parents didn't think about how the "different" child would fit into their lives, their families, their communities, their love - I think most transracial adoptions would fail.

I wish everybody could understand how much our adoption was about love and how little it was about saving. I wish people could see how lucky I am to have been given the privilege of parenting this child. From a larger perspective, my daughter, her birth mother, and I each saved each other from some difficulty, some ache, some tragedy in our lives. The "saving," to the extent there was any, was equal on all our parts. And I expect we'll all spend the rest of our lives educating the public to that fact.