

We Are Family! by Marcia Burnell

My thirteen year old daughter Hannah came home from school with the story of how friend's mother had approached her and said, "I didn't know Leah was your sister. I thought all of you were black." Hannah answered, "My family is Black, White and Hispanic." The mom said, "Oh, your a melting pot." "No, we're a family!"

We attract attention wherever we go, not only because of our different racial identities, but also because of the size of our family. We are often asked what group we are from. I explain we are not a group, but a family. People, in their amazement, will sometimes ask how we can be a family. I always respond, "In the normal way. You know, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister." They always stand there with their curiosity showing and I proudly state, "We are one of those miracles in life. God has made us a family through adoption."

I write these words about my family because there are concerns whether as white parents, we are able to assist our black, brown and white children to value and respect themselves and the race they were born into. I add white also, as I truly feel self esteem is also a white concern.

We live our lives very religiously. We have shown our children through our Judeo-Christian beliefs that Adam and Eve were most likely Black. And that Moses, Joseph and Samuel were raised by non biological parents. Moses and Joseph were raised by members of a race different than their own. It appears God created transracial adoption. I note that as adults however, both Moses and Joseph lived by the customs and ways of their biological parents and not their adoptive parents. I expect my adult Black and Hispanic children will also.

We purchase as many books by and about blacks as we can find. We have made sure that our children know how the black race has influenced history, inventions, science, technology, astronomy, religion, philosophy, education, entertainment and sports.

We encourage our children, as much as possible, to do their book reports using black stories, thereby benefiting not only themselves but educating their teachers and peers. Hannah portrayed Harriet Tubman this year during Black History Month. We applaud her choice of role models.

We have purchased many fiction books about black children, men and woman so that our children are not continually surrounded by non culturally-relevant images and ideas. Our

home is decorated with many works of Black and Hispanic art, both prints and figurines, depicting famous Black Americans and everyday life experiences. Our children's dolls are representative of several races, including their own Black and Hispanic.

We attend African and Hispanic cultural events with our children. We recognize the importance interaction with people from the Black and Hispanic race - expressing pride and joy in who they are as a people and their history as a people.

We also enjoy the Black and Hispanic media. We subscribe to Black magazines, (news and hair styling). We choose videos where Blacks and Hispanics are portrayed positively. These films have given us much to discuss about what has occurred in and to the Black and Hispanic races.

We have been very fortunate because when we adopted our first two black sons, we were able to remain in contact with their birth grandparents. Our extended family has helped us a lot in becoming more sensitive in racial issues.

People may prejudice my children because of the color of their skin. If we allow those people to upset them, our children have become victims. I am not saying that racial remarks are in any way appropriate. But we cannot control racist remarks or actions. We can only control our reaction to them, this I teach my children.

I can not stop my children from being falsely accused because of the color of their skin. I can not protect them, but I can teach them to protect themselves and support them if these events touch their lives and agree with them the atrocity should not have happened. I can show them that a opinion of one person or event does not necessarily reflect an entire community or life. Racism exists but so does our ability to deal with it. Love and unity also exist.

We have a strong sense of family. When my children were younger, I dressed them in matching colors, sometimes matching dresses so that other people could identify us as "family". We spend a lot of time together talking about who we are as an adopted family and who we have been before we became the family we are. Only two of our children arrived home as infants.

One of our daughters Lisa came at age 9, she is now 18. Recently she wrote the following to a birthmother about our

family. "You might think that a big family may not be a great place for your child to grow up in because he/she might not get the love and care he/she needs. But don't worry. For I assure you that your child will be loved and cared for by not only his/her new parents but also by his/her many brothers and sisters. I should know for I made the decision to be adopted by this family when I was 9 1/2. I don't regret that choice, for if I could have anything different, I would have loved it if I came as a baby. So I pray that you make the right choice to where your child should live for my heart is open to your precious child. I want to thank you for thinking of my family to be your child's family." Another daughter Hannah came at 7, who is now 13 wrote "I am adopted into (as you know) a large family. People say too large but to tell you the truth I couldn't live through the day knowing one of them wasn't there for me. We are all loved and treated equally, as some people think impossible. We are excited about having another member of our family, boy or girl. I make a commitment to love your child how I would want to be loved and how I am loved." Our son Jonathan came at 5, he is now 12. He wrote the following, "Being in a big family is fun especially for my little brother Isaac, he's 3 years old. Personally, I think it is fun because you never get bored, and when we play football on the street there

is plenty of people to play including the street kids they're nice too and we like to give people a chance. P.S. Christmas' here are great! Just to come and see all the presents makes your heart jump with joy!" David came at 3 years, now 13, he wrote "if it is a boy or girl I want to be the nicest, most dependable brother it ever has. I'm the tallest in the picture, I am also the cute one. If it is a boy I will teach him basketball and how to keep rhythm on a drum set, and to protect himself from predators. But if it is a girl I will teach her how to draw and how to make friends and how to attract boys."

My children will continue to discover who they are and what is important and exciting to them. They will take what life has already taught them and go in search of themselves. They will have learned that there are many things in life that you can't change. I believe my children will have the tools they need to love the lives they are living.

Our family works! Not because we are a successful "melting pot", but because we are not about each person living or working solely for themselves. We are about all of us working and learning together.