As a transnational/transracial adoptee, I know that transnational adoption irrevocably transforms the lived experience of biological parents, adoptive families, and adopted children—in many ways that are not overtly apparent. Would I prohibit transnational adoption? Do I condemn the practice entirely? Does transnational adoption dismantle the nuclear family model? I don’t know. What I do know, however, is that scholars who assume a rigid position on either side of the transnational adoption debate are regressing rather than progressing. At stake here is a multi-voiced narrative that encompasses the biological mother, the adoptive family, and the transnational adoptee. If the objective of confronting a multifaceted debate is to unearth one-sided solutions, the effort becomes futile. Scholars must approach this controversy with flexibility as they collaborate with those of us who live every day the reality about which they theorize. We, too, are the experts. It is our time to speak.

At six and a half months, I was adopted from an orphanage in Calcutta by a single mother from the United States. Raised in a white, middle-class family, I recognized the advantages of my circumstances—the privilege accorded to children who leave the so-called developing Third World, and take up residence in a more prosperous location. Assimilation enabled me to experience Western culture, but only at the expense of my origins. In the anthology *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*, John Raible notes in his essay “Lifelong Impact, Enduring Need” this “paradox that is the inheritance of all adoptees, who arguably have been given a fresh start in life, is rooted in the opposite experience of profound loss.” It is from this position that I scrutinize the politics of transnational adoption. I offer a feminist critique from the perspective of an “outsider within.” To write from a primarily academic perspective would do a great disservice to those of us who sit “on the periphery.”

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all citations in this article are drawn from *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*, edited by June Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin (South End Press, 2006).

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Growing up as the daughter of a white, single mother, our visible differences elicited all-too-predictable reactions over the duration of my childhood. “Is that your real mom?,” my peers would query. “She’s not dark like you.” At a young age, I began to internalize prevailing Western assumptions rooted in racist logic. Instead of recognizing these attitudes as a reflection of white supremacist values, I misconstrued them as a set of criteria that I was unable to satisfy; I understood marginalization as a fault of my own, and not as the product of a racist society.

Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, the editors of Outsiders Within, state: “…although it appears to be an innocent question, ‘Where do you come from?’ carries the implicit rejection ‘you are not like us,’ and underlines the assertion ‘you do not belong here’.” Indeed, as Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Bartholet maintains in “International Adoption”: “In [transnational] adoption, adoptive parents and children meet across lines of difference involving not just biology, but also socio-economic class, race, ethnic and cultural heritage, and nationality.” Under these circumstances, the transnational adoptee is inevitably positioned as Other against a homogenous backdrop that is perpetually reinforced. In Rachel Quy Collier’s “Performing Childhood,” she asserts: “An adopted child….is given a (new) name, language, religion, cosmology, worldview; she is, in a sense, colonized.” Transnational adoption is a problematic affair that must be deconstructed in order to comprehend the gravity of its consequences on the lives of the biological mother, adoptive family, and transnational adoptee.

Transnational adoption is a troubling phenomenon of the last half-century. Anthony Shiu, in “Flexible Production: International Adoption, Race, Whiteness,” observes that laws enacted in the U.S. since the early 1990s—designed to accommodate the desires of privileged white adoptive parents, rather than to improve the circumstances of biological mothers or adopted children—have resulted in a marked rise in transnational and transracial adoption. It is distressing that even the titles of many of these laws emphasize economic, rather than social or humanitarian, objectives. Who would imagine that the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 has anything to do with the creation of families? One would expect that a law with that name might have more to do with the acquisition of property—and in fact, that is very close to the truth. As Shiu explains it, the SBJPA law attends to issues of supposed “reverse discrimination,” ensuring that whites are able to adopt non-white children, irrespective of their best interests. Shiu states: “Children become the strategic discursive wedge—indeed the very ‘good[s]’ desired—that enables the law to work toward fulfilling white middle-class parental desire.” He goes on to quote Cheryl Harris, who claims: “White privilege, as legally articulated, is always concerned with property and access to it.” Shiu cites numerous examples which describe, in painful detail, the self-absorbed and self-indulgent attitudes of white adoptive parents. None of the parents depicted in his article possess the slightest sensitivity regarding race, class, identity and culture. I do not doubt the veracity of these anecdotes. However, it does not seem—based on my personal observation—that this extreme degree of insensitivity is universal among all adoptive parents of transnational adoptees, as Shiu seems to suggest. There are grey areas that should be acknowledged.

Transnational adoption is often framed from one of two mutually exclusive positions: adoption as rescue (middle-class whites as the saviors of vulnerable, racialized children), or adoption as kidnap (affluent Western whites displacing children of color from their birth families and countries). Karen Dubinsky, in “The Fantasy of the Global Cabbage Patch: Making Sense of Transnational Adoption,” notes that neither of these tropes is “particularly illuminating.” Reductionism will never serve us well in an attempt to understand the complexities of transnational adoption; binary simplifications only distort a situation in which there are perhaps as many elaborately interconnected sets of facts as there are people involved.

In the arguments swirling around transnational adoption it is generally the mother—biological or adoptive—who bears the brunt of critical scrutiny. As Oparah, Shin, and Trenka acknowledge: “The real alternative [to adoption] is found in welfare policies that support poor mothers of color rather than penalizing them, criminal justice policies that strengthen and heal communities rather than destroying them, and international politics that prioritize human security over profits.” Furthermore, “a real transnational feminist solidarity [must] be created, one that leads women to fight for each others’ most basic human rights to parent their own children and that rejects transactions that pit (birth) mother against (adoptive) mother.”

In “Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women,” Marlee Kline describes the nexus out of which, I would argue, the power and prestige of transnational adoption also arises. Kline maintains: “the ideology of motherhood speaks not only to gender roles and behavior, but it also constructs some locations within social relations of race, class, sexuality, ability….as more appropriate for motherhood than others.” Most salient in Kline’s essay is the assertion that “mother-blaming” obscures the wider context of “racism, poverty, ill-health, and violence.” The controversy surrounding transnational adoption cannot easily be solved or neutralized, and it is perilous to place blame upon the individual mother. Doing so diverts our attention away from systemic injustices. While there are indisputable colonial implications in the lure of transnational adoption, it is unproductive to posit the


The Benefits of Co-Sleeping

By Molly Brannigan

Many American parents feel called to sleep with their little ones, but feel unsure about caring for their babies and children differently than they were cared for themselves. Most Americans approaching parenthood today slept independently from the beginning of their lives and anticipate a similar experience for their own babies. But after they actually meet their babies, many parents feel reluctant to be apart from them at night. More parents are keeping their children with them at night, and are finding that sleeping together is both enriching and satisfying.

It is probable that co-sleeping has always been fairly common in the United States, but only in the last few years are co-sleeping parents publicly discussing their sleeping practices. The more scientists look at co-sleeping, the more developmental and health benefits they find for children and adults. The more parents experiment with co-sleeping, the more they discover the many ways co-sleeping can deepen and enrich their relationships with their children. Some also discover that it makes parenting, during day and night, easier.

Co-sleeping is good for building relationships

Co-sleeping with babies can deepen bonds between parents and children because it increases the amount of time they spend touching. Touch releases the hormones that activate the neuro-physiological processes that are the foundation of human social relationships. The two most important of these hormones are oxytocin and prolactin. Parents may have read about these hormones only in the context of breastfeeding, without hearing that they are also created in significant quantity when babies and parents are in close physical proximity, and especially when they are touching. This information may be particularly meaningful to adoptive parents for whom breastfeeding is not an option.

In both adults and children, oxytocin is responsible for the feelings of safety, trust and generosity, as well as the impulse to create social interactions. During the early period of brain development, it is involved in helping the brain learn to decode non-verbal social information. Prolactin is responsible for feelings of nurturance and caretaking, and increases our understanding of babies’ non-verbal cues. It also creates feelings of relaxation and sleepiness in both babies and adults (especially welcome at bedtime).

Co-sleeping is good for babies and children

There is a growing body of scientific evidence that tells us that the more time that babies spend touching their parents, the healthier they are. Because co-sleeping increases the number of hours that babies spend in close proximity to their parents, it can contribute to their good health. Babies in close physical proximity to trusted adults have stronger and more regular heartbeats, more regular breathing patterns, more oxygen in their blood, and fewer stress hormones in their bodies. As a result, they grow faster, cry less, and spend more time in the quiet alert state (the state most conducive to learning). Babies sleeping in close proximity to their parents are less likely to die of SIDS, which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all babies under six months sleep in their parents’ room (though the AAP recommends the use of a crib).

Research shows that children who sleep with their parents cry less, and have fewer behavior problems. Additionally, they are less likely to experience sleep problems like night terrors and extreme difficulty falling asleep. When co-sleeping babies and children night-wake, parents are able to resettle them to sleep more quickly than they can solitary sleeping babies. This is because they are less aroused by the time parents reach them, and because relaxing hormones associated with close

Safest Co-Sleeping

- Babies and children should only co-sleep with non-smoking adults.
- Babies should always start sleep on their backs (if they can roll over on their own, it is not necessary to roll them back).
- Babies and children should only co-sleep on mattresses or futons. It is not possible to safely co-sleep on a sofa or waterbed.
- Babies and children should only co-sleep on a firm mattress, and there should less than a two-finger-width gap between the mattress and headboard or wall.
- Arrange blankets so that they cannot cover the baby or child’s face. Some parents put very young co-sleeping babies on top of the blankets. Keep babies away from pillows.
- Babies and children co-sleeping with a sibling (other than a twin) should be separated from the sibling by an adult body.
- Co-sleeping adults must be sober. Co-sleeping is not safe if you have been drinking, taking drugs, or have taken medication that could interfere with your rousability (such as Nyquil).
- Babies and young children should not sleep alone in adult beds.
Remember When I Came Out of Daddy’s Tummy?

By Gail Steinberg & Beth Hall

Kayla is working carefully, cooking the royal breakfast on her toy stove in the backyard—sourdough oatmeal, pebble popovers with crushed fresh raspberries, pretend vanilla ice cream and cold-water tea. The feast is almost ready. She pours the tea from her pink flowered teapot into thimble-sized cups, as grandly as any princess would do.

Kayla has all the time she needs to lick all the berry juice off her fingers, one by one, as Kayla’s mom holds her cup with care, taking imaginary sips. The princess and the queen have enough time today to do anything they choose, and the sun is shining.

Mom is thinking about Kayla—every delicious, miraculous inch of her daughter makes her want to swoop her up and give her a thousand million kisses.

But Kayla is thinking about something else. “Remember when I came out of Daddy’s tummy?”

“Uh-oh,” thought Kayla’s mom. “Breathe. Pay attention. This is something important.”

“Kayla, you didn’t come out of your daddy’s tummy. Only mommies can grow babies inside of their bodies, not daddies.”

“Okay,” said Kayla. “Remember when I came out of your tummy?”

“I have been your mommy since you were born but you were not inside my body either. Your birth mom carried you in her body and when you were ready to be born, you came out of her.”

“Nope, that can’t be right. I want to come out of your body,” Kayla insisted. “If I wasn’t in Daddy, I was inside you.”

“I can see how you might have thought that,” said Mom. “You grew inside your birth mom just like all babies do. And when it was time for you to be born, you came out of your birth mom just like all babies do. She wanted to take care of you but she couldn’t because she had grownup problems.”

“What did you say when you first saw me?” asked Kayla.

We said, “How amazing! How wonderful! You are our most important dream come true! We are so happy!”

“And then, we wrapped you in your yellow blanket and put you in your car seat.”

“Oh,” thought Kayla, “I love my yellow blanket.” Then she sat straight up, startled and wondering…should she ask, could she risk it? “Who’s my real mom, Mommy?”

“You have two real moms and two real dads—your birth parents who gave you life are real and so are your daddy and I who take care of you as you grow up. But we did not have you inside our bodies.”

“Your first mom, your birth mom, is your real mom because she brought you into the world but she did not think she could take care of you in all the ways that a baby needs so she picked us to be your other real mom and daddy…forever.”

“Is it okay to love all your parents or do you have to choose?,” asked Kayla.

“Parents can love all of their kids, not just one,” said Mommy, “and kids can love all their parents. And mostly they do because that’s what kids and their parents, all kinds of parents, do. Your first mommy said she loved you a lot. You never have to choose, we all love you and you can love all of us.”

“I’ll never forget that first ride home with you in the car,” said Mom. “No rough stuff and no bumps!”, we said, “This is our most precious princess having her first trip home. Make certain she has a smooth ride!”

“When we got home all the rest of the family was waiting in a line to welcome you with kisses and flowers. They were so excited. Thank goodness, you clever child, just then you wet your diaper!”

“You gave us a good excuse to whisk you away to your new room. Your daddy and I could not wait to be alone with you, just our own little family. After we changed your diaper all three of us snuggled into the big rocking chair and we gave you your bottle and sang you your lullaby.”

“Sing it,” said Kayla, “just like that time.”

“Little love, little darling, little sparrow, little starling, little light, little pearl, little treasure, little girl.”

“Oh,” Kayla said, relaxing against her mom, “Would you care for some more tea?”
In this lyrical and disquieting first novel, Wendy Lee reflects on the movement of human beings across oceans and cultures, races and socioeconomic divides to connect, however imperfectly, with a shared fate. Lee, a young Chinese American writer, looks at two ways Chinese now come to America—by choice and by adoption—and explores how these different paths to the same destination affect identity, family, and belonging. For the narrator of Happy Family, the line between adoptee and immigrant blurs. Fate expels both from the land of their birth and shuts the door behind them: “For anything different to have happened, the entire course of history would have to be changed.”

Above all, Happy Family is a character study of Hua Wu, a young undocumented Chinese immigrant from Fujian province who finds work at a restaurant in New York’s Chinatown. Isolated even there by linguistic barriers (Hua speaks Mandarin, her co-workers Cantonese), she ventures into the prosperous foreign world of the Upper West Side, where at a neighborhood park she spies a lone Chinese toddler, Lily, and her white American adoptive mother, Jane. Immediately identifying with Lily, Hua inserts herself into their lives.

Like Lily, Hua is an orphan putting down roots in a foreign land. She is fascinated by Lily’s adoptive family, surprised to see the attachment between Lily and her white parents, and stunned by the cornucopia of stuff in Jane’s home and Lily’s toy box. Soon Hua quits her job at the restaurant to become Lily’s nanny. She fills the emptiness of her own life with projections about Jane’s, only to discover that the marriage at the heart of this “happy family” is cracking apart.

Lee creates a rich inner voice for Hua, filled with echoes from her past and longing for a better, more connected, less fate-driven future. Hua confronts the diversity of the Chinese diaspora, the difficult recent past of her homeland, and the lifelong impact of losing parents, even ones she hardly knew. The ghosts of Hua’s dead parents and Lily’s unknown ones haunt the book.

As she moves through New York City, Hua notices the pecking order of race and class: the dark-skinned nannies of white children in the park, white men with serial Asian girlfriends, white women squeezing round figures into slender qipao, Chinese language and culture as fad. “Mandarin-speaking nannies are a hot commodity on the Upper West Side,” Jane tells her.

Indeed, cultural appropriation permeates the book. Jane, a curator at the Museum of Asian Art, has filled her home with beautiful Chinese objects. Hua recalls a teacher’s warning that “Americans had no culture so they are always trying to take on the culture of others. [She] wondered when Jane’s interest in China extended to adopting a baby.” Hua zeroes in on the irreducible paradox of international adoption: “Lily needed parents and Jane and her husband needed a child. But foreigners were forever meddling in business that wasn’t theirs, taking things that didn’t belong to them.”

Hua too takes things that don’t belong to her. At first she steals little things from Jane—a white pebble, a swipe of makeup, a splash of perfume. Later, she steals Lily.

Here the novel takes a disturbing turn. Leaving with Hua at night on an unexpected cross-country bus ride, Lily is eerily passive. When an attached toddler is separated from parents, even in the company of a familiar nanny, she will eventually object, then cry, then tantrum. Early in the book Hua observes clear signs of healthy attachment, such as Lily’s preference for her mother over Hua and her delight as she runs into her father’s arms. Yet once removed from the only home she can remember, Lily shows no emotion. She asks about her mommy but never cries for her.

This little girl at the heart of the novel is oddly undeveloped as a character—part literary device, part screen for the adults’ projections. Any parent of a two-year-old knows that children this age have distinct personalities and temperaments. Lily has neither. In fact, she becomes less distinct as the novel progresses. Lily’s lack of distress on separation from her parents may reflect the author’s inexperience with young children or it may signal the belief that transracial family bonds are easily broken. That belief is painful to adoptive parents, but it is widely shared. A blurb on the back of Happy Family asserts that this child is “closer to [Hua] than its legal mother.” By virtue of their shared origins, Hua too decides that Lily belongs with her. She bundles her up and takes off.

The adults Hua meets along the way who realize Hua is not Lily’s mother don’t call the police. This is a kidnapping, not a trip to the zoo, yet the word is never mentioned. Is it because Lily is “only” an adopted daughter that no one treats her abduction as a crime?

Hua worries occasionally that the police might pursue her, but it seems they never do. She ends up not in prison but in California, watching the sun set over the Pacific, China invisible on the far shore. She left Lily halfway across the country; presumably the child is home now. Hua imagines that Lily’s parents would not only forgive her but thank her for “loving” Lily “as much as they did.” Is she mad? No matter

(Cont. on pg. 13)
Ask Pact

To Move or Not To Move

Q We are getting ready to bring home a child from Ethiopia. We are a white family (we have two children already who were born to us) and we have gone to several workshops on transracial adoption, including some panels of adopted adults. Here is the problem: it seems like there is a big debate about whether transracial families need to live in diverse areas or if children can thrive with less diversity as long as their parents are supportive and giving positive messages about race and people of color. What does Pact think?

A What we know about all human beings is that isolation tends to be hard on us psychologically. We are a socially interdependent species. Belonging is described by researchers as playing a key role in the maintenance of confidence and self-esteem in most people. Each of us needs others who validate our existence and reinforce our cultural identity, acting as mirrors that reflect our own experience. When this reflection is confusing, or does not match with one’s self-perception, it leads to isolation or an identity crisis. When others reject us, we are likely to reject ourselves too and internalize feelings of self-loathing or disgust.

Rather than getting involved in debates about whether or not people are entitled to adopt across racial lines based on where they live or with whom they interact, perhaps it is more useful to look at what the outcomes have been for adopted people who have grown up in racial isolation. We have noticed two common experiences in transracial families that we call Geographic Isolation and Demographic or Residential Segregation.

Geographic isolation

This lifestyle is defined by families who live in white-majority areas that are geographically isolated from people of color—very few if any people of the same racial or ethnic background as the transracially adopted child (or even people of color of different backgrounds) live within the child’s field of experience. Not only is it likely that the child growing up in this circumstance is the only person of color in their classroom or school (with the occasional exception of other adopted children), they may also be the only one in their school district, county, or region. As articulated by Beverly Daniel Tatum in her important book, Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria, this kind of isolation is often debilitating for children. Without community, children’s ability to develop an integrated feeling of belonging is compromised. Often the goal of parents who live in this circumstance is to minimize what they may see as the dangerous emphasis that society places on race. Ironically, their choice to live in this kind of isolation tends to produce an internal sense in their child that race is central and a multiracial community is critical to feelings of belonging. We have heard this from many adult adoptees who say that their own experience was so out of line with the world view of their parents that they felt an overwhelming pressure to flee the environment where they grew up in order to find a diverse community where racial identity exploration is commonplace.

So what happens?

When adoptees in such situations become adults, they often disconnect (physically and emotionally) from their adoptive family because they cannot feel comfortable in the parental environment, or they disconnect from their racial group because they cannot feel comfortable in their own skin. The first choice is sad, because of course the adopting parents desire closeness with their children that is at odds with the adult child’s need to leave and find a new and often entirely different environment where they see themselves reflected. But perhaps the second outcome, adults of color who do not feel comfortable with people of their own racial and/or ethnic group, is even more painful, since that has been defined by most psychologists as a symptom of self-hate, something that is unlikely to lead to long-term happiness or a well-adjusted life. Adoptees who have grown up in these circumstances are more likely to suffer from depression and/or low self-esteem.

Demographic isolation or residential (self) segregation

When families live in white-majority suburbs or neighborhoods that border neighborhoods or areas with many people of color, a different set of messages is delivered to the children in the family. These children often assume that their adoptive parents have made a conscious choice to keep the people of color who live nearby at bay. This sets up a “loyalty test” that puts the adopted child of color in the position of feeling that they must choose between their adoptive parents and making connections to people of their own racial and ethnic heritage. The irony here is that parents leading this lifestyle usually see themselves as accepting towards people of their child’s race and often bemoan how “hard” it is to make true friendships across racial and ethnic lines. They insist they have chosen their home’s location only in the name of a “better” school district or a “safer” neighborhood. But better for whom? Safer for whom? These parents are making choices that ultimately isolate their child and set up a dynamic that can get very volatile during the teen years. Of course, motivated families can learn to create connections without moving. Interestingly, those families who invest in such connections often find that they become more comfortable with the idea of living in a diverse neighborhood and end up moving.
So what happens?
Children who grow up in this kind of isolation often seek peers of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds during their tween and teen years in a way that exhibits poor judgment in terms of values and/or trustworthiness on the part of the “friends” with whom they connect. Their view often reflects the mainstream media’s understanding that people of color live in the “ghetto” because they have no personal familiarity with local neighborhoods of color. This is almost always an inaccurate and very dangerous point of view that stems from low self-esteem and an unbalanced view of what it means to be a person of color in America. Transracial parents often do not understand their own role in setting their children up for this kind of imbalance and flirtation or immersion in dangerous behavior and settings.

Parents in transracial families who live in Geographic or Demographic Isolation often protest that their children seem happy and well-adjusted, but children typically try to fit into the life in which they find themselves. However, it is important to remember that being different or “other” is a central reality of these children’s existence, and at the same time they are not learning a cultural language that will connect them to people who share and understand this experience of otherness—so even among other people of color, they remain to some extent outsiders. This double-edged sword of racial or ethnic isolation often causes great angst and pain during the teenage and adult years, and can lead to a real disconnect between adoptees and adoptive parents later in life, when the adult adoptees realize the cost to them of the choices their parents made (or didn’t make).

Why transracial parents may be ineffective at building cross-racial connections
The reality is that most Americans do not live a truly multicultural life on an intimate basis. Most of us eat dinner with, worship with, and engage in other intimate relationships with people who are the same race as we are. This means that inherently transracial families are doing something different, whether they live in diverse areas or not. Racial isolation is often attributed to unconscious choices that influence our lifestyles. Only by bringing those choices into the light of honest analysis will we be able to make changes, if indeed we are serious about doing so.

In the pre-adoption phase, it can be helpful to consider how your personality will respond to the unique challenges that come with transracial adoption. Transracial adoption means that your family becomes “public,” because your differences are readily apparent to others. If you like to blend in and go with the crowd, think again. If you believe there is one right way to do most things, you should consider how you will incorporate into your family the different points of view that will likely stem from your child’s different experiences. If you are attracted to learning new ways of thinking, you will enjoy the challenge. Introverts often struggle with what feels to them like the burden of creating new relationships across cultural lines. Similarly those who experience a sense of shame at their own lack of knowledge and/or cultural incompetence may struggle to reach out for new relationships because it triggers their own emotions. If you know these to be your personality types you will need to explore how you will overcome such barriers to ensure that you do not serve your own comfort more than your child’s.

Finally, those of us who are white or experience privilege based on our racial identification must look honestly at our own unacknowledged racism to assess how much it may be hindering our connections to others of our child’s racial group. At Pact we hear from parents who say things like, “I want my child to go to college, so I don’t want them to get too caught up in Latino [insert any race or group here] culture....” This is a racist statement that presumes that it is the culture itself that devalues education rather than recognizing that racism is a huge contributing factor to why Latinos and other people of color don’t perform as well in school or other means of “success.” The more you interact with people of color the less likely you are to believe such assumptions, because your experience teaches you otherwise.

Over the years we have seen committed families find many different ways of meeting their children’s needs for racial and ethnic connection—everything from changing where they live to “changing in place.” Pact offers a variety of consultation services (available by phone as well as in person) for families who are considering transracial or transnational adoption as well as those who are already parenting children of a different race. If you are parenting across racial lines—or planning to do so—and have been wondering exactly how to bring more diversity into your family’s circle and support your child’s cultural and racial self-esteem, Pact’s Building Connections Across Cultures program is designed to help (www.pactadopt.org/community.html). However you proceed, remember that the “should we move?” question is complex and multi-layered, because transracial adoption is complex and multi-layered. There are many internal as well as external issues to consider and while the solutions are usually neither quick nor easy, they are always enriching when we are open to growth and committed to crossing barriers and making new connections for the sake of everyone in the family.
For foster children, a move between foster homes, to concurrent homes, or back to their birth families is a pretty common occurrence. It is something that can be done well or in a manner that is damaging to them. Whenever possible, children need to move in a gradual and planned way, with a great deal of support from the adults in their lives.

Children are shocked, frightened and traumatized by fast removals and subsequent placements with people they may have only met once, if at all. Their first removal from birth family is usually, by necessity, a quick one, an event that children often experience as similar to an abduction, even when they have been frightened or hurt in that environment. We do not want to recreate this trauma when we move them again.

Children may look like they are fine during a sudden move, but they are actually in shock. Often they are obedient and quiet, as obedient as they might be in a natural disaster, following instructions from adults. It is not, however, natural for children to move without protest. If you think about how your birth or adopted at- or very-near-birth children would react if they were unexpectedly picked up and moved from your home, you would expect them to cry and resist.

In a hasty move, children haven’t had time to express their feelings or to understand why they are leaving. It’s common for them to believe that they did something wrong, that they are somehow at fault. Many times they do not get the chance to say goodbye to other children who might be in the home and to process their feelings about the loss of foster sisters or brothers. The child may have been looking forward to a future event at the previous home, a birthday party or a family trip, and may feel a great deal of disappointment if they are not able to be part of it. They may also develop fears that they will have to move again or might somehow disappear from their next home, even if it planned as a permanent placement.

A poorly planned transition can sabotage a concurrent or new placement and increases the risks of disruption. Coming out of shock (otherwise known as the “honeymoon phase”), children can and often do begin to act up, as they become overwhelmed with their own feelings of grief and loss.

Foster and adoptive parents have an important role to play in supporting children in transition. They are the “container” that keeps the children safe as they try to make sense of big, strange events in their lives—events that would likely floor us as adults. Imagine if we were suddenly removed from our families and sent to live with strangers, without making the choice for ourselves. Even when adults are in unhappy relationships that eventually disrupt, they usually need time to disengage and often stay connected to the previous partner because despite the pain, they care about the person with whom they have been intimate. Children are not so different. They need to receive validation that it is normal for them to cry and question these kinds of big changes, and abnormal for them to be “cheerful little troopers.” When birth or foster parents are willing to meet with the new family and accompany the child on a visit to the new home they can serve to reassure the child by endorsing the new family as safe and good for them.

When birth or foster parents are not available to ease the transition, adoptive parents can help by giving children room to express grief over the loss of connections. Be explicit with children, reminding them that it is okay with you if they love or miss previous caregivers. Get pictures if possible that you and the child can look at together. Encourage them to remember things: “How did you do this at your old house?” or “Did you have a tradition before that we could incorporate into our family?” If you pray in your family, include previous caregivers, even those who might have hurt your child, with acknowledgments such as: “Take care of his birth mother [insert name here] or foster mother, who may not have always done what he needed, but without whom he would not have been given life and thus be here with us in our family…”

Allowing the child to express his or her feelings is a bigger gift than you may ever imagine. Helping children face experiences that children would never have to handle in a perfect world is the most important work foster parents and social workers can do.

Devon Rubin is a licensed clinical social worker who has been in the field of adoption since 1985. She currently works in adoption and foster care licensing for Contra Costa County. For many years Devon was the social work supervisor for Bay Area Adoption Services, an international adoption agency. She also works with birthparents as an Adoption Service Provider for the State of California.
Members of the Pact Teen Club and other young adoptees were asked to reflect on the election of President Barack Obama—how it makes them feel, what it means to them, what it means to people of color.

Mateo, 10, Hispanic:
I think it is great because he is the first black president. He is a person of color, like me, and it makes me happy. Hopefully it will change people judging other people by the color of their skin. It also makes me believe that I can do anything.

Emiliano, 11, Mexican/Puerto Rican:
I feel proud, glad; proud he got elected president because he represents me, my father and my family. He knows what he is doing, not like the old president. Barack Obama knows what he stands for. President Bush did not keep his promises and did stupid things like sending our troops to Iraq for oil. It matters to people of color that Obama is president because their voices will be heard. It matters to me a lot because he will make our country safer and a non-polluted environment. Also because he is like us, he respects us.

Jarrett, 13, Hispanic:
Obama makes me believe in myself. He inspires me to know that I can do something and make change. I am excited by his new plans and ideas and happy that the environment is a priority that he will focus on. I like that he plays basketball!

Lilah, 14, African American:
When it first hit me that we have an African American President, pure emotion filled my body. I didn’t ever even bother imagining something like this happening. But obviously Barack Obama has changed many minds and proved stereotypes wrong. Having him as President will help a lot of blacks that thought it wasn’t possible to make it, start believing. Black males are now trading their do-rags and gold chains in for books and pencils. Change is finally happening amongst classmates, and adults, many of them have told me, “I never thought this would come to be in my lifetime.” It is going to be amazing to see his presidency unfold.

Celeste, 15, African American:
I am happy that the long list of old white presidents is finally changing. I don’t think he just represents African Americans; I think he better represents America as a whole. I hope he does a good job.

James, 17, African American:
I believe that Obama does not represent only African Americans but represents all people of color. This will change America and it is the biggest thing that will probably ever happen in my generation. It also matters to me personally since both Obama and I have similar stories, coming from white middle-class parents, so this inspires me to do greater things with my own life.

Ella, 17, African American/white:
America has now put our future into the hands of the first black president, Barack Obama. We now as a people have turned our backs on the past trials of slavery and segregation, though they will never be completely forgotten. Throughout the years there have been smaller victories, but none to the scale near the one which put Barack Obama as our president. Discussing the subject amongst classmates, and adults, many of them have told me, “I never thought this would come to be in my lifetime.” It is going to be amazing to see his presidency unfold.

Sofia, 19, Latina:
I am really happy that Obama won. I don’t think that he represents me personally but I think that he represents that we (America) are ready for a Black president. He is a symbol of overcoming racial barriers. They are still there but I think that Barack Obama is the change we need today to have a better, more successful country. I am happy people didn’t base their judgment on racial tension alone. His winning might encourage me personally to speak out more because if feels like someone has my back.
Carnegie & Sons

Annette Carnegie is a self-described “spreadsheet person.” Once she identifies a goal, she works toward it methodically, doing extensive research and weighing her options. She brought these skills to bear when she decided to become a single mother through adoption, an experience that was both dream-fulfilling and eye-opening.

Annette was working as an attorney at a high-powered law firm in San Francisco when she decided she was ready to become a mother. She herself was adopted by members of her extended family in Jamaica, so adoption was a familiar option. As an adopted person, she wanted to work with an organization that treated all members of the adoption triad with respect. As a person of color, she wanted to work with an organization that did active outreach to people of color as potential adoptive parents. Her research led her to Pact, where she felt the staff prepared her for adoption with thoughtful, provocative questions and the right mix of support and self-sufficiency.

After completing her paperwork, homestudy, and “Dear Birth Mother” letter, Annette settled in for the wait, which stretched over many months. During support group meetings, she bonded with another single mother anxiously awaiting a match. They both watched enviously as one of the married support group members showed up with a baby in her arms. Suddenly, while she was in the midst of a trial, Annette got the call. She had been matched with a little boy, born a week earlier and living in foster care in Chicago. His birth mother had asked an agency there to find him an adoptive family—her only stipulation was that the parent(s) be African American.

Annette frantically gathered baby gear while working with Pact to figure out how to shoehorn her travel to Illinois into her non-negotiable trial schedule. When Annette arrived in Chicago, she was amazed to find that the local agency was entirely staffed by African Americans—yet they had no African American adoptive parents as clients.

Within just a couple of days, Annette was headed home with her son Daniel in her arms. She was grateful that she had been cared for by an experienced, loving foster mother. Annette did not meet Daniel’s birth mother, but six months later the birth mother sent her a letter, and they have been in contact ever since, communicating via letters, emails, and a few phone calls. Daniel’s birth mother has since finished college and is now pursuing a master’s degree in early childhood education. Annette has been able to ask Daniel’s birth mother questions about her family medical history and get her expert advice on Daniel’s developmental progress.

An only child herself, Annette always wanted to have more than one child. By the time Daniel was three, she was in spreadsheet mode again, planning how she could manage work and childcare with two kids. She began searching for a less high-pressure job, and contacted Pact again. Just months after her file was activated, while negotiating a new job, she got word that she had been matched with a baby who was due to be born within days.

This time both birth parents were involved. They were quite clear that they were seeking an open adoption with a family of color, and had grown frustrated with the agency they were working with, who kept matching them with white families and/ or families of color who wanted a closed adoption. Finally they contacted Pact themselves, who connected them with Annette. Within days, she was on the red-eye to Florida, where she was able to witness the birth of her son Eli. Ten days later, the two of them returned to San Francisco, where soon Daniel was proclaiming, “Thank you for getting my baby brother, I love him so much!”

Eli’s birth parents want to maintain regular communication, and Annette has worked with them to establish realistic expectations. She sends them letters and pictures, and together they are deciding when a visit will happen. She understands that their pressing need for contact stems in part from their experience in a system that was not respectful of their needs and left them feeling powerless.

When asked if she worried about the economic inequity between her and her children’s birth parents, Annette made clear that because her own family has struggled with poverty, she is experienced in setting boundaries about what kind of support she can or cannot provide—a perspective shared by many African Americans who have risen from impoverished backgrounds and worked hard to achieve professional success and financial security.

Annette and her boys have settled into a busy, happy life. Annette gets help with childcare from a nanny and babysitter, and Daniel is now attending preschool (as well as swimming, soccer, and karate lessons). Because the African American population in San Francisco is relatively small, and her family is not nearby, Annette has joined Jack and Jill1 to make sure her sons have regular opportunities to interact with other

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1 Jack and Jill of America is an African American social and cultural organization for mothers and their children; membership is by invitation only.
Orphan Trains to Babylifts,” Tobias Hubinette asserts: discomfort as I battle to embrace a hybrid identity. In “From rarely full acceptance or genuine integration of perceived has resulted in exoticization, tokenism, and ostracization, but predominantly white, middle-class milieu, where my ethnicity and will continue to be as the result of growing up in an Indian given name, Ayla, was placed in a subordinate position as my middle name. I ask what the ramifications have been means that I was given an American name, and that my East Indian mother (and by extension, the adoptive family) as enemy. While she does exercise a considerable amount of ethnic, political, social, cultural, and economic privilege over birth mother, it is important to realize that the adoptive mother is, herself, a product of societal control; larger institutions of discourse regulate her behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions. She is not an autonomous agent in the process of transnational adoption, or in the subsequent selection of her child. According to Oparah, Shin, and Trenka, we must endeavor to “connect [transnational] adoption to broader struggles for decolonization and social justice,” rather than support the individualization of blame. Much more attention should focus on the biological mother, whose voice has been erased from this debate. The relinquishment of her child does not demonstrate her inability to undertake the role as an acceptable “mother,” but instead reflects the embedded framework of global inequities that position her as victim. In “Performing Childhood,” Rachel Quy Collier contends: “Adoptees are told that their birthmothers loved them so much that they gave them up for adoption. Logically, it does not make sense to believe that if you really love someone, you will stop having a relationship with them.” Collier’s argument is insulting to the biological mother. The capacity to “love” in this context becomes secondary when the biological mother must first contend with abject hopelessness. The question of “love” is almost beside the point when the most fundamental, basic issues of survival are paramount. Karen Dubinsky asks whether birthmother “agency” is meaningful in the “winner-take-all model of transnational adoption as it is currently organized.” She goes on to quote historian Ricki Solinger who suggests not. “Such transfers,” she writes, “...almost always depend on poor and/ or culturally oppressed mothers who utterly lack choices.” As a 20-year-old transnational adoptee, I ask myself what it means that I was given an American name, and that my East Indian given name, Ayla, was placed in a subordinate position as my middle name. I ask what the ramifications have been and will continue to be as the result of growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class milieu, where my ethnicity has resulted in exoticization, tokenism, and ostracization, but rarely full acceptance or genuine integration of perceived differences. There are no easy solutions to mitigate the discomfort as I battle to embrace a hybrid identity. In “From Orphan Trains to Babylifts,” Tobias Hubinette asserts: Today, in the leading [Western] adopting regions...a discourse of multiculturalism celebrates [transnational] adoptees as bridges between cultures, symbols of interethnic harmony, and embodiments of global and post-modern cosmopolitanism. In a perfect world, who knows? Transnational adoptees might be worldwide emissaries of multiculturalism. But this is not a perfect world, and that is much too tall an order. Indeed, it is presumptuous to ascribe this dubious honor to adoptees who never chose this path in the first place. The potential for a “bridge between cultures” may exist, but widespread problems with race, class, and gender have yet to be resolved. Proponents of transnational adoption cannot dismiss the elusive, subversive nature of Western ideology if they wish to imagine cultural bridges. It is a mistake to suggest that inequality gaps can so effortlessly be repaired. Furthermore, Oparah, Shin and Trenka observe that advocates of transracial adoption “often invoke the aphorism ‘love sees no colour’.” This is a disconcerting assertion, through which the ideals of white privilege are governed and reinscribed. Until recently, the voice of transnational adoptees was virtually absent from the debate. It is vital that attention be given to our stories of survival, ambivalence, hardship, and perseverance. Together, we are a formidable force against prevailing racist and colonialist logics. In “Power of the Periphery,” Kim Diehl avows: “Being a transracial adoptee may be the most radicalizing force in my life, one that has coursed through me with an intense and raw power.” Mark Hagland declares: “All my experience as a member of diverse, often highly marginalized categories in society has compelled me to consciously develop an integrated identity.” When I discovered Outsiders Within, it was the first time that I encountered others who spoke to my experience. I found solace and empowerment in the narratives shared by transracial adoptees across the world. I found myself exclaiming “Yes! This is my struggle too!” And by the end of the book, “yes, this is our struggle.” I am prepared to come out fighting alongside my impassioned transracial allies. I can offer no painless answers to the complex politics of transnational adoption. What I have discovered, however, is that rigidity on either side of the debate is not helpful. Those of us who aspire to address the problems inherent in transnational adoption must shift our attention to the overarching issues of global inequality. Injustices involving race, class, gender, poverty, political turmoil and government corruption create a demand for transnational adoption in the first place; these are the challenges that must be given our utmost concern. But until then, may transnational adoptees continue the long trek home. Whether that place is external—a return to our country of origin—or internal—a place of momentary peace—may our voices resound in the face of adversity. Molly McCullough will be a guest speaker at Pact Camp 2009. To read the original paper from which these excerpts were taken, visit johnraible.wordpress.com.
BOOK REVIEW

The Identity Trap:
Saving Our Teens from Themselves
by Joseph Nowinski, Ph.D.
Publisher: Amacom, 2007, $22.00
by Marie-Claude Provencher

As the mother of three kids very close in age, it is always with great interest—and yes, anxiety—that I read about adolescence. In The Identity Trap: Saving Our Teens from Themselves, Joseph Nowinski gives parents useful tools for relating to their teenagers. He explains the identity issues (traps) linked to such teen behaviors as eating disorders, drug abuse, alienation, combative ness, depression, self-destructive behavior, shyness, self-hatred, tattooing and body piercing. Written in an accessible style, the book features easy-to-read “tip boxes,” exercises, and Frequently Asked Questions.

Dr. Nowinski focuses on identities rather than the behaviors that derive from those identities. He encourages parents to establish communication with their children so that they can understand what kind of identity their kids are constructing through their social interactions with friends and peers at school. For instance, a parent might ask whether a child has a nickname among his or her friends as a way to understand the school’s social system. These kinds of clues can give parents important information about their children’s vision of their own identity. Nowinski suggests that as teenagers “try on” various identities during adolescence, they discover new things about themselves that will eventually contribute to their adult sense of self.

For instance, a parent may be raising an “alienated” teen who talks, dresses and acts in ways that challenge authority. Nowinski tells us that parents, through meaningful, non-confrontational conversation, need to focus on what the identity is and acknowledge it with the teenager. Focusing on the behavior instead of the identity often turns parents into “police officers” and can lead to limited and tense communication. Parents have to make sure the child knows that whatever his or her identity is, he or she remains an individual. This provides an opening for modifying the identity. Since with every challenging identity there is a positive side, the non-conforming aspect of alienation can be celebrated as a positive outcome.

If a teenager shows signs of eating disorders, Nowinski suggest focusing not on eating behavior but rather on finding out more about the child’s activities and social life at school—listening rather than talking. Social settings in school and peer pressure can drive teenagers to take on identities that can lead to destructive behaviors. By listening, parents may find out the identity their child is trying to attain. Then, without steering the conversation towards nutrition, parents can introduce the idea of choice in identities and share some of their own struggles as teenagers.

Even when parents or helping professionals are confronted with problematic behaviors, Nowinsky does not believe they should emphasize the reason for or implications of the behavior, but rather focus on the youth’s present and future by helping the child experience success and consider positive identity options. It is usually not productive to spend too much time dwelling on the past. Identity emerges out of teenager’s current experiences which have more to do with their future. Focusing on the past does not hold the cure to problematic identities. The goal is to help build a resilient identity where optimism, purpose, persistence and challenge are present.

Building traditions and rituals support a teen’s resilient identity by underscoring the positive values of the family and society of which they are a part. Rituals and traditions help strengthen the parent-child bond and can sometimes be more effective than rewards and punishments (Nowinski reminds us that no one has ever won an argument with a teenager). These practices also establish a sense of the child as a member of the family and the community and do not always place the child at the absolute center.

The final chapter deals with spirituality, which Nowinski describes as “how we live” rather than “how religious we are.” His description of a spiritual lifestyle includes creating a sense of purpose in a family, allowing time and space for meaningful communication, apologizing when necessary, and expressing gratitude often.

My one criticism is that in describing problematic identities, Nowinski uses the phrase “dark identities,” which has unfortunate racist connotations. Although many of the clinical examples he describes deal with identity issues that may be most often associated with white teens (“emos,” “Abercrombies” and such), the tips he offers seem universal. All in all, this is a very useful book that I expect to be referring to frequently in the coming years.

Marie-Claude Provencher is a white mother who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with two African American sons who joined her family through adoption and a white daughter to whom she gave birth.
Co-sleeping (cont. from page 3)

physical proximity to parents help them return to sleep more easily. They are less likely to cry on the way to sleep and less likely to cry upon waking.

The effects of increased calming hormones associated with co-sleeping can be particularly helpful in parenting babies and children who are fussy, very energetic, easily over-stimulated, or sensitive. For children who have difficulty separating from their parents, co-sleeping can significantly reduce the number of separations to be endured.

Children exposed to a lot of oxytocin early in life—those who were touched often and spend a lot of time in close physical proximity to their parents—have been shown to be more independent, more exploratory, less anxious in an unfamiliar environments and better able to manage stress in later childhood and adulthood. Co-sleeping is one way to ensure that children are exposed to plenty of oxytocin.

Co-sleeping is good for parents

Many parents worry that they will not as sleep as well if they sleep with their babies. Parents of small babies often worry that they will injure their babies while they sleep; usually this fear recedes as they develop confidence in their parenting abilities and the robustness of their babies. As this happens, parents begin to sleep longer and better. Recent studies show that parents who sleep with their babies get more sleep, in particular more rest-inducing REM sleep, than parents who sleep separately from their babies.

Many parents worry less about their babies when they are close, and feel more deeply connected to them. Parents also get the benefits of regular doses of oxytocin and prolactin as a result of closeness to their children—increasing both their feelings of well-being and their ability to withstand stress. Working parents who spend a large part of their daytime hours away from their children often use co-sleeping as a way of staying as connected as possible during the hours they are with their children.

Parents may find that co-sleeping means that they have to more creative when it comes to making time for sex. Some couples find another place in the house to be intimate while baby is sleeping in the family bed. Others take advantage of naptimes when babies may be sleeping in a crib. Some parents move their sleeping baby into a crib for an hour or two so that they can get some time together. Every couple will find their own solution.

Transitioning adopted children to co-sleeping

Some babies cared for in institutions become accustomed to sleeping alone in a crib (even if the crib is in a room with many other cribs) or have not had a lot of experience of touch at the time of their adoption. Some of these babies may find the amount of sensory stimulation inherent to co-sleeping overwhelming at first, and may need a slow and respectful transition to co-sleeping. You can start with a crib right next to your bed, and gradually introduce as much snuggling time as your baby finds pleasurable, allowing her to return to her crib if she gets overwhelmed by the sensations of sustained close physical proximity. Over time, most babies will be able to enjoy co-sleeping as much as their parents. It is possible that babies who require a slower introduction to co-sleeping will benefit most from what it has to offer. This may also be true for their parents.

Transitioning away from co-sleeping

Eventually, all families become ready to begin sleeping separately. The right time will be different for every child and every family. Sometimes this transition goes quickly, sometimes slowly. Sometimes children go right from the parents’ bed directly into their own bed in their own room. Sometimes the route is more circuitous, with a stop in a separate bed in the parents’ room or in a sibling’s bed. There are many paths families can travel when moving to separate sleep. Parents who are alert to the needs of their children, as well as their own needs, and who are able stay flexible will find the solution that works best for their family. Your heart will be your best guide in finding your path. ■

Molly Brannigan has three children, ages seven, five and two. She has been leading workshops for parents since 2002. She can hardly remember sleeping without children!

Happy Family (cont. from page 5)

what you think of international adoption, kidnapping is not an act of love.

Or is it? Internationally adopted children are removed from everything they’ve ever known and handed over to complete strangers who take them on a long journey to an unfamiliar place. Family building is only one part of the story. Scholars in receiving and sending countries alike increasingly regard international adoption as part of a complex dynamic of politics, economics, race, class, culture, identity, and kinship. Tobias Hübinette, a Korean adoptee and academic in Sweden, concludes that “intercountry adoption has always worked for the interests of adoptive parents and receiving countries, never for the interests of adopted children or supplying countries.”

It is hard for us adoptive parents to accept that our act of love can be viewed as an act of injustice, whether by an adult adoptee or an American-born Chinese writer. Our children were abandoned, we protest. It’s all because of China’s “one-child policy”—that’s where the injustice is. We built our families through intercountry adoption, sure, but we also gave a family and a home to a child who had lost both. We could never in a million years equate Lily’s adoption from China with her abduction from New York.

One day, though, Lily might. ■

Amy Klatzkin, an adoptive mother of a daughter from China, works as a psychotherapist at Child Trauma Research Program, UCSF.
Singer Eleanor MacDonald is an adoptee who, at age fifty-four, has given up trying to find her birth family. She spent many years longing for her “circle” to be complete, hoping she could enjoy even just one embrace between herself, her birth mother, and her own daughter. But finally, says MacDonald, “I realized that I love my life…I have all that I need, and it just came time to let the search go.” Throughout her search, MacDonald was aided by her husband, songwriter Paul Kamm. Paul wrote Eleanor a song for her mother that she has been performing for many years. We are grateful to them both for allowing us to share it with our readers.

All This Time
Lyrics by Paul Kamm

There are voices in my head
I hear most of what they say
Oh but sometimes I don’t listen much
The mirror on the bathroom wall
Is my only photograph of you
As you might have once appeared to me
My love is here
My love is here
Tell me what you really feel
I met a stranger on the street,
One that looked a lot like me
I wonder did she know your face somewhere
They’ve hidden you in secret files
You could be close or many miles
All this time I know that you’ve been there
My love is here
My love is here
Tell me what you feel
Do you live in California or in Tennessee
Does the wind blow your hair with some Delta breeze
Now I keep a place inside that only you would see
Oh but all this time
Did you think of me?
There’s a shadow on the wall
It follows me as I get up
Down the hallway in the black of night
I stumble over hidden toys
From my only baby girl
She is sleeping as I turn the light
My love is here
My love is here
Tell me what you feel
Do you live in California or in Tennessee
Does the wind blow your hair with some Delta breeze
Now I keep a place inside that only you would see
Oh but all this time
Did you think of me?

In Remember When I Came Out of Daddy’s Tummy, Kayla is interested in her own beginning but also trying to understand how she is connected to her parenting mother, her mother by adoption. For every adopted person there are two stories of beginning and identity: being born and being adopted. Be careful to tell both. Some adopted people have grown up feeling as if they weren’t really born, because no one talked about that part of their history. Birth is an incredibly important event—leaving it out is a huge loss for a child. Young children take great joy in learning their own stories.

All human beings are born. Keep your child’s story factual and add as many specific details as you know. If you have no details, you can use general information about how babies are born. Children around the age of three are very interested in babies and where they come from. By the time their children reach this age, all adoptive parents needs to be talking about adoption, because birth and adoption are linked.

If you do not talk about your kids’ stories beginning with their birth, they will infer that there is something wrong with their beginnings and feel sad or mad or confused, since everyone else knows about their beginnings. Every adopted child was born before they were adopted. That means that birth parents are part of their stories—whether you know them or not. Talking about but not for your child’s birth parents can be particularly challenging but it is essential.

Even in a moment like the one depicted here, when Kayla is resistant to the notion that she was born to someone else, it is critical to stay with the truth, while validating the child’s underlying desire to be assured that she is deeply connected to her adoptive mother. The way to do that is to show your child that you are comfortable with the complexity of her connection to her first mother and to you.

Children are very good at reading unspoken messages. Look honestly at yours. As parents we must ask ourselves, “Who am I taking care of now, myself or my child?” If your child’s questions make you uncomfortable or nervous, explore them in the context of support groups or even therapy, so you can become comfortable with the notion of being the second (or third or more…) mother. Find the joy in being lucky enough to be with your child each day, rather than feeling unlucky because you don’t share genes or the birth experience. As you make peace with your own feelings, you will model the way your children can make peace with theirs.

Kayla’s mom embraces the real-ness of Kayla’s birth mother rather than falling into the sometimes competitive notion that one parent is more real than the other. What a great validation of all of Kayla’s connections—because indeed all of the parents who contribute to her creation and personhood are real. And like a typical child, once Kayla gets the answers and comfort she needs, she can go back to the true business of her life—enjoying the moment as she learns to become the human being she was born to be. So enjoy and please pass the tea!

Director’s Corner (cont. from page 4)
Thank You To Pact’s 2008 Donors

Without the help of generous donors, Pact could not continue to provide programs that serve children of color and their birth and adoptive family members. Thank you to everyone who makes our programs possible!

In 2008, Pact:

- Gave support and services to over 100 expectant parents
- Presented 10 workshops and consultations to adoption and child welfare professionals, educators, and teachers
- Consulted with 52 pre-adoptive parents and 34 post-adoptive parents
- Facilitated 32 adoptions and consulted on 21 more
- Delivered 30 educational workshops and conferences for adoptive parents
- Hosted 8 Teen Club meetings with 72 teens and tweens participating
- Collaborated on two 8-week support groups for LGBTQ transracial adoptive parents
- Sponsored bi-monthly gatherings for adoptive parents of color
- Sponsored monthly gatherings for transracial families
- Sponsored two internet chat groups, one for adoptive parents of color and one for transracial adoptive parents
- Hosted 46 families at Pact Camp, where children and parents explore racial identity in the context of adoption

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Deborah & Franklin Santos
Ellen Ysra Sloan
Lauran & Jeffrey Weinmann
Hazel White & Matt Plut

Less than $100
Anonymous
Jason & Lynn Baskett
Lesley Bell
Karen & James Bustillo
MC & Patricia Davitt
Katy Despot
Moira C. Dowell
Chet & Pat Frankenfield
Eve Hershcopf & Gregory Lewis
Suzanne Irving
Susan & Joe Jimenez
Michelle Johnson
Kaiser Permanente Community Giving
Joanna Karatzas & Phil Enquist
Andrea Kelly
Teresa Kruzan & Richard Wilinski
Elaine R. Lee
Terry & Kimberly Ligocki
Maire Machens
Beverly & Edward Matsushi
Quentin & Amanda McMullen
Rachel Noerdinger
Susan Rappaport
Peter Reinke
Gabriel Ristorucci
Jon & Eileen Schlundt
Frederick & Lisa Seitel
Katrina Smathers
Nina Teicholz
Elizabeth Van Buren
Lisa Walker
Janice & Edward Williams

Donation specified for New Baby Fund
Donation specified for Pact Camp Fund
Donation specified for AFAAD (Adopted & Fostered Adults of the African Diaspora)
Spring 2009 Calendar

Parenting Strategies for Adoptive Families
May 16, 8am-12:30pm, Oakland, CA
This workshop focuses on practical strategies for issues like celebrating birthdays, planning vacations, changing schools, moving, divorce, graduation, rites of passage, holidays, adding or losing family members, and other normal life events that have special resonance for adoptive families. Participants are encouraged to share specific family concerns.

True Colors!
June 20, 9:30am-4pm, Oakland, CA
This workshop for transracial and interracial families focuses on the issues inherent to parenting across racial lines. Get concrete suggestions on how you can help your child connect to his or her racial heritage and develop a positive racial identity. A panel of adult adoptees will share their lived experiences.

Pact Family Camp
July 16-20, Alliance Redwoods Conference Grounds, Occidental, CA
Pact Family Camp brings together families with adopted children of color to share their experiences, learn from experts and each other, and enjoy each other’s company. Many families who have attended referred to the experience as life-changing. Program details and registration information are available on the Pact website.

Northern CA Bay Regional Adoptive Family Group: Ongoing
May 3, 2-4 pm, East Bay location
June 7, 2-4pm, East Bay location
July 5, 2-4pm, Santa Cruz location
Families with adopted children of color meet monthly at various venues for informal gatherings; sign up to receive email notification of the specific location.

Pact Teen Club: Ongoing
May 9, 6-9:30pm, San Francisco
June 13, 6-9:30pm, East Bay
Teens and tweens only! Meet other kids of color who were adopted or fostered. Have a good time with other kids who are like you. Separate groups for teens and pre-teens. Parents can participate in a concurrent peer support group; childcare is available for younger siblings.

Adoption Book Group: Ongoing
April 28, featured book: Beyond Good Intentions by Cheri Register
May 26, featured book: Debating Race by Michael Eric Dyson
June 23, featured book: Daughter of the Ganges by Asha Miro
Join other adoptive parents for a free drop-in discussion of books related to adoption, with a focus on race and parenting. Meets on fourth Tuesdays from 6:30 to 8:00pm at Bananas in Oakland.

Families of Color Discussion Group: Ongoing
June 13, 1-4pm, East Bay location, topic: Understanding Adoptees’ Feelings
Families with at least one parent of color come together to discuss issues for adoptive families.

Sign up to become a Pact Member!

Circle one rate:  
Family: 1 year $40.00  2 years $75.00  3 years $110.00
Organizational: 1 year $75.00  2 years $125.00  3 years $200.00
Grassroots Organization: 1 year $50.00  2 years $85.00  3 years $125.00
Gift Membership* (Family): 1 year $30.00  2 years $60.00  3 years $100.00
* purchased by members in good standing

Name(s) ___________________________
Address ___________________________
City ___________________________ State ______ Zip __________
Phone ___________________________ Email _______

Amount Enclosed $ __________________
Check # __________ (payable to Pact) enclosed

Charge my: ☐ VISA ☐ MC ☐ American Express

CC# ___________________________ Exp date _______ CVV# __________

For more information: www.pactadopt.org/membership/

Join other adoptive parents for a free drop-in discussion of books related to adoption, with a focus on race and parenting. Meets on fourth Tuesdays from 6:30 to 8:00pm at Bananas in Oakland.

Pact, an adoption alliance

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